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Sarah Delale

Literary Authority and Chivalric Authority in the Works of Jean III de Werchin

(›Le Songe de la barge‹, challenge letters and ballads
composed with Guillebert de Lannoy)

Abstract. The works of Jean III de Werchin point out an evolution of literary practices at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries. The challenge letters sent by the senechal to his potential opponents rely on a double literary authority: firstly, on the model of past knights, especially those of the Round Table; secondly, on the courtly scenario of a man fighting for his lady's honour. The inclusion of those challenge letters in a manuscript containing 15th century pas d'armes shows that Werchin's rhetoric stands at the transition from ›plain‹ military practices to military challenges based on literary scenarios. As for Werchin's ›Songe de la barge‹ and poetic debate with his squire Guillebert de Lannoy, both works testify to the development of a literary aesthetic among knights, especially from the 14th century onwards. This aesthetic relies on the cultural companionship and complicity between members of the chivalric class – a class whose function is to take sides in cultural, social and military conflicts. Within this class, the literary form of the ›debate‹ aims less at a reflection on the world than at a playful opposition, on both linguistic and cultural levels.

Jean III de Werchin was born in 1374 and died in the battle of Agincourt on October 25, 1415. He was renowned during and after his lifetime as one of the bravest knights of his time.¹ He was part of a generation of fighters who took an interest both in warfare and in the literary culture of their time: those knights renewed the literary field of the *courtoisie* by incorporating the ideology *d'armes et d'amour* in their military practices. During the 14th century, a great number of knights had taken a deep interest in love poetry and first-person narratives: Jean III de Werchin's grandfather,

Jean II de Werchin, was a friend and an occasional benefactor of Jean Froissart (Grenier-Winther 1996, p. XI). But Jean III de Werchin was not only celebrated as an extraordinary fighter interested in the arts; he was also renowned as a talented poet. He was far from being the only knight-poet of his generation: the ›Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut‹ reports that, at a young age, Jean II le Meingre, known as Boucicaut (1364–1421),

ja commençoit a sentir naturellement [...] la pointure amoureuse que Doulz Regart, le subtil archer, procure et envoie es gentilz courages. Si [...] se print a faire balades, rondiaux, virelais, lays et complaints d’amoureux sentement, desquelles choses faire gayement et doucement Amours le fist en pou d’eure si bon maistre que nul ne l’en passoit, si comme il appert par le ›Livre des Cent Balades‹, duquel faire lui et le seneschal d’Eu furent compaignons ou voyage d’oultre mer. (›Fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre‹, p. 31–32)

was already beginning to naturally feel [...] the wound of love that Sweet Look, the subtle archer, inflicts to noble hearts with the help of his arrows. Thus [...] he started to compose ballads, ›rondeaux‹, ›virelais‹, ›lais‹ and complaints about love, and Love made him so competent in writing easily and cheerfully that he quickly surpassed all others in that matter, as evidenced by the ›Livre des Cent Ballades‹ that he and the seneschal of Eu composed together during their trip overseas.

›Les Cent Ballades‹ (1905), probably composed in 1389, debate the necessity to be faithful to a unique lady during courtship, or to court several ladies simultaneously to increase one’s chances of being loved in return. Several knights gave their opinion on the matter, among which Jean de Chambrillac, François d’Aubercicourt, Guillaume de Tignonville, Charles d’Ivry and Jacquet d’Orléans, who later joined (as well as the seneschal of Eu and Jean II le Meigne) an association called the ›Cour amoureuse‹, founded in Paris by the Dukes of Burgundy and Bourbon in January 1401 (n. st.) (Bozzolo/Loyau 1982–2018).

Those courtly and literary networks expanded to military competitions and *emprises*, characterized by the ›Livre des fais du bon messire Jehan le

Maingre< as a type of military challenge that was rather new or recently renewed.² In 1402, Boucicaut founded the ›Escu vert a la dame blanche‹, a military order dedicated to the defence of women, with some of his closest friends: Jean de Chambrillac and François d’Aubercicourt were part of its thirteen tenants, along with other members of the ›Cour amoureuse‹ such as Charles d’Albret, Raoul de Gaucourt, Jean de Châteaumorand, Jean Betas and Jean de Torsay (›Fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre‹, p. 160–171).

Raoul de Gaucourt took part with other knights in a poetical discussion with Jean de Garençières – a knight-poet also known for his poetical debates with Charles d’Orléans (Gaucourt’s ballad appears in Paris, BnF, Français 19139, p. 468–469; see Neal 1952–1953; Mühlethaler 2018). Though Garençières does not seem to have been part of the ›Cour amoureuse‹, he was also a friend of Lourdin de Saligny, another member of this court. To both, Guillebert de Lannoy, Jean III de Werchin’s squire, addressed a ballad preserved in a unique manuscript, within a poetical debate where himself and Jean de Werchin discuss the necessity for Guillebert to forget or to stay true to a lady who rejected him (›Ballades‹, p. 99–100).

All those fighters were relating their chivalric prowess to the power of love – thus promoting their class and identity in real life through a literary universe. Even though a great number of them perished in Agincourt, they had a heavy influence on the next generation of fighters, as can be seen in a tournament organised by Charles VII half a century later:

Le roy Charles, [...] pour entretenir à sa cour le goût des armes, [...] fit publier un tournoy pour le 1^{er} may [1447] entre les Montils et le Bois-Saint-Cosme. Deux partis, de cinquante seigneurs chacun, devoient soutenir l’un la loyauté, l’autre la desloyauté des dames; le Roy étoit à la tête du premier parti avec le comte de Foix; le comte d’Eu étoit à la tête du second. Tous chargèrent ensemble, et après avoir rompu leurs lances chamaillèrent avec de gros bâtons de houx en guise d’épées; le parti du Roy eut l’avantage; ceux de l’autre parti furent bien battus et la plupart renversés. (Courteault 1906, p. 204–205)

To maintain an interest in warfare at his court, King Charles had a tournament announced for the 1st of May [1447] between Montils and Bois-Saint-Cosme. Two parties of fifty lords each were to support, one, loyalty, and the other, disloyalty to the ladies. The King led the first party with the Count of Foix; the Count of Eu led the second party. All of them charged at once, and after having broken their lances, bickered with big sticks of holly as swords. The King's party had the advantage; those of the other party were well beaten and most of them overthrown.³

When knights are writing to promote their own class and identity, without any intermediary, we shift from a socio-literary pattern that Daniel Poirion called ›the poet and the prince‹ (where knights and princes embody a worldly authority, and clerks a literary or scholarly authority, as for Jean II de Werchin and Froissart) to a pattern where poetry and knighthood are combined in a unique identity. How did those knights-poets make use of literature, as a way to promote a certain vision of their world and of their duty; and how did those writings increase their authority?

Debates included in first-person poetry or first-person narratives constitute a literary format that very easily connects reality with fiction. Any discourse at the first-person, whether autobiographical or explicitly fictional, is always promoting an oriented or biased image of reality (Kahneman/Slovic/Tversky 1982; Kahneman 2011). When literature is used by fighters, a class of noblemen that has a pragmatic role in society, its primary role is not to resolve or appreciate the contradictions of reality. Fighters take sides within those contradictions, as a military class whose authority and function are to defend positions within social, national and international conflicts.

1. The Knight Jean III de Werchin: Literary Authority in Military Competitions

Jean III de Werchin was renowned in the beginning of the 15th century for being prompt to organise or take part in *emprises*, military challenges

against other knights in Europe. He was an *entrepreneur en faits d'armes* («a military entrepreneur»; Paravicini 1999), especially from 1396 to 1409. In 1396, he fought John Cornwall and three other English knights with three knights from Hainaut, the sire of Ligne, Michel de Ligne and Robert Rouc. In 1399, he was in Aragon and took part in a tournament in Cardona in following April. In June 1402, he defied all knights, except those from France and Hainaut, while he was taking a trip from Coucy to Santiago de Compostela. From 1404 to 1409, he tried to fight against John Cornwall and the knights of the Order of the Garter.

Some of Werchin's challenge letters are preserved in four manuscripts (Paravicini 1999, § 18, notes 17 and 54). London, British Library, Additional 31379 preserves the letters and recounts of some of his *emprises*. A fragment, Lille, AD Nord, J 472, contains several letters exchanged between Jean de Werchin and John Cornwall. In a manuscript copied in 1459 in Genappe, Brabant (Lefèvre 2006, p. 427–428), some challenge letters appear after what Sylvie Lefèvre calls the ›recueil Saintré‹, a compilation of texts gathering the romance ›Jehan de Saintré‹, the short story ›Floridan et Elvide‹ and an excerpt from the ›Chroniques de Flandre‹ (Lefèvre 2009).

The fourth manuscript, Paris, BnF, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 1167, is an anthology probably gathered by a herald of arms, maybe Charolais (Paravicini 1999, note 53; on Charolais, see Schnerb 2006; Simonneau 2013; Stanesco 1988, chapter XIII, p. 189–197). Opening with military rules and regulations, this copy contains the letters of Jean de Werchin concerning his trip to Santiago de Compostela and one of his *emprises* in 1404, and those addressed to John Cornwall and the king of England. It also reports on other challenges led by Gonterry Guichade and Haubourdin in 1437–1438; Ternant and Galiot de Bardaxin in 1445 (BnF, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 1167, f. 22–26: ›Les armes faites par monseigneur de Ternant a l'encontre de Galiot de Bardaxin escuier‹ (›the feats of arms that the Lord of Ternant held against Galiot de Bardaxin, squire‹), and f. 26v: ›La teneur des lettres faisant mencion comment

Galiot de Baidaxin promist delivrer monseigneur de Habourdin des armes declariees es chappitres cy dessus escrips) («the content of the letter mentioning how Galiot de Baidaxin promised to deliver the Lord of Habourdin from the military enterprise described in the previous chapters»); Jehan de Rebreviette; Jean de Bourbon and Thomas of Lancaster in 1406, as well as the ›Pas de la belle pelerine‹ (›Passage of the Beautiful Pilgrim Lady‹) led by Jean de Luxembourg, sire of Haubourdin and the ›Pas de la fontaine de pleurs‹ (›Passage of the Fountain of Tears‹) led by Jacques de Lalaing, both in 1449.⁴ The copy ends on a letter recounting the military achievements of Jacques de Lalaing, written to Jacques' father by Jean le Fèvre de Saint-Remy, Toison d'Or.

This manuscript places Jean III de Werchin at a turning point between two generations. On the one part, Werchin's contemporaries such as Boucicaut multiplied *emprises d'armes* (›military enterprise, chivalrous adventure‹) that involved only mottos or basic symbols (e.g. a bracelet that was not to be removed until the end of the *emprise*); on the other part, the following generation enriched these military challenges with literary scenarios. The 15th century *pas d'armes* (›passage of arms‹)

peuvent se concevoir comme un simulacre épuré de guerre dans lequel les chevaliers jouent un rôle d'acteur en s'opposant à l'épée, la lance ou la hache. À travers une histoire partiellement dévoilée et des signes volontairement porteurs de sens, les spectateurs ont à résoudre une sorte d'énigme à entrée multiple. Qui combat, pourquoi et pour qui ? Une dame se cache-t-elle derrière cette entreprise ? Que signifie cette devise, ces lettres brodées sur la tenue du combattant ? La curiosité est attisée par des voies diverses et l'imaginaire est très sollicité. La musique, la poésie et les allégories viennent parfaire les effets dramatiques du combat. (Nadot 2012, p. 21)

can be conceived as a rudimentary reproduction of war, in which the knights play an actor's role while fighting with a sword, a lance or an axe. Faced with a partially revealed story and ambiguous signs, the spectators are invited to solve an enigma with multiple entries. Who is fighting, why and for whom? Is there a lady behind this challenge? What does this motto mean, or these letters embroidered on the fighter's outfit? Many clues arouse the curiosity of the

public, whose imagination is highly solicited. Music, poetry and allegories reinforce the fight's dramatic effects.

In this type of military exercise, arts and warfare merge as a way to intertwine fiction and reality in the public's mind: reality must be interpreted through literary codes. Jacques de Lalaing's ›Pas de la fontaine de plours‹ (›Passage of the Fountain of Tears‹), which took place for a whole year near Chalon-sur-Saône (1449–1450), was staged in the vicinity of a fountain. There, Jacques de Lalaing had a portrait installed, figuring

une dame [...] [qui] tenoit maniere de plourer tellement que les larmes tombaient et couroient jusque sur le costé senestre, ou fut une fontaine figurée et sur icelle une licorne assise, tenant maniere d'embrasser [...] trois targes [...]; et furent lesdictes targes toutes semées de larmes bleues; et pour ces causes fut la dame nommée la dame de Plours, et la fontaine, la fontaine de Plours. (›Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche‹, t. 2, p. 146–147)

a lady who was crying so much that tears were falling on the left side of the image, where a fountain had been painted, with a unicorn seated on it that seemed to grasp three shields. And those shields were covered with blue tears, and that's why the lady was named the Lady of Tears, and the fountain, the fountain of Tears.

One fighter declared that he wanted to *donner confort à la dame de Plours, estre du très heureux nombre des combatans en ceste emprinse* (›Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche‹, t. 2, p. 175: ›give comfort to the Lady of Tears and be part of all the happy fighters of this noble undertaking‹). The ideas of giving comfort and being part of the fighters, related in the same sentence, show how the staging is artificial and considered with a certain distance by the knights who want to participate, but how everybody tends to play along with the game. The micro-narration of rescuing a crying lady works as a cultural go-between for the fighters.

By making use of a common-place fiction or of a basic allegory, knights constantly navigate between fiction – which represents a cultural authority for military actions – and reality, as warfare is a set of rules transmitted by

challenge letters. Thus, the fighters are invited to exercise their body as well as their rhetorical talents. To take part in ›Pas de la fontaine de plours‹, the sire of Espiry writes a request to Jacques de Lalaing,

et luy faisoit ceste requeste avec plusieurs beaux et aornez motz, dont le chevalier estoit bien garni; car ledit seigneur d'Espiry fut tenu de son temps l'un des vaillans, saiges, plaisans et courtois chevaliers qui fust en Bourgoingne. (›Mémoires d'Olivier de la Marche‹, t. 2, p. 175–176)

And he had written his request in fair and beautiful words which he was familiar with; for this sire of Espiry was known during his life as one of the valiant, wise, amiable and gracious knights in Burgundy.

The fighters are not only judged on their talents in warfare; they are also appreciated in the way they respond to the original scenario and eventually expand it to a new or a higher level.

The ›Pas de la fontaine de plours‹ has been recounted in the letter of Jean Lefèvre de Saint-Remy, Toison d'Or, to Jacques de Lalaing's father (after 1453) which appears in one of the manuscripts containing Jean III de Werchin's challenge letters (Paris, BnF, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 1167), but also in a historical work, the memoirs of Olivier de la Marche, as well as in the ›Livre des fais de Jacques de Lalaing‹, a partly romanced biography mentioning Jean III de Werchin as a model of knighthood. This romanced biography was then used as a source and an inspiration for Antoine de la Sale's ›Jehan de Saintré‹. One manuscript holding the letters of Jean III de Werchin also contains the ›recueil Saintré‹. The medieval manuscripts thus establish a continuity between real military actions (such as Jean de Werchin's challenges), staged *pas d'armes* (recounted in memoirs and half-romanced biographies) and pure fiction such as ›Jehan de Saintré‹. This continuity in written media echoes a continuity in the knights' minds, between real fight and literary discourse.

The use of courtly fiction as an authority is also testified by the importance given in *pas d'armes* and *emprises* to fictional knights from the

Round Table.⁵ The *joyeuse garde* («Joyous Gard») and Lancelot's character were a major inspiration for two *pas d'armes* staged by René d'Anjou during the year 1446, in Razilly and Saumur (Nadot 2012, p. 170–172 and 183–184), as well as for the ›Pas de la Belle Pèlerine‹ whose

aventure chevaleresque rappelle également l'emprise d'Alixandre l'orphelin pour sa dame. [...] Pour faire écho à ces histoires, le seigneur de Haubourdin endosse une cotte aux armes de Lancelot. Le même motif orne le cheval du seigneur de Créquy tandis que celui du seigneur de Ternant arbore celles de Palamède [...]. [C]ette attitude montre que l'imprégnation est à la fois directe (le déguisement de Lancelot, connu de tous) et diffuse (à travers le schéma commun du chevalier amoureux fait prisonnier). (Nadot 2012, p. 171)

knightly endeavour also recalls the military challenge of ›Alixandre l'orphelin‹ for his lady. [...] To echo these stories, the lord of Haubourdin wears the coat of arms of Lancelot. Those arms also adorn the horse of the lord of Créquy, while the lord of Ternant's horse bears those of Palamede [...]. This choice testifies that the impregnation is both immediate (Lancelot's renowned coat of arms) and diffuse (through the literary pattern of a captive knight in love).

Half a century before the ›Pas de la Belle Pèlerine‹, Jean III de Werchin writes to the king of England to challenge any knight from the Order of the Garter. To do so, he also refers to the Order of the Round Table:

Par plusieurs et anciennes ystoires ay maintesfoys veu et oï que du temps du tresnoble et trespuissant roy, le bon Artuz, regnant en la seigneurie ou a present regnez, estoit establi pour lors en sa tresnoble roiale court une ordre de laquelle estoient plusieurs chevaliers qui se appeloient les chevaliers de la Table Ronde, qui alors surmontoient touz autres de valeur, de chevalerie. Et ne se tenoit nul chevalier parfaitement apprenné s'il n'avoit l'acointance par armes a cieus de la Table Ronde. Et aussi ay entendu que aucuns roy du dit royaume depuis, en recompensant la dicte ordre, ont establi celle qui je appelle la Garretiere, laquelle encore dure, dont a present sont plusieurs nobles chevaliers. (›Correspondance‹, p. 163)

I have often read and heard in many ancient stories that, in the time of the most noble and powerful king Arthur the Good, who was ruling the country you're currently ruling, there was an Order established at his noble and royal

court, and there were several knights in that Order who claimed themselves to be the knights of the Round Table; those knights prevailed upon all others in virtues and knighthood. And no knight would consider himself to be fully educated until he had fought against those of the Round Table. And I have also heard that in remembrance of this Order, a king from the said kingdom has since established an Order called the Order of the Garter, which still exists, and to which many noble knights belong.

The authority of fiction acts as a pretext for war and fighting, but it may cause misunderstandings. When King Henri IV writes back to Jean III de Werchin, he corrects him about his literary reference:

Est moult estrange au regart de la dicte ordre, car on ne list point aux ystoires anciennes de la dicte Table Ronde que jamais touz cieulx d'icelle ordre alasant combatre a un seul chevalier estrange, mais on y treuve bien en plusieurs lieux commant un d'iceulx c'est combatu tout seul par plusieurs foiz contre X, XX, XXX, XL chevaliers estranges tout a une fois. (↗Correspondance, p. 176)

This is very strange regarding the said Order, because in the ancient stories of the said Round Table, one can read nowhere that all knights from that Order fought all at once against one foreign knight, but it often occurs that one of those knights fought several times against ten, twenty, thirty foreign knights all at once.

The literary battle on textual explanations supersedes the military battle. Jean III de Werchin answers more elaborately, though maybe not more clearly:

Ce ne peult riens toucher a mon emprinse, car si on n'y treuve que un chevalier estrange ne combatist a touz cieulx de la dicte ordre, si treuve l'an bien que plusieurs chevaliers d'icelui temps s'essaierent en armes en la court du tres-noble et trespuissant roy, le bon Artus, a plusieurs des chevaliers de la dicte ordre et mesmement a sa personne. En oultre j'ay bien es dictes ystoires leu que toutes requestes qui se faissent par estrangers chevaliers au noble et trespuissant roy, et par especial en armes, que jamais nulle nuly refusast, mais leur fist acomplir leur chalenges et vouloir par la maniere qu'il les vouldroient requerre. (↗Correspondance, p. 178–179)

This can't relate to my challenge because, if one cannot find anything about a foreign knight fighting against all knights of the said Order at once, one can actually find that several knights from that time gave a try at fighting at the Court of the most noble and powerful king Arthur the Good, against several knights of the said Order, and even against the king himself. Furthermore, I did read in the said stories that the noble and most powerful king would never refuse any request made by foreign knights, especially in warfare, but he would always fulfil their will and challenges in the way they had requested it.

The king's remark on the English knights' bravery sounds like a dare and maybe like a dismissal, but Werchin replies with what looks like literary blackmail: if Henri IV wants to act like the noble heir of King Arthur, he has to stick to the ancient stories' scenario and to accept the challenge. Military challenges, seen as physical and cultural competitions, extend more and more from the body field (what we now call ›sport‹) to the linguistic and literary field. The knights refer to both fields as defining features of their identity.

In that sense, Werchin as well as Boucicaut represents a pivoting point in the evolution of military challenges. They constitute cultural models for the next generation of knights, as can be seen in the manuscript of Paris, BnF, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 1167. As a fighter coming from the Burgundian territories, Werchin is textually put in relation with later fighters from the same area who enriched their military challenges with more elaborate scenarios.

2. The Poet Jean III de Werchin: Love, Cultural Identity and Chivalric Authority

Jean III de Werchin was also a poet: he was granted the title of Minister of the ›Cour amoureuse‹, a role reserved to *approuvés factistes par apparence et renommée* (›Cour amoureuse‹, t. I, p. 36–37: »writers known by proof and reputation«). As such, he had to organise and judge at least one literary contest every year, and he could be solicited to judge love cases.

The social practice of love debates and questions, such as the *demandes d'amour*, is often portrayed in courtly texts composed during that period.⁶ Alongside with poetical competitions and *feste de joustes* organised *pour esveil de gracieuseté et pour l'honneur des dames* (»tournaments« organised »to inspire graciousness and to honour the ladies«), the »Cour amoureuse«'s charter was encouraging the production of love cases in the form of legal requests:

Se aucunes questions, pour plaisant pasetempz, sourdoient entre noz subgés en fourme d'amoureux procès pour differentes oppinions soustenir, tant que les parties fussent appointiees en fais contraires et a baillier par escript, [...] ne porra chascune des deux parties metre en ses escriptures plus de .XII. articles et en chascun article plus de .XII. lignes parmy raisonnable marge, et telles lignes que une fueille de papier pourra comprendre du travers, lesquelles escriptures seront leues ainsy que ordonné sera, et après seront baillés, toutes seelees, es mains de noz amoureux Presidents ou de l'un d'eulx, pour en determiner et decider la sentence amoureuse ainsy que le caz requerra a jour de saint Valentin et non autre jour. (»Cour amoureuse«, p. 41)

If, for recreational purposes, any question was to oppose our subjects in an amorous trial where their opinions should differ, so that the opposing parties would decide to write down their views on the matter, [...] each of the parties shouldn't include in their petition more than twelve sections which shouldn't exceed twelve lines each within reasonable margins, nor exceed the lines that one sheet of paper can include. Such requests will be read as ordered, then sealed and delivered to all our amorous Presidents or to one of them, and the amorous judgment will be discussed and rendered accordingly to the case on Valentine's Day – and on no other day of the year.

Debates written in verse could also be submitted to the Ministers of the Court, as shown by a verse letter written by Amé Malingre and submitted to all of the »Cour amoureuse«'s Ministers, including Werchin (Ritter 1880, p. 451–468). In the same courtly context, between 1400 and 1402, Christine de Pizan dedicated to Werchin her »Dit des trois jugemens«, inviting him to resolve three love debates for the sake of their protagonists.

The ›Cour amoureuse‹ bear witness of a literary evolution within the courtly societies of the 15th century. Contrary to Guillaume de Machaut's ›Jugements‹ poems, Christine de Pizan's ›Dit de Poissy‹ or Alain Chartier's ›Livre des quatre dames‹, its debates do not confront different situations but different points of view on a unique situation. Each point of view tries to win over the other(s) to characterize a unique reality. Werchin's compositions also testify of this evolution.

The poetical works of Jean III de Werchin survive in a unique manuscript (Chantilly, Musée Condé 686) preserving an exchange of ballads between Jean de Werchin and his squire, Guillebert de Lannoy, and a first-person narrative written by Werchin, called ›Le Songe de la barge‹ (›The Dream of the Barge‹) (Grenier-Winther 1996, p. XXIX–XXX; Paravicini 1999; Piaget 1910).

The ballads' exchange was probably composed around 1402–1404. It is a debate concerning Guillebert's love situation: as his lady refuses to love him, must Guillebert continue to love her (that's his decision) or must he move on to another lady (that's Werchin's advice)? The debaters never seem to agree and the exchange ends with a proposition from Werchin to ask the opinion of Guillebert's Lady. Thus, the ballads' exchange ultimately takes the form of a love judgment.

Joan Grenier-Winther observes that a ›petit livret en papier [...] intitulé au dos ›Debat au seneschal de [Haynnau]‹« (1996, p. XXIX–XXX: »small book on paper with the title ›Debat au seneschal de [Haynnau]‹ written on its back«) mentioned by Barrois in the inventory of Philippe le Bon's library (1419–1467) could actually be identified to some of the ballads exchanged between Jean de Werchin and Guillebert de Lannoy. The book's *incipit* may refer to the beginning of ballad VII, a ballad introducing the debate between the knight and his squire (Grenier-Winther 1996, XXIX–XXX). This could possibly indicate that the collection of 46 ballads appearing in Chantilly,

Musée Condé 686, was in fact a collection of ballads by Guillebert de Lannoy, in which one or two debates with Werchin were incorporated (ballads 7–18 and 23/24–31).

Debates written in the first person create a poetic emulation inside a group of military companions: it is a poetic form of sociability within a social class (Latour 2005). This aesthetics rely on the complicity or companionship of its participants: ›complicity‹ here refers to a tacit agreement to undertake common actions or to take part in a community, with shared values and linguistic practices only mastered or fully understood within this community.⁷ Hence the use of mottos, such as the *N.l.n* appearing in half the lines of Guillebert's ballad XXI (›Ballades‹, p. 117–118), or the fact that Guillebert addresses his ballad II to *Mes freres et mes amis* (›my brothers and friends‹) and his ballad III to *Lourdin, Lourdin de Saligny, / Et vous, Garencies, compains* (›Ballades‹, p. 98–99).

As for the knights' conformation to each other's behaviour, it can be observed in many expressions within the ballads, such as the refrains *Je le feroye tout ainsy* and *Comme avés fait, je le feroye* (›Ballades‹, ballad XXVI, p. 122: »I would act exactly in that way« and XXXI, p. 126: »I would act as you did«). It was already a recurrent pattern in the ›Cent Ballades‹' replies. Guillaume de Tignonville's ballad is addressed to the authors of the debate; after quoting the name of three other repliers, the ballad concludes on the following refrain: *Yvry s'y tient, aussi fait Tignonville* (›Les Cent Ballades‹, p. 211–212: »Ivry sticks to it and so does Tignonville«).

Another knightly community based on complicit literature can be observed at the beginning of the ›Songe de la barge‹. This first-person narrative is staged on November 1404 in the city of Brest, where French knights and soldiers are waiting to go and help the Welsh rebellion against the English army.

... leur voulloir estoit fermé pieça
A faire guerre
Et eulx armer sur le roy d'Engleterre.
Mais le fort vent nous tenoit si en serre
Que ne pouyons eslongner de la terre
Pour nous trouver
Dessus iceulx ou nous voullions aller.
La nous falloit ainsy noz temps passer
Tant que le vent se vouldist retourner.
[...] [T]rompectez oÿsiez
Fort retentir tout en tour, ce sachiez,
Sur ces vasseaulx,
Ces menestrés corner motés nouveaulx,
Et faire aucunes balade(s) et rondeaulx;
D'autres conter de ses long[s] contes beaulx
Pour eulx esbatre.

(>Songe de la barge<, l. 35–60)

... their mind was then firmly set on / Going to war / And fighting against the king of England. / But a strong wind was blowing around us / So that we couldn't even leave the shore / To reach the place / Where we would attack our enemies. / And here we had to spend our time and wait / Until the wind would change direction. / [...] You could hear the sound of trumpets / Resounding loud and clear, to be sure, / On all those ships; / And those minstrels playing the newest songs / And composing some ballads and rondels; / Others telling those long and lovely tales / To have some fun.

The knights are engaging in musical and poetic activities: this emulation is presented as a prelude for military competitions. Several members of the >Cour amoureuse< were in Brest for that expedition, among whom the Prince of the Court, Pierre de Hauteville, and other members such as Guillebert de Lannoy and Lourdin de Saligny. Jean de Garencières may also have been present.

As the first-person narrator is waiting in his war-berge, he falls asleep, distraught by the fact that his lady seems to have stopped loving him. He dreams that he encounters >Courtoisie< who leads him to the God of Love's Court of Justice. Love will hear every lover who wants to complain about

his or her lover, in order to banish false lovers from his Court. After hearing a certain number of complains, the dreamer sees his lady in the assembly and wishes to complain about her, despite ›Courtoisie‹ who advises him to remain silent. As he is about to speak, his war-barge collides with another boat.

Lors voul partir
Pour en aller devant Amours gehir
Les griefs doulours que j'avoye a souffrir,
Mais droit alors vint sur ma nef ferir
Une grant barge
Par Fortune, qui mainte nef fort charge,
Tant qu'emporta une partie large.
Lors mon patron qui de tous ot la charge
Prinst a crier;
Aussy firent trestous ly marinier
Dont la noise me fist tost eveillier.
Mais tantost me vint dire ung escuier
Comment ala
Et qu'une nef a ma barge hurta,
Tant que la pouppe a peines emporta
Et grant partie en la mer en versa.
›La Dieu mercy,
En grant peril avons esté ycy:
Mais tout va bien, n'en soies en soussy‹,
Me dist tantost l'escuier que je dy. [...]
Si m'avisay, en tant qu'estoie seulz,
De rimer la vision que j'eux;
Pour ce fiz tout au mieulx que je peux,
Certainement.
A cest livret donne nom proprement
›Le Songe de la barge‹, tellement
Fut lors nommé par moy joyeusement
De bon vouloir,
Veullans le faire aux amoureux savoir.
(›Songe de la barge‹, l. 3430–3467)

I was about / To present myself before Love to tell / The miseries that I had to
suffer / But at that point, a big barge collided / With my own boat / (Because

Fortune overloads many boats), / Ripping off a very large piece of it. / So my captain, under which care we were, / Began to yell; / And all sailors instantly did the same, / Thus, the noise immediately woke me up. / But a squire quickly came and told me / What just happened, / And that a boat collided with my barge, / So that the stern had been hardly ripped off / And a great piece of it sunk to the sea. / ›And God be blessed, / All of us here have been in great danger / But all is well, so no need to worry‹, / Said the squire that I mentioned before. [...] / And as I was alone, I decided / That I would rhyme the vision that I had; / That's why I did it as best as I could, / I assure you. / And to this booklet I give the name of / ›The Dream of the Barge‹, as it is the name / I gave to it when I was full of joy / And of good will, / Wishing to make it known to all lovers.

›Le Songe de la barge‹ is not innovative in its format. The dream frame is realistic, related to a historical context in which Jean III de Werchin actually took part. The dream itself is allegorical and is structured as a trial. The only real character within it is Jean de Werchin's Lady, but as she stays anonymous, she refers to a type more than to a real person. Within the fiction, allegories are the main authority. Werchin reuses the common scenario of an allegory guiding the narrator as its disciple or pupil. ›Courtoisie‹ calls the dreamer *amis* and *filz* (›friend‹ and ›son‹, e.g. *amis* ›Songe de la barge‹, l. 255, 270, 309, *mon filz* l. 593 and 698, *mon tresdoulz filz* l. 650). The knight mimics the position of scholarly or clerly narrators in many dream visions and first-person narratives, from at least the 13th to the 15th century.

The dialogue gives the narrator an opportunity to learn more about the world, as when ›Courtoisie‹ points out *Honte*, *Dangier*, *Tristresse*, *Paour*, *Desesperance* and *Reffuz* (›Songe de la barge‹, l. 793–713: ›Shame‹, ›Danger‹, ›Sadness‹, ›Fear‹, ›Despair‹ and ›Refusal‹) who are all present in the Court of the God of Love:

›Amours souvent mainteffois le[s] revoye
Et boute arriere,
Mais trestousjours est telle leur maniere,
Combien qu'Amours leur face dure chiere,

Qu'ilz reviennent sans faire priere
Ne sans mander.
Et Amours pas ne les veult hors bouter
Pour tousjours mais, ne son hostel vëer,
Quar, au fort, rien ne peuent contrestre
A son vouloir.
Sy ne luy chault s'i[ls] sont en son manoir;
Sur tous se tient sires, au dire voir.
De maintes gens veult entour soy avoir;
Il a raison.<

(>Songe de la barge<, l. 751–764)

>Love very frequently see them again / And dismiss them, / But they always
act in such a manner / That even though Love is hard on them all, / They come
back without asking for it / Nor being asked. / And Love doesn't wish to exile
them all / Forever, nor to ban them from his court, / Because in the end they
can never act / Against his will. / He doesn't care if they are in his court, / For
he is the real master of them all. / He wants to have many people around, /
And he is right.<

The allegories explain the world as it is, and as it won't change: through this dialogue, the dreamer gains a capacity to understand his reality, as in many first-person narratives from the same period – one can think of the >Roman de la rose< as well as of more contemporary compositions, such as Guillaume de Machaut's >Remede de Fortune< or Christine de Pizan's >Chemin de long estude<.

Another authority appears both in real letters of challenge and in fiction: the knight's Lady herself. In Jean III de Werchin's works as in courtly literature in general, the Lady is summoned as the reason why a knight should reflect on life; and that reason is love.

In the challenge letters, the Lady represents an authority conferring both the power to fight and the humility necessary to justify the challenge. Jean de Werchin writes to John Cornwall:

Et ne veuillez pas pancer, ne vous, ne autre, que ce que cy dessus vous escrips
ce face pour nul orgueil et envie, mais tant seulement pour desir d'avancer

mon honneur et pour acquerir la grace de ma tresbelle dame et maistresse. Honneuré seigneur, je prie a dieu d'Amours qu'il nous daint joye de vostre dame. (»Correspondance«, p. 157)

And don't think, you or anyone else, that I do what is written here above in a fit of pride or envy, as my only desire is to increase my honour and to acquire mercy from my beautiful Lady and mistress. Honourable Sire, I pray the God of Love that he give you joy from your Lady.

Some manuscripts also preserve a letter written by a lady asking Jean III de Werchin to fight with her lover. The lady appears as the challenge's practical organiser:

Et si aucunement vous esbahisiez de mes lectres pour ce que l'on trouve peu de dames et damoisselles que rescripvent lectres d'armes, ce me fait faire le dessus dit chevalier pansant que vous ferez plus pour mes lectres que pour les siennes. Et pareillement vous en requerent une compaignie de dames et damoisselles qui sommes ycy assemblées deliberés de vous faire bonne chere. [...] Mon seigneur le seneschal, je prie a Dieu qui vous daint estre entretenu de vostre dame ainsin que vous le deservez. (»Correspondance«, p. 148)

And if in any case my letter startles you, as one can hardly find ladies or maidens who write challenge letters, know that I write it at the request of the said knight, who thinks you'll do more on my behalf than on his own behalf. And there is also an assembly of ladies and maidens that are gathered here with me, who are requesting the same thing from you, and who are waiting to receive you with joy. [...] Seneschal, my dear Sir, I pray God that He give you as much happiness from your Lady as you deserve.

Love, as a shared value within the knightly community, is summoned as the cultural pretext and noble motive for war: knights escape the suspicion of pride and of pure cruelty by fighting »to acquire« a Lady's »mercy«. The »Lady« refers to a type: as a person, she embodies a goal and a reward (»He give you as much happiness from your Lady as you deserve«); as a spectator, she ensures the coherence of a community to which she participates only as an external witness. To reinforce war and warriors' regulations, she

must strictly follow the scenario and comply to it. She is literally at the disposal of the knight, »waiting to receive [him] with joy«. But what happens when the Lady doesn't stick to the plan and refuses to reward her knight, thus dismissing her role as ultimate goal for fighting?

Condemning this dismissal is the ›external‹ role of knights' poetry and narrations, which ›internal‹ role is to reinforce the knights' complicity. In the ›Songe de la barge‹, the narration emerges from the frustration of the author and narrator at his lady:

Lors prenoie tout mon esbattement
A ung penser que vous diray briefment :
C'est que ce n'est ma coulpe nullement
Que suis seullet.
Mais je acuse ma dame de ce fait,
Quar sa beaulté en mon cuer si fort trait,
Par son parler et par son douz atrait,
Qu'avoye mis
Mon cuer, mon vueil a la servir toudiz [...]
Tant qu'il advint
Que pour son serf doucement me retint,
Dont ce mon cuer en soy trop bien retint.
Mais en bref temps, du dueil comblé devint,
Quant son doulz vueil
Se detourna en son tresdoulz acueil,
Et que perdy son gracieulx recueil [...].
En tel penser estoie tous les jours,
Trestout seullet en mes dures doulours,
En ma chambrecte,
Qui lors estoit en ma barge bien faicte,
Ou je pensoie a ma joye deffaicte,
Qui tousjours est dedens mon cuer portraicte,
Tant qu'une fois
Je m'endormi, par pensee destroiz.
Lors me sembla que dedens ung beau boys
Ou je ouoye de maint ozeil le voix,
Je m'embati.

(›Songe de la barge‹, l. 69–124)

And there I was finding all my pleasure / In reflecting on the following things:
 / That it is not my fault in any way / If I'm alone. / But I put all the blame on
 my Lady, / 'Cause her beauty stroke my heart so strongly / Through her lan-
 guage and her gentle appeal / That I had put / My heart and my will into her
 service [...], / So much so, that / She gently held me as her own servant, / And
 that my heart was full of happiness. / But shortly after, it sunk into grief, /
 When her sweet will / Turned away as well as her sweet greetings, / And when
 I lost all her friendly welcome [...]. / Every day I got lost in those thoughts, /
 All by myself and in frightful distress, / In my small room, / Which was com-
 fortably set in my barge, / Where I was pondering the joy I lost / Which is still
 freshly portrayed in my heart, / And so, one time, / I fell asleep, depressed by
 all those thoughts. / And I found myself walking in the woods, / Or so it
 seemed, and I could hear the sound / Of many birds.

The trials conducted by the God of Love in the allegorical fiction of the
 ›Songe de la barge‹ originate from this remark of the narrator: *je acuse ma
 dame de ce fait* (›I put all the blame on my lady‹). This is probably the
 reason why the only manuscript preserving the ›Songe de la barge‹, Chan-
 tilly, Musée Condé 686, also contains other accusations or allegorical trials
 against women (Grenier-Winther 1996, p. III), either within the
 misogynistic tradition of encyclopaedic knowledge (as in the ›Secret des se-
 crets‹: ›The Secret of Secrets‹), within the context of marriage (as in the
 ›Quinze joies de mariage‹: ›The Fifteen Joys of Marriage‹) or within the
 context of courtly love (as in Alain Chartier's ›La Belle dame sans mercy‹
 and one of its sequels, Achille Caulier's ›Cruelle femme en amour‹: ›The
 Cruel Woman in Love‹).⁸

These series of works tend to place Jean III de Werchin in the early
 stages of a renewal in courtly discourses, where literary quarrels about love
 interconnects with the *querelle des femmes* (›the woman question‹). In
 those texts, the male point of view relies on the authority of complicity: a
 shared experience of love and common values are playfully explored and
 confirmed through the confrontation of contradictory emotions. Here
 again, women are the object of discourses and the spectators of knightly
 actions. As such, they reinforce the members' complicity within a male

community, but they interact with those members from outside the community (Latour 2005).

On the one hand, first-person debates based on love accusations create a discursive continuity between the enunciators (true people living in the real world) and the literary discourse, which includes prescriptive dialogues provided by allegories. On the other hand, the ladies of the real world are replaced by stereotyped characters. The issues concerning real ladies are dealt with through fictions condemning their refusals and rejections.

Those literary productions are justified by the necessity to preserve a sociability between men and to strengthen the courteous patterns on which this sociability is based. They are a way to reinforce behaviour patterns in the real world: complicity lead to imitation and reproduction, and eventually impose a point of view through an emotional consensus (Kahneman 2011). Repeated condemnations of women's cruelty invite the ladies of the real world to comply to the courteous patterns – even if they do not properly belong to the community actually benefiting from those patterns.⁹

3. Uncertain Lessons on Life and Fiction

When Jean III de Werchin mimics the posture of scholarly or clerkly narrators in dream visions, he gives less of a lesson on life than a depiction of the world as it is. This way of dealing with reality through literary authority is not always a success: Werchin and Henri IV argue on their reading of Arthurian novels instead of talking about real military encounters, and the narrator and character of the ›Songe de la barge‹ is unable to evolve within his narration. ›Courtoisie‹ tries to teach her disciple to let go of his bitterness after his Lady's rejection (›Songe de la barge‹, l. 3307–3326), but he refuses to renounce to his obsession for legal proceedings. He is saved by the wreckage of his ship, avoiding at the last moment a wreckage in his relationship with the Lady. As the squire tells him, *En grant peril avons esté ycy: / Mais tout va bien, n'en soiés en soussy* (›Songe de la barge‹, l. 3447–

3448: »All of us here have been in great danger / But all is well, so no need to worry«). His reality saves him from what is going wrong in a dream, even though this dream was trying to make up for the Lady's wrongdoings in his reality.

Instead of giving the opportunity to an author and narrator to gain wisdom and evolve, the ›Songe de la barge‹ depicts an irrational behaviour, presenting it as a very common point of view on love. The role of this fiction is to fix issues in the real world, but not by considering all points of view and trying to make them meet in the middle. One point of view must win over all others, and that's why this point of view doesn't have to change.

This is probably why the trial and debate structures were such a success among the literary productions of the 15th century. In the ›Songe de la barge‹, none of the complains presented to the God of Love are judged. The idea is to hear two successive points of view which will never agree with each other, to account for contradictions from the real world, and to let the audience decide whatever they want. As a young man says to an old one at the end of a later love debate,

Sire, la court d'amours est souveraine,
Laissons jugier a qui en doit chaloir
Et si mectons ce procès a qui[n]zaine:
Qui est loyal s'en face son devoir.
On ne cognoi[t] pas les gens pour les veoir,
Tous les oyseaulx ne sont pas d'ung plumaige,
L'ung est gris, l'autre blanc, l'autre noir;
Amans aussi n'ont pas tous ung coraige.
(›Debat du jeune et du vieux‹, f. 140v)

Sire, the amorous court is a sovereign one,
So, let those who are competent decide
And let's transmit this trial within two weeks:
The loyal people will do their duty.
One cannot know people by seeing them,
And not all birds have the same feathering,
One is grey, one is white, one is black:

Likewise, not all lovers have same feelings.

The discursive continuity within those literary practices, from challenge letters to poetical exchanges and first-person narratives, echoes the way a knight negotiates with reality. By describing the world as it is, the knights bend reality to their own point of view, as an attempt to pass an opinion for a reality. Of course, the authority of complicity includes playful humour and self-derision, as can be seen in the ›Songe de la barge‹ with the wreckage of the dreamer's boat. But this complicity is, by essence, based on a partial and excluding point of view. An aesthetics relying on complicity tends to impose a certain vision of the world, through the over-representation of one (male) vision (to the detriment of others) within oral and written productions.

This is maybe one of the reasons why Agincourt was the end of Jean III de Werchin and of so many of those knights. Trying to bend reality through cultural norms and avoiding to take the opponent's point of view into account, plus some terrible discrepancies between warlords of the same party (that is, discrepancies within a community founded on complicity), give you on one side knights in shining armour, on the other side skilful archers, and mud in the middle.

Notes

- 1 Voltaire devoted a few lines to Jean III de Werchin in his ›Essai sur les mœurs‹: see Piaget 1909, p. 71.
- 2 ›Fais du bon messire Jehan le Maingre‹, I, 17, p. 66, about the Saint-Inglevert's *emprise* in 1390: *pourpensa Bouciquaut une entreprise la plus haute, la plus gracieuse et la plus honorable que passé a lonc temps en crestienté chevalier entreprist* (›Boucicaut conceived the highest, most gracious and honorable endeavour that a knight had undertaken for a very long time in Christianity‹). For the different types of military challenges, see Nadot 2012, p. 11–31.

- 3 The manuscript recording this tournament is currently lost; we know the content of this record only through a summary written in the 18th century by Louis-Georges de Bréquigny, published in Courteault 1906.
- 4 For the ›Pas de la belle pelerine‹, see BnF, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 1167, f. 27–39v; for two recounts of this *pas d’armes*, see ›Mémoires d’Olivier de La Marche‹, t. 2, p. 118–135 and ›Chronique de Mathieu d’Escouchy‹, t. 1, p. 244–263. For the ›Pas de la fontaine de pleurs‹, see BnF, Nouvelles acquisitions françaises 1167, f. 40–47v as well as ›Mémoires d’Olivier de La Marche‹, t. 2, p. 141–204 and ›Chronique de Mathieu d’Escouchy‹, t. 1, p. 264–273.
- 5 As Mathieu d’Escouchy writes, *pooit sambler qu’ilz voulsissent ensievyr et tenir les termes que jadis les chevalliers de la Table Ronde* (›Chronique de Mathieu d’Escouchy‹, t. 1, p. 107: »it might have seemed as if some wanted to follow the customs once followed by the knights of the Round Table‹). This inspiration may also have been promoted through a specific type of military challenge called *table ronde*. Nadot 2012, p. 18: »Parfois mise en doute, la filiation entre jeu de la *Table Ronde* et *pas d’armes* est vraisemblable. Dans les deux cas, les combats s’effectuent dans un contexte littéraire où honneur chevaleresque et lutte pour le cœur d’une dame sont présents, avec un référent littéraire d’arrière-plan« (»Sometimes queried, the filiation between games of *Table ronde* and *pas d’armes* is plausible. In both cases, the fights fall within a literary context and background relying on knightly honour and struggle for the heart of a lady«).
- 6 Felberg-Levitt 1995. See e. g., among the works of Christine de Pizan, the ›Dit de la rose‹ (*chascun devoisoit, / Ou d’amours qui s’en avisoit / Ou de demandes gracieuses*. ›Dit de la rose‹, l. 73–75: »everyone was chatting / about love if they wanted / or about graceful requests«) or the ›Debat de deux amans‹ which recounts a debate around a *demande d’amour* (*Parlons d’amours un pou, et, sans arreste, / D’entre nous .iii. de devisier s’appreste / Son bon avis chacun, et s’amour preste / Plus joye ou mains / Aux vrays amans*. ›Debat‹, l. 357–361: »Let’s talk about love for a while, and / Let all of us three give their opinion / on whether love brings more joy or more pain / To good lovers«).
- 7 On the concept of ›complicity‹ (*connivence* in French) within literature, see Bayle, Bombart and Garnier-Mathez 2015. For examples of ›complicit literatures‹ (*littératures de connivence*), see e.g. Cayley 2006, Taylor 2007 and Armstrong 2012. This type of interactions and associations is very close to a ›buddy system‹.

- 8 Jean de Werchin is praised as a faithful lover in the ›Hospital d’amour‹ by Achille Caulier, the author of the ›Cruelle femme en amour‹ (see ›Le Cycle de La Belle Dame sans Mercy‹, p. 362–364).
- 9 For a contemporary condemnation of these socio-literary procedures towards women, see Christine de Pizan’s ›Cité des dames‹, p. 500–502, and ›Duc des vrais amans‹, p. 332–352.

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Author’s address:

Sarah Delale
Université Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint-Denis
2 Rue de la Liberté
93200 Saint-Denis, France
E-Mail: sarah.delale@univ-paris8.fr