THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Poetic Creation in Jean Froissart's L'Espinette amoureuse and Le Joli Buisson de Jonece

Citation for published version:
Sinclair, F 2012, 'Poetic Creation in Jean Froissart's *L'Espinette amoureuse* and *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*', *Modern Philology: Critical and Historical Studies in Literature, Medieval through Contemporary (MP)*, vol. 109, pp. 425-439. https://doi.org/10.1086/665608

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):
10.1086/665608

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Early version, also known as pre-print

Published In:
Modern Philology: Critical and Historical Studies in Literature, Medieval through Contemporary (MP)

Publisher Rights Statement:
© Sinclair, F. (2012). Poetic Creation in Jean Froissart's L'Espinette amoureuse and Le Joli Buisson de Jonece. Modern Philology, 109, 425-439doi: 10.1086/665608

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Download date: 15. Feb. 2025

Forthcoming in *Modern Philology*, due out April 2012

Poetic Creation in Jean Froissart's *L'Espinette amoureuse* and *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*

FINN E. SINCLAIR
University of Edinburgh

A significant feature of Jean Froissart's writing, whether it be the prose *Chroniques* or his poetry and *dits* in verse, is the close identification that exists between author and narrative, life and text. Froissart's role as chronicler and author features strongly in his work; his position as compiler, recorder, and creative writer is an important aspect of his presentation of himself, but in addition, Froissart's voice and his persona infiltrate every level of his writing. Even in his *Chroniques* (c. 1369–1400), initially intended to continue the chronicle of Jean le Bel and to preserve a section of lived history as written text, Froissart's voice progressively colors his writing; he becomes character and narrator, rather than purely observer – a development that reflects the autobiographical presentation of his earlier *dits amoureux*.[1]

This confluence of life and book leads Laurence de Looze to study Froissart's works, in particular the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Prison amoureuse*, from the point of view of pseudo-autobiography, a narrative fiction presented as a lived truth. The narrative is, however, destabilized through internal questioning of this truth.[2] The complexity of this (pseudo-) autobiographical narrative is deftly illustrated by de Looze, who emphasizes the way in which "The pseudo-autobiography … has as its hallmarks constant slippage, Derridean *différance*, frustrated desire, and an unsettled reader."[3] Although the *Chroniques* are thus seen to be increasingly permeated by Froissart's authorial voice and presence, his poetic *dits* most evidently manifest a sense of slippage and ambiguity, since the focus here lies on the Froissart-protagonist and the recounting of his experience by the Froissart-narrator.

The writing of the self and of 'personal' experience into verse narrative, cannot, however, simply be seen as producing a fragmentation or proliferation of different aspects of the author/narrator/character figure which then unnerves or frustrates the reader. The poetic form itself is important in conveying a sense of meaning and in shaping the way in which the work is received. This study will address the way in which ambiguity is created in Froissart's 'pseudo-autobiographical' *dits amoureux* through a simultaneous presenting of experience as both personal and universal. I will focus on the *Espinette amoureuse* (c. 1369) and the *Joli buisson de Jonece* (1373), since both are closely concerned with the interrelation of life and poetic creation, and both, in various ways, extend the notion of experience to the universal.[4] The strategies Froissart employs to achieve this will be explored below, but an important aspect of the connection between the individual and the universal is Froissart's use of verse. Both in the late Middle Ages and in the present day the inherent difference of verse from prose was, and is, recognized as lying not only in its form but also in the fact that it has a particular epistemic value. This inheres in its greater quotability and memorability, and in its more profound connection to body and voice.[5] In this respect, it has a particular kind of 'truth value'; as stated by Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay: "Poetry, by virtue of its form, can lay claim to truth that is independent of its content … this is effectively what is at stake in

the idea that poetry is true because it is poetry and not despite it. The poetic form stakes out a relation to truth that is different in nature from the truth claims of prose."[6]

While Armstrong and Kay's study relates to French poetry of the late Middle Ages, Seamus Heaney reads a similar power in poetry in general, suggesting that "the imaginative transformation of human life [through poetry] is the means by which we can most truly grasp and comprehend it."[7] This somewhat paradoxical statement implies that poetry grants access to an essential, recognizable truth, but that this can only take place through an imagination that in some way goes beyond and transcends the quotidian. In so doing, poetry transforms lived experience into something that is more than itself, and yet essentially itself. Giorgio Agamben devotes much study to the relationship between poetry, philosophy, and life, with particular reference to the Middle Ages. For Agamben, although there exists a tension in the articulation of life and lived experience in speech and poetry, the idea of transcendence is important. In his collection of essays, *Stanzas*, each of the essays "traces … a topology of joy (*gaudium*), of the *stanza* through which the human spirit responds to the impossible task of appropriating what must in every case remain unappropriable."[8] This inquiry into an unreal, philosophical, topology responds, according to Agamben, to "the theory of the phantasm that subtends the entire poetic project bequeathed by troubadour and Stilnovist lyric to European culture."[9]

The notion of a philosophical transcendence which is opened up through poetry, a "going beyond" life as lived experience, takes Heaney's and Agamben's reading of the possibility of a poetic "truth" beyond that of de Looze's focus on poetic pseudo-autobiography. Both ways of reading and interpretation can, however, usefully be applied to Froissart's *dits*, where the themes of life, art, and the generation of poetry provide the core and the motivation for textual production. The impossibility of locating a sense of a fixed and inviolate "truth" also corresponds to the conflicting readings of truth pertaining in the later Middle Ages in France, when a truth could be variously asserted, claimed, and satirized in the same work.[10]

The *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli buisson de Jonece* work together to develop and reflect upon one narrative, that of Froissart's unrequited love, which is initiated in the *Espinette amoureuse*, and revisited, reassessed, and reinterpreted during the course of the *Joli buisson*. Both poems are apparently autobiographical, with Froissart the narrator retrospectively recounting the experience of Froissart the protagonist, and they both open with a statement that appeals to the notion of reality and the relating of a lived truth.[11] In the *Espinette* Froissart describes his childhood and natural inclination to love, progressing from this to inform his readers that the *dittier* he now presents will tell the truth about love: "la verité en iert retrette" (*EA*, line 111). In a similar fashion, the *Joli buisson* opens with the words: "Des aventures me souvient / Dou temps passé" (I remember the events of time past) (*JBJ*, lines 1–2), events which Froissart will record in writing while he has "… sens et memore, / Encre et papier et escriptore" (sense and memory, ink and paper and a writing desk) (*JBJ*, lines 3–4). In both cases, Froissart reinvokes the past and past memories, which are then recorded in writing in order to present and preserve a certain kind of truth – that of 'lived' experience. Love, memory, and writing are linked from the outset in the mind of the author, in that of the reader, and in the poems themselves, yet the poems encapsulate, rework, and redefine Froissart the protagonist's experience of love in a way that ultimately transforms it into a universalized poetic experience.

In both the *Espinette* and the *Joli buisson* Froissart the narrator returns to the memory of his earlier self to create his present narrative.[12] This is a remembering complicated by the slippage between different levels of consciousness and also by the

fact of its translation into writing.[13] Michel Zink sees this interaction of self and memory as "l'activité de l'esprit qui définit le moi comme émergence du passé dans le présent et comme une construction du passé par le present."[14] The self of the past and that of the present interact – memory is a product and a reflection of the present, but the present self is also shaped by and through memory. Jacqueline Cerquiglini views the return to past events as implying a slippage between the present and past self less fluid than in Zink's version: "Le regard sur le passé est un retour sur soi, une confrontation de points de vue."[15] The image of the self produced by chronological dialogue is not binary, however, nor is it confined to a framing in linear time. The notion of slippage produces a version of the self that is neither past nor present, but generated in the unspoken space between. Recognition of this *différance*, this supplement, opens up a space for the creative rewriting of the self, one shaped by memory and recollection but with a fluidity that allows for redefinition and reframing in response to the demands or desires of poetic construction.[16] This creative space answers Heaney's invocation of the transformative aspect of poetry and corresponds to Agamben's sense of the unity between life and poetry on a certain level: "[T]he indeterminateness of what is lived and what is poeticized is absolute, and life is truly only what is made in speech."[17]

Froissart reveals himself as very much aware of the creative potential of a controlled interplay between different constructions of the narrative self, memory, and poetic writing. Not only does he manipulate memories and the remembering of memories to create narrative, he also manipulates the time-frame of his tale in order to heighten the impact of a return to youth and the memories of youth in the *Joli buisson de Jonece*. The *Espinette amoureuse* was probably composed about 1369, and the *Joli buisson* four years later, when Froissart would have been thirty-five years old. In the *Espinette*, the reader is aware of Froissart's retrospective gaze from the start. Following the account of his childhood, and his youthful inclination towards love, he introduces the main narrative section of the poem with the memory:

> D'une aventure qui m'avint
> Quant ma jonece son cours tint, –
> Onques dou coer puis ne m'issi, –
> Pour che compte en voel faire ichi.
> (*EA*, lines 347–50)
> [Of an event which I experienced in my youth, and which has since then never left my heart – for this reason I want to recount it here.]

This event is a vision of Mercury, Juno, Pallas, and Venus (*EA*, lines 397–618) during which Froissart chooses Venus over the other goddesses, allying himself with Amours and preparing the way for the encounter with his beloved *dame* (*EA*, lines 696–787) that takes place shortly afterwards. The joys and torments of this love are recounted by Froissart from the perspective of an older, though perhaps not wiser, man, but the final section of the *dit* (line 3861 onwards) shifts to the narratorial present. This does not seem to entail a drastic chronological leap, however, since Froissart addresses his lady directly, and his love for her has evidently not faded:

> En mon coer s'art et estincelle
> La vive et ardans estincelle
> Qui ne prendera ja sejour

> Heure ne de nuit ne de jour.
> (*EA*, lines 3887–90)
> [In my heart there burns and glimmers the bright ardent spark which will never cease, neither night nor day].

Froissart closes his "tretier" with a *lai* that he hopes will please his lady (*EA*, lines 3912–14), implying that it will be conveyed to her, as have been many of his previous poems, and that she will read it. Froissart's concealment of their two names between the words "NOUS FUMES et LE TAMPS" ("we were" and "time") (*EA*, line 4185) within the *lai* does, however, clearly suggest the passage of time if not the fading of love.

The *Espinette amoureuse* produces the impression of a poem composed, as Froissart suggests, to tell the tale of his youth and the events and emotions that most forcefully shaped his life and his memories. This is a tale still in process, however. Although the *dit* draws to a close with the lengthy *lai* that encapsulates its essence, Froissart's love for his lady, the tale attains no real closure. Froissart the narrator/protagonist still lives in the hope of a reciprocal love, and still languishes happily in his little hawthorn bush ("Ains languis en vie ewireuse / Dedens l'Espinete amoureuse" [*EA*, lines 4197–98]). In the *Joli buisson de Jonece*, however, Froissart stresses his age ("Mes temps s'en fuit ensi q'uns ombres" [My time flies away like a shadow] [*JBJ*, line 376],) and his distance in time from his youthful love affair. The portrait of his lady that inspires him to compose poetry again, and reawakens lost and forgotten emotions, has lain neglected for over ten years (*JBJ*, line 480) and unregarded for at least seven (*JBJ*, line 541). In this *dit*, Froissart takes a step back from his love. His initial preoccupation is not the state of a desperately unrequited happily unhappy lover, but writing, its origins in nature and the significance of its content. This shift implies a chronological distance from the concerns of the *Espinette*, the philosophical preoccupations of age having replaced the amorous ones of youth.

This manipulation of time within both the *dits* and their framing allows for the construction of multiple versions of the self and for multiple perspectives upon this self. If the *Joli buisson de Jonece* is read in conjunction with the *Espinette*, this opens up even greater possibilities for the rewriting and reinterpretation of character and emotion. The chronological gap of narrative time between the two *récits* extends the extra-textual span of real time, hastening Froissart the narrator's rush into middle age and heightening the distinctions between the youthful protagonist of the *Espinette*, its implied author, and the theoretically more aged and experienced author of the *Joli buisson*. This narrative time-shift is compounded by Froissart the protagonist's physical retrospective through his dream in the Bush of Youth. Time folds back on itself as the mature author/protagonist of the *Joli buisson* returns in his dream to an earlier time that never really existed. The text is opened up to a greater range of chronological viewpoints – that of the protagonist within the *buisson*, the narrator remembering this memory, the implied author, and the perspective of the reader beyond the encapsulating world of the text. The tree-ring effect of the work is complicated by the fact that the whole of the episode inside the bush is not only a return to the memory of a past love, that of the *Espinette*, but a subtle reworking of it. The "misremembering" that takes place within the *dit* of the *Joli buisson* unsettles the discerning reader, but can be explained by the fact that this is not an exercise of memory or a recapitulation of past events but the recalling of a dream, product of Froissart's inner consciousness. The unreliability of events and their recording reflect

the shifting and elusive nature of the bush that in no way resembles a bush, much less the little hawthorn tree of the *Espinette*. Froissart describes the "merry bush" as clear and shining, its color fluctuating between azure and white (*JBJ*, lines 1405–13), but its appearance is "peu estable" as it shifts and transmutes with each gust of wind (*JBJ*, line 1417). This is an image hard to conceptualize, as Froissart makes plain, and even harder to depict: as Sarah Kay points out, there exist no manuscript illustrations of the bush.[18] The elusive qualities of the bush point to the fact that while Froissart's dream takes place within it, the bush is itself a dream – an internal, intellectual, or emotional space, rather than a physical one.[19]

Space and time are thus opened up to a subjective rewriting which ties them together within the frame of the written text. Michel Zink sees Froissart's notion of time as Augustinian: "un temps purement subjectif, celle d'un passé qui n'existe que dans la mémoire, et donc dans le présent ("si le passé n'est plus, où est-il?")."[20] For Zink, this idea of time is "le fondement même de sa [Froissart's] poésie."[21] This notion of time as subjective, and as linked with memory and remembering, takes on form and shape within the written text. The subjective space of the "merry bush" of Froissart's dream may mirror the transforming shifts of time and memory, but its existence within the *dit* that bears its name gives form to Froissart's musings on the nature of time, memory, and love. Poetry becomes a means of shaping and giving voice to thought, but also a space where the familiar and the imaginative meet. The day-to-day preoccupations of life – love, loss, ageing, death – are played out in different yet recognizable forms.

This is perhaps the point at which de Looze's notion of a multi-faceted pseudo-autobiographical writing most evidently meets Heaney's notion of poetry as a means of reaching an essential "truth." While the one is bound up with the idea of multiplicity and slippage, sheering away from any suggestion of an inherent core of truth or being that can be grasped, the other focuses on poetic writing as a cohesive and universalizing force. Their dynamics pull in opposite directions, yet when related to Froissart's *dits*, both ways of reading illuminate the currents of thought and modes of expression that shape his poetry, and they do have distinct points in common. Both de Looze's and Heaney's poetic models depend on the relationship that the text seeks to establish between writer and reader, both exploit the tension and interaction created between the individual and the universal, and both hinge on the function of the poetic "I" or poetic voice as expression of a thought and experience translated into poetic form.

It may seem somewhat perverse to speak of the "eclipse of the individual" in relation to Froissart's works, which are often seen as encapsulating the interrelation of author and text and as foregrounding the individual, but it is at the point of confluence between author and text that the notion of a defined individuality is lost. As seen above, the recalling of memory and the transformation of the past self into the poetic self opens up a space for creative reconceptualization. It is here that individual meets universal and quotidian meets imaginative. Froissart does infiltrate his texts as both character and narrator, but this can never be a simple act of recording or the expression of a coherent individuality. Michel Zink points toward this when he states that Froissart writes himself "pour composer le masque sous lequel le poète se dissimule et se révèle", and that Froissart links this poetic self with his work "comme un homme qui éprouve le besoin de se définer par un temps antérieur qui est celui d'une oeuvre préalable."[22]

In the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli buisson de Jonece* the relationship between poet and text and between individual and universal are crucial to the

openness of the *dits*, both as constructed, intertextual objects and as expressions of a *sentement* and an experience that transcend the time and place of poetry. In the *dits amoureux*, Froissart writes himself into his narrative and grounds it in the idea of lived experience through his description of "his" personal circumstances and emotions. The opening of the *Espinette amoureuse* defines both Froissart the protagonist's character and that of the tale to follow, as he recounts his early affinity with love (*EA*, lines 23–54). This individual experience, however, is placed within the broader context of youth's natural inclination – "Pluiseur enfant de jone eage / Desirent forment le peage / D'amours paiier ..." (At an early age many children greatly wish to pay the dues of love...) (*EA*, lines 1–3) – and the noble qualities that stem from the experience of love:

> Car qui voelt son coer entamer
> En bons mours et en nobles teches,
> En tous membres de gentilleches,
> Amours est la droite rachine
> Et coers loyaus qui l'enrachine
> En soi et point ne s'outrequide
> (*EA*, lines 80–85)
>
> [For whosoever would like to initiate his heart into good habits and noble qualities and all kinds of noble sentiments, love is the true source, and the loyal heart that roots itself within it can never be thought presumptuous.]

The young Froissart is a microcosmic representation of amorous and noble youth, at once its reflection and its exemplum. Through this generalization, his experience is from the start opened up to audience identification, and his *dits* are linked with the themes of other works.

The theme of love and its expression in poetic narrative is prevalent in much medieval verse, and forms the core of the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli buisson de Jonece*, even though the latter poem concludes with the rejection of amorous love in favor of the divine.[23] In her wide-ranging study of Guillaume de Machaut's poetry, Jacqueline Cerquiglini points to the two forces Machaut saw as providing "la source de la poésie": Nature and Love; "Nature est du côté de la forme de la poésie, Amour, de la matière."[24] This interaction between the two and their differing roles in the production of poetry map equally well onto Froissart's *dits*. At the beginning of the *Espinette* Froissart recalls how Nature introduced him to those things that incline a person towards love (*EA*, lines 33–35), causing him to love birdsong, gardens in the springtime, and amorous tales. In the *Joli buisson* Froissart links Nature with writing, emphasizing the fact that Nature created and nourished him so he may write "biaus dittiers" (beautiful rhymes) (*JBJ*, line 37), and bemoaning the fact that he has lost his "don de Nature" (gift of Nature) when he feels himself unable to write (*JBJ*, line 101). Nature provides the inclination and impetus for writing and presses the writer towards its "natural" content, that of love.

Froissart shares his attitude towards poetic creation as well as his use of contemporary poetic topoi with other fourteenth-century writers who felt themselves "des fils, mais des fils évoluant dans un monde devenu vieux," and in which the sources of writing had run dry.[25] His complaint to Philosophie in the *Joli buisson de Jonece* encapsulates this feeling: "Que porai je de nouvel dire?" (What can I say that is new?) (*JBJ*, line 433).[26] Froissart finds his inspiration through gazing upon the long-forgotten portrait of his lady, an image "en parchemin" (on parchment) (*JBJ*,

line 490), which recalls the memory of his love, but also the physical form of the written text, and his past writings on love.[27] The emphasis lies on memory and the invocation of the past, but also on writing: the recording of experience in the written text, and a later return to this text as a means of renewal and inspiration. Cerquiglini suggests that by the fourteenth century, "La poésie lyrique est passée d'une temporalité de l'énonciation à la temporalité de l'écriture et de la lecture."[28] This return to textual sources strengthens and gives an additional dimension to the idea that: "Tout se passe comme si, pour le poète, l'expérience était toujours une réexpérience, la réactualisation d'une expérience passée."[29] The notion of creation as being a continual recreation, a recycling of a memory and an experience recorded in writing, lifts the poetic work from the level of narrative or lyric composition to that of meta-narrative.

An important aspect of this process is the use of citation and allusion in late medieval poetry. Froissart's debt to Machaut in the writing of his *dits amoureux* is well recognized, as is the influence of the *Roman de la Rose*. Both the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli buisson de Jonece* reveal Froissart's extensive knowledge of contemporary as well as classical texts, as he weaves his *dits* with allegorical characters and mythical references. This impulse towards citation and the recycling of themes and images marks the Froissardian *dit* as rooted in a particular tradition, but also takes the composition of each poem to a level beyond itself. The technique of interlace marks another instance of the way in which the general movement of the *dits* is from the individual to the universal, and from a personal, autobiographical, experience to a one that is both communal and literary.

Both the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli buisson de Jonece* embellish and enhance Froissart's account of his love through the protagonist's encounters with a series of allegorical figures. In the *Espinette*, Amours teaches and encourages Froissart (*EA*, lines 115–22; 976–77; 1082–89), he is accompanied by Douls Pensers, Espoirs and Plaisance as he meditates on the revealing of his love to his lady (*EA*, lines 1049–66), while Male Bouce finally causes his lady to turn away from him (*EA*, lines 3723–48). The dream-world of the *Joli buisson* sees a proliferation of these figures: Froissart is led to the bush of youth by Venus, where he is greeted by Jonece (*JBJ*, lines 1436–84), and a host of allegorical figures including Douls Samblant, Atemprance, Francise, Pité and Plaisance, as well as the negative figures of Refus, Dangier, and Escondit surround Froissart's lady (*JBJ*, lines 2329–33; 2402–16). This use of allegory evidently links the *dits* with the *Roman de la Rose* (as well as with other *Rose*-influenced works), as does the fact that Froissart encounters his lady in a flower-filled garden in both texts (she is compared to a flower in the *Espinette*, although this is a marguerite and not a rose). In addition to setting the *dits* within a network of interconnected poems, the separating of qualities into allegorical personifications also has the effect of expanding and opening out the autobiographical element of Froissart's tale. Both Philosophie and Jonece can be read as Froissart's doubles. Anthime Fourrier sees Philosophie as providing a focus for reflection: "Elle est son moi détaché en vis-à-vis, son double autonome."[30] It is Philosophie that leads Froissart to the portrait of his lady and prepares the way for Froissart's return to the "Bush of Youth" through the reawakening of lost memory and the renewal of the desire and the ability to compose:

> Et la vins ou ja mis avoie
> Le coffre, en sauf lieu et couvert;
> Si l'ai deffremé et ouvert

> Et l'ymage, que tant desir
> A veoir, voi illuec jesir.
> Je le pris et le desploiai
> De la toile ou ja le ploiai
> Et, trestost qu'au nu le vi,
> Mon coer entirement ravi
> En un penser fresc et nouviel
> Qui me fist faire, et par reviel,
> Un virelay en ce moment.
> (*JBJ*, lines 550–61)
>
> [And I came to where I had left the casket, in a safe, tucked-away place. I unfastened and opened it, and I saw the picture, which I desired to see so much, lying within. I picked it up and unwrapped the cloth which I had wrapped it in before and, as soon as I laid eyes on it fully, my whole heart bounded with a fresh, new thought which caused me to compose a joyful virelai at that moment.]

The impetus for writing lies within the self, and is inspired both by memory and by love, but it may also be found in other literary works: the "chemin" that leads to the "parchemin" which holds the image of Froissart's lady (*JBJ*, lines 489–90) is also the path that leads to writing and the culture of the book.[31]

Jonece is likewise an aspect of Froissart's own self:

> Nous sons d'un eage et d'un grant,
> D'une maniere et d'un aler,
> D'une vois et tout d'un parler,
> Et c'est cose qui bien s'acorde,
> Car li philozophes recorde
> Que sannables quiert son sannable.
> (*JBJ*, lines 1495–1500)
>
> [We are of the same age and height, the same manner and comportment, the same voice and just the same way of speaking, and it works well for as philosophers say, "like seeks like".]

Jonece leads the mature Froissart back into his dream of youth, but also functions to explain the philosophical construction of the "merry bush," while Froissart is completely distracted by the gaiety around him. Their roles seem reversed: while Jonece appears versed in "grant astronomie" (great astronomy) (*JBJ*, line 1724), Froissart would rather have "… un chapel / Fait de flourettes bien et bel" (a crown of little flowers well and truly made) (*JBJ*, lines 1751–52) than "… tout le sens / Qui est a Paris ne a Sens" (all the knowledge of Paris or Sens) (*JBJ*, lines 1754–55). But through this play on the doubling of his character, Froissart becomes at once scholar, lover, and poet. His text is likewise set in philosophical or scholastic framework as well as a poetic one.[32]

Froissart also sets his narrative persona and his *dits* within an intertextual frame through his use of classical, and in particular Ovidian, myths. As the opening to the tale of his first meeting with his lady in the *Espinette amoureuse*, Froissart tells of a waking dream-vision in which he encounters Mercury, Juno, Venus, and Pallas. Froissart is asked to make his own choice between the three goddesses and, like Paris, he chooses Venus. "Tout li amant vont celle voie" (Every lover takes this path) (*EA*,

line 524), says Mercury. This marks Froissart the narrator-protagonist out as a "natural" lover, in accordance with his earlier statements on Nature, but also reveals him as one among many: *all* lovers make this choice and take this path. The (pseudo-)autobiographical context of the tale is broadened out to encompass the historical, mythological, and literary. Froissart is a lover not only because he falls in love but also because he fits into the category of the classical and literary lover. He compares himself to those who have died for love, Leander, Achilles, and Acteon (*EA*, lines 1309–17), and in his *Complainte del Amant* (a lyric insertion) he recalls the sufferings of literary heroes, including Lancelot and Tristan, setting himself among their number (*EA*, lines 2308–23). In the *Joli buisson*, it is Desir that links Froissart's sufferings in love with those of Phoebus, Pygmalion, Paris and Tristan, among others (*JBJ*, lines 3154–3365). The self-perpetuating nature of poetic tradition is revealed as Froissart's *dits* draw upon a body of literary knowledge to punctuate their own narrative. This use of existing characters, tales, and imagery sets Froissart's love poetry into a recognizable context and provides a frame for his *récit*. Yet although Froissart may nominally be cast in the mould of an Acteon, a Lancelot, or a Tristan, he is also the creator and shaper of the text that contains them. This opens up the way for an imaginative rewriting and reinvention that perpetuates imagery and meaning while at the same time reshaping them to fit a new context.[33]

Reference to literary tradition and the repetition of established narrative elements were a way of authenticating experience and of lending authority to both text and authorial voice in the Middle Ages, but Froissart goes beyond this to reinvent tradition and "knowledge." He both rewrites classical myths – for instance portraying Narcissus as falling in love with Echo – and invents them. The myth of Papirus and Idorée in the *Espinette amoureuse*, and several apparently Ovidian tales that feature in the *Joli buisson* are not found in Ovid (or in any other pre-existing text for that matter). Through this reinvention of the known, and spontaneous generation of the seemingly familiar, Froissart draws attention to the fictional nature of his tales, and to the way in which the written word can be manipulated and narrative renewed. This textual manipulation has links to the fluidity of the notion of "truth" in the late Middle Ages, especially in the context of writing and the glossing of writing.[34]

Froissart's initial claim to authority through the recalling of a past memory and fixing it in present writing, which occurs at the opening of the *Espinette amoureuse* and the *Joli buisson de Jonece*, is swiftly undercut by his manipulation of time, space, and memory within his poetic texts. As pointed out by de Looze, Froissart confounds expectation. His narratives may claim an autobiographical source, but the transmutation of life into poetry works to disrupt any coherent reading of the self and its narrative. As Seamus Heaney says, quoting Václav Havel, "poetry is 'a state of mind, not a state of the world.'"[35] The reader's appreciation of Froissart as a coherent and identifiable individual is destabilized by the way in which the author constructs and deconstructs his image as character and narrator in the flow of time and of writing. His invocation of the fleeting nature of time and the transformative qualities of memory, together with the multiple perspectives he brings to bear on his depiction of the self as lover, dreamer, narrator, and writer, produce an image which is polyvalent and metamorphic. It also opens out this 'self' to a reading that focuses on the universal and the general, rather than on the individual. This writing and glossing of a fragmented yet universal, self answers the fourteenth-century call simultaneously to subvert and to erect a notion of truth.[36] It also reflects the tension that Agamben sees as existing in the relationship between life and poetry, and Heaney's vision of poetic expression as a means of going beyond, transcending, and

transforming the quotidian.[37] An informed reading of Froissart's *dits amoureux* takes us beyond the notion of the pseudo-autobiographic, though this plays its part, and leads us to consider the relationship between experience, poetry, and poetic creation in a way that has relevance both to the composition of medieval verse, and to the present day.

---

[1] This participation of Froissart as protagonist within the *Chroniques* is fully marked by Book III, as noted by Peter Ainsworth, among others. See Peter F. Ainsworth, "Configuring Transience. Patterns of Transmission and Transmissibility in the 'Chroniques,'" in *Froissart across the Genres*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sarah Sturm-Maddox (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 15–39.

[2] Laurence de Looze, *Pseudo-Autobiography in the Fourteenth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 31. Chapter 1 discusses Jean Froissart.

[3] *Ibid.*, 32.

[4] The editions referred to throughout are Jean Froissart, *Espinette amoureuse*, ed. Anthime Fourrier (Paris: Klincksieck, 1963), and Jean Froissart, *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*, ed. Anthime Fourrier (Geneva: Droz, 1975). All translations are mine.

[5] Guillaume de Machaut conceived of lyric poetry as having a particular "truth value" through its origin in the rhythms of the body rather than in those of words. See Jacqueline Cerquiglini , *"Un Engin si soutil". Guillaume de Machaut et l'écriture au XIVe siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine 1985), 181–200 (especially 194–96).

[6] See the Introduction in *Knowing Poetry: Verse in Medieval France from the Rose to the Rhétoriqueurs*, by Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, with the collaboration of Rebecca Dixon, Miranda Griffin, Sylvia Huot, Francesca Nicholson, and Finn Sinclair (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 2011). This goes against the prevalent notion that prose was equated with truth from the early thirteenth century onwards. These various pronouncements about the supposed falsity of verse have been reviewed many times, most recently by David Hult, "Poetry and the Translation of Knowledge in Jean de Meun", in *Poetry, Knowledge, and Community in Late Medieval France*, ed. Rebecca Dixon and Finn Sinclair (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 19–41. On the connection between prose and veracity, see Ruth Morse, *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 98–99.

[7] Seamus Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry. Oxford Lectures* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995), xv.

[8] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. By Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), xviii.

[9] *Ibid.*, xviii.

[10] On notions of truth see Jeanette Beer, *Narrative Conventions of Truth in the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1981). Her chapter 6 on Guillaume de Machaut's *Livre de Voir-dit* makes explicit these conflicting attitudes towards the idea of truth.

[11] For the elaboration of a concept of multiple author functions (poet, narrator, protagonist) in later medieval literature see Catherine Attwood, *Dynamic Dichotomy: The Poetic "I" in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century French Lyric Poetry* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998).

[12] For an overview of the perception and use of memory in the Middle Ages see Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 1993). She points out that "[I]n a memorial culture, a "book" is only one way among several to remember, a text to provision and cue one's memory with "dicta et facta memorabilia". So the book itself is a mnemonic, among many other functions it can also have", (8).

[13] Michelle Freeman points to Froissart's innovative use of memory to create authority: "This construct ... recasts in a personal, lyric framework what had been a familiar convention in *translatio studii* romances of the twelfth century: namely, memory – a faculty of mind as well as of poetry and rhetoric – is invoked here as an authority that allows for the continuing of the past in another time while also insuring believability", ("Froissart's *Le Joli Buisson de Jonece*: A Farewell to Poetry?", in *Machaut's World: Science and Art in the Fourteenth Century*, ed. by Madeleine Pelner Cosman and Bruce Chandler [Articles of the New York Academy of Sciences, 1978], 236).

[14] "The activity of mind that defines the self as the emerging of the past in the present and as a construction of the past by the present" (Michel Zink, "L'Amour en fuite: *L'Espinette amoureuse* et *Le Joli Buisson de Jeunesse* de Froissart ou la poésie comme histoire sans objet", in *Musique naturele. Interpretationen zür französischen Lyrik des Spätmittelalters*, ed. Wolf-Dieter Stempel [Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1995], 196.)

[15] "To look back at the past is to return to a past self, a confrontation of points of view" (Jacqueline Cerquiglini, "Écrire le temps. Le lyrisme de la durée aux XIVe et XVe siècles", in *Le Temps et la durée dans la littérature au Moyen Âge à la Renaissance* [Actes du Colloque organisé par le Centre de Recherche sur la Littérature du Moyen Âge et de la Renaissance de l'Université de Reims, novembre 1984], ed. Yvonne Bellenger (Paris: Nizet, 1986), 104.)

[16] Armstrong, Kay et al. see poetry itself as offering a surplus with respect to prose in the later Middle Ages. See *Knowing Poetry*, Introduction.

[17] Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* (California: Stanford University Press, 1999), 81.

[18] Sarah Kay, *The Place of Thought: The Complexity of One in Late Medieval French Didactic Poetry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 126.

[19] In her study of the philosophical implications of the "merry bush" Kay describes it as "the place where thought is mapped", and states, "If what it maps is "real," it is only in the sense of being an inner, conceptual reality that is constantly shifting according to the subjective position of the one who thinks, and the language he or she uses to think with" (*Ibid.*, 125; 132–33).

[20] "A time that is purely subjective, that of a past that exists only memory, and therefore in the present ('if the past is no longer, where is it?')" (Michel Zink, *Froissart et le temps* [Paris: PUF, 1998], 16).

[21] "The very foundation of his [Froissart's] poetry" (*Ibid.*, 16).

[22] "To construct the mask behind which the poet both hides and reveals himself" ... "like a man who feels the need to define himself by an earlier time which is that of a previous work" (*Ibid.*, 30 and 24).

[23] Freeman questions whether the *Joli Buisson de Jonece* marks Froissart's "final adieu to the poetic world," ("Farewell to Poetry?", 243).

[24] "The source of poetry" ... "Nature gives poetry its form, Love, its content" (Cerquiglini, "*Un Engin si soutil*," 17).

[25] "Sons, but sons developing in a world become old" (Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, *La Couleur de la mélancolie. La fréquentation des livres au XIVe siècle 1300–1415* [Paris: Hatier, 1993], 11).

[26] Cerquiglini-Toulet points to the "anxiety about poetic creation" that suffused poetic writing during this period, and which was related to the perceived importance of relating composition to a *sentement*, or lived experience. See

"Fullness and Emptiness: Shortages and Storehouses of Lyric Treasure in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Contexts: Style and Values in Medieval Art and Literature*, ed. Daniel Poiron and Nancy Freeman Regalado, *Yale French Studies* (Yale University Press, 1991), 224–39, 226. Catherine Attwood, however, underscores the shifting relationship between experience and literary expression during the fourteenth century (*Dynamic Dichotomy*, 39–42).

[27] As pointed out by Kay, "The fact that the painting is preserved on a parchment page also brings to mind the common medieval image of memory as a book", (Kay, *Place of Thought*, 135).

[28] "Lyric poetry passed from an age of enunciation to the age of writing and reading" (Cerquiglini, "Écrire le temps", 105).

[29] "Everything happens as if, for the poet, experience was always a re-experience, the recurrence of a past experience" (Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, "Un paradoxe mélancolique ou le lyrisme chez Jean Froissart", in *Perspectives Médiévales, Actes du Colloque International Jehan Froissart, Lille 3– Valenciennes, 30 septembre – 1er octobre 2004*, organisé par Marie-Madeleine Castellani et Jean-Charles Herbin [Paris: Société de langues et de littératures médiévales d'oc et d'oïl, 2006], 55).

[30] "She is his detached, mirroring self, his autonomous double" (Fourrier (ed.), Froissart, *Joli Buisson*, Introduction, 30).

[31] Kay points out this linguistic play on "chemin" and "parchemin" as metaphor for "the access of reminiscence to memory", (*Place of Thought* , 135).

[32] See Kay, *ibid.*, on the treatment of scholastic philosophy in the *Joli Buisson de Jonece*.

[33] On the relationship between thought, writing, and re-creation Agamben comments: "Thought lives off the death of words. From this perspective, to think and to poeticize is to experience the death of speech, to utter (and to resuscitate) dead words", (*End of the Poem*), 63). Although to set thought into writing may be seen as a way of producing a kind of death (the text as "dead letter"), Agamben shows that further creativity springs from this "death" in written language. Thought is continually renewed through the literary and poetic recycling of textual imagery and ideas.

[34] On the principle of authority and its relation to citation in the Middle Ages see Agamben, *Stanzas*, 74; and on poetry's knowledge of itself see Armstrong, Kay, et al., *Knowing Poetry*, Chapter 5.

[35] Heaney, *Redress of Poetry*, 4.

[36] As pointed out by Beer: "In the case of truth guarantees, a complex tradition of inherited presuppositions made paradox inevitable. The complexity of the tradition was not lessened when that paradox itself became traditional. When the assurance HERE-IS-TRUTH could be understood as equivocation or evasion, it no longer exploited the naïveté of a listening audience", (*Narrative Conventions*, 85).

[37] Agamben suggests that, from the point of view of the poet, poetry and life cannot ultimately be separated: "[I]f poetry and life remain infinitely divergent on the level of the biography and psychology of the individual, they nevertheless become absolutely indistinct at the point of their reciprocal desubjectivization", (*End of the Poem*, 93). This "desubjectivization" occurs when poetry and the life it expresses are set into language, according to Agamben, but this is surely even more the case when this poetic imagination is set into the written word, into text, since then it becomes most fully divorced from its origin (lived experience), and is opened to a multiplicity of readings and interpretations.