CHAPTER 1

Art and Actuality: An Overview

Art in Letters

The letter has always formed an occasion on which ordinary people use language with more attention to formal correctness, euphony and rhetorical effect than they would normally. Hence the appearance of the various medieval *artes dictaminis*, manuals that provided rules and models for the 'art' of 'dictating' a letter (for actual writing was a skill often separate from verbal composition, and many 'authors' of letters did not actually personally inscribe them[1]). The earliest known *ars dictandi* (the *Breviarium de dictamine* by Alberic of Mont-Cassin) appeared about 1087, and the genre peaked over the following two centuries.[2] Few actual letters seem to have modelled themselves on the detailed division into five or more parts set out in many of these manuals (salutation, *captatio benevolentie*, narration, petition, conclusion[3]); but most of them adopted some form of the standard opening salutation and the closing formulae, as well as some of the other locutionary moves that provided the writer with a formal framework within which to unfold his own actual and personal concerns. We will encounter one such model epistolary (devoted to love letters), together with extracts from another, in Section II.

There was also another sense in which the English author of a letter was required to use language less naturally and with more studied art than in other contexts. Until well into the fifteenth century French remained the

[1] See pp. 53–9 below.

[2] On the *ars dictaminis*, see pp. 194–268 in James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA, 1974) and pp. 76–103 in his *Medieval Rhetoric: A Select Bibliography*, 2nd edn (Toronto, 1989). The treatises were often accompanied by illustrative letters (real or invented): for examples from England see W.A. Pantin, 'A Medieval Treatise on Letter-Writing, with Examples, from the Rylands Latin MS 394', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 13 (1929), 326–82, and John Taylor, 'Letters and Letter Collections in England 1300–1420', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 24 (1980) 57–70.

[3] See Catherine Moriarty, ed., *The Voice of the Middle Ages in Personal Letters 1100–1500* (New York, 1990), p. 16; for a summary overview of this and other divisions (and a claim, not entirely convincing, that Margery Brews's letter, given at p. 47 below, can be analysed in its entirety in those terms), see Martin Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle* (Tübingen, 1991), pp. 8–13.

standard language for epistolary purposes. Though French had gradually given way to English in many other spheres, in this area it was still the accepted norm.[4] A *donait françois* [French primer] produced by John Barton at the beginning of the fifteenth century justifies its usefulness to his English countrymen by pointing not only to their need to communicate with their French neighbours across the Channel, but also to the facts that French was still the language of English law and of much polite literature and elegant ephemera, and that the gentry chose to write their letters to one another in French: 'les leys d'Engleterre pour le graigneur partie et aussi beaucoup de bones choses sont misez en Francois, et aussi bien pres touz les s[eigno]rs et toutez les dames en mesme roiaume d'Engleterre volentiers s'entrescrivent en romance'.[5] Hence French is the language used in the two fourteenth-century English letters that form Texts 4 and 5 (both draft love letters written on blank spaces in manuscripts devoted to church matters). As the fifteenth century progressed, French started to be replaced by English in letters, and the copies of love letters which form Text 6 (and which date from the second half of the fifteenth century and occur in a roll that otherwise preserves the business correspondence of the English gentleman Robert Armburgh) are in English, not French.

In rhetoric and language, letters were thus usually in any case artefacts rather than spontaneous and unstudied utterances. And yet further art was required of those who wrote love letters, which convention demanded should be in verse. Thus, among the model letters in the French epistolary of Text 2, the love letter alone is in verse. A similar assumption is made with regard to love letters in an epistolary compiled after the Middle Ages had given way to the early modern period, when letter-writing handbooks started to appear in English: William Fulwood, in his *The Enimie of Idlenesse: teaching the maner and stile howe to endite, compose, and write all sorts of Epistles and Letters* (London, 1568; 2nd edn 1578), added to the material derived from his French source a final chapter devoted to twelve model love letters, more than half of them in verse, 'a treatment accorded no other type of model letter in the collection', and in verse apparently of his own composition (see Camargo, pp. 161–2). The lover, then, was expected to aspire to something of the rhetorical and metrical skills of the poet, to

[4] 'In letter writing ... English was not an accepted language ... and letters written in England were either in French or in Latin': Herbert Schendl, 'Code-Choice and Code-Switching in Some Early Fifteenth-Century Letters', in *Middle English from Tongue to Text*, ed. Peter J. Lucas and Angela M. Lucas (Frankfurt, 2002), pp. 247–62 (p. 247). Cf. also J.A. Burrow, 'The Languages of Medieval England', in his *English Poets in the Late Middle Ages* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 7–28 (p. 20). For examples, see M. Dominica Legge, ed., *Anglo-Norman Letters and Petitions from All Souls Ms. 182* (Oxford, 1941).

[5] Quoted from the edition by E. Stengel, in 'Die ältesten Anleitungsschriften zur Erlernung der französischen Sprache', *Zeitschrift für Französische Sprache und Literatur* 1 (1879) 1–40 (p. 25).

master rhyme and to select from a repertoire of conceits. And all three of the four actual lovers whose letters figure in Section III obeyed this convention and wrote in verse – though the somewhat uneven command of metre and rhyme scheme indicates that the writers (two male, one female) are novices in this area.

The convention had a cultural context. Composing verses was one of the accomplishments acquired in a gentle or courtly education – one that was displayed to the female in the courting ritual as an act of wooing. It thus appears alongside the other social, cultural and martial skills acquired by the apprentice knight and gentleman in Chaucer's description of the young squire ('A lovyere and a lusty bacheler': *CT* I.80):

> He koude songes make and wel endite,
> Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write. (95–6)

Young men were especially inclined to exercise their greater or lesser skill in this art when in love, which 'naturally', it was supposed, prompted one to 'sing' of or to one's beloved. For making verses is amongst the 'commands' of Love and figures as such among the instructions given by that god to the lover in the *Romaunt of the Rose*:

> Among eke, for thy lady sake,
> Songes and complayntes that thou make,
> For that wol meven in hir herte,
> Whan they reden of thy smerte. (2325–8)[6]

Thus, in Baudet Herenc's *Parlement d'amour*, the lover is ordered by the god to compose a ballade, and being thus 'contraint D'Amours', does so, despite misgivings about his ability, 'pour obeïr a Amours'.[7] To this tradition of thought and behaviour belong Shakespeare's Orlando (who pins verses to Rosalind on 'every tree': *As You Like It* III.ii.9) and the three lovers of *Love's Labour's Lost*, who fall simultaneously both in love and into 'sonneting' – in obedience to 'Dan Cupid, Regent of love-rhymes' (III.i.165–71).

These rhymes were often courtship offerings to the mistress of the lover's heart, part of his efforts to please and impress her. And it seems the ladies were indeed both pleased and impressed by the tributary lyrics – for they evidently enjoyed the prestige of being the inspiration and dedicatee of

[6] Quoted from the Middle English translation, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edn, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, MA, 1987). Quotations from Chaucerian texts other than *Troilus* are also all taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*.

[7] See lines 1–17 of the text as it appears (pp. 127–68) in *Alain Chartier: The Quarrel of the Belle dame sans mercy*, ed. and tr. Joan E. McRae (New York, 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009398091.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

elegant poems and songs more than they feared the talk this might give rise to. Here is Heloise on Abelard's rhetorical gifts and the sex appeal he enjoyed as a result, both for her and for other women:

> You had ... two special gifts with which you could at once win the heart of any woman ... the gifts of composing verse and song ... You have left many songs composed in amatory verse and rhyme. Because of the very great sweetness of their words as much as of their tune, they have been repeated often and have kept your name continually on the lips of everyone ... more than anything this made women sigh for love of you. And as most of these songs told of our love, they soon made me widely known and roused the envy of many women against me ... Your letters came to me thick and fast, and your many songs put your Heloise on everyone's lips, so that every street and house resounded with my name. (Letter 2, pp. 137–41)[8]

Even speaking eloquently on the subject of love was a courtly refinement: it is one of the ingredients, for instance, in the ideal court scene (whose features will be so guessable that the narrator lists them only in negatives, as things he will not describe) in the Knight's Tale: 'Ne who moost felyngly speketh of love' (*CT* I.2203). This too was a skill that women were assumed to find attractive. Criseyde, for instance, though she does not respond as positively as Pandarus had hoped to the news that a handsome young prince is in love with her, cannot resist asking him how he first discovered Troilus's love, and the question that follows is revealing:

> 'Kan he wel speke of loue', quod she, 'I preye?
> Tel me, for I the bet me shal purueye.' (II.503–4)[9]

Though she hastily covers the question, Pandarus's reaction ('Tho Pandarus a litel gan to smyle': II.505) shows that he has at last detected some interest, an interest he is prompt to feed by shamelessly inventing a little story to act as a frame for a suitably eloquent 'complaint' he fabricates for Troilus (II.523–39). It is Troilus's letter, however, that gives Criseyde her first occasion to form a judgement unmediated by Pandarus's embroidery of his loverly eloquence – though 'unmediated' needs some qualification: Pandarus had suggested the letter and given some anxious directions on certain faults

[8] Quotations from and translations of the text of the letters of Abelard and Heloise are from *The Letter Collection of Peter Abelard and Heloise*, ed. D. Luscombe, tr. Betty Radice, rev. D. Luscombe (Oxford, 2013).

[9] Quotations from *Troilus* are from *Chaucer: Troilus & Criseyde*, ed. B.A. Windeatt (London, 1984), where the English text is presented *en face* with that of its source (Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*).

to avoid in the composition and advised a few tear stains to improve the effect (II.1002–43).

Pandarus is, in fact, sure that he knows how a romance should be conducted, and the fact that he sets store by a letter and how it is written is significant. For the letter occupied a particularly important place in this general area of courtship through rhetorical and/or metrical eloquence. Deservedly well known is the story created in the nineteenth century by Edmond Rostand about the seventeenth-century Cyrano de Bergerac, presented in Rostand's play as a man disfigured through possession of a huge nose, in love with a lady whom he wins for another man by penning the latter's letters for him – for what Cyrano lacks in romantic charm physically he more than makes up for in the rhetorical area. The story is a moving distillation of an idea with a long history: that women are likely to be particularly favourably impressed by skills in the articulation of amorous feeling. Troilus in fact pens his own letter, one not especially influenced by Pandarus's specifications. But Pandarus trusts him to have made a decent job of it. Obviously confident that Troilus's powers will have had their due effect, he snatches a private moment (when they meet again after she has read the letter) to put a question to her:

> 'Now, Nece myn, tel on', quod he, 'I seye,
> How liketh 3ow the lettre that 3e woot?
> Kan he ther-on? for by trouthe, I not.'
>
> Therwith al rosy hewed tho wex she,
> And gan to homme and seyde, 'so I trowe'. (II.1195–9)

Criseyde is obviously trying to sound casual, but her blush (like the earlier eagerness she had attempted to cover up) betrays an interest she is embarrassed to admit.

The verse often used in a lover's letter is likewise an indication of the role of verbal art in courtship. However affectionately wives and husbands may write to each other, they do not use verse. In the French model epistolary of Text 2, the lover writes in verse, but the husband in prose – for the latter is not courting. In the *Ancrene Wisse* [guidance for anchoresses], written about 1200, there is a witty allegorical representation of God as the 'wooer' of man's soul: the Old Testament is represented as the time in which he wooed through *sonden* [messengers] and through *leattres isealet* [closed or sealed letters] – a reference to the supposed concealed references to Jesus in the Old Testament – those 'closed' letters then being replaced, when the lover came in person, by the *leattres iopnet* [open letters, letters patent] of the New Testament, written 'in His own blood' and forming '*saluz* to his

leofmon [sweetheart] – *luue gretunge* forte *wohin* [woo] hire wiþ & hire luue wealden [possess]'.[10] There is certainly here a reference to the letter as a form of courtship, and probably to the verse letter in particular, for there existed at the time of this text an Anglo-Norman epistolary verse form called the *salut d'amor* [love greeting]: see below.[11]

Letters in Art

Literary art had already itself borrowed from actuality in the area of the letter. Ovid's *Heroides* (a collection of imagined verse letters from legendary women lovers: Penelope to Ulysses, Dido to Aeneas, etc.) had set a classical precedent. Love letters in Latin verse were followed by the emergence of the love letter as a recognizable lyric genre in the Provençal *salutz* and the French and Anglo-Norman *saluts d'amor*, named from the formal 'salutation' to its addressee with which every letter began.[12] Chaucer's *Troilus* is a particularly significant text with regard to the history of the literary love letter in English verse, for the poem was widely known, admired and imitated in the generations following his death. The two sets of letters in *Troilus* belong to two of the most common categories of love letter: the initial declaration of love and the letter occasioned by geographical separation – and we will encounter in Chapter 2 other examples of both types. In his inclusion of these letters, Chaucer was following his source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, but with some adaptations of his own. He gives only in reported speech the content of the exchange of letters (of which Boccaccio gives the actual texts) that occurs at the beginning of the relationship, when both lovers are still resident in Troy (II.1065–85, 1218–25; cf. *Filostrato* II.96–106, 121–7). He follows Boccaccio in giving the text of the letter Troilus later writes to Criseyde when she has left Troy (V.1317–1421; *Filostrato* VII.52–75), but matches this *Litera Troili* with the text of a *Litera Criseydis* (V.1590–1631) for which there is no equivalent in Boccaccio (though *Filostrato* VIII.5 hints at letters written by her to Troilus), thus producing the epistolary duet which we will notice elsewhere – the letter and its response, in this case the painful earnest of Troilus's letter and the

[10] *Ancrene Wisse*, ed. Bella Millett, 2 vols, EETS OS 325, 326 (2005–6), Part 7.2/61–6 (emphasis added).
[11] The word *salut* is not recorded as referring to the verse form in the *MED*, where the other instances are all post-1400 (and so post-Anglo-Norman) or in medieval French (from which *MED* derives it). The *Ancrene Wisse* reference is 200 years earlier and probably reflects Anglo-Norman usage, in which the word does figure in that sense: cf. 'Si fesei[e] les serventeis, Chaunceunettes, rymes, saluz Entre les drues e les druz' (cited by the *AND* from *S Edm* 6).
[12] For examples, see Ernstpeter Ruhe, *De Amasio ad Amasiam: Zur Gattungsgeschichte des mittelalterlichen Liebesbriefes* (Munich, 1975), pp. 22–50, 81–7, 91–7 (Latin), pp. 97–119, 161–70, 208–15 (Provençal), pp. 215–53, 271–4 (French). On Latin verse letters, see further Ch. 3 below.

equally but differently painful prevarications of Criseyde's. And with that latter pair of letters Chaucer produced the first literary love letters to appear in English – though they occupy this position by virtue of the licence of art rather than by reflection of reality, for, of course, in his own late fourteenth century, these letters would have been in French – as is conceded by the extra-metrical subscriptions 'Le vostre T' and 'La vostre C' (V.1421, 1631), which indicate the French language which is to be assumed and from which his readers would be familiar with the epistolary formulae that the lovers use and adapt.[13]

A comprehensive and detailed history of the love epistle as a literary form over the two centuries following the *Troilus* is provided by Martin Camargo (see n. 3 above). Between 1400 and 1568, it became in fact the 'dominant form of the late Middle English love lyric' (Camargo, p. 127). A particularly fine example occurs in the macaronic *De amico ad amicam*, a poem written in alternating French, English and Latin lines, and one which came complete with a *responsio* from the *amica* addressed.[14] Subsequent English examples abound, occurring notably in anthologies connected with particular households and places, for instance, the commonplace book of the Cheshire gentleman poet Humfrey Newton, the collections associated with the Findern and Welles families of, respectively, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, the compilation of love poems made in Scotland by the Edinburgh merchant George Bannatyne, as well as among the so-called 'Suffolk' love poems and in more isolated pieces by known or anonymous poets.[15]

[13] These subscriptions do not appear in all manuscripts (though they are unlikely to be scribal): see the textual apparatus in the edition by Windeatt. On the letters and their conformity with prevailing epistolary style, see Norman Davis, 'The *Litera Troili* and English Letters', *RES* 16 (1965) 233–44.

[14] For the most recent edition of this pair of poems see pp. 194–7 in Thomas Duncan, ed., *Medieval English Lyrics and Carols* (Cambridge, 2013).

[15] See Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, chs. 4 and 5 (pp. 87–163), especially the summary list at pp. 127–8. For texts of love epistles in the collections cited, see R.H. Robbins, 'The Poems of Humfrey Newton, Esquire, 1466–1536', *PMLA* 65 (1950) 249–81, poems II–IV, VII–IX, XI–XV, XVII–XVIII; *The Welles Anthology: MS Rawlinson C.813*, ed. Sharon L. Jansen and Kathleen H. Jordan (Binghamton, NY, 1991), poems 3–5, 11, 13–16, 22, 32–4, 38, 40, 42, 44–7, 49, 53–6, 59; *The Bannatyne Manuscript*, ed. W. Tod Ritchie, 4 vols, STS, 3rd ser., 5, 22–3, 26 (1928–34), 'ballattis of lufe' (vol. 3), poems 253, 255, 259, 264, 266, 267, 287, 294–7, 304–5, 387 (many in ballade form, epistle and ballade-with-envoy being virtually indistinguishable in this collection); *The 'Suffolk' Poems: An Edition of the Love Lyrics in Fairfax 16 Attributed to William de la Pole*, ed. J.P.M. Jansen (Groningen, 1989), poems 6, 14, 17; and items 14 and 31 from the Findern manuscript (see Text 3, pp. 227–38 below). The Welles and Suffolk collections also include poems written in the sister form of the ballade (see pp. 10–12). On the so-called Findern manuscript – an anthology consisting largely of love lyrics (copies and excerpts as well as apparently unique and local compositions) – and its emanation from a south Derbyshire household (only perhaps that of the Findern family), see Text 3, p. 223 below; and on Humfrey Welles and the occurrence of identifiable local persons and places in some items (not the love poems) in the manuscript associated with him, see Edward Wilson, 'Local Habitations and Names in MS Rawlinson C 813', *RES* 41 (1990) 12–44.

Art from Actuality

The autobiographical basis of *Le livre du voir dit*, written in the 1360s by the French poet Machaut, is specifically asserted both in the title (which distinguishes the work from his other first-person narrative *dits* by pointing to the *voir* [true] story it contains) and within the text, which reproduces (doubtless with some editing and polishing) the prose letters exchanged between himself and a young girl called Péronne (the name apparently yielded by a cryptic encoding of it in the rondeau following Letter 35), letters embedded in a connecting (and embroidering) verse narrative and accompanied (with added poems) by verses exchanged between the pair.[16] Machaut here gives rhetorical full dress, complete with dream sequences and personifications, to a body of letters arising from a real liaison. A personal tune was later given similar literary orchestration by Charles d'Orléans (taken prisoner by the English at the battle of Agincourt in 1415), who, while in detention in England, wrote a series of ballades to his absent wife Bonne, and on his grief at her death – a series he later translated into English, adding a second sequence of ballades addressed to a new lady he describes himself as having fallen in love with.[17] Charles's was in fact one of a number of ballade sequences which appeared over the three generations from the late fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth century.[18] He had been preceded by Gower, who wrote in French a sequence of fifty love ballades, and by Christine de Pisan, who later twice went fifty better to produce two sequences, the second of which, *Cent balades d'amant et de dame*, traces a love affair through to its tragic close in the desertion of the lady, a sad story that had also formed the theme of the opening sequence of poems in her earlier *Cent balades*.

Ballades were often in effect a form of verse love letter.[19] This was not only because they addressed the beloved in the second person. In the tradition of love verse, second-person address is in itself not uncommon, and can occur in a number of different verse types. But in most cases, the address is rhetorical: the reader is not required to assume or imagine that the poem was actually presented to the mistress addressed. Conversely (since the language of love was often surprisingly closely imitated in courtly

[16] References to the poem are from *Guillaume de Machaut: le livre dou voir dit*, ed. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, tr. R. Barton Palmer (New York, 1998).

[17] Charles's French poems are cited from *The Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and His Circle*, ed. John Fox and Mary-Jo Arn (Tempe, AZ, 2010), and the English versions of them (and his other English poems) from *Fortunes Stabilnes*: *Charles of Orléans's English Book of Love*, ed. Mary-Jo Arn (Binghamton, NY, 1994).

[18] On the ballade sequence or cycle, see Helen Louise Cohen, *The Ballade* (New York, 1915), pp. 109–17 (French) and 223 (English).

[19] The close connection between the amorous ballade and the verse love epistle is also remarked on by Camargo (*The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, p. 36).

compliment from male to female), some poems addressed to named women are or may be mere gallant compliments rather than serious expressions of love, even though it is likely that they were meant to be presented to the lady so celebrated. Chaucer's ballade 'To Rosemounde' would seem to be a poem of this type, since the refrain 'Though ye to me ne do no daliaunce' (which follows assertions that the mere sight of her is a balm, it is happiness enough to love her, and in all events the poet will ever be her thrall) seems designed tactfully to indicate that Rosamund is not being asked to respond (which the poem, notably and unusually, never begs her to do), and to compliment its addressee without embarrassing her. Her name (used at line 15) would not in any case be revealed if there were any real affair (see below, pp. 49–50).

But the amorous ballade resembled the epistle, not only in being (frequently) a second-person address, but also in being at least represented and imagined as actually delivered. One might note the verb used with reference to the ballade in Christine's ironic praise of a carpet knight (*CB* LVIII) whose valour consists in such things as *composing* virelays ('faire virelais': 23) and *delivering* ballades ('baladez baillier': 6).[20] As a metre, the ballade consists of the same rhymes carried through three stanzas with a refrain, followed (in the 'classic' ballade) by an 'envoy' in which the poem is directed to a particular person. But the envoy may be used differently and in fact does not always occur, for poets treated it as an optional alternative to an earlier envoy-less version of the form.[21] Love ballades, in fact, differ considerably in the degree to which they represent themselves – in the poem and envoy, if there is one – as to be delivered, or merely as poems addressed in a looser way to the beloved, if indeed they are addressed to him/her at all, as opposed to being simply poems expressing the feelings of the lover-poet. Their closeness to letters thus varies. In Gower's collection, the envoy in which the poems always terminate regularly acts to 'send' the poem to its destined addressee through such formulations as 'Ceo dit envoie a vous, ma dame' (XXIII) or 'Va t'en, balade, u jeo t'envoierai' (XXXVI). The poems are therefore virtually indistinguishable in form from verse epistles, and indeed 'ceo lettre' figures frequently among the various other terms (*balade*, *escript*, *dit*, *supplicacioun*, for instance) used in self-references.[22]

[20] Quotations are from *Œuvres poétiques de Christine de Pisan*, ed. Maurice Roy, 3 vols (Paris, 1886), vol. 1 (*Cent balades*) and vol. 3 (*Cent balades d'amant et de dame*).

[21] Champion remarks that several of the ballades by Charles d'Orléans lack envoys and that Christine de Pisan had also often favoured 'ce type archaïque dépourvu d'envoi': Charles d'Orléans, *Poésies*, ed. Pierre Champion, 2 vols (Paris, 1971), vol. 1, p. xxxiv.

[22] See II.25, III.23, IV.24, XV.26, XVIII.21, XX.25, XXII.27, XXVII.23, XXXVIII.24, XXXIX.26, XLIV.23. References are from *The Complete Works of John Gower: The French Works*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford, 1899). *John Gower: The French Balades*, ed. R.F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, MI, 2011) provides an edition with facing translation.

By contrast, Christine's *Cent balades* and the poems of Charles d'Orléans occasionally use other metres and forms, do not all take the form of second-person address to the beloved and do not always consistently assume or maintain the fiction of a missive. Both sequences thus move between meditation and address. Christine's starts by tracing out the same framing narrative as is formed by Charles's French and English ballade sequences – a bereavement that prompts a renunciation of love (a resolve no more 'de faire ami, ne d'amer', *CB* XIX.24; cf. the refrain to Charles's Ballade 76 'Forwhi y am fulle ferre from that purpos'), followed by a second love affair, which ends in Christine's case in the lover losing interest. The two sequences have some historical as well as thematic connection, for Christine belonged to 'le cercle de ménestrels, de musiciens, de rimeurs qui trouvérent chez Louis d'Orléans [Charles's father] un protecteur',[23] and her *Cent balades* may well have been one of the (conscious or unconscious) models that Charles had for producing ballade sequences that versified personal romantic experience in a form that gave it universal significance.

For the bereavement each refers to is certainly historical, and the subsequent romantic entanglement almost certain in Charles's case, and not improbable in Christine's. Charles's French sequence actually has implicit reference to the autobiographical fact of the death of his wife, and the ballades of his English sequence are addressed to a lady also represented as real. Christine's ballades on the same situation do not have the same pervasive autobiographical *reference*, but they do have an at least partial autobiographical *basis*. Christine was widowed at the age of only twenty-five and left to make her own way in the world as best she could (which she did partly through her pen), and the opening poems in the *Cent balades* certainly refer to this real-life bereavement. As to the subsequent poems, she denies in Ballade L what she claims is an assumption by some that the fact of her writing poems on love (a subject she has chosen because it is one accessible and agreeable to all: 11–13) indicates that she must be in love (which she would be happy to admit, were it true: 19–21). But the specific places and lengths of time that are mentioned in connection with the first lover (XXV.2–4, XXV.6, XXXVIII.10–11, XLVI.4) render that affair more individualized than what emerges from the ballades that follow (which deal with a variety of different love-related subjects, without suggesting any particular narrative or person), and it is difficult to believe that some actuality (observed or undergone) does not underlie it (and perhaps parts of the *Cent balades d'amant et de dame*), though the rest of the sequence is not such as to raise suspicions of that nature. Christine's biographer,

[23] Charles d'Orléans, *Poésies*, ed. Champion, vol. 1, p. xxiii.

Charity Canon Willard, sees the sequence as reflecting only the 'trials of widowhood' and 'solitude' that she underwent, a subject Christine certainly did treat elsewhere in her verse as well as in the *Cent balades*: see Rondeau III ('I am a widow lone, in black arrayed').[24] Canon Willard at no point even canvasses the possibility that the liaisons depicted as following the bereavement might also reflect biographical facts. But she is perhaps too ready to rule out (from the almost inevitable lack of hard evidence to the contrary) what is after all not unlikely: that a woman widowed at the age of twenty-five should have had subsequent romantic attachments. Some of Christine's depictions of sorrow and desertion in love, that is, may have been born of painful experience. And Canon Willard's categoric assumption of a virtuous widow, invariably opposed from the first, in practice and in theory, to love outside marriage, is a position that, as we will see, certainly leads to an under-nuanced interpretation of the *Cent balades d'amant et de dame*.[25]

Art for Appropriation

Machaut, like Christine, sought and found wealthy patrons for a prolific output, and both he and Charles involved themselves personally and systematically in the manuscript records of their oeuvre. In these senses, all three were professionals using personal history in the service of an art of which they were notably self-conscious.[26] But the traffic between private experience and professional art could travel in the other direction: for, conversely, writers often assumed readers who might make use of the texts in their own private lives. Love-poets, that is, seem to have been well aware of the porous nature of the boundary between love affairs on and off the page and, indeed, to have advertised the possible relevance of their verse to readers who might wish to appropriate it in order to further their own *amours*. Gower provided marginal notes (appearing beside the end of Balade V and the beginning of Balade VI) to indicate which of his *Cinkante Balades* were relevant to any lover and which were appropriate only to those aiming at marriage: 'Les balades d'amont jesqes enci sont fait especialement pour ceaux q'attendont lours amours par droite mariage' [the ballades up to this point have been composed particularly for those who await fulfilment of

[24] *Œuvres poétiques*, ed. Roy, vol. 1, pp. 148–9; the translation is from Charity Cannon Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York, 1984), p. 57

[25] See Ch. 2, n. 23, below.

[26] The autobiographical element in sequences such as these, and that in the Devonshire manuscript referred to at p. 17 below, is a complex and controversial matter which we intend to discuss more fully in a separate publication.

their love by way of rightful marriage]; 'Les balades d'ici jesqes au fin du livere sont universeles a tout le monde, selonc les propretés et les condicions des Amantz, qui sont diversement travailez en la fortune d'amour' [the ballades from this point to the end of the book are of universal application, describing the various properties and situations of lovers and the different fortunes of love]. And Gower was careful to include both (a) a sequence of ballades (XXXII–XXXVII) specific to the major festivals which lovers were supposed to mark (New Year, Valentine's Day, the advent of May), where the reader-lover could choose between alternative versions expressive of joy or frustration, according to his circumstances ('selonc ... la fortune d'amour'), and (b) to include some spoken in a woman's voice (XLI–XLIV, XLVI), which, again, offer alternative portrayals of a woman happy in a true lover or reviling a false one. He was apparently trying to make the sequence as usably relevant as possible to the different occasions, genders, situations and intentions (marital or otherwise) of his readers, so that all could find appropriate songs to sing (i.e. verses to send).

When Chaucer, in the proem to his *Troilus*, disclaims any personal amorous hopes or ambitions, he adds that he is nevertheless only too glad to think that others may derive some personal real-life benefit from his verse:

> Bot natheles, if this may don gladnesse
> To any louere and his cause auaille,
> Haue he my thonk, and myn be this trauaille. (I.19–21)

The lines replace Boccaccio's declaration to his lady that, since his love is his muse, though the effort is his, any credit arising from it should be hers ('Tuo sia l'onore e mio si sia l'affanno, s'e' detti alcuna laude acquisteranno' [yours be the honour and mine be the toil, if the writings acquire any praise]: I.5). Chaucer uses his proem to relate the audience both to himself and to the matter, rather than using it, as Boccaccio does, to point to the relation between himself and his beloved that the narrative mirrors. In this new context, 'Haue he my thonk' probably transfers to the putative reader-lover the appreciative credit due to any rhetoric he may borrow from the poem, the phrase 'and his cause auaille' reminding us that love is a *suit* – which, like other suits pursued in the courts or by petition, may stand or fall by how well the suitor pleads it. And the lover who needs to convince his lady of his passion and devotion, in order to move her to respond favourably, may derive, through *Troilus*, some assistance in prosecuting his case or cause. The poem inscribes its sympathetic readiness to be helpful into the person of Pandarus, ever full of plans, of wisdom as to what may 'further' a lover's cause and advice as to how to proceed: how, for instance,

to plead one's suit by letter (II.1003–29) or in person (II.1368–70). From his sometimes comically practical wisdom on tactics, the lover might learn something, if only to ponder the whole question of the role of strategy and rhetoric in this area. More relevant, however, is the verse in which Troilus's feelings are expressed, which may provide, as well as the psychological solace for another lover of articulation of his own feelings, useful tropes, turns of phrase, or wholesale reusable lines or stanzas, which may 'his cause auaille' when that other lover pleads it. It is certainly the case that *Troilus* became the *lingua franca* of love, in which context it was widely imitated and echoed.[27]

> Go, litill bill, with all humblis
> vnto my lady, of womanhede þe floure,
> And saie hire howe newe troiles lithe in distre3,
> All-onely for hire sake and in mortall langoure;
> And if sche wot nat whoo it is, bute stonde in erore,
> Say it is hire olde louer þat loueth hire so fre, trewe,
> hir louynge a-lone – not schanginge for no newe.[28]

Thus runs the envoy to one fifteenth-century love lyric, written in the same rhyme-royal stanza as *Troilus*, echoing the envoy Chaucer had used (*Troilus* V.1786: 'Go litel boke, go, litel myn tragedye'), and mimicking the typical posture and language associated with Chaucer's often prostrate and *wo*ful hero, the *trewe* lover of whom the writer claims to be a reincarnation – the 'newe troiles' so often found in those whose causes Chaucer had hoped his poem might 'auaile'.

One of Charles d'Orléans's *chansons* (Rondeau 82: 'Je suis mieulx pris que par le doy' [I am more securely seized than by the finger]) was recorded by him as written 'pour Estampes' (the Compte de Neves, a friend of his), and Charles, by his own account, regularly wrote love verse on others' behalf (see *Fortunes Stabilnes* 4650–735) – thus providing very specific examples of the poet making over to another any real-life goodwill or *thonk* accruing from his *trauaille* in amorous eloquence. The 'I' of love lyrics is a poetic or archetypal 'I' that in fact suggests and invites

[27] For a full discussion and extensive bibliography of the afterlife of *Troilus*, see 'Imitation and Allusion, c.1385–1700', in Barry Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde*, revised edn (Oxford, 1995), and the studies cited by Camargo (*The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, p. 137, n. 21), which include John Stevens, *Music and Poetry in the Early Tudor Court* (London, 1961), pp. 213–14 and R. H. Robbins, 'The Lyrics', in *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (New York and London, 1979), pp. 380–402 (pp. 382–3).

[28] Lyric no. 190, final stanza, in Rossell Hope Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, 2nd edn (Oxford, 1955); for other examples of poets comparing themselves explicitly with Troilus, see Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer*, pp. 371–2.

readerly application to, or writerly appropriation by, any actual empirical 'I'.[29] In the absence of particularizing details, the sentiments can be attributed to or appropriated by any other voice. And those who responded to the prevailing rule or instinct to 'sing' or versify their love might simply send an existing poem – as (with an added quatrain of his own composition: see Text 6, 1.31–4) did Robert Armburgh (if he wrote the poems in the Armburgh Roll) in the case of the fine macaronic poem (see above: p. 9) that seems to have been quite widely known and admired, since it is preserved in two manuscripts (Cambridge University Library, Gg.4.27 fols. 10^{v}–11^{r} and London, BL, Harley 3362, fols. 90^{v}–91^{r}) – and, as Camargo points out, Middle English lyrics do not commonly appear in more than one copy.[30] For, if one has a cause, it may be prudent to avail oneself of the services of an expert pleader – and poets (especially non-aristocratic ones) were regarded, and regarded themselves, as the scribes or professional exponents (rather than the principals) of amorous *sentement*.[31] The aim of such borrowings was not to deceive the addressee, who might often recognize the verse as an allusion or a quotation, but to present the beloved with a verbal bouquet of rhetorical flowers. The vocabulary, rhymes and conceits popularized by certain widely circulated poems such as *Troilus* (and perhaps also the Lydgate anthology in London, BL, Sloane 1212[32]) were also in their way looser 'quotes', or roles in which the addressee was expected to recognize a 'new Troilus'. Borrowings from existing art were themselves a form of art, as one extreme example from the Söflingen Letters (1467–84) may illustrate. These letters were written to the Poor Clares of Söflingen (often from the male clerics who were their spiritual 'friends'), and they include an ingeniously derivative love (or at least, loving) letter that is effectively a cento of quotations from a German translation of Piccolomini's prose tale *Euryalus et Lucretia* (1444).[33]

Imitating models devised for and used in actual letters, the verse love letter became in many other ways a site in which art and actuality, reading and writing, the reception and practice of the art could merge. At the height of the popularity of the genre (c. 1500), 'a large part of the audience was engaged in producing as well as reading love epistles', as Camargo points

[29] On these two functions of the first-person pronoun, see the seminal article by Leo Spitzer, 'Note on the Poetic and Empirical "I" in Medieval Authors', *Traditio* 4 (1946) 414–22.

[30] See Camargo, *The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, p. 46, n. 69 (citing J. Boffey, *Manuscripts of English Courtly Love Lyrics* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 88–9).

[31] See Daniel Poirion, *Le poète et le prince: l'évolution du lyrisme Courtois de Guillaume de Machaut à Charles d'Orléans* (Paris, 1965), pp. 196–9.

[32] See Boffey, *Manuscripts*, p. 14, n. 23.

[33] See Ch. 3, pp. 110–13 below. See also Bert Roest, *Order and Disorder: The Poor Clares* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 193, 233, 275, 315–16.

out, commenting also on how often the poems show their writers borrowing details and lines from one another and reworking existing material (see Camargo, pp. 129, 136–7). In the Welles anthology, for instance, there is extensive borrowing from Stephen Hawes in items 13–16 and 56 and reuse of a stanza from Lydgate in item 34, while item 38 is entirely made up of recycled material from Chaucer's *Troilus* and item 49 includes a quatrain found elsewhere.[34] Those who collected verse epistles might write their own, and might actualize or personalize sender or addressee: Bannatyne reproduced examples from others (who are sometimes named[35]), including some metrically and rhetorically highly accomplished and artful ones by Scott, but a cryptic signature reveals at least one of them to be probably of his own composition ('Causs Me no^{t} *ban* þat evir I the indyte *Na tyne* my travel' (287.69–70, emphasis added, with 'Bannatyne' written in the margin in a later hand) – though it includes passages borrowed from Chaucer: lines 33–7, 'No thing of ry^{t} I ask my lady fair ... of grace and no^{t} of ry^{t} I craif', are from the Franklin's Tale, *CT* V.1324–6, and lines 41–5, 'And gif þat I be fund to 3ow vntrew / Wilful heichty or ... Ielouss vnkind or chengeing for ane new / a vane wantour rebelling to 3our seruyiss / as trato^{r} is fals', are equally clearly borrowed from *Parliament of Fowls* 428–30 and 456–8. A little later, Humfrey Newton similarly entered into his commonplace book verse love letters that included some which spelled out, acronymically, the names of himself, his wife Elena and (presumably) friends called 'Margaret' and 'Brian'.[36] An interactive mixture of art past and/or public and sharply particularized present is a striking feature of the later Devonshire Manuscript, which was compiled by three gentlewomen attendants of Anne Boleyn (Mary Shelton, Mary Fitzroy and Lady Margaret Douglas). The collection is dominated by poems by Wyatt, but it also includes love poems written by Lord Thomas Howard that almost certainly refer to his love for Lady Margaret (fols. 44^{r}–47^{v}), whom he married, and also a sequence of poems written by and to one another while the pair were in separate prison rooms as a consequence of their love and marriage (fols. 26^{r}–30^{r}), as well as a poem particularized by acrostic *to* Mary Shelton (fols. 6^{v}–7^{v}), verse *by* Lady Margaret (fol. 88^{r}), some poems by less well-known and more amateur contemporaries of Wyatt, and extracts from Chaucerian verse used in an exceptionally interesting way (to reflect personal circumstances, at fols. 29^{v}–30^{r} and 89^{v}–92^{r}) to orchestrate a debate between different views of love.[37]

[34] See the editors' headnotes to these poems.
[35] 'ffinis steill' (294), 'q[uod] scott' (295, 296), 'ffinis q[uod] king hary stewart' (305).
[36] Newton poems III, IV, VII, VIII and IX.
[37] References are to the transcription of the manuscript in *A Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript (BL MS Add 17,492)*, ed. Raymond Siemens, Karin Armstrong and Constance Crompton (Toronto, 2015), available online at http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The Devonshire Manuscript.

Art or Actuality: Arguable or Disputed Cases

Overlap between reality and art is so pronounced a feature of the love letter that it can sometimes be difficult to know whether one is dealing with a copy or draft of an 'actual' communication or an 'artful' and archetypal one.[38] The presence or absence of particularizing details that suggest a specific rather than a representative case is, of course, the most obvious deciding factor. But, since anything that might identify the sender or addressee was avoided in real love letters (see Chapter 2 below, pp. 49–50), and since artful ones aimed for general applicability, there can be difficult cases. Thus in our Text 5, we have interpreted the few lines of French verse that take the form of a love letter found in a flyleaf of Oxford, Corpus Christi, MS 154 (containing material relating to Llanthony Priory in Gloucester) as relating to a 'real' affair, a draft for an actual letter, as the lack of metrical polish and a certain cryptic unease would make it read awkwardly as 'art'.

But the evidence points in a different direction in the case of another little poem scrawled, in a hand later than that of the other contents, on the flyleaf of a manuscript of religious works (London, BL, Royal 6.B.ix):[39]

Ryht godely, fressh flour of womanhode,
My lyues Ioy, myn hertes plesance,
Example of trouth and rote of godelyhode,
And verayly my lyues sustenance –
And, with al þe hool, feythful obeisance
That seruant can thenk or deuyse,
To you þat haue myn herte in gouernance,
Me recomande in all my best wyse.
Quod H. Bowesper

The last line indicates the stanza was thought of as formally a letter, and the sentiment, language and rhymes are close to some in the 'actual' fifteenth-century love letters in the Armburgh Roll (see for instance Text 6, 4A.5–6, 9; 4B.1–2; 5B.5–7, 13–16) – though those latter, even when not demonstrably using and adapting existing poems, are often indebted to stand-

[38] In the case of actual missives (letters that were in fact sent and received), there will of course be codicological evidence of their actuality: for examples see Ch. 2, pp. 28 and 31 and Text 7 below, and the instances discussed and illustrated in Jürgen Schulz-Grobert, *Deutsche Liebesbriefe in spätmittelaterlichen Handschriften* (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 24–6, 105–15, 128–31.

[39] The poem is assumed to refer to the Virgin Mary by Carleton Brown, who includes it (no. 40) in his edition of *Religious Lyrics of the XVth Century* (Oxford, 1939). We have adopted the corrections made (from the manuscript) by Camargo (*The Middle English Verse Love Epistle*, p. 144) to what Brown misread as 'gvuernance' (line 7) and 'recemande' (line 8).

ard literary conceits and topoi.[40] One might thus conclude that this, too, was a draft for a love letter, were it not for the concluding *quod* formula. 'Quod X' was used to indicate attribution to an author or to the scribe who copied out existing text. A number of poems in the Bannatyne manuscript, for instance, conclude in an ascription that takes the form of 'q[uod] chausseir' (283), 'q bannatyne' (284), 'q steill' (289), etc. In the Findern manuscript the formula regularly indicates the scribe who copied out the entry in question. The Langland scribe John Cok used it, not only after a concluding *amen* to indicate his own penmanship of the material copied, but also to indicate quoted material (from Isidore), which he adds to Langland's paraphrase of it and signals the insertion by 'quod Iohannes Cok'.[41] Whether 'Quod H. Bowesper' indicates attribution to or inscription by Bowesper, the formula almost certainly identifies the lines as citation of existing material. But the very fact that such verses occur as manuscript doodles and pen trials is itself significant evidence as to the familiarity most people had with various poems taking the form of amorous address, poems they could quote from memory.

Some of the poems occurring, sometimes as 'fillers', in the Findern manuscript possibly (but disputably) refer to actual situations (see Text 3, pp. 225–7 below). There are other cases in which there is disagreement rather than doubt: each reader makes a fairly confident assumption as to the (non-)actuality of a given epistolary text, on which, however, some or most others may hold a contrary view. Individual critics have, for instance, questioned the authenticity of the letters of Abelard and Heloise, and one or two have argued that the *Epistolae duorum amantium*, written at about the same time, were not actual letters – though it has in each case been demonstrated that the case for authenticity is stronger than for non-authenticity.[42] Conversely, in the course of a useful article establishing the number of and divisions between lyrics (formerly listed as one item) in a fifteenth-century manuscript, Linne Mooney comes to the conclusion that one of these poems (a love epistle in a woman's voice) is 'only explicable in a historical, and therefore autobiographical, context', a hypothesis she bas-

[40] The love letter that forms item 14 in the 'Suffolk' poems, a web of amorous clichés and formulae, also finds echoes in some of the verse in the Armburgh Roll (Text 6): see, for example, 3.46, 4A.25–36, 4B.1–7, 5C.13–22.

[41] See pp. 45 and 49 in Simon Horobin, 'John Cok and His Copy of *Piers Plowman*', *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 27 (2013) 45–59.

[42] See John Marenbon's evaluation of the debates over the authenticity of the Abelard–Heloise letters at pp. 19–33, 'Authenticity Revisited', in *Listening to Heloise: The Voice of a Twelfth-Century Woman*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York, 2000), and the comments by Sylvain Piron at pp. 185–99 and 213–18 in his *Lettres des deux amants* (Paris, 2005), in which the Latin text of the *Epistolae* is preceded by a translation into modern French. The standard edition of the *Epistolae* is by E. Könsgen (Leiden, 1974). Both texts are discussed in Ch. 3 below (pp. 65–85).

es on grounds that we find insufficient to support it.[43] The epistle purports to be answering another received from the lover, responding to his request for a meeting (8–14) and to his fear of being made a fool of and incurring 'mokry' (71–2). The lady declares her love, but is firmly uncooperative: she will not consent to any meeting that might bring dishonour or scandal, can offer no hope of one in the foreseeable future, and so can only urge on him the steadfast endurance of delays and difficulties that is the mark of the true and faithful lover (15–49). One of the *Carmina Burana* (70: 'Estatis florigero tempore') presents a not dissimilar dialogue between a passionate male and a woman who, fearful of scandal, enjoins upon him constancy and patience. While Mooney finds the poem 'remarkable in so uniquely expressing a woman's point of view of *derne* love' (p. 243), the female voice and perspective had a tradition of its own (see pp. 59–62 below), with which this poem is in broad conformity. It is certainly not unique in that respect. Nor do the references to specific points raised in a letter to which the present one responds necessarily indicate any underlying exchange of actual letters, as Mooney assumes (p. 244). Reference to a letter received does occur in, and form part of the evidence for, certain or probable actual cases.[44] But the present poem requires no access to its supposed predecessor to be explicable, and it attributes to the lover nothing but standard male complaints. Nor is it unique in representing itself as replying to a letter from the man and stating the specific points to which it responds. There is a poem in the Welles anthology beginning, 'Right best beloved',[45] in which the woman summarizes and replies to some standard male moves made in a letter from him: pleas for her truth, her incomparable beauty, the torments of absence, the fear and self-consciousness that impede expression of his feelings, etc. The woman replying to her lover, it seems, was a received type of epistolary poem, and was a kind of variation on the paired-letter format, a variation in which typical male and female attitudes are condensed into one letter, the woman's reply incorporating the male missive to which it responds, with consequent emphasis on the female (usually guarded) response to male ardour. The Welles poem does not present any departure from the gender stereotypes (the prudent caution of the honourable woman responding to male passion and haste) that might suggest an actual rather than a typical case, though the unspecified charge for which pardon is asked in the

[43] Linne Mooney, '"A Woman's Reply to Her Lover" and Four Other New Courtly Love Lyrics in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19', *MAev* 67 (1998) 235–56 (p. 242). An edited text of the poems is provided by Mooney at pp. 249–56.

[44] See Text 6, 5C.33–6 and cf. line 29 of item 31 in the Findern manuscript, on which see Text 3, p. 227 below.

[45] *Welles Anthology*, no. 59 (pp. 252–4).

Findern poem might do so (see p. 227 below). But Mooney's case rests principally on the final stanza of the poem she discusses:

> But, the second Troyles, as I began
> To be playne unto yow in my sentence,
> And nat the Royal Ox forto be clepyd the swan,
> Ne the swan that ys whyte in existence
> To be cleped Coll – thys ys but apparence,
> As in wordes traversyng the kyng –
> I pray to God, foule fall dissemblyng. (Mooney's text: ll. 85–91)

Mooney claims these lines are so worded as to suggest a cryptic identification of an actual addressee who must clearly be of the same 'noble birth' and 'royal descent' as Troilus (p. 243) and (given that heraldry seems at least in part to underlie lines 87–9) may well be Henry Bolingbroke (later Henry IV), the ox being associable with the 'bole' [bull] perhaps suggested by his cognomen and the white swan being the badge of his first wife and sometimes borne by him. However, the grammar and sense of lines 86–9 do not imply that the terms listed might be used of the addressee if one was not being 'plain', but that not being plain would involve calling an ox a swan or a white swan by a name used for black things (cf. 'col-blake' in *MED*). The use of these animals in heraldic arms or badges does seem to underlie the lady's designation of them as ones that might be used as code in potentially treasonous discourse. When, for instance, in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Stanley sends messages of warning to a friend and later to co-conspirators about the king, he refers to him cryptically as the 'boar', which was his heraldic badge (III.2.7–8, IV.5.1–3). But the designation 'second Troyles' is, as we have seen, not singular in itself, and in fact here simply reinforces the steadfastness the lady has urged in the absence of any hope of a meeting – a matter on which she says she has been and will be 'plain': she will not use 'dissemblyng' by giving him false assurances, those 'botmeles bihestes' which, for instance, Troilus found in Criseyde's letters (V.1424–31). Lines 87–91 can thus be paraphrased as: 'I will not say black is white, calling the large and majestic ox a swan or call the white swan black, or use such indirections as are used by traitors when they plot against the king'. She is aligning her plainness with political truth and loyalty, rather than hinting heraldically at the identity of her lover because the political dangers of any relationship force such indirections, as Mooney assumes, and we do not find them inexplicable unless assumed to relate to an 'actual' lover. Yet the lines are somewhat cryptic and illustrate the potentially blurred or arguable boundary in this territory between art and actuality.

The relative proportions of art and actuality in any given case can also be problematic. The woman or wife writing with love and longing to an absent lover or husband was a popular rhetorical topos that figures as an epistolary type in the model love letters of Boncompagno (Text 1, 146/29ff., 154/1ff.) as well as in poems (e.g. 'O, happy dames' at fol. 55^{r-v} in the Devonshire manuscript). But she could also, of course, be a real woman. Eleven letters of this type occur scattered amongst the items forming an epistolary formulary from medieval Bohemia. Various specific details strongly indicate the sender to have been the late thirteenth-century Queen Kunhuta writing to her husband Přemsyl Otakar II during his absence on a military campaign. But the letters (in Latin), like others in this collection, come without the *superscriptio* that would confirm the identity of sender and addressee, probably in order that they may thereby better serve the purposes of archetypes, which they certainly suggest in many respects, since they are clearly influenced by the amorous rhetoric conventionally pertaining to the situation (quoting, for instance, from Psalm 39: see note to Text 1, 146/31). That the composer of the letter might have felt the influence of the rhetorical tradition would not be surprising. But the special complication in this case is that the wifely devotion expressed is inconsistent (though not absolutely irreconcilable) with the representation of Kunhuta in a contemporary chronicle as a treacherous adultress. That claim may itself, of course, reflect the influence of another archetype. But it may well be that in the letters 'the actual queen's perspective is reflected through a "shared authorship" which involves different individuals from the composer to the reviser, and knows multiple production stages, from the transcription to the compilation of the collection'. That is the conclusion drawn by Francesca Battista in an essay which gives an excellent account of the case and the problems posed by it and which is contained in a volume with a highly significant title: *Medieval Letters: Between Fiction and Document*.[46]

Reality or Realism?

Ambiguous cases occur throughout the period at issue. Since real love letters were by convention stylized and formulaic and devoid of identifying details, these characteristics alone cannot rule out actuality, and, conversely, the presence of specific details cannot rule out art, especially if they are not such as to confuse (for allusion to the particulars of a

[46] *Medieval Letters: Between Fiction and Document*, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout, 2015). Battista's essay, 'Queen Kunhuta's Epistles to Her Husband', is at pp. 265–76.

genuine case tends to leave loose ends that suggest a wider story is needed to make full sense of them). The ambiguity, that is, can itself be artful. The following two lyrics may be cases in point. They occur in Humfrey Newton's commonplace book and are numbers XII and XIV in Robbins's edition of the poems therein contained.[47] They may be of Newton's own composition or by a friend or acquaintance, or they may be records of poems he had come across or remembered.[48] They may or may not refer to actual cases, and the initial 'Mittitur' [It is sent] may be simply a generic marker (of a verse epistle: it occurs also with II, XIII, XV and XVII), or it may indicate a poem that was actually delivered to someone. They thus typify the ambiguities that can arise in this area. But their success depends partly on their teasing suggestion of an underlying 'reality' that can only be hinted at indirectly: 'M' in the first suggests a specific person whose name is being deliberately concealed, the concealment (pretended or real) indicating the reality of a 'private' epistle.[49] Both lyrics certainly work by appearing to bring into the 'public' domain a correspondence they simultaneously indicate is importantly and crucially 'private' and whose sender and sendee can thus be referred to only cryptically, by initials and 'tokens':

[47] They are also included (as nos. 193 and 194) in Robbins, ed., *Secular Lyrics*. We quote from 'The Poems of Humfrey Newton', ed. Robbins, but have used our own punctuation.

[48] It is generally assumed that Newton was the author of the courtly love poems (fols. 92^{v}–94), though he has elsewhere copied into the commonplace book verses he certainly or probably did not himself compose: to wit, poems I (*ABC of Aristotle*), XIX (some versified advice on purchasing land, attributed to the jurist Fortescue), XX (six lines of alliterative prophecies), XXI (Richard de Caistre's hymn), XXII (an alliterative poem in a style and metre both older than and very different from the other poems) and XXIII (a copy of a 'nightingale' poem once attributed to, though now thought not to be by, Lydgate: see Deborah Youngs, *Humphrey Newton: An Early Tudor Gentleman* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 171). It is therefore unsafe to assume he must have been the author of all the courtly love poems (some or all of which may just have been works circulating and/or composed locally), simply because none of them has been found elsewhere, and because he was probably the author of three of the five brief acrostic epistles (those that spell out the names of himself and of his wife Elena: III, IV and VIII); and, if he can be supposed to be also the author of the other two acrostic epistles to 'Margeret' and 'Bryan' (VII and IX), it must be likewise supposable that, conversely, even those on himself and Elena were composed by a friend or acquaintance.

[49] 'M' recurs as addressee in the first line of another of Humfrey's verse letters (XVII: 'Mi Mornynge, M, greues me sore') – which also, like the second poem quoted above, refers to seeing her in church, often mentioned as the likeliest venue in which the lover can be in the physical presence of his beloved, and where he may have seen her for the first time: cf. *Troilus* I.267–73 and *Welles* 13.60–1 ('at þe furst tyme þat I dyd yow mete / In the myddes of þe churche when I dyd yow grete'). In both cases 'M' may well be meant to suggest the name 'Margaret' (abbreviated to 'M' at Text 4, I.1), a very popular girl's name, and one common in the Newton family, where it was given, for instance, to one of Humfrey's daughters and his wife's younger sister (see Youngs, *Humphrey Newton*, pp. 26, 101, 183); it also forms the name spelled out in one of Humfrey's short acrostic verse love letters (VII), where it is probably that of a friend or acquaintance – and it is the name of the addressee and (perhaps) the sender of the actual love letters of Texts 4 and 7, respectively.

Mittitur:

I pray you, M, to me be tru,
for I will be tru as longe as I lif;
I wil not change you for old ne newe,
ne neuer lof oþer whiles þat I lif.

and ye be auiset, þis oþer yere, — *and ye be a.* if you remember
ye send me a letter of luf so dere; — *send* sent
I was as glad of youre writynge
as euer I was of any thynge,
for I was sek the day be-fore – — *sek* sick, ill
that letter heyled, I was sek no more.
M, in space
comes fortune and grace;
I trist hit so for to be — I trust that it will so happen
Þat it shall li3t on you and me. — *li3ht* alight
M, be stidfast and tru in tho3t,
ffor lof is the swetter the der þat it is bo3t. — *der* dearer
and M I hope securly — *hope securly* certainly think
there is non þat byes it so dere as we.
and in what place so euer ye be,
as oft as ye wil, ye shall me þer se.
þerfor be ye tru tru, — *tru tru* truly true
or ellis sore I mun it rew; — *sore I m. i. r.* I must grieve bitterly for it
be ye stidfast and also true,
ffor y wyl not change for old new. — *change f. o. n.* change the old for the new
and sithen as we may not to-geder spek,
be writynge we shall oure hertes breke. — *be* by; *breke* unload

Mittitur:

Go, litull bill, and command me hertely — *command* commend
Vnto her þat I call my trulof and lady,
be this same tru tokynnynge — By this verifying sign
that sho se me in a kirk on a friday — *se* saw
in a mornyng,
With a sper-hauk on my hand;
and my mone did by her stond; — *mone* man-servant
and An old womon sete her by
that litull cold of curtesy, — Who was not skilled in courtly ways
and oft on her sho did smile,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009398091.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to loke on me for a wile. — *to* to encourage her to
and yet be this an-oþer token:
to the kirk sho comme with a gentilwomon; — *comme* came
euen be-hynd the kirk dore
they kneled bothe on the flore,
and fast thay did piter-pater –
I hope thay said matens togeder! — I think they were saying Matins
yet ones or twyes, at the lest,
Sho did on me her ee kest; — *ee* eye
then went I forthe preuely,
and haylsed on thaym curtesly.
be alle the tokens truly, — *be alle the* by all these
command me to her hertely.

The precise nature of the relationship between art and actuality in these two poems may have been clearer to their original (probably small and local) audience, but their charm still depends on implying such a relationship. Newton's anthology also includes a 'Dear John' verse letter from a woman (XI) whose female voice is certainly not the standard one. The speaker appears to have consented to a (probably arranged) match with another man, and writes to give her lover permission to transfer his affections, should he wish. This cannot have been uncommon news for sweethearts to give or hear, and it must usually have been the women who gave it. The female voice is therefore pertinent here. Such a letter from a woman is included by Boncompagno in his collection of model love letters for various circumstances (see Text 1, 144/25–30). But the self-possessed conciseness of that model is very different from Newton's poem on the same occasion. The poem does not type its speaker in either of the expected ways, as (misogynistically) an example of the infidelity of woman or (sentimentally) as a tragic *mal mariée* (a common figure), but is simply resignedly regretful in tone, affectionate and valedictory simultaneously, and Humfrey obviously composed (or recalled or copied) it for the chord of remembered or recognized sad actuality that it sounds:

fare-well, þat was my lef so dere, — *þat was m. l.* you who were my beloved
  and fro her that loued you so well.
ye were my lef from yere to yere –
  wheder I were yours I connot tell.
  to you I haue byn trew and lell
    at all tymes vnto this day;
  and now I say fare-well, fare-welle:
    I tak my lef for euer and ay. — *lef* leave

youre lof, for-soth, ye haue not lost:
if ye loued me, I loued you, I-wys;
Bot that I put you to gret cost,
þerfore I haue you clipt and kist. *clipt* embraced
bot now my luf I most nedes sesse, *sesse* cease from my love
and tak me to hym that me has tan. *take me* betake myself to; *tan* received
þerfore tak ye anoþer wher ye list: *wher ye list* wherever you choose
I gif you good lef, sertayn. *lef* leave, permission

Gif ye me licence to do the same.
this tokyn[50] truly I you be-tak
In remembrance of my name;
Send me a tokyn for my sake;
wheder it be send erly or late,
I shall it kepe for old qwayntenance.
and now to crist I you be-take,
to saue and kepe in whert and sance. *whert and sance* health and fitness

[50] The 'tokens' in this verse are of a different kind from those found in the previous poem (discussed in Ch. 2 below) and refer here to the gift of an object from one lover to the other – a common way of acknowledging a love relationship (cf. Text 4, I.11, II.54–7 and Text 7, I.3, II.11).