

IN THE FOREST OF LONG WAITING: CHARLES D'ORLÉANS
AND THE *QUERELLE DE LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCY*

The *Querelle de la Belle Dame sans mercy* and its socio-literary significance have recently solicited a broad range of new critical discussion.¹ However, most, if not all readings have taken as their starting point the understanding that the composition of the *Querelle*, which repeatedly re-inscribes and reinterprets the actions and motivations of Alain Chartier's debating Lover and Lady in a series of response-poems, was initially sparked off not by literary activity, but by a pair of letters recording the genuine and vehement reactions to the *Belle Dame* of Chartier's earliest readers at court. The patterns of manuscript transmission associated with these two documents reinforce this impression; overwhelmingly often the two letters are indeed placed in manuscripts immediately after Chartier's *Belle Dame* and before any other responses to the poem (including Chartier's own), creating a powerful sense that the debate began in Chartier's immediate circle, and was taken up later by other poets. This article suggests, however, that the letters' manuscript presentation may be misleading us: there is, I argue, strong internal evidence to suggest that the letters are closely associated not with Alain Chartier, but with Charles d'Orléans and his poetic coterie at Blois. Such an association highlights the continuities and the complex intertextual relationships between the poetry written by Charles and his associates in the 1440s, and Alain Chartier's earlier work.

Alain Chartier's c.1424 debate poem *La Belle Dame sans mercy* achieved large-scale and long-lasting popularity during the fifteenth century. This is principally attested to by the number of poetic responses and continuations which were appended to it, and which are now referred to under the general title of the *Querelle de la Belle Dame sans mercy*.² The *Querelle* comprises a very large number of texts: some are more closely related to Chartier's poem, and to each other, than others. Emma Cayley has most recently proposed a framework for the *Querelle* based on different 'cycles' of response to the *Belle Dame*,³ not all of which are uniformly present in all manuscripts.

First-cycle texts centre on Chartier's role and responsibilities for the poem: they comprise the *Belle Dame* itself; the two prose letters traditionally thought to be by early readers; Chartier's *Excusacion*, in which he apologizes to an irate God

of Love for having written the poem; and a rare verse response to the *Excusacion* claiming to be from female readers.⁴ The vast majority of manuscripts containing some form of the *Querelle* feature most of the first cycle, their scribes almost uniformly situating the letters in between Chartier's *Belle Dame* and his rather tongue-in-cheek *Excusacion*, or apology, for that poem.⁵ The first letter (which I term *la requeste*, in line with its most frequent manuscript rubric) purports to be from an unspecified group of men to a group of their lady friends, and attacks Chartier's poem in no uncertain terms; opening with an elaborate allegorical scenario, it attempts to persuade the ladies to whom it is addressed to take the amorous pleas of its writers seriously, to listen to their criticisms of the *Belle Dame*, and to cease to read it, lest it affect their own capacities for showing *mercy* – and, thus, for appropriate amatory engagement with their suitors. The second letter (which I term *la lettre*) purports to be from these same ladies to Chartier, alerting him to the accusations levelled at him and his poem in the first. It forms an appendix or attachment to *la requeste*; its female writers explain that

pour ce que nous vous cuidons tel que bien vous savez excuser et deffendre de ceste charge quant vous en serez adverti, nous vous envoions le double, esperans que vous metrez peine a vous geter hors de ce blasme a voustre honneur.⁶

(because we believe that you are such that you will know well how to excuse yourself and defend yourself from this charge when you have been alerted to it, we are sending you a copy, hoping that you will take pains to refute this blemish on your honour.)

The ladies, then, apparently side with Chartier and his fictional creation, forwarding on *la requeste* to him so that he can rebut its charges.

Traditionally, these prose letters have been approached critically as actual, real-life, real-time contributions to the *Querelle*. So, for example, Laidlaw, in the standard edition of Alain Chartier's poetry, linked Chartier's *Belle Dame* with the letters and his *Excusacion* in a way which suggested an explicit chain of causality: 'The *Excusacion* was written in reply to criticisms of the *Belle dame* ... the criticisms were set out in a letter sent to the ladies of court. When they forwarded a copy of the letter to Alain Chartier, the ladies added a note of explanation.'⁷ More recently, McRae has reiterated this viewpoint: 'it appears that letters written to Chartier by ladies and courtiers ... started the debate shortly after the poem's appearance in 1424.'⁸ In these readings, Chartier's need to 'excuse' himself was in part set off by the engaged, lived response of this real-life, real-time public. This assumption that the men's and women's letters were by real people who were in some senses documenting or shaping a discursive version of their own 'real' or experienced emotions and responses to the poem and to each other has had obvious implications for their dating: if this is indeed how the letters were composed, they must have been written and sent relatively

soon *after* the *Belle Dame*; Laidlaw and McRae place them between 1424 (the presumed date of the *Belle Dame*) and 1425 (the presumed date of the *Excusacion*).⁹

Manuscript presentation and *mise-en-page* has created a powerful sense of the verisimilitude of the letters as ‘real-life’ documents; but late medieval poetics might suggest that we approach this as a construct rather than an unproblematic reflection of reality. Writing of verse epistles, Yvonne LeBlanc surveys the ‘epistolary-enhancing elements’ at the level of formal, stylistic, and paratextual features which can lend ‘letter-like quality’ to poetic texts.¹⁰ The letters of the *Querelle* are subject to analogous ‘epistolary-enhancing elements’: very often, they are self-consciously presented in manuscripts *as* letters. They are usually, for example, introduced with identifying rubrics: ‘coppie des lectres envoyées par les dames à Alain’; ‘coppie de la requeste baillée aux dames contre Alain’ (‘Copy of the letter sent by the ladies to Alain’; ‘copy of the request sent to the ladies against Alain’).¹¹ Their continuous prose usually completely fills in the manuscript’s verse writing column with an extended block of text, as in the layout found in Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 2230, fols 137^v–139^r. This immediately contrasts with the verse layout of the *Belle Dame* itself, particularly if the letters follow straight on from the end of the *Belle Dame* on the same folio, as happens in this manuscript and many others. *La requeste* is unsigned; however, *la lettre* is usually not, and the ladies’ signatures are sometimes presented as ‘real’ signatures. This presentation can be articulated on the page by locating the signatures in the space where one might expect an actual signature to a letter; as, for example, in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 1131, fol. 104^v, or through the use of descriptive rubrics, such as the following, from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 2230, fol. 139^r: ‘Estoit escript en la marge dessoubz les lettres . katherine / marie / et Jehanne’ (‘Written in the margin underneath the letter was: Katherine, Marie, and Jehanne’).

In addition to the ladies’ signatures, many manuscripts use further rubrics which construct a chain of causation between the *Belle Dame*, the letters, and Chartier’s *Excusacion*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 924, for example, titles the *Excusacion* ‘Responce sur la dicte requeste par l’acteur baillié aux Dames’ (fol. 45^v; ‘Response to the said request [i.e. the men’s letter] by the author, sent to the ladies’). Here, the *Excusacion* is presented as a direct result of the men’s letter, linking the poem to the letters in a sequence of responses to the *Belle Dame* and to each other. In this sequencing, the *Excusacion* is imagined as only being conceived of and composed because of the real-life epistolary activity of the men and the ladies, activity which we as readers are invited to experience as ‘real’ as we read. The impression of gaining access to real-life correspondence is heightened by the noun ‘copie’ (‘copy’), which recurs frequently in rubrics introducing the letters. For example, Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 554 labels *la requeste* as a ‘copie de la requeste baillié aux dames par aucuns

contre le dit maistre alain. Laquelle copie estoit enclose dans les lettres cy dessus transcriptes' (fol. 66^v; 'Copy of the request sent to the ladies by certain people against the said *maistre Alain* [i.e. the men's letter]. The which copy was enclosed in the letter transcribed above [i.e. the ladies' letter]'). This rubric's repeated insistence on the *copied* or *transcribed* status of the manuscript's letters creates a subtle sense of the uniqueness of the putative originals, and thus the documentary accuracy or verisimilitude of the 'copie[s]'.¹²

Features such as these invite – indeed, condition – a reader to approach these two texts, unlike those which surround them, as records of *actual* letters, as have scholars such as Laidlaw and McRae, rather than fictional contributions to the *Querelle*. This kind of presentational feature, however, is surely in part a self-conscious strategy on the part of the scribes copying this material; in other words, it does not, necessarily, need to bear witness to a 'real-life' situation. These letters do not have to *be* real because they are so often presented as such – their role as 'pièces justificatives'¹³ is clearly a desired and carefully constructed effect, and does not need to be a straightforward reflection of the reality or actuality of their original composition (although it may, of course, reflect what some readers or scribes believed). Regalado, writing of Villon's *Testament*, describes the way in which its '*effet de réel* opens it up to a study not of [historical] referents but to the effect of referentiality created by the power of the poet's language'.¹⁴ A similar argument may be made for the letters: they do not simply reflect or transmit reality; rather they 'represent' it in such a way as to simultaneously mask *and* call attention to the processes of that representation.¹⁵ We might compare the ways in which Chaucer's fifteenth-century scribes dealt with the exchanges of letters between the lovers in *Troilus and Criseyde*. On two occasions, Chaucer embeds the text of letters composed by Troilus and Criseyde within his narrative poem (although he continues using *Troilus'* rhyme royale verse form to do so) and his fifteenth-century scribes seem to have responded to these (clearly fictional) moments in comparable ways. For example, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24 (copied c.1489 or later) marks out the letters on fols III^v and II5^r by elaborately flourishing and enlarging the French-language signatures with which the lovers close their epistles, effectively creating a 'bottom margin' in the middle of the manuscript page, towards the right of which the signatures are displayed as though they were signatures at the bottom of a letter.¹⁶ Christine de Pizan chose to present the inset letters within her *Livre du Duc des vrais amants* in a similar way in the Queen's manuscript, London, British Library, Harley MS 4431 (copied c.1413–14).¹⁷ Here, for example, an embedded letter is introduced by a rubric on fol. 159^r: 'letres closes en prose' ('enclosed/secret letters in prose'). Its prose form is further highlighted by the way in which its text completely fills the ruled writing column from edge to edge, contrasting visually with the verse above it, and it presents the signature of the letter, 'vostre treshumble serf

obéissant' (fol. 159v; 'your very humble and obedient servant'), beneath and to the right of the writing column after a space. Like the letters in the Arch. Selden copy of *Troilus*, the scribe here carefully creates a brief visual impression of a 'real' letter using the resources of the manuscript page.

These two fifteenth-century examples, of course, have earlier and very widely disseminated precedents; perhaps most influentially Guillaume de Machaut's *Livre dou voir dit*. Some manuscripts of this text, which deploys complex and repeated formal shifts between verse narrative, lyric, and prose letters, present the lovers' letters to one another in highly self-conscious ways. McGrady, for example, has explored the way in which MS E of the *Voir Dit* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 9221) 'gives full authority to the natural tempo of prose' through its 'innovative layout' of the letters and 'occasion[s] prose rhythm ... imbu[ing] the texts with material evidence of sound'.¹⁸ A key part of this innovative layout, and of the effects it may create, for McGrady, involves mobilizing actively an audience's visual expectations of what a 'real' letter would look like, in contrast to the visual experience of reading lyric and narrative verse:

The scribe responsible for the entire *Voir Dit* [in MS E] reserves for the interpolated letters a formal cursive bookhand common in diplomatic correspondences. This script secures for a set of love letters the status of authentic documents. In addition, the scribe imitates the layout of a missive by frequently setting off the signature from the surrounding text. Minus the seal, these copied letters have the look and feel of an actual correspondence.¹⁹

Something of the same effect, I suggest, is created by the various ways in which the *Querelle's* two letters are presented in manuscript form. While I have not seen any *Querelle*-manuscripts which employ the same radical changes in *script* seen in MS E of the *Voir Dit* to distinguish its prose letters, McGrady's comments remain, nonetheless, useful for reconsidering the ways in which the letters function in the *Querelle*. Not only do they create a visual manifestation of the change in tone, rhythm, and sound implicit in the shift from the verse of the *Belle Dame* itself to prose, their content, *mise-en-page*, and common descriptive rubrics also contrive to construct a private, epistolary fiction to which the reader is made party.

Reading the *Querelle* letters as carefully wrought, fictional constructs rather than actual records of correspondence between Chartier and his readers allows for new approaches to these texts, and develops our understanding of their significance and impact within the *Querelle* as a whole. Here, then, I argue for their fictionality, and the conscious constructedness of their apparent verisimilitude as reader-responses – a hypothesis which allows me to explore their overlooked intertextual connections with other fifteenth-century works. I suggest, in sum, that the letters may have their origins not in a 1424 epistolary spat between a group of courtly gentlemen and ladies, but in important fifteenth-

century social and poetic networks, networks which have recently been the subject of renewed critical scrutiny, and which centre on the figure of Charles d'Orléans.

One of the most striking elements of *la requeste* in particular is its deployment of allegory to articulate its central concerns. The text opens by sketching out an extended allegorical narrative, in which its first-person speakers figure themselves as questing knights, lost and under attack in a changing and hostile landscape, engaged in 'la queste du don d'amoureuse mercy' ('the quest for the gift of loving mercy'):

Suppliant humblement voz loyaulx serviteurs, les actendans de vostre tresdoulce grace et poursuiuans la queste du don d'amoureuse mercy, comme ilz ayent donné ... leur temps à pourchacer le riche don de Pitié que Dangier, Reffus et Crainte ont embuché et retrait en la gaste forest de Longue Actente ... et que en un pas qui se nomme Dure Response ont esté plusieurs foiz destroussez de Joye et desers de Leece par les brigands et souldoyers de Reffus.²⁰

(Your loyal servants, the awaiters of your sweet grace and pursuers of the quest of the gift of loving mercy humbly beg you, as they have given ... their time to the pursuit of the rich gift of Pity, whom *Dangier*,²¹ Refusal and Fear have ambushed and taken prisoner in the ravaged Forest of Long Waiting ... and who, on a pass known as Hard Response, have been many times robbed of Joy and deprived of Happiness by the brigands and mercenaries of Refusal.)

These lines set up a number of immediate intertextual resonances, which sensitize readers to their conscious literariness.²² The first is the image of the 'gaste forest', the location of the fictional quest. A search on the Garnier *Corpus de la littérature médiévale* reveals that the adjective 'gaste' applied to the noun 'forest' is a formulation overwhelmingly characteristic of Chrétien de Troyes's *Perceval*.²³ Through the collocation 'gaste' + 'forest', then, the male speaking voices of the letter define their situation, in its opening words, as a familiar *literary* one. However, the letter adds a second element to this image to transform it from a landscape feature into an allegory: it is the 'gaste forest **de Longue Actente**', the ravaged forest **of long waiting**. The forest thus moves from being the literal landscape in which the knight or would-be-knight adventures to a metaphor for the male protagonists' feelings: the experience of waiting for the favour of a desired lady is here conceptualized as *like* being alone in a hostile, ravaged forest. The locus of the forest and the imagined experience of the quest within and through it physicalizes and spatializes the experience of waiting.²⁴

Like the collocation 'gaste forest', however, this very striking image is not unique to *la requeste*. The 'forest de Longue Actente' is also an image deployed by Charles d'Orléans and his circle of friends, family, and acquaintances in their poetry written after Charles's 1440 return to Blois from English imprisonment. Charles wrote poetry throughout his life, and appeared to be particularly

interested in its role in performing and constructing social relationships and networks: as is well known, his so-called 'personal manuscript', which survives as Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 25458, records not just his own poetry but also the post-1440 poetic contributions of friends, family, visitors, and members of his household at Blois, copied accretively (by Charles himself and by others) into the manuscript throughout the 1440s up to the mid-1460s.²⁵ As recent commentators have shown, the variety of fixed form lyrics in this manuscript construct and perform a complex social, intertextual, and intellectual nexus, bespeaking a society at Blois made up of 'co-creators in what amounts to a collaborative artistic and social production' distinguished by 'intersection and collision of form, theme and metaphor'.²⁶

One way in which Charles and his contemporaries engage in this collision-poetry is by composing *rondels* and *balades* repeatedly around the same refrain line,²⁷ creating clusters of poems which are held in close conversation with one another.²⁸ 'En la forest de Longue Actente' is one of these repeated lines: twelve poems in fr. 25458, by Charles and others, deploy it in some form, mostly as a refrain line in *rondels*, once as a refrain line in a *ballade*, and once as the opening line of a *ballade* (see Appendix B). Arn's study tracing the complex copying sequence of Charles's manuscript places the copying of these poems to the period between the mid-1440s and mid-1450s (her 'third stint'); it must be noted, of course, that copying does not necessarily indicate date of composition, and the poems may have been composed slightly earlier in the 1440s.²⁹ There is one further *rondel* which must be considered as a later part of this sequence, as it too features the 'forest' refrain line. It is found on fol. 56^v of Carpentras, Bibl. Inguimbertaine, MS 375. This is a copy of Charles's manuscript, made c.1456 for his wife Marie de Clèves.³⁰

The setting of 'la Forest de Longue Actente', then, forms the repeated, structuring principle for series of linked texts by Charles and his associates which, together, explore creatively how the allegorical forest-space might look, feel, and signify, and how an imagined adventure within it might unfold. Often, these poems construct tension between the forest as a space of enjoyment and safety and a space of potential danger and unpredictability. They play upon the relationship between literary resonance and real-life experience: throughout the Middle Ages, the forest exists both as a powerful literary trope, bringing a range of associations with it, and as an actual physical landscape which is legally owned, regulated, and deployed as a resource.³¹ These poems use this tension extremely fruitfully: the forest is at once the backdrop for chivalric, amorous adventure and quest; a space which is controlled and used for luxury aristocratic leisure pursuits such as hunting; an uncontrollable space which harbours dangerous individuals who live and act outside the law; and a space whose physical features (darkness, depth, vastness) connote chaos, confusion, loss, and longing.³² The poems are

tightly interwoven and co-responsive, creating a complex nexus of repeated and reworked imagery, sounds, puns, and rhyming words, most constructing plural relationships with more than one of their counterparts. It is beyond my scope here to do full justice to the multiple connections and tensions between them;³³ instead, I shall focus particularly on their many and detailed areas of overlap with the imagery of *la requeste*.

Comparing the way in which the ‘forest de Longue Actente’ poems in Charles’s manuscript develop with the opening of *la requeste* is revealing. There is a raft of correspondences, in terms of how the forest is imagined, what kinds of allegorical happenings are repeatedly associated with it, and how these are described or figured. Taken together, these correspondences are extremely striking. Consider, for example, *la requeste*’s image of the ‘queste du don d’amoureuse mercy’ (‘quest for the gift of loving mercy’). Several of the texts within the poem sequence also explicitly feature a quest as the central activity in the forest: three *rondels* use the term ‘queste’ to describe their protagonist’s activity in the forest (Thignonville’s *rondel* in Marie’s manuscript, R244 and R251), while another (B86) describes those entering the forest as doing so ‘Pour la conqueste de Mercy’ (‘for the conquest of Mercy’). A further four poems refer to their protagonists as on some kind of a journey within the forest (B81, R246, R197, R195). The noun ‘sente’ (‘pathway’) recurs seven times (B86, R194, R195, R197, R244, R246, R251), often with the sense that the speaker has become lost or wandered from an apparently safe path within the forest, e.g. R251:

La haye fut garnie de tente
 Et fis ma queste belle et gente
 Suivant les chiens je m’egaré
 En la Forest de Longue Actente.
 Je cours, je corne, je tourmente.
 En traversant, sans trouver sente
 Me trouvoy treffort enserré
 Tout seul, presque desesperé ...

(The woodland was provided with tents, and I went on my quest fair and fine, [but] following the dogs I lost my way, in the forest of Long Waiting. I give chase, I sound my horn, I rage on. While criss-crossing, not finding a path, I found myself completely trapped, all alone, nearly desperate.)³⁴

The danger of being in this unknown wilderness may be an amatory or a physical one. Several of the poems use the idea of being lost in the forest to express a sense of amatory loss and misery: the noun ‘actente’ (which always dictates the a-rhyme of the *rondels* in the sequence) is rhymed with at least two of the following in seven of the poems: ‘dolente’; ‘tourmente’; ‘je me/il se garmente’; ‘lamente’; ‘je me/il se sente’ (‘sorrowing’; ‘torment’; ‘I/it complains’; ‘lament’;

'I/it feels', this latter verb frequently used in conjunction with the homophone 'sente', the noun meaning 'pathway'). This overarching sense of the forest as a space denoting feeling, specifically frustrated or rejected love, chimes well with *la requeste's* use of the image. However, in parallel with this amatory signification there runs a more dangerous and hostile thread of imagery in some of the *rondels*: R251's speaker is, after all, 'esgaré' ('lost') from the path (an image shared with R197, R246, and R247), and this state makes him vulnerable to attack.

La requeste turns on the danger and hidden hostility to be met with on the paths through the forest: its male questing protagonists have been attacked 'en un pas qui se nomme Dure Response', 'par les brigands et souldoyers de Reffus' ('on a pass which is called Hard Response', 'by the brigands and mercenaries of Refusal'), and 'Pitié' ('Pity') has previously been 'embuché et retrait' by 'Dangier, Reffus et Crainte' ('ambushed and imprisoned' by 'Dangier, Refusal, and Fear') within the forest. Like *la requeste*, which here creates a series of allegorical enemies ranged against its questing lovers, several of the poems in Charles's manuscript people the forest with a range of personifications, often hostile forces which similarly lie in wait there for the male quester. Almost identical imagery to do with ambush and sudden attack in the dangerous space of the forest recurs several times in the 'en la forest' poems. So, for example in B86, 'Amours' ('Love') is imagined rescuing men lost in the forest 'sy / Qu'ilz s'echappent des brigandages / De Dangiers par petiz boucages / Puis les duit en la droicte sente' ('so that they escape from the brigandage of *Dangiers*, hiding in the woodland, then he leads them onto the right path'). This kind of danger is particularly apparent in a pair of poems, R196 and R197, by Charles and his associate Fredet, in which Charles's response poem specifically continues Fredet's scenario:

R196 (Fredet):

En la Forest de Longue Actente
 Des brigands de Soussy bien trente
 Hélas! ont pris mon povre cuer
 Et dieu scet se c'est grant orreur
 De veoir comment on le tourmente.
 Priant vostre ayde, lamente
 Pource que chascun d'eulx se vente
 Qu'ilz le merront a leur seigneur
 En la Forest de Longue Actente.

(In the forest of Long Waiting, thirty brigands of Anxiety's band, alas, have captured my poor heart, and God knows that it is a great horror to see how it is tormented. Begging for your help, it laments, because each of them boasts that they will take it to their lord, in the forest of Long Waiting.)

R197 (Charles):

En la forest de Longue Actente

Fourvoyé de joyeuse sente
 Par la guide, Dure Rigueur,
 a esté robbé vostre cueur
 Comme j'entens, dont se lamente. ...
 Et en briefz motz, sans que vous mente
 Soyez seur que je me contente
 Pour alegier vostre douleur
 de traictier avec le seigneur
 Qui les brigans soustient et hente
 En la Forest de Longue Actente.

(In the forest of Long Waiting, turned away from path of joy by the guide Hard Rigour, your heart was abducted, as I hear, about which it laments. ... And, in short, without lying, you can be sure that I will be happy, in order to lighten your pain, to treat with the lord who supports and is a friend to the brigands, in the forest of Long Waiting.)

This pair of *rondels* employ an almost identical scenario to the letter, and also a very similar allegorical format, using what Paxson terms 'second personification': personified characters who are 'actantial characters' at the level of narrative or 'story', who 'occupy the material space-time of the fabular ... level of the narrative text'.³⁵ Indeed, taken together, these two poems construct a coherent, structured, and sequential narrative featuring both personified and non-personified 'actantial characters' sustainedly interacting: this renders them unlike several of the other 'forest' poems, but very like the *requeste*. So, Fredet imagines a personified, hostile overlord called 'Soussy' ('Anxiety') who has set his 'brigans', lurking in the dangerous spaces of the forest, on the tracks of Fredet's first-person narrator. 'Soussy' and his men are bent on holding up the amorous quest, and have undertaken a violent group kidnapping of Fredet's heart. Fredet's plea to Charles to save his heart, now being held prisoner, rests at least in part on the (implicit) fiction that 'Soussy' is a social superior, someone of Charles's ducal standing, with whom Charles will be able to intercede on his hapless friend's behalf, effectively using his social status to negotiate the release of Fredet's heart. Charles's reply self-consciously accepts the implicit flattery: he graciously agrees to intercede with 'le seigneur' who employs the 'brigans'. Comparisons with the ambush by the 'brigans et souldoyers de Reffus' in the letter are striking: the same kind of ambush is perpetrated by mercenary soldiers in the pay of a particular figure; the location is an allegorical or semi-allegorical pathway in both cases (the pass of 'Dure Response' in the letter, the 'joyeuse sente' in R197); there is the explicit mention of 'brigans de Soussy' in R196 and 'brigans de Reffus' in the letter. There is also an echo in names between Charles's personified treacherous guide in R197, 'Dure Rigueur', and the *place*, 'Dure Response', where the suitors are allegedly ambushed in *la requeste*.

In sum, the whole allegorical schema with which the poems work – in addition, of course, to the repeated use of the specific refrain line ‘en la forest de Longue Actente’ – links them to the opening part of *la requeste*. This correspondence is, I suggest, too great and too sustained to be a coincidence. At a factual level, this connection has been noted before: Daniel Poirion and Alice Planche both mention it briefly in their discussions of Charles’s work. However, Poirion and Planche are both working with the traditional reading of the *Querelle* letters as immediate, ‘real-life’ responses to the 1424 *Belle Dame*, while the Blois forest-poems must have been written post-1440, the date of Charles’s return from English captivity to Blois. Both, therefore, posit a chronology in which Chartier’s usage pre-dates and influences that of Charles.³⁶

There are several factors which might lead us to query this view, and to consider the situation from a different angle – in short, factors which might lead us to wonder whether the letters were, in fact, produced around the same time and by the same group of people as the poems in Charles’s manuscript, as their *own* response to the *Belle Dame*, a response which interlocks thematically with their poetic experimentation around the forest of long waiting. The first of these factors relates to what we know of the group of readers and writers which coalesced round Charles at Blois: individuals who enjoyed engaging in collaborative composition, provoking and creating literary responses, connections, and dissonances between texts. Adrian Armstrong has recently characterized the social group at Blois as a literary ‘laboratory’ for ‘collectively fuelled experimentation’, a place for poetic collaboration, competition, and exploration

in which different aspects of poetic form and language are tested. What is the effect of varying line or stanza length, or of adopting different antithetical structures? What balance can be struck between rich rhyme and syntactic coherence? How might a fellow-poet’s views be persuasively contested? These and other ‘research questions’ are investigated through a methodology of compositional practice.³⁷

It seems to me that these poets would have been precisely the kind of readers who were interested in imagining and composing contrasting, gendered epistolary responses to the *Belle Dame*.

Secondly, there is the uniqueness and the particular construction of the allegorical image ‘en la forest de Longue Actente’. This particular image does not, so far as I know, appear *anywhere* other than in Charles’s manuscript and *la requeste* in the first half of the fifteenth century, or earlier.³⁸ Charles is certainly not the first medieval poet to use the forest as an allegorical image for something else (nor, of course, is he the first post-Roman *de la Rose* poet to utilize personifications such as ‘Dangier’), but he does construct his forest-image in a particularly personal and distinctive way.³⁹ In terms of its grammatical and syntactical structure, the phrase ‘en la forest de Longue Actente’ is peculiarly

characteristic of Charles and his fellow-poets. It starts with the preposition 'en', proceeds to a concrete noun, in this case 'forest', then links that concrete noun to an abstract one with the word 'de' – so, in this case, 'de Longue Actente'. This allegorical structure – 'le' or 'la' [something concrete] 'de' [something abstract], sometimes preceded by a preposition like 'en' or 'dedens' – is used very frequently indeed by Charles and his fellow-poets throughout their work. We see constructions like 'En la nef de Bonne Nouvelle' (B28); 'L'emplastre de Nonchaloir' (B73); 'En la chambre de ma pensee' (B96); 'En la forest de ma Pensee' (R165); 'Dedens l'abisme de douleur' (R252, R253, R254); 'Dedens la maison de Douleur' (R444, R445); 'En la grant mer de Desplaisance', '[le] bescuit durcy de Langueur / Avecques eue de Rigueur' (R296); 'La nef de Desireux Vouloir', 'les marchans de Longue Actente' (R294); '[le] soleil de Plaisance' (Ch57); 'De Confort la voille', 'L'eau de Fortune', '[le] bateau du Monde', '[les] avirons d'Espoir', 'les vagues de Torment' (B140); ('in the ship of Good News'; 'the poultice of Indifference'; 'In the chamber of my thought'; 'In the forest of my Thought'; 'Within the abyss of pain'; 'Within the house of Pain'; 'In the great sea of Misery', 'the hard biscuit of Languor / With the water of Rigour'; 'the ship of Desiring Will', 'the merchants of Long Waiting'; 'the sunshine of Pleasure'; 'the sail of Comfort', 'the water of Fortune', 'the boat of the World', 'the oars of Hope', 'the waves of Torment').⁴⁰ While it is, of course, true that Charles did not invent this way of constructing an allegorical image, the *density* of its use across his manuscript is, I think, remarkable, and makes it a peculiarly characteristic marker of his immediate literary milieu. Indeed, Strubel refers to it as 'un véritable indicatif poétique de Charles d'Orléans, un trait caractéristique de son style'.⁴¹ This is a style in which Charles wrote poetry *pre-1440* as well as *post-1440*: the work which he composed in England between 1415 and 1440, too, features this type of allegorical construction, suggesting that it is indeed a long-standing, core part of his poetic practice.

Interest in the signifying potential of the wood or forest also appears to have spanned his writing career; Strubel terms it one of his more 'personal' images.⁴² The image of woodland recurs several times outside the 'en la forest' sequence, in both Charles's *pre-* and *post-1440* poetry, often used as one half of his distinctive allegorical structure. So, for instance, R165 (a *post-1440 rondel*) takes place 'En la forest de ma Pensee' ('in the forest of my Thought'), while the *pre-1440 Balades* 43 and 63 locate their speakers 'ou boys de Merencolie' and 'en la forest d'Ennuyeuse Tristesse' respectively.⁴³ *Pre-1440*, then, Charles was already playing with the image of the forest-space, and what and how it could signify emotionally, in different ways. He was expressing these thoughts, moreover, in images which are almost identical, in tone and construction, to the refrain-line 'en la forest de Longue Actente'. In this context, the hypothesis that he was suddenly inspired to think about the forest in this characteristically

allegorical way in the late 1420s or 1430s by reading the line in an early copy of the *Querelle* letters, but that he then waited until the 1440s to actually *cite* the line in his own poetry, surely does not seem likely.⁴⁴ Rather, I would suggest, the *Querelle* letters may much better be read as a product of the same time and literary milieu as the poetry: Blois in the 1440s.

Reviewing the surviving manuscripts provides evidence which would tend to support this view, pointing to a potential *post-1440* date for the letters (i.e. a date contemporary with Charles's return to Blois and the poetry he and his contemporaries began to produce there). Four *Belle Dame* manuscripts are particularly important here; all four have been traditionally dated pre-1440, and two are securely dated to c.1425–30. These very early manuscripts, Lausanne, Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, MS 350 (c.1430) and New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.396 (1425–30), are the earliest datable codices containing the *Belle Dame*.⁴⁵ Arguing for a date in the 1440s for the second cycle of *Querelle* texts, McRae has recently underlined that neither of these early manuscripts contains the second-cycle poems.⁴⁶ These manuscripts equally provide no evidence that the letters circulated with the *Belle Dame* as part of the first cycle of the *Querelle* in the late 1420s: Lausanne 350 moves from the *Belle Dame* to the *Excusacion* with no intervening matter, whilst Morgan M.396 transmits only the *Belle Dame* alongside a selection of works by Machaut (some incomplete).

Two further early *Belle Dame* manuscripts must now be examined: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS 473 and Toulouse, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 826.⁴⁷ Both place the letters in their conventional place between the *Belle Dame* and the *Excusacion* and both have been traditionally dated to the period 1425/6–40.⁴⁸ However, in both cases the dating may be less clear-cut than has been previously suggested. Bern 473 is a composite manuscript, compiled in discrete units which are copied on different paper stocks over a period of time. The paper comprising the quires which contain its 'Chartier' section has been dated to 1435–7 and placed at Chambéry by de Mandach, according to its watermark (a bull, seen in profile), which he identifies with Briquet no. 2774.⁴⁹ On re-examining the watermark and consulting Piccard's catalogue, it seems to me that it much more closely resembles Piccard numbers 86247 and 86252 (both Xanten, 1436) and no. 86263 (Kleve, 1439).⁵⁰ No. 86263 (Kleve, 1439) seems to me to provide the closest match for what can be seen of the head, face, feet, and tail. The prancing bull watermark was clearly in use from the mid-1430s to at least the end of the decade, and these examples – particularly the Kleve 1439 example which provides the closest match for Bern 473's mark – if not providing positive identification for the period post-1440, certainly do not preclude further fabrication and/or circulation and use of that paper in the 1440s.⁵¹ In fact, the copying of the most securely datable *texts* in Bern 473 is placed by de Mandach at about 1447–51, the

topical interest of some of them centring around the years 1446–9.⁵² It is clear that the Chartier section of Bern 473 was copied *before* the hand which copied these texts contributed to the manuscript, since the hand adds annotations to that section of the manuscript (and others).⁵³ How soon before is, however, not straightforward to determine. It is certainly possible that the *Belle Dame* and the letters were copied during the 1440s, after the production of the paper and before the annotations of around 1447–51.

A similar situation occurs when we examine the second apparently pre-1440 manuscript to contain the letters. Toulouse 826 is also a paper codex, and has also been dated according to its three watermarks, which have been identified as resembling (though not identical to) marks dated variously by Briquet to between 1419 and 1435.⁵⁴ Unlike Bern 473, Toulouse 826 contains no signatures, annotations, or indications of provenance whatsoever, nor does it appear to have been copied in discrete and clearly separable sections over a relatively long period of time,⁵⁵ rendering it impossible to be more precise in terms of date. It retains its medieval binding, but this looks like a home-made limp binding of plain, coarse parchment and twine, and is equally difficult to date precisely. Again, it is surely perfectly possible that the paper approximately dated by Laidlaw was used to construct the manuscript in the 1440s or later: an approximate paper date alone cannot provide a firm indication of date of copying.

Alongside this suggestion that Bern 473 and Toulouse 826 could well have been copied slightly later than has been traditionally thought, three more Chartier codices provide evidence which supports a post-1440 date for the letters' composition. All three are securely datable to the years after 1440. Fribourg, Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, MS L 1200 is the first of this group of manuscripts. It has suffered damage, and it now bears no immediately evident trace of the prose letters. It is, however, one of only two surviving manuscripts to transmit evidence of *versified* versions of the letters, which employ the same *huitain* stanza form as the *Belle Dame* and most other verse contributions to the *Querelle*. The second manuscript to do so is Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 554, a later fifteenth-century Chartier codex which contains the letters in full, in verse and in prose.⁵⁶ Although much of the relevant part of Fribourg L 1200 has been lost, enough remains to suggest that it did the same. It now only contains the *incipit* rubric to the versified version of *la requeste*,⁵⁷ found on the same folio as the close of the *Belle Dame*, fol. 17^v. The manuscript is then missing five folios, and picks up again at fol. 23^r.⁵⁸ On this folio, we find the *incipit* and full versified version of *la lettre*, which continues to fol. 24^v, where it concludes with an *explicit*, and where the *Excusacion* immediately begins.⁵⁹ The Fribourg manuscript routinely sets out three *huitain* stanzas of verse per page; so, six stanzas per folio. The Besançon manuscript gives us the total number of stanzas making up the complete versified *requeste*: eighteen. Eighteen stanzas would only

take up three full folios of the Fribourg manuscript. Assuming that the versified texts in Besançon and Fribourg were the same length (and their texts of the versified *lettre* are, so it would seem likely that the same is true of *la requeste*), the Fribourg manuscript's gap of five folios leaves two folios unaccounted for by the missing verse *requeste* whose rubric introduces it at the bottom of fol. 17^v. The Besançon manuscript situates the prose and verse versions of the letters next to one another at fols 64^f–71^r and the overwhelming probability is that the Fribourg manuscript did likewise, and that the two unaccounted-for folios from the group of five that are missing contained the two *prose* letters.

Fribourg L 1200 is a composite manuscript, made up of two sections; its first half transmits the first and second cycles of the *Querelle*, followed by a series of short texts in French and German. Its second half contains an unrelated copy of Chartier's *Livre des quatre dames*. The most recent description of the manuscript dates its copying to pre-1450. It is possible to be more precise about its binding. The manuscript retains its fifteenth-century Fribourgeois binding and its back flyleaf (fol. 197) is a reused legal act containing the date May 1439.⁶⁰ The manuscript, therefore, must have been bound together some time after this date, and presumably at a time when the legal document had become obsolete. As McRae observes, it is difficult to judge with any certainty when this might have been (how much time needs to elapse for a legal document to be considered reusable as binding material?), but we are almost certainly looking at a date post-1440, possibly in the mid- to late 1440s, for this manuscript's binding.⁶¹ Indeed, her recent suggestions concerning the dating and genesis of the second cycle of *Querelle*-poems, which this manuscript contains in full, suggest persuasively a possible date for that cycle around 1445–50: the Fribourg manuscript may well form one of the first witnesses to this complete cycle of *Belle Dame* responses.

Two further manuscripts, moreover, provide an intriguing connection between the *Querelle* and Charles's social group at Blois. Bibliothèque nationale de France, MSS fr. 20026 and 2230 both originate in the Blois milieu, and can be dated approximately by their heraldic decoration. Fr. 20026 belonged to Charles's wife Marie de Clèves, whom he married in 1440. It features the arms of Orléans and Clèves in its margins, indicating that it was made for her after her marriage.⁶² Its contents have been copied (by the same scribe) and expanded on in fr. 2230, which was owned by Marie's sister-in-law Marguerite de Rohan. Marguerite married Charles's younger brother, Jean d'Angoulême, in 1445, and her manuscript, like Marie's, depicts her arms with her husband's in its margins.⁶³ Both of these manuscripts contain the *Belle Dame*, the letters, the *Excusacion*, and the earliest second-cycle *Querelle* poem, the *Accusations contre la Belle Dame sans mercy* by Baudet Herenc.⁶⁴ The later of the two, fr. 2230, also contains one further *Querelle* poem by Acile Caulier, *L'Hôpital d'amour*, a fact which suggests that the Blois circle had ongoing access to the developing

texts of the *Querelle* throughout the 1440s. Furthermore, there is evidence that in 1449 Charles and Marie paid a sum of money to Baudet Herenc, author of the first second-cycle *Querelle*-poem. This raises the possibility that they may well have had a hand in that poem's genesis; at the very least it is proof that they knew him in the 1440s.⁶⁵ Both fr. 20026 and fr. 2230 serve as reminders of the intensely collaborative, creative, and performative social context which surrounded Charles and his family: their flyleaves bear witness to an enormous collection of signatures and mottoes inscribed by their contemporaries, including many of the authors whose poems appear in Charles's personal manuscript, some of whom contributed poems to the 'forest de Longue Actente' cluster.⁶⁶ If the letters were composed at Blois, it would seem natural that Marie and Marguerite would incorporate them, between Chartier's poem and his *Excusacion*, in their own *Belle Dame* manuscripts, manuscripts which they and their contemporaries obviously regarded as important objects bearing ongoing, physical witness to myriad intellectual and socio-literary connections and interactions. Regalado, discussing the presentation of Villon's works in manuscript and print, underlines the extent to which book designers and producers felt free to shape what seemed to them to be chronologically coherent narrative sequences using his texts:⁶⁷ it is not unusual for readers to desire to order texts in this way, rather than attempting to follow chronology of *composition*. The widespread positioning of the letters between the *Belle Dame* and the *Excusacion* thus fits in with broader trends in the composition and construction of fifteenth-century *recueils*.

Placing the manuscript evidence alongside the early history of the 'forest de Longue Actente' image, and alongside our knowledge of the complex socio-literary practices of Charles and his circle, opens up some intriguing questions about the origins of the *Querelle de la Belle Dame sans mercy*. The image of a 'real-life' dispute concerning Chartier's Lady, chronicled in the *Querelle*'s letters, is undeniably seductive, as is the desire to identify by name the individuals involved.⁶⁸ Yet the evidence, re-examined, may point in quite a different direction; the *Querelle* may well have had its beginnings not within Chartier's own immediate circle of readers, but as part of an elaborate game of literary imagination and experimentation played out in the coterie of one of the most creative poets of the fifteenth century. Recent critical approaches to Charles's poetry have focused on the importance of its particular manuscript context, and have adopted what might be termed an intertextual reading strategy, approaching the 'tissu du recueil' in such a way as to trace and explore the multi-layered 'jeu des échos' between different poems, poets, images, techniques, and conceptualizations across his manuscript.⁶⁹ Setting the letters of the *Querelle de la Belle Dame sans mercy* alongside these poems extends the game of echoes and intertextual connections from Charles's own manuscript outwards, knitting socio-poetic production at Blois to imaginative engagement with one of Alain Chartier's most prolific, popular, and generative works. The

large, inter-responsive, and quasi-competitive, quasi-collaborative lyric output of Charles and his contemporaries, although *formally* very different, has, it appears, important intertextual and intellectual connections with Chartier's longer narrative works, perhaps particularly with the articulation and the impacts of his debate poetry, such as the *Belle Dame*. The possible implication of the Blois coterie in the production of the letters which begin the *Querelle* in manuscripts suggests a community at Blois who are keen and imaginatively involved readers of Alain Chartier, and whose own literary practice is, despite its differences in form, both critically and creatively responsive to Chartier's poetics.

Appendix A

The seventeen of a possible forty-six manuscripts containing the *Belle Dame sans mercy* which do *not* contain the letters. Manuscripts are listed according to date using the approximate dating laid out by Laidlaw, *Poetical Works*, p. 45. Sigla are those allocated by Laidlaw. Manuscripts which also contain the *Excusacion* are marked **.

Early fifteenth century (pre-1440)

Gf: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M.396 (1425–30)

****Np:** Lausanne, Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, MS 350 (c.1430)

Late fifteenth century (1470–1500)

Ge: Jena, Universitätsbibliothek, MS El. fol. 98

Om: Stockholm, Kunglige biblioteket, MS V. u. 22 (post-1477)

****Qf:** Arnhem, Bibliotheek, MS 79

Qg: Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS 10961–70

Qm: London, British Library, Royal MS 19 A iii

Some time in the fifteenth century

Gb: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 15219

Nc: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 25435

Ng: Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 685 (post-1457)

Pg: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 2264

****Ph:** Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 19139

Po: Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 3523

Pp: Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, MS 11

****Qb:** Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, MS 390

Qc: Chantilly, Musée Condé, MS 686

****Qo:** Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, MS 971

Appendix B

Poems by Charles d'Orléans and his circle which use the line 'En la forest de Longue Actente', from MS fr. 25458, Charles's personal manuscript, using Fox and Arn's numbering, where B=*ballade* and R=*rondel*. The manuscript is paginated rather than foliated; page numbers for each poem have also been given, as have the names of poets.

B81, p. 131; Charles ['en la forest ...' here used as opening line; in all other poems used as refrain]

B86, p. 136; Jacques, the bastard of La Tremoille

R193, p. 413 supra; Nevers

R194, p. 414 supra; Charles ('my lord')

R195, p. 415 supra; Marie de Clèves ('my lady of Orléans')

R196, p. 416 supra; Fredet

R197, p. 417 supra; Charles ('Orléans')

R244, p. 447 supra; Phillipe Pot

R245, p. 447 infra; Antoine de Lussay

R246, p. 448 supra; Guiot Pot

R247, p. 448 infra; Gilles des Ormes

R251, p. 450 infra; Jacques, the bastard of La Tremoille

From Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, MS 375, Marie de Clèves' copy of fr. 25458:

One further *rondel*, on fol. 56^v of the manuscript, by Thignonville

This *rondel* is not featured in Arn and Fox's edition. A facsimile of the relevant manuscript page can be found in Taylor, *Making of Poetry*, p. 151.

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NOTES

I would like to thank Joan E. McRae for her generosity in exchanging ideas with me during the research for this article; Mary-Jo Arn for very useful email discussions regarding Charles d'Orléans's personal manuscript, now Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 25458; and *Medium Ævum's* peer reviewer for their constructive comments. All translations from French are my own unless otherwise stated.

¹ See for example Emma Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue: Alain Chartier in his Cultural Context* (Oxford, 2006), ch. 4, Joan E. McRae, *Alain Chartier: The Quarrel of the Belle Dame Sans Mercy* (New York and London, 2004); Joan E. McRae, 'Cyclification and the circulation of the *Querelle de la Belle Dame sans mercy*', in *Chartier in Europe*, ed. Emma Cayley and Ashby Kinch (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 90–104; Adrian Armstrong, *The Virtuoso Circle* (Tempe, Ariz., 2012), ch. 1. For an edition of one *Querelle*-manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque

nationale de France, MS fr. 1131 (with appendices from several other manuscripts), see *Le Cycle de la Belle Dame sans mercy*, ed. David Hult and Joan E. McRae (Paris, 2003).

² For the accretive, competitive-collaborative dynamic of the *Querelle* and its range of participants, see esp. Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, ch. 4 and Armstrong, *Virtuoso Circle*, ch. 1.

³ See Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, pp. 137–40.

⁴ Extant only in four manuscripts: Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 3521, Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 554, Fribourg, Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, MS L 1200 (known in earlier scholarship as the 'Fribourg-Diesbach' MS), and Arnhem, Bibliotheek, MS 79.

⁵ For manuscripts of the *Belle Dame* and first-cycle *Querelle* texts, the standard work remains *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. James Laidlaw (Cambridge, 1974). Laidlaw lists the *Belle Dame* as extant in forty-four manuscripts (p. 328), of which only seventeen transmit it *without* the letters (see Appendix A). Of these seventeen, twelve also omit the *Excusacion* (they may, however, transmit second- or third-cycle *Querelle* texts). Only the remaining five contain the *Excusacion* with no letters. One further manuscript containing the *Belle Dame*, the *Excusacion*, and the letters has been discovered by Joan E. McRae since Laidlaw's edition. This is Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 297, dated by the JONAS database's section romane to the second half of the fifteenth century ('Hatfield, Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 297' in the Jonas-IRHT/CNRS database: <<http://jonas.irht.cnrs.fr/manuscrit/76098>> accessed 6 September 2016; see also Joan E. McRae, 'A community of readers: the Quarrel of the *Belle Dame sans mercy*', in *A Companion to Alain Chartier*, ed. Daisy Delogu, Joan E. McRae, and Emma Cayley (Leiden, 2015), pp. 200–22, at p. 202). In addition to this, Fribourg, Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire, MS L 1200, which is catalogued by Laidlaw in *Poetical Works* (MS Qj, p. 128) but not included in his forty-four manuscripts of the *Belle Dame*, must in fact be counted as a *Belle Dame* manuscript: it opens with a now-fragmentary copy of the poem, having lost its first five folios, but clearly contained a full copy of the poem when it was complete. It also contains the *Excusacion*, traces of the letters (which I discuss in more detail above), the rare verse *Responce des dames*, and the second cycle of *Querelle* texts. There is thus currently a total of forty-six known manuscripts of Chartier's poem. The Jonas-IRHT/CNRS database gives a total of forty-nine, three more; two of these are, however, now lost (Turino, Bib. nat. and univ. MS L.IV.03 and Lyon, bib. mun. MS 744bis), and the third (BnF MS fr. 1169) does not, to my knowledge, contain the poem (see Emma Cayley, 'Collaborative communities: the manuscript context of *Alain Chartier's Belle Dame sans mercy*', *MÆ*, 71 (2002), 226–40).

⁶ *Poetical Works*, ed. Laidlaw, p. 360.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

⁸ Joan E. McRae, 'Piecing the puzzle: reconsidering the dating of the Quarrel of the *Belle Dame sans mercy* and *Le Champion des dames*', *Medieval Perspectives*, 30 (2015), 115–30 (p. 115); I am grateful to her for sharing an advance copy of this article with me. For an alternative reading, which situates the letters historically within Chartier's immediate milieu, and also suggests that he himself may have been their author in a fabricated move to spark notoriety, see Sylvie Lefèvre, 'Le Cachet de la poste faisant foi: *La Belle Dame sans mercy* et sa datation au miroir des lettres de réception et de leur lecture', *Romania*, 131 (2013), 83–99.

⁹ See *Poetical Works*, ed. Laidlaw, p. 40 and p. 42 for a presumed chronology of Chartier's French poetry for a presumed chronology of Chartier's French poetry and for suggested revisions to that chronology, Lefèvre, 'Cachet de la poste'.

¹⁰ Yvonne LeBlanc, *Va lettre va: The French Verse Epistle (1400–1550)* (Birmingham, Ala., 1995), p. 33.

¹¹ *Poetical Works*, ed. Laidlaw, pp. 36of. These rubrics are from Laidlaw's base text (Qd, Toulouse, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 826); however, similar rubrics are extremely common across manuscripts of the letters. Here and elsewhere, citations from manuscripts have been normalized in accordance with standard editorial practice.

¹² We might compare Armstrong's discussion of the ways in which Jean Molinet's short poem *L'Épitaphe du duc Philippe de Bourgogne* is presented in some manuscripts as an 'authentique témoignage historique': the actual inscription copied from his tombstone. Adrian Armstrong, 'Avatars d'un griffonage à succès: *L'épitaphe du duc Philippe de Bourgogne* de Jean Molinet', *Le Moyen Âge*, 113 (2007), 25–46 (pp. 36f.).

¹³ Armstrong, 'Avatars d'un griffonage', p. 36.

¹⁴ Nancy Freeman Regalado, 'Effet de réel, effet du réel: representation and reference in Villon's *Testament*', *Yale French Studies*, 70 (1986), 63–77 (p. 75).

¹⁵ On Barthes's 'representation' and the *effet de réel* see Regalado, *Effet*, p. 64.

¹⁶ For a description and dating of Arch. Selden. B. 24, see *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer and the Kingis Quair: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Arch. Selden. B. 24* with an introduction by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards and an appendix by B. C. Barker-Benfield (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 1–60.

¹⁷ See <<http://www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/index.html>>, accessed 12 April 2015, for comprehensive description and digital images of this manuscript, a presentation copy made for Queen Isabeau of France whose production was overseen by Christine herself.

¹⁸ Deborah McGrady, *Controlling Readers: Guillaume de Machaut and his Late Medieval Audience* (Toronto, 2006), p. 131. Lawrence Earp gives a date of c.1390 for this manuscript, *Guillaume de Machaut: A Guide to Research* (Hoboken, NJ, 2013; 1st pub. 1995), p. 93.

¹⁹ McGrady, *Controlling Readers*, pp. 134f. and fig. 26, an image from the *Voir Dit* in MS E, fol. 204^r, showing visual shifts between lyric song (including musical notation), narrative verse, and prose letter from Toubelle to the narrator.

²⁰ *Poetical Works*, ed. Laidlaw, p. 361. A manuscript variant in the name of the pass where the suitors have been attacked is also quite often found: 'Dure Requeste' ('Hard Request'). I have capitalized the noun 'Pitié' in line with other personifications in the passage, although Laidlaw does not.

²¹ The personification 'Dangier' can be understood to signify 'Peril' or a lady's courtly withdrawal from a suitor in a general sense, but is also very likely a deliberate echo of the same character in the *Roman de la Rose*; here and elsewhere, I have therefore retained it in French.

²² As Hult and McRae observe, the narrators here consciously 'réinscrivent leur position dans l'éthique chevaleresque traditionnelle', *Le Cycle*, p. xlv.

²³ A proximity search for these words on the Garnier *Corpus de littérature médiévale* (Classiques Garnier numériques, 2001) returns four hits, all from *Perceval* ('gaste forest/forez' at lines 75, 390, and 2953; 'forest gaste' at line 449).

²⁴ See Armand Strubel, 'En la forest de Longue Actente: réflexions sur le style allégorique

de Charles d'Orléans', in *Styles et valeur: pour une histoire de l'art littéraire au Moyen-Âge*, ed. Daniel Poirion (Paris, 1990), pp. 167–86 (p. 173).

²⁵ For the manuscript, see *Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS fr. 25458: Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and his Circle*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn and John Fox, trans. R. Barton Palmer (Tempe, Ariz., 2010) and esp. Mary-Jo Arn, *The Poet's Notebook: The Personal Manuscript of Charles d'Orléans* (Turnhout, 2008).

²⁶ Jane H. M. Taylor, *The Making of Poetry: Late Medieval French Poetic Anthologies* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 129. On the multiplicity of interacting voices, imagery, and forms in the manuscript, see also Armstrong, *Virtuoso Circle*, ch. 3 and *Le Livre d'amis: poésies à la cour de Blois (1440–1465)*, ed. Jean-Claude Mühlethaler and Virginie Minet-Mahy (Paris, 2010), introduction and index des personnifications.

²⁷ On Charles's poetic terminology, see *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans*, ed. Arn and Fox, pp. li–liix.

²⁸ On which see further Taylor, *Making of Poetry*, pp. 104–33 and Armstrong, *Virtuoso Circle*, pp. 73–7. I here cite the poems using Arn and Fox's numbering; for cross-references to the numbering in Pierre Champion's earlier edition (*Charles d'Orléans: Poésies*, I: *La Retenue d'Amours, ballades, chansons, complaintes et caroles*; II: *Rondeaux* (Paris, 1923; 1927)) see their index of first lines, pp. 853–70.

²⁹ Arn, *The Poet's Notebook*, p. 189 (table 5) and ch. 4 on the third stint. Arn discusses the more precise ordering, within stint 3, of *rondels* in the 'forest' group at pp. 124f., although her conclusions take as their starting point the assumptions: (a) that the sequence developed as a chronologically structured competition between poets; (b) that Charles must have 'set' this (and other) repeated refrain lines in an initial poem for the competition to start; and (c) that poems were copied into the manuscript when they were composed (on this, see also pp. 14f.). These are hypotheses which traditionally have been accepted in most scholarship on Charles, but which have, more recently, been very persuasively questioned (see e.g. the discussion in Armstrong, *Virtuoso Circle*, p. 73).

³⁰ See Taylor, *Making of Poetry*, pp. 15of.

³¹ See Corinne Saunders, *The Forest of Medieval Romance* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. introduction and ch. 1: 'While the forest functions as a recurring literary topos with great symbolic power, it is also a "real" landscape, linked to the geographic, economic and legal concepts of the forest in the Middle Ages', p. xi.

³² On forests as refuges for outlaws and criminals, see Saunders, *Forest*, pp. 3f.; on the forest as hunting territory owned and administered by the rich and powerful, pp. 7–10; on the forest as philosophical symbol of chaos and disorder, pp. 19–33. For the innovative creative potential of blending (e.g.) courtly, philosophical, and everyday or 'real-world' discourses within the Blois poetry, see Armstrong, *Virtuoso Circle*, pp. 104–6.

³³ For an excellent discussion of the repeated reworking of a particular field of imagery so that it resonates within and between poems within Charles's manuscript, see Virginie Minet-Mahy, 'Charles d'Orléans et la tradition des métaphores maritimes', *Studi Francesi*, 135 (2001), 473–97. On the importance of reading the manuscript closely and carefully as a 'toile métaphorique', see *Livre d'amis*, ed. Mühlethaler and Minet-Mahy, pp. 39–44.

³⁴ I base my translations of poems from Charles's manuscript on R. Barton Palmer's in *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans*, ed. Arn and Fox.

³⁵ James J. Paxson, *The Poetics of Personification* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 161, pp. 35f.

Paxson distinguishes this from 'first personification', which he defines as 'local rhetorical ornament': the difference is between 'a figure that exists strictly in speech, and a figure that gets extended into an actual story ... projected into a narrative dimension' (pp. 35f.).

³⁶ Daniel Poirion, *Le Poète et le prince: l'évolution du lyrisme courtois de Guillaume de Machaut à Charles d'Orléans* (Paris, 1965), p. 186; Alice Planche, *Charles d'Orléans ou la recherche d'un langage* (Paris, 1975), p. 203. For a more recent reiteration of this view, see Claudio Galderisi, *En regardant vers le pays de France. Charles d'Orléans: une poésie des présents* (Orléans, 2007), p. 144 n. 67 and Lefèvre, 'Cachet de la poste', p. 92. On Chartier's possible poetic influence on Charles more generally, see John Fox, *The Lyric Poetry of Charles d'Orléans* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 63–5.

³⁷ Armstrong, *Virtuoso Circle*, pp. 77, 115.

³⁸ There are, of course, several later occurrences of it; for instance, in René d'Anjou's *Livre du Cœur d'amour épris* (c.1457–77) or in some of the poems featuring in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS n.a. fr. 15771 (c.1453–6), a manuscript anthology of lyric poetry. Both of these sources are almost certainly responding to Charles directly: René was part of Charles's social circle, contributed several poems to MS fr. 25458 (R5, R10, R13, R15), and wrote Charles into his *Livre*. N.a. fr. 15771 contains poetry from, and poetry directly responding to, the collection in Charles's personal manuscript. See Taylor, *Making of Poetry*, ch. 3, esp. pp. 175–85; *Une nouvelle collection de poésies lyriques et courtoises du XV^e siècle: le manuscrit B. N. nouv. acq. fr. 15771*, ed. Barbara Inglis (Paris, 1985), and Galderisi, *En regardant*, pp. 181f. (tableau 1). For 'le motif de la "longue attente"' post-Charles d'Orléans, see also Poirion, *Poète et prince*, pp. 185f. Lefèvre highlights a single, mid-thirteenth-century example of an image composed in this way to connect thought to a forest: 'La Forest de longue pensée' in Richard de Fournival's *Consaus d'amours*, 'Cachet de la poste', p. 92 n. 33.

³⁹ For example, Deschamps, in *Balade CCXXIX* (opening 'En la forest jadis noble et desert' ('In the forest once noble and wild')), deploys the forest as an allegorical figuration of the political predicament of France (*Ceuvres complètes de Eustache Deschamps*, ed. Le Marquis de Queux de St Hilaire and Gaston Raynaud (Paris and Le Puy, 1878–1903), 11 vols, volume II (1880): *Balades de Moralitez*, p. 57). *Balade XXX* of volume X (1901): *Pièces attribuables à Eustache Deschamps* (p. 38) uses the 'forest d'Ardaine' in a vaguely comparable way to Charles's 'forest de Longue Actente' as the *locus* for a frustrated amatory quest, but the 'forest d'Ardaine' obviously denotes a geographical place, and the *balade's* refrain ('maudit soit la forest perilleuse!' ('may the perilous forest be cursed!')) does not work in the same allegorical way to the 'forest de Longue Actente' image. For a more detailed argument concerning the uniqueness of Charles's allegorical constructions when compared to his poetic contemporaries and predecessors, see Strubel, 'Réflexions', esp. p. 183.

⁴⁰ See further Strubel, 'Réflexions', pp. 168–71 on this repeated construction, which can express personification (so, in the phrase 'en la forest de Longue Actente', 'Longue Actente' could be understood as an imagined individual to whom the 'forest' belongs, and who, therefore, invests it with some of his characteristics); but which Charles frequently shifts into what Strubel terms 'réification', where the 'forest' is imagined as *made up of* or metaphorically constituted by the abstract state of 'Longue Actente', just as 'Longue Actente' takes on the potentially myriad properties of a 'forest'. The abstract state or concept is thus blended with a physical referent, and the connotations of each affect the

other. See Strubel, 'Réflexions', pp. 173–5; Galderisi, *En regardant*, pp. 136–9 and Paul Zumthor, *Langue, texte, énigme* (Paris, 1975), pp. 197–213.

⁴¹ Strubel, 'Réflexions', p. 168.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁴³ These two *balades* also survive in Middle English versions: see *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles d'Orléans' English Book of Love*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn (Binghamton, NY, 1994), B43 ('in the carfull wode') and B70 ('in the forest of Noyous Hevynes').

⁴⁴ It is possible but not certain that Charles owned a pre-1440 copy of the *Belle Dame* (which may or may not have contained other texts): the November 1440 Saint-Omer inventory of the books he brought back from English captivity contained the following, at no. 34: 'ung autre, en papier, de Balades, commençant: *Une fois chevauchant pensoie*' ('another, on paper, of *balades*, beginning: *Once, while riding, I was thinking*'). This is expanded in a slightly later inventory, termed 'B' by Ouy, no. 107: 'Ung autre livre de balades en papier, commensant *Nagueres chevauchant pensoie*, appelé *les Cent balades*' ('Another book of *balades*, on paper, beginning *A little while ago, while I was riding, I was thinking* and called the *Cent balades*'). Clearly, this is either a copy of the *Belle Dame* or a copy of the *Cent balades*: confusion seems to have arisen because of the two texts' very similar opening lines ('*Nagueres chevauchant pensoie ...*' ('A little while ago, while riding, I was thinking')) compared to '*Une fois pieça chevauchois / Entre Pont de Cé et Angiers / Ainsi qu'en chevauchant pensoie ...*' ('Once, a while ago, I was riding between Pont de Cé and Angiers; while I was riding I was thinking')). For inventory B, see Gilbert Ouy, *La Librairie des frères captifs: les manuscrits de Charles d'Orléans et Jean d'Angoulême* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 41–54. For the Saint-Omer inventory, see Pierre Champion, *La Librairie de Charles d'Orléans* (Paris, 1910), pp. xxv–xxix.

⁴⁵ For a full description and images of Lausanne 350, see <<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/fr/description/bcul/Ms0350/>>, accessed 20 September 2016. For a full description of Morgan M.396, see Earp, *Guide*, pp. 101f. and Laidlaw, *Poetical Works*, p. 73.

⁴⁶ McRae, 'Piecing the puzzle', p. 118.

⁴⁷ Bern 473's particular provenance in the household or entourage of Amédée VIII (Antipope Felix V from 1439 to 1449) is discussed by McRae, 'Piecing the puzzle', pp. 118f. and André de Mandach, 'À la découverte d'un manuscrit d'Amédée VIII à la bibliothèque de Bern: avec des textes inédits attribués à Alain Chartier', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 30 (1968), 115–32, esp. p. 125.

⁴⁸ Neither contains any second-cycle *Querelle*-texts. Toulouse 826 does, however, contain *La Belle Dame qui eut mercy* (a title taken from common rubrics to the poem, although not featuring in this particular manuscript). This text is usually attributed to Oton de Grandson (and would therefore be earlier in date than the *Belle Dame*), but seems to have been adopted in the fifteenth century as a 'response' to it and integrated into the *Querelle*. Toulouse 826 presents the *Belle Dame qui eut mercy* – which, like the *Belle Dame*, takes the form of a conversation between an aspirant lover and a lady – as an untitled sequence of six discrete, paired 'complaints' and 'responses' rather than a single narrative text (fols 52^v–63^v): the compiler does not link it explicitly by title or rubric to the *Belle Dame*.

⁴⁹ De Mandach, 'Un manuscrit d'Amédée VIII', pp. 118f. and p. 127. C. M. Briquet, *Les Filigranes: dictionnaire historique des marques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600, A Facsimile of the 1907 Edition with Supplementary Material Contributed by a Number*

of *Scholars*, ed. Allan Stevenson (Amsterdam, 1968). Briquet no. 2774's image is in fact a watermark from Colmar dated 1423, but Briquet lists twelve further bull watermarks as 'variétés similaires'. One of these is de Mandach's 1435–7 Chambéry mark, but others are dated by Briquet to the years between 1441 and 1478. In any case, I believe that a closer match can be found with a different watermark catalogued by Piccard; see further below. Laidlaw, *Poetical Works* follows de Mandach's dating (p. 84).

⁵⁰ Bern 473's bull watermark is consistently found partially concealed in the manuscript's gutter, rather than in the centre of the writing page, which makes accurate measurement and appraisal of the whole image very difficult. For this reason, I do not here claim a positive identification; I suggest, however, that those parts of the mark which are visible resemble Piccard numbers 86247, 86252, and 86263 (found in the group 'tetrapod-bull-above rod consisting of one line') more closely than the Briquet mark identified by de Mandach. The bull's most characteristic features are its upwardly prancing feet (both front and back legs), which are also found in the Piccard group I have identified, but not, it seems to me, in Briquet no. 2774, which has relatively flat back feet and legs. The chain-lines in Bern 473, where clearly visible, are between 36 and 37 mm apart, while the Piccard prancing bull series appears in Piccard's drawings with chain-lines that are between 36 and 38 mm apart. See <<https://www.piccard-online.de>>, accessed 3 March 2017.

⁵¹ I am grateful to Orietta da Rold and Christophe Flüeler for helpful discussion of this point.

⁵² De Mandach, 'Un manuscrit d'Amédée VIII', pp. 118–20, p. 131.

⁵³ See *ibid.*, appendix, esp. pp. 129–31.

⁵⁴ See description in Laidlaw, *Poetical Works*, pp. 121–3. The three watermarks are: a bull's head, a gloved hand, and a paschal lamb in a circle. Laidlaw found the bull's head (the principal watermark, used for the first six of seven quires in Toulouse 826, including the *Belle Dame* and *Querelle* quires) similar (but not identical) to Briquet no. 14313 (1419, Bruxelles and 1430, Morges, Vaud). I cannot find an exact match for any of the manuscript's watermarks in Piccard, although I find the bull's head most similar in shape and design to Piccard no. 79329 (Konstanz, 1441). This mark is, however, too large, and its chain-lines too far apart to form an exact match with Toulouse 826. The closest match in design between chain-lines of approximately the right size is Piccard no. 79387 (Frankfurt, 1438), although this too does not seem to me to be precisely identical to the bull's head in Toulouse 826. See <<https://www.piccard-online.de>>, accessed 3 March 2017.

⁵⁵ Although openings and ends of texts do usually coincide with quire boundaries, and its final quire (no. 7) and flyleaves exhibit different watermarks from the other six quires. The *Belle Dame* itself does not close at a quire boundary: it spans the end of quire 2 and the opening of quire 3. These two quires are clearly designed to work together as a unit, however; they contain Chartier's *Débat du reveil matin*, which opens quire 2, plus the first cycle of the *Querelle* (*Belle Dame*, letters, *Excusacion*), plus the *Belle Dame qui eut mercy*, which concludes quire 3.

⁵⁶ For a full description of Besançon 554, see Laidlaw, *Poetical Works*, pp. 119f.

⁵⁷ 'Cy apres s'ensuit la supplicacion transmise par les amoureux aux dames / toute en Rime escripte' (Fribourg, Bibl. Universitaire, MS L 1200, fol. 17'; 'Here afterwards follows the supplication transmitted by the lovers to the ladies, all written in rhyme'). For a

description and images of this MS, see <<http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/description/bcufl/L1200/>>, accessed 15 April 2016.

⁵⁸ Fribourg L 1200 has been foliated in its top right-hand corner by an early hand.

⁵⁹ 'Explicit la lettre des dames envoyée à meistre allain'; 'Cy apres s'ensuit l'excusacion faicte par le dit maistre Alain sur ces présentes' (fol. 24^v; 'Explicit the letter of the ladies sent to *maistre Alain*; Here afterwards follows the *excusacion* made by the said *maistre Alain* about these present [texts]').

⁶⁰ This back flyleaf also contains, on its recto, a *rondel* in a fifteenth-century hand, beginning with the lines 'Me ferés vous tousiours languir / Belle que j'ay voluz servir' ('Will you forever make me languish / Beautiful [one] whom I have wished to serve'). Earp provides tentative evidence for a possible connection to the circle at Blois: lines 9f. of the *rondel* are virtually identical to lines 5f. of a short poem found as an annotation on fol. 71^r of Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS 5010 C, a Machaut manuscript. This poem shares an opening line with Charles's R108 ('Et ne cesserez vous jamais?' ('And will you never cease?')), which has led Earp to suggest that, in view of the way that Charles and his contemporaries composed around repeated images and lines, the Aberystwyth Machaut manuscript may have its origins in his circle, and could possibly be identified with the one owned by Dunois, the Bastard of Orléans, Charles's half-brother. Fribourg L 1200 could similarly have originated with, or crossed the path of, someone in some way associated with Charles or his coterie. See Earp, *Guide*, p. 97 (on Dunois's unidentified Machaut manuscript) and pp. 79–84 (on Aberystwyth 5010 C and its annotations).

⁶¹ McRae, 'Piecing the puzzle', p. 121. McRae here states that the date 1439 is found on the front pastedown; however, I can only locate it on the back flyleaf.

⁶² Ouy, *Librairie*, p. 49 identifies fr. 20026 as the (possible) *Belle Dame* manuscript which Charles brought back from England and which was listed on the Saint-Omer inventory of his books made in November 1440, when he returned to France (cf. n. 45). However, this does not seem to me to be possible, even if we could be sure that the book referred to was definitely a copy of the *Belle Dame*, since fr. 20026 features the arms of Charles's new wife, and he married Marie after his return.

⁶³ For descriptions of fr. 20026 and fr. 2230, see *Poetical Works*, ed. Laidlaw, pp. 111f. and 108f. and McRae, *The Quarrel*, pp. 28–32.

⁶⁴ As McRae, 'Piecing the puzzle', p. 119 notes, the version of the *Accusations* in Marie's and Marguerite's manuscripts is truncated at the end, although the manuscripts present it as complete. This could be a sign, she suggests, that it was copied in an early, as yet unfinished form.

⁶⁵ See McRae, 'Piecing the puzzle', pp. 119f.; *The Quarrel*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ See Pierre Champion, 'Un liber amicorum du XVe siècle: notice d'un manuscrit ayant appartenu à Marie de Clèves, femme de Charles d'Orléans (Bibl. nat. ms. Français 20026)', *Revue des Bibliothèques*, 20 (1910), 320–36.

⁶⁷ Nancy Freeman Regalado, 'Gathering the works: the *Œuvres de Villon* and the intergeneric passage of the medieval French lyric into single-author collections', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 33 (1993), 87–100; see esp., for example, her discussion of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 20041 and Pierre Lever's 1489 Villon print, pp. 97f.

⁶⁸ As Poirion suggests is possible, *Poète et prince*, p. 47 and n. 84.

⁶⁹ *Livre d'amis*, ed. Mühlethaler and Minet-Mahy, p. 39.