

Late Medieval French Composite Poems

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Abstract

Without an authenticated autograph manuscript, it is often hard to assign authorship to a medieval work. Inter textual references help, as do internal references of a personal, historical, or other nature. Many texts, however, remain anonymous until concrete proof of authorship is discovered. Three anonymous French poems dating from the late fourteenth to the early fifteenth century present an additional problem in the often frustrating job of assigning of authorship to early texts in that they have a bi-partite structure that points to their being, in fact, an amalgamation of two separate poems, thus may have been written by two different poets. In 1894, the Swiss medievalist, Arthur Piaget, was the first to advance the theory that one of these poems, *La Belle Dame a mercy* (also known as *La Belle Dame qui eut mercy*), was really two separate poems, although he did not elaborate. I propose to present paleographical, material, and thematic evidence to support Piaget's claim. Two similar poems from the same period and courtly milieu will be included in the discussion: *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame* (also known as *D'un Amoureux parlant a sa dame*) and *Le Serviteur sans guerdon*. Recent theories on poetic production in the late middle Ages, as well as on the compilation of manuscript collections and early printed books, will also inform a general theory of late medieval composite works.

Keywords: Medieval French poetry, love debate poems, La Belle Dame, *mise en livre*

Introduction

Without an authenticated autograph manuscript, it is often hard to assign authorship to a medieval work. Inter textual references help, as do internal references of a personal, historical, geographical, political, or other nature. A great number of texts, however, simply remain anonymous until concrete proof of authorship is discovered.

Three anonymous French poems from the late Middle Ages present an additional problem in the often frustrating job of assigning of authorship to early texts, to wit, they have a bi-partite structure that would seem to indicate that each poem is, in fact, an amalgamation of two separate works, thus may have been written by two different poets. The three poems that I contend to be composite works and which are the focus of this study are *La Belle Dame a mercy* (also known as *La Belle Dame qui eut mercy*), *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame* (also known as *D'un Amoureux parlant a sa dame*), and *Le Serviteur sans guerdon*, all dating from the last quarter of the fourteenth century into the first half of the fifteenth century.

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The specifics regarding the form and text of each poem follow:

- *La Belle Dame a mercy* (hereafter referred to as *La Belle Dame*) has 378 lines distributed over thirty-six stanzas.² The first eighteen stanzas are “square,” that is, they are octosyllabic *huitains* or eight-line stanzas with each line counting eight syllables. They are built on an interlacing rhyme scheme of *ababbcbc*, a form very common to late medieval French lyric poetry. The nineteenth to the final, thirty-sixth stanza, however, exhibit a different stanzaic form. While the lines in this second set of eighteen stanzas are octosyllabic, as they were in the first set, each stanza now contains thirteen lines (called *treizains*) and is built on the rhyme scheme *aabaabbccddcd*. Thirteen-line stanzas were exceedingly rare in late medieval poetry, as they were judged to be far too long and much more challenging, needing four different rhymes in each stanza (Brandin, Hartog, 1904, p. 97).
- *La Belle Dame* is an amorous debate poem with two speakers: a (self-proclaimed) loyal, earnest, and persistent suitor and an initially recalcitrant, but ultimately “merciful” lady, who succumbs to his blandishments. There is no narratorial framework to the poem, as there is in many similar poems from the period. Only the voices of the lover and the lady are heard, in alternating terns or sets of three stanzas, with the lover speaking first and the lady speaking last.
- *Le Dialogue d’amoureux et de sa dame* (hereafter referred to as *Le Dialogue*) has 414 lines, also distributed over thirty-six stanzas. The first eighteen stanzas in *Le Dialogue* are octosyllabic, as in *La Belle Dame*, but they are ten-line (rather than eight-line) stanzas (or *dizains*), with an *ababbccddcd* rhyme scheme. Once again, the shift in the stanzaic structure of the poem occurs at the start of the nineteenth stanza. The second set of eighteen stanzas are octosyllabic, thirteen-line stanzas, built on the *aabaabbccddcd* rhyme scheme, exactly as in *La Belle Dame*. And like this poem, *Le Dialogue* presents an amorous debate in alternating three-stanza groupings, in which a lovesick suitor tries to convince a lady to grace him with her love. This lady, however, is armed with an ironclad self-possession, steadfastly refusing to acquiesce to her suitor’s pleas. *Le Dialogue* also opens with the voice of the lover and ends with that of the lady.
- *Le Servitor sans guerdon* presents a slightly different scenario, although it, too, has a bi-partite structure. Like *La Belle Dame*, *Le Serviteur* contains 378 lines, but they are distributed differently. The first eight stanzas of *Le Servitor* are octosyllabic *huitains* on the rhyme scheme *abaabbcc*, unlike that used in *La Belle Dame*. At the ninth (rather than the nineteenth) stanza, the poem shifts to a new structure. Depending on the manuscript witness, the remaining lines are divided either into fifty-two six-line stanzas (*sizains*) or twenty-six twelve-line stanzas (*douzains*). When divided into *sizains*, the first five lines have eight syllables, while the sixth line has four; if presented as *douzains*, of course, the lines are all octosyllabic except for the sixth and twelfth lines, which have four syllables. The flow of the rhymes and the link between stanzas is smoother when the six-line stanzas are used, as the “b” rhyme always becomes the first rhyme of the following stanza (*aabaab, bbcbbc, ccddcd*, and so on). In the longer stanzas, the flow is more protracted; moreover, the second rhyme is forced to be used three times in the middle of the stanza (*aabaabbbcbbc, ccddcdde, and so on*), a pattern not frequently seen in poetry from this era. Lastly, *Le Serviteur* is a complaint rather than a debate, as only the voice of a despondent lover lamenting his lady’s refusal is heard; the lady herself never speaks.

In a series of articles published in *Romania* in 1901-1905, the Swiss medievalist, Arthur Piaget, introduced and, in some cases, edited the dozen or so poems that he referred to as “imitations” of Alain Charter’s famous and frequently anthologized *La Belle Dame sans mercy*, which is generally dated to 1424. Included in Piaget’s study were both *La Belle Dame* and *Le Dialogue*, although Piaget chose not to edit these two poems. In the penultimate article of this series, in which he discussed *La Belle Dame*, he made no mention at all of this poem’s bi-partite structure. In the final article, however, focusing on *Le Dialogue*, Piaget remarked upon the rupture in the internal structure of both *Le Dialogue* and *La Belle Dame*, but offered no explanation for this. Piaget did not include *Le Servitor* in his study, as it is not generally considered to figure in the cycle of *La Belle Dame sans mercy*.

Piaget’s 1901-1905 “imitation” articles did not mark the first time, however, that he had written about *La Belle Dame*. Ten years prior, he had published a short bibliographical note, also in *Romania*, detailing the contents of a fifteenth-century manuscript located in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1727.

² Three manuscript witnesses of *La Belle Dame* present an extraneous thirty-seventh stanza (two are alike, one unique), spoken by the lover.

In this piece, Piaget dismissed the idea that one of the amorous debated poems contained in the manuscript, namely *La Belle Dame a mercy*, had been written by Alain Chartier, even though the compilers of the manuscript had labeled the poem “Complainte d’amours et response faite par maistre Alain Charretier secretaire du Roy” (p. 206). Then, in a somewhat offhand manner, Piaget made four significant statements: first, that the poem known as *La Belle Dame a mercy* consisted, in fact, of two shorter poems; secondly, that these two shorter poems appeared separately in some manuscripts; third, that at least one of these shorter poems was written before Chartier’s *La Belle Dame sans mercy*; and fourth, that this earlier poem started with these lines: ‘Young, noble, source and river, Of love and of joyous countenance’.....³ The lines that Piaget cited are, of course, from Stanza XIX (lines 145-146) of *La Belle Dame a mercy*, i.e. from the beginning of the “second part” of the poem – or, as Piaget and I contend, from the beginning of one of the two self-contained poems that were, at some point in their manuscript history, melded together and called *La Belle Dame a mercy*.

A century later, Joan McRae’s *Alain Chartier: The Quarrel of the Belle Dame sans mercy* (2004) was published, which featured editions and English translations of several of the amorous debate poems written by Chartier and his contemporaries. McRae’s study included *La Belle dame ou a mercy* (the title given to *La Belle Dame* in her base manuscripts), but she did not provide any explanation for the shift in its stanzaic structure. To date, neither *Le Dialogue* nor *Le Serviteur* has been edited critically or translated.⁴ In the pages that follow, I shall present evidence in support of Piaget’s claim that *La Belle Dame* is a composite work, extending his theory to apply to the two other poems from the same period and courtly milieu, *Le Dialogue* and *Le Servitor*. This evidence comes from the manuscript and print traditions of the three poems, material aspects of the manuscripts and incunabula that contain the poems, and thematic elements in the poems themselves. Recent theories on poetic production in the late middle Ages, as well as on the compilation of manuscript collections and early printed books (cf. Cayley, 2006; Taylor 2003, 2007; Armstrong 2007) will inform a general theory of late medieval composite works.

2. Method

2.1 Manuscript and print traditions

Given their thematic and stylistic similarities, it is not surprising that there is some overlap in the manuscript and print traditions of *La Belle Dame* and *Le Dialogue*, and their presence in the same manuscripts suggests a similar process of amalgamation of separate works into a single one, whether it was at the level of the poet, scribe, compiler, or printer/publisher of the manuscript or incunabula. For its part, *La Belle Dame* is known to exist in nineteen manuscript witnesses (one of which has been lost⁵), as well as in at least nine different early printed editions or incunabula. *Le Dialogue* is known from five extant manuscripts and several incunabula; an excerpt of the poem is also found in amid-sixteenth-century printed anthology of poetry with the delightful title of *Le Trésor des joyeuses inventions du paragon des poesies*. Four manuscripts and several incunabula contain both *La Belle Dame* and *Le Dialogue*.⁶

³..... est formée de deux petits poèmes qu’on trouve isolés dans quelques manuscrits; l’un d’eux est probablement antérieur à la *Belle Dame sans mercy* elle-même. Il commence par ces vers: ‘Jeune, gente, source et riviere, D’amour et de joyeuse chiere’ It is not obvious, however, why Piaget judged Stanzas XIX-XXXVI to be earlier than I-XVIII, and he provided no explanation for his assertion.

⁴McRae (2004) based her edition and English translation of *La Belle Dame* on two manuscripts, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 2230 and 20026. My own critical edition and English translation of *La Belle Dame*, based on Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1642, is forthcoming; my editions and English translations of *Le Dialogue* and *Le Serviteur* are in progress.

⁵ The lost manuscript was part of the library of the 7th Duke of Newcastle, Henry Pelham Archibald Douglas Newcastle (1864-1928). It was removed from Clumber, Worksop and was sold at a Sotheby auction on Dec. 6, 1937 (Lot #941) for £1600 to the London book dealer, Maggs Brothers, who were representing a client identified only as “BU” in their records. All attempts to identify “BU” (individual or institution?) and to locate the manuscript have failed.

⁶ Paris, Bibliothèque de France, f. fr. 833 and 1131; Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, ms. 3523 (Stanzas XIX-XXXVI only); Torino, ms. L.II.12; at least two of Pierre Le Caron’s printed editions of the works of Alain Chartier (the *editio princeps* dated September 5, 1489, and his third version, published in 1494), and André Du Chesne’s 1617 printed edition of Chartier’s works.

As for *Le Servitor*, it has seven manuscript witnesses; it was also featured in the printed edition of *Le Jardin de Plaisance*, published by Antoine Vérard around 1501. There are no known manuscripts or incunabula in which *Le Servitor* appears with either *La Belle Dame* or *Le Dialogue*. Variant readings found in each of the poems suggest a disjointed and confusing manuscript history that could explain separate poems being melded together. For example, when the shift occurs in *La Belle Dame* at line 145, from *huitains* to *treizains*, there are two distinct strands in the readings, each with its own sub-strand of variant. One Reading of This line, found in ten manuscript witnesses and incunabula, is "Cueur de douceur source riviere." Variations on this reading include "Mer de douceur source et riviere" and "Ma douceur source et riviere," found in one manuscript each. The second reading, found in eight witnesses, is "Jeune gente source et riviere." Several variations of this reading also exist, including "Jeune gente fresche et entiere," "Jeune gente sonese et riviere," "Jeune gente demourant sur riviere," "Jeune gente sourdant reviere" and "Joyne gente source et riviere," each found in a single manuscript. Three incunabula contain yet another variation of this reading: "Jenne gente plaisant manière." The divergence in the readings of the poem at this specific point, where structural change also occurs, suggests two separate works being appended to one another, two separate trajectories in the history of the text, and confusion on the part of subsequent scribes copying the work.

Disjointed affinities between manuscripts in the reading of the first and second parts of *La Belle Dame* also reveal shifts in the genealogical lines which could indicate disparate composition. The readings of the first eighteen stanzas of *La Belle Dame* as found in three manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 833, 1642,⁷ and 24440) are remarkably similar and, in several places, unique to these three manuscripts. After the eighteenth stanza, however, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1642 moves away from the other two, exhibiting a stronger kinship with three other Parisian manuscripts (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 924, 2230, and 20026), as well as with the Carpentras manuscript (Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, ms. 390) and a manuscript now located in Copenhagen (Kongelige Bibliotek, Ny. Kgl. S. 1768.2). While it is difficult to establish an absolute genealogy, it is again conceivable that the copying of this poem follows at least two different trajectories after the eighteenth stanza as a result of the amalgamation of separate works.

The manuscript tradition of *Le Dialogue* is also far from linear. None of the manuscript or incunabula witnesses of this poem is complete. One manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 1131 (which also contains *La Belle Dame*), is unique in missing just four lines of text (lines 37, 94, 177, and 289). Five other witnesses (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 833; Torino, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria, ms. L.II.12; Pierre Le Caron's 1489 and 1494 print editions; and André Du Chesne's print edition from 1617) contain those four lines, but are missing several other individual lines and/or blocks of text, including all of Stanza XXX (spoken by the lady). Le Caron's 1489 print edition omits line 346, whereas in the other four witnesses, this line seems at first to be missing, but, upon closer examination, it is found at the end of Stanza XXXI, four lines below where it should have appeared, with no note to indicate the error.

Of all of the witnesses to *Le Dialogue*, it is Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 3523, that best demonstrates the disjointed nature of the poem's transmission. Like the five listed above, this manuscript is also missing all of Stanza XXX. Unlike these, however, the Arsenal manuscript demonstrates a kinship with Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1131, in that they both contain line 394 (missing in the others) and they alone invert lines 204-205. That said, the Arsenal manuscript also distinguishes itself from ms. 1131 on several points: its reading of line 204 is similar to, but not identical to that in ms. 1131; its reading of line 205 ("J'en ay .xx. puces en l'oreille") is totally unique, not found in ms. 1131 or any other witness; it contains lines 289, which is missing in ms. 1131; and it inverts lines 298-99, as do all other witnesses except ms. 1131. Furthermore, the Arsenal manuscript stands completely alone in several readings, but most especially at line 346. This is the line that is out of order, disrupting the rhyme scheme. The reading in the Arsenal manuscript, "Que j'ay tousjours servy sans blasme," is different, however, from that which appears in ms. 1131 ("Et qui scet combien je vous ayme")⁸ and in all others ("De ce forfait et grant diffame").

The manuscript tradition of *Le Serviteur* is as disjointed as that of the other two poems, with only limited kinship seen between witnesses. The most complete and polished version of the poem (missing only one line) is Antoine Vérard's printed edition of *Le Jardin de Plaisance*, first published in 1501.

⁷Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1642 and 1131, as well as Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Ny. Kgl. S. 1768.2, are the only three manuscripts which present the full text; all others are missing a few to several lines.

⁸This line in ms. 1131 appears in the right position, thus maintaining the correct rhyme for the stanza.

This edition aligns most often with Bibliotheek Arnhem ms. 79 and British Library, ms. 19.A.iii, both of which date from roughly a quarter of a century earlier. Both of these manuscripts are missing six and nine lines respectively; in these cases, *Le Jardin* presents unique readings.

All three of these do contain line 77, however, which is missing in all other witnesses. And the *Jardin* text has an entirely unique reading at lines 218-220. Other lines missing from the manuscript witnesses follow no particular pattern, making it hard to trace a solid genealogical line.

Obviously, variant readings are commonplace when dealing with manuscripts and early printed editions, so the inventory of variants found in manuscripts containing these three poems should not be understood as unassailable evidence for a theory of composite works. It is, however, conceivable that the inconsistent nature of the genealogy of the poems and the often widely variant readings are a reflection of the disjointed transmission of the poems and the possibility that separate works were, at some point, copied as one.

2.2 Material Evidence

The material evidence for a theory of composite works is strong. The first such evidence comes from the layout of the poems on the folio or page. In one-third (six of eighteen⁹) of the extant manuscripts containing *La Belle Dame*, the first eighteen *huitains* end on the verso of one folio, while the nineteenth stanza, containing thirteen lines, begin on the recto of a fresh folio.¹⁰ This distribution of lines on the folio points to the likelihood that the first part of the poem – that is, the first stanza through the eighteenth stanza – was originally a self-contained piece which was copied and/or bound together with another, different poem. Without any title, indentation, decoration or other marker to indicate two separate works, the conjoined poems were subsequently thought to be one and copied/printed as such. The layout of *Le Serviteur* in one of its manuscript witnesses, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, ms. 10961-7, provides similar evidence for a theory of separate, but combined works. In this manuscript, the poem's eighth (eight-line) stanza ends toward, but not at the bottom of the right side of the folio, with blank space left, while the ninth stanza, with its new format, appears at the top of the verso of that folio, as if it were the start of a new poem.

More conclusive material evidence suggesting that *La Belle Dame* is made up of two stand-alone works is found in the Arsenal manuscript mentioned above. In this manuscript, the explicit "Et ho" follows the eighteenth stanza, at the bottom center of the folio; another "Et ho" is found at the conclusion of the thirty-sixth stanza. It is safe to assume that "Et ho" is used here as an explicit; the endings of nine other known works in this manuscript are announced in the same manner.¹¹ The presence of this explicit in *La Belle Dame* to mark closure after both the first set of eighteen stanzas and the second set strongly supports the idea that the scribe of the Arsenal manuscript considered that he was dealing with two separate poems.

In another manuscript witness to *La Belle Dame*, Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, ms. 390, a change occurs in the way that rubrics are used to indicate a new speaker at the point of rupture in the stanzaic structure. In Stanzas I-XVIII, the rubric announcing who is speaking appears at both the beginning and the end of the speech, whereas starting at Stanza XIX, the rubric appears *only* at the start of a speech, never at the end. And even more tellingly, Du Chesne's 1617 printed edition of *La Belle Dame* places the title "Complainte" above the nineteenth stanza, clearly indicating the start of a new poem. Evidence found in the manuscript and printed witnesses to *Le Dialogue* provides additional support for a theory of composite poems. In the same Arsenal manuscript mentioned above, only the second part of *Le Dialogue* is presented (beginning at the nineteenth stanza, with the incipit "Helas! Ma dame et ma maistress"), leaving little doubt that this is a self-contained work.

⁹ Given that the nineteenth manuscript is lost and could not be consulted, I will refer to the eighteen manuscript witnesses that I have seen.

¹⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 924 and 1624; Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 3523; Besançon, Bibliothèque municipale, ms. 554; Carpentras, Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine, ms. 390; and Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, Ny. Kgl. S. 1768.2. In all other manuscripts, Stanza XIX flows unremarkably from the previous stanza, appearing eight lines down the folio once, six lines down twice, and two stanzas into the folio six times, while in the remaining manuscripts, Stanza XIX begins toward the bottom of the folio.

¹¹ These include Alain Chartier's *Complainte contre la mort* and his *Lai de Paix*, Pierre de Nesson's *Testament*, and the *Lais François Villon*, among others.

Although no title appears above the piece, it is preceded by a poem ending with the explicit "Et ho;" it starts at the top of the recto of the folio; and it continues over eighteen octosyllabic *treizains* to the thirty-sixth stanza, with the explicit "Et ho" marking the end. The library's (modern) catalogue description of this manuscript states that the poem is missing the first part; I would argue, however, that "Helas! Ma dame et ma maistresse" is a poem in its own right, copied as such by the scribe.

If this is the case, it could very well have been at this point that the composite poem was created. Both the Arsenal manuscript and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1131 are broadly dated from the fifteenth century, so it is hard to know which was earlier. It is possible, however, to think that the scribe of ms. 1131 copied a short poem starting f" M'amour, ma dame souveraine" (Stanzas I-XVIII in *Le Dialogue*) and then either copied inadvertently, without differentiating or appended intentionally another short poem found in the Arsenal manuscript starting "Helas! Ma dame et ma maistresse" (Stanzas XIX-XXXVI). Subsequent copies made from ms. 1131 would have perpetuated the understanding that this was a single poem called *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame*.

Interestingly, the compilers of the sixteenth-century anthology of poetry mentioned above, *Le Trésor des joyeuses inventions du paragon de la poésie*, said to be contemporary poets, chose to include just a six-stanza excerpt from *Le Dialogue*. This excerpt starts, not at the beginning of the poem, but at Stanza XIX. The first part of the excerpt is labeled "Epistre d'un amant a sa dame" and contains the lover's three-stanza speech starting "Helas! Ma dame et ma maistresse" (Stanzas XIX-XXI). This is followed by the three-stanza response spoken by lady (Stanzas XXII-XXIV), which is called "Rescrit de la dame au dit amant."¹² It seems probable from this that the compilers of *Le Trésor* also considered that the poem starting "Helas! Ma dame et ma mistresses" was a separate work worthy of their anthology.

Decoration in certain manuscripts also signals composite works. At the beginning of each new poem in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1131, a capital letter three lines high designates the first letter of the first word of the piece. Such an initial is found at the beginning of the first stanza and the nineteenth stanza in both *La Belle Dame* and *Le Dialogue*, a good indication that the scribe in each case understood that he was dealing with separate poems and decorated the manuscript (or gave instructions to a decorator) accordingly.

In the case of *Le Serviteur*, the difficulty one scribe had laying out the poem on the folio also hints at a composite work. As mentioned, the shift from eight-line stanzas to six-line (or twelve-line) stanzas in *Le Serviteur* occurs between the eighth and ninth stanzas. The scribe who copied Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1661, clearly did not expect such a shift, since he stumbles over the stanza length at this point in the poem and needs three stanzas to regain his bearings. In the first through the eighth stanzas, he correctly copied eight lines per stanza. His ninth stanza, however, runs thirteen lines; the tenth has ten lines. In this manuscript (and three others), line 77 is missing, so the scribe ended up with twenty-three lines in these two stanzas, or one short of what was needed to group the lines correctly into four six-line or two twelve-line stanzas. Finally, at the eleventh stanza, the scribe copied twelve lines and this pattern of *douzains* is continued to the end of the poem. Other manuscripts containing *Le Serviteur* avoid the problem entirely, using no indentation or any other marker to indicate stanzas. Only one manuscript – Bibliothek Arnhem, ms. 79 – transitions smoothly from the *huitains* in the eighth stanza to *sizains* in the ninth stanza.

2.3 Thematic Evidence

The break in the flow and the internal logic of the three poems at the location of the structural shift also points to a melding of different poems. The lady's last speech in the first part of *La Belle Dame* contains an adamant refusal of her suitor's pleas. She states that she will never share her heart with anyone but her husband and "amy." Furthermore, she asserts that her suitor's loyalty, beauty, and good character ensure that he will be able to attract another, more merciful lady. Three of the manuscript witnesses invert the seventeenth and the eighteenth stanzas, and in this configuration, the lady's refusal is even stronger, as her statement that her heart will never be split between a husband and a lover is her final word on the subject.

¹²A review of the variant readings in the text in *Le Trésor* does not point to the Arsenal manuscript as its base, even though both focus on the same portion of *Le Dialogue*. The text in *Le Trésor* aligns more closely to Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1131, which contains all 414 lines.

The lover is the first to speak in the second part of the poem, and he seems oblivious to the lady's absolute refusal in the preceding stanza. Indeed, his response reads more like the start of a new poem than a response in an ongoing debate (texts below are from Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, f. fr. 1131; translations are mine):

Jeune et gente, source, riviere
 D'onneur et de joyeuse chiere,
 Qui font en vous beaulté florir,
 Vous estes ma dame premiere,
 Qui m'amour avez toute entiere. (ll. 145-49)

[Young and noble, the source and the river, of honor and of joyful countenance, which make beauty blossom in you, you are my lady, first and foremost, who has all of my love.] The transition between the eighteenth and nineteenth stanzas in the *Le Dialogue* is equally disjointed. At the end of the first part of the poem, the lady admits that she could love her suitor, but resists out of fear of gossipmongers:

Car chose en vous ne scey pour quoy
 Qui ne soit bonne et gracieuse,
 Et si vous jure par ma foy
 Se je vouloie estre amoureuse,
 Je seroie bien envieuse
 Que vous me vouldissies amer
 Et vostre amie reclamer,
 Hors du parler des mesdisans.
 Mais ce me pourroit trop grever
 De les en faire voir disans. (ll. 171-180)

[For I know nothing in you, which is neither good nor gracious, and so I swear to you, by my faith, if I wanted to fall in love, I would be very desirous that you should want to love me and claim me as your beloved, beyond the reach of the gossipmongers. But this would grieve me too much to have them speaking the truth about us.] The lover's reaction, however, is to ignore what the lady has just said and to continue his lamentation on his pitiful condition *sans* her love. The exclamation "Helas!" and his direct appeal to his lady echo the start of many other similar and self-contained poems on unrequited love:

Helas! Ma dame et ma maistresse,
 Puis que vostre plaisant jeunesse
 M'a mis en tel point que je suis,
 Hors de toute joie et de liesse,
 Pour me donner deuil et tristesse
 Si largement que je ne puis
 Avoir bon jours ne bonnes nuits
 Ne vivre fors qu'en desplaisance.
 Et si n'est mie en ma puissance,
 Qu'une heure puisse reposer,
 N'avoir ailleurs nulle esperance
 D'avoir de mon mal allegiance,
 Vueilles moy garison donner. (ll. 183-190)

[Alas! My lady and my mistress, since your pleasant youth has put me in the place where I find myself, far from all joy and happiness, it gives me grief and sadness so great that I can have neither good days or good nights, and can only live in displeasure. And if this is not within my power, that I cannot get even one hour of rest, and have no hope whatsoever to have my pain alleviated, would that you please give me relief.]

The thematic shift in *Le Serviteur* is equally striking, as the eighth stanza speaks of closure, both in terms of the poem itself and of his acceptance of the suffering his lady's refusal causes him to bear: "Si conclus que je me plain dray, Et diray ce dont je me dueil" [So I conclude that I will lament and I will say what I am suffering from]. The remaining stanzas, beginning at Stanza IX, can easily be read as a second, separate complaint on a hard-hearted, merciless lady (text taken from Arnhem, ms. 79):

Puis qu'ainsi est or ny a mais
 Que de deschargier le grief faiz
 Des maulx aspres et doloureux
 Dont je suis de joye deffaiz
 C'est a vous que ma plainte faiz
 Cueur rigoureux (ll. 65-70)

[Since it is so, to remove the heavy burden of the bitter and painful illness which drains all joy from me, it is to you that I make my complaint, harsh heart...]

2.4 Poetic Production and the *Mise en livre* in Late Medieval France

Recent studies on poetic production in late medieval France, including Emma Cayley's (2006) theory of "collaborative debating communities," Adrien Armstrong's (2012) "virtuoso circles," and Jane H. M. Taylor's (2007) "coterie poetics," offer new ways to examine and understand their regularities in poetic structure that are found in *La Belle Dame*, *Le Dialogue*, and *Le Serviteur*. Common to these theories is the idea that the reworking and restructuring of earlier poetic works, and I would add, the melding of different works together, was frequent and intentional. According to Cayley (2006), knightly and courtly poets of the day participated in competitive literary exercises to hone and prove their poetic prowess, showing how "the literary product [was] not the single work of an isolated individual, but rather the result of a knowing collaborative effort" (p. 6). Poets engaging in this poetic community in the period between the High Middle Ages and the Renaissance freely contributed new works and/or applied new twists to existing works. Drawing on the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of "field" as a relational network, Armstrong (2012) observes that,

... Poets seek to acquire individual cultural capital – and, in so doing, contribute to the sum of the knowledge of poetry – by refining and exploring features of pre-existing poetry. The ways in which they may do so are potentially infinite, and are certainly not all peculiar to verse, but are selected and actualized according to the material, ideological, and aesthetic contexts in which different poets work (p. 170). Imitation, which would become objectionable in the centuries that followed, was acceptable, if not desirable. As Sara Preisig (2002) explains,

...Fifteenth-century poets were not looked down upon for borrowing material or ideas from contemporary vernacular texts; they were admired when they succeeded in making subtle and adept manipulations of those recognizable elements to convey a specific argument or critique (p. 933).

On the level of individual lines of poetry, the first line of Stanza XIX, i.e. of the second part/poem in *La Belle Dame* (line 145), serves as a good example of the kind of intertextuality that is characteristic of poetic production in the late Middle Ages. The most frequent reading of this line is a variation of "Jeune, gente, source, riviere." The rhythm of the line is reminiscent of lines found in earlier works, for example, line 1697 in Machaut's *Le Livre du voir-dit* ("Douce, plaisant et debonnaire"), and line 73 in Oton de Granson's *Complainte de saint Valentin* ("Belle, bonne, douce, plaisant"). Echoes of the line can also be heard in poems by later poets such as Charles d'Orléans: "Jeune, gente, plaisante et debonnaire" (line 1 in *Balade XIX*); and "Jeune, gente, nompareille princesse" found in the envoi (line 34) of his *Balade XXXVIII*.¹³

¹³ Charles d'Orléans also uses something similar in line 21 of his *Balade XI*, "Tout prens en gré, jeune, gente princesse."

More striking still is line 149 in (coincidentally) the nineteenth stanza of Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans mercy*, which reads "Jeune, gente, fresche et entiere."¹⁴ Such "ritual formulas of ceremonial politeness" (p. 277), as Poirion (1965) calls them, are at the heart of the lyric genre of the era, and attest to the kind of poetic modeling, borrowing, reworking, and imitating that characterizes this period.

The compilation of texts for a manuscript collection or a print anthology (the process referred to as the *mise en livre* by R. Chartier, 1993, pp. 102-103) was clearly approached in a deliberate manner, with the compiler or printer/publisher deciding what to include based on thematic and/or stylistic kinship.

As Taylor (2007) states, any given poem, fulfils a function or has a role within an anthology which it does not have outside it, and ... this coterie circulation of work in manuscript, properly evaluated, articulates artistic preoccupations, and assumptions about the literary process, which reveal much about the socio-literary dynamics of particular texts and about the social history of literature (p. 15). Understanding this dynamic, therefore, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that self-contained poems were also combined to create something new.

2.5 The Cycle and the Quarrel of the Belle Dame

A rupture in the poetic structure like those found in *La Belle Dame*, *Le Dialogue*, and *Le Serviteur* might even be understood to reflect the tensions that are believed to have existed in courtly circles of the era, as seen in the alleged controversy known today as the "Quarrel of the *Belle Dame*." Shortly after the appearance of Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans mercy* in 1424, in which the lady denounces "l'hypocrisie des libertins courtois" (Poirion, 1995, p. 260), members of the royal court of Charles VI wrote to Chartier, criticizing him for insinuating that all ladies were like his Belle Dame, who, they said, lacked the womanly virtue of pity. Chartier answered these charges in 1425 in his *L'Excusation de maistre Alain*, an oneiric debate poem between himself and the God of Love in which Chartier proclaimed his devotion to both women and to Love; declared that it was inadvisable for a lady to grant her love to anyone who addresses his suit to her; and claimed that he had only recorded what he overheard the lady to say, not what he himself thought.

The God of Love acquits the dreaming poet, who says that he will appear before the ladies of the court to apologize. Longer poetic responses and/or sequels to Chartier's poem followed, written by a number of contemporary poets,¹⁵ forming what is now called the "cycle of the Belle Dame." Typically set in a court of love, these poems presented Chartier's lady either being tried and condemned for her lack of mercy or defended on the grounds that she had the right to choose her own lover. What is interesting about the poems that evolved into the "Belle Dame cycle" is that the disputants were more often than not "locked in a stalemate with the hope of resolution endlessly deferred" (Altmann, Carroll, 2003, p. 28). Cases were sometimes referred to a different adjudicator for a new trial or they were left in limbo with no clear resolution, both scenarios allowing for a new poem to be written in response to the earlier one. For Cayley (2006),

...what we are witnessing is not the recording of an actual dispute between named parties...but an intellectual and literary exercise whose continuation is part of an elaborate competition or game between poets and which is fostered by a flourishing climate of cultural and literary debate and exchange in late medieval France (p. 2). Following this line of thought, it seems possible that, at some early point in their manuscript history, a scribe copying the first part of one of our poems may have decided (on his own or at the behest of a patron or courtier) to act as a kind of adjudicator, appending a separate poem to the first because they were on a similar theme and/or because the dénouement of the first poem needed to be either changed or reinforced. The first part of *La Belle Dame*, for example, is a short poem in which a lady steadfastly refuses her lover's suit.

¹⁴The coincidence can be taken one step further when one realizes that the wording in Chartier's line 149 in *La Belle Dame sans mercy* is identical to line 145 in *La Belle Dame a mercy* as found in one of its manuscript witnesses, Rome-Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms. 4794. This manuscript dates from the mid-fifteenth century, thus the scribe may have known Chartier's poem well enough to have unintentionally copied his wording rather than what was in the poem of the merciful lady.

¹⁵Cf. Hult, Kelly (1982), McRae (2003), McRae (2004), Calin (2005), and Cayley (2006) for details on the Quarrel, as well as the Belle Dame poems by Baudet Herenc, Achille Caulier, and others.

To rectify what could have been seen as this lady's uncouthly¹⁶ and unreasonable rejection, the scribe or compiler may have appended another poem to it, one in which the lady ultimately agrees to the lover's suit, thus showing herself to be merciful. The lady in the first part/poem of *Le Dialogue* adamantly refuses her lover's suit; in the second part/poem, the lady continues to reject the lover's pleas with even more reasoned arguments, and she remains merciless. And in *Le Serviteur*, the much longer second poem may have been appended to the first to emphasize the depth of the lover's despair over his lady's refusal, as well as his loyalty in love even when there was no hope of a cure for his lovesickness, either from his lady or the God of Love.

The practices involved in the making of manuscript compilations and print anthologies would have enabled the creation of composite works by "collecting the poems together and, in the majority of instances, actually placing them in adjacent positions within the manuscript" (Cayley, 2006, p. 182), according to the particular socio-cultural field in which they were produced and/or the particular audience to which they were directed.¹⁷In this way, composite works would have been created.

In his articles on the "imitations" of Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans mercy*, specifically in the 1905 section where he discusses *Le Dialogue*, Piaget made three significant statements regarding the relationship between *La Belle Dame a mercy*, *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame*, and Chartier's poem. First, he stated that it was conceivable that Chartier was familiar with the two other poems (presumably, but not necessarily, in their amalgamated state); second, he judged that Chartier, like others of his generation, had reworked an existing genre, i.e. the one he found in *Le Dialogue* and *La Belle Dame*;¹⁸ and third, he contended that Chartier had rejuvenated a theme that had already been developed by earlier poets, giving it, in Piaget's estimation, a more literary and lively form.¹⁹Piaget thus concluded his five-year study of the "imitations" of Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans mercy* by pointing to *La Belle Dame a mercy* and *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame*, not as imitations of, but as inspirations for Chartier's poem. In acknowledging that Chartier had found in *La Belle Dame a mercy* and the *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame* some of the qualities that made his *La Belle Dame sans mercy* so successful (p. 207),²⁰Piaget underscored the importance of these two anonymous and little known poems to a fuller understanding of the evolution of the courtly amorous debate genre in the late medieval period.

3. Conclusion

Piaget's original and unsubstantiated theory from 1894 that *La Belle Dame* was really a composite of two separate works is now underpinned with manuscript, material and thematic evidence. What we now call *La Belle Dame a mercy* was likely an eighteen-stanza poem about unrequited love and a merciless lady, comprised of *huitains* in *ababbcb* – the same kind of poem composed by any number of poets of the era who were giving expression to "a shared, communal, formalized, almost ritualized (even if only imagined) set of feelings" (Nicholson, Grenier-Winther, 2015, p. 21). At some point, a second poem on a similar theme, pre- or post-dating the first poem, with a thirteen-line stanzaic structure and a "happy" ending, was either copied or bound immediately after the first poem, with no marker of any kind to indicate that the two poems were, in fact, separate pieces.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Kelly (1978) and Sansone (1997) for discussions of courtly rhetoric and language.

¹⁷ In this citation, Cayley (2006) refers specifically to Michault Taillevent's *Passe temps* and Pierre Chastellain's *Contre passe temps* (which are, coincidentally, found adjacent to *La Belle Dame a mercy* in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, f. fr. 1642), but her point applies more broadly to late medieval texts.

¹⁸ Armstrong (2012) reminds us that "... when approaching French poetry of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, we must bear an important principle in mind. Individual poetic phenomena – whether texts, poets, poetic communities, or manuscript anthologies – must be considered as far as possible within an evolutionary context, because the compositional choices that shape them are to a great extent responses to the choices made by other, earlier poets. To treat any one of these phenomena in isolation may be a hermeneutic necessity for the purposes of literary historiography, but should not distort its profoundly relational character" (pp. 170-171).

¹⁹ Chartier "a bien pu lire l'une et l'autre complainte" and "n'aurait fait que rajeunir, en lui donnant il est vrai une forme plus littéraire et plus vivante, un thème développé avant lui" (Piaget, 1905, p. 207). A cursory glance at the two Belle Dame poems reveals their many common threads, from the lover's pledge to honor and serve his lady forever, his claim that Love delivered his heart to the lady, and his preference for a quick death over a painful life languishing from her cruelty, to the lady's refusal to believe that her suitor's lovesickness could be fatal, her assertion that she was free to choose the object of her love, and her aversion to falling victim of gossips and ruining her reputation.

²⁰ "...quelques-uns des traits qui ont fait le succès de la *Belle Dame sans merci*."

Subsequent scribes copied the two poems as if they were one and gave it the name *La Belle Dame a mercy*. Something of the kind likely happened with *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame*, *Le Serviteur sans guerdon*, and others. Such a theory of composite works, however, does not require that these poems be split into their component parts to be analyzed and appreciated. Instead, a broader methodological approach is encouraged, one in which philological considerations are naturally and fully included in a textual analysis. As Armstrong and Quainton (2007) observe (and applaud), "the minutiae of a text's transmission are increasingly considered not as a rather unpalatable prerequisite to the study of its thematic and formal properties – as something to be left, if at all possible, to someone else – but as decisively influencing this study" (p. 2). The poetic structure of poems such as *La Belle Dame a mercy*, *Le Dialogue d'amoureux et de sa dame*, and *Le Serviteur sans guerdon* – the result of decisions made at level of the poet, scribe, compiler, printer, and/or publisher – can and should be considered part of any literary analysis, any meanings formulated from that analysis, and – it must be said – any attribution of authorship.

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