

GRANDSON IN THE WORLD: FROM THE PAYS DE VAUD TO EDWARD III'S COURT

Denis RENEVEY

Chivalric orders flourished in the second half of the fourteenth century. England's Edward III created the Order of the Garter in 1348, and John the Good the Order of the Star in 1352, while Amédée VI of Savoy, shortly before his departure for the crusades, instituted the Order of the Collar in 1362-64. If these rulers had different specific motives for such orders, they had in common the desire to emulate the chivalric values of the military orders of the crusades that marked the thirteenth century. Literary models such as the Arthurian knights also served to refashion late medieval knighthood. Othon III de Grandson (c. 1340-97) (hereafter Othon de Grandson), knight of the Pays de Vaud, like his father Guillaume de Grandson, who was one of the first knights of the Order of the Collar, became a close advisor of Amédée VII (1360-91) when the latter succeeded his father Amédée VI (1334-83) in 1383. Othon's service to the count was political and military; in 1368, he was engaged in deeds of arms with other Savoyard knights against High-Burgundian ones; by 1372, Froissart was praising him as 'banneret et riche homme durement' [banneret and most worthy fighter], an accomplished leader of knights on the battlefield.

During that year, Othon took part with the English in a naval battle at La Rochelle against the French, fighting alongside the Count of Pembroke, son-in-law of Edward III, King of England. According to Froissart's *Chronicles* from the Amiens manuscript, the king himself appointed the knights who were to accompany his son-in-law on this mission; Othon was the first knight on the list; he also acted as one of the main lieutenants of the Count.¹ The outcome of this battle was unfortunate for the count and his troops, as the English fleet was defeated by the Spanish after a two-day

¹ I here summarise information from Arthur Piaget, *Oton de Grandson: Sa vie et ses poésies* (Lausanne: Librairie Payot, 1941), pp. 12-13. This essay forms a diptych with the following

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battle. The Count, Othon de Grandson and Guichard d'Angle were among the seventy prisoners brought to Santander after a month-long journey by sea. Although Pembroke and Guichard d'Angle were quickly ransomed, Othon de Grandson spent two years in Spanish captivity. Soon after his release in 1374, following a substantial ransom from the English king, Othon, back in England, officially entered the service of John of Gaunt, as a legal contract signed by both John of Gaunt and Othon on 5 August 1374 attests:

Ceste endenture faite parentre nostre seigneur Johan, Roy [de Castille et de Leon], d'une part, et monsire Otz de Granson, chivaler, d'autre part, tesmoigne que ledit monsire Otz est retenuz et demurrez envers nostre-dit seigneur pur peas et pur guerre a terme de sa vie, en manere qu'ensuit...²

[This indenture, contracted between our lord John, King (of Castille and of Leon), on the one hand, and Sir Othon de Grandson, knight, on the other hand, is testimony that the so-called Sir Othon is detained and remains by our said lord in peace and war for the rest of his life, in the following manner...]³

Although Othon returned to Savoy in 1376, he was clearly back in England in 1379, for he took part in a more successful military expedition, leaving Southampton for Cherbourg with John of Arundel, to replace the Navarrian garrison with an English one. The death of his father in 1386 brought him back to the Pays de Vaud and as far as historical research attests, his last visit to England, from 1392-96, was as an exile, following repeated accusations of plotting the death of Amédée VII (who most likely died, on 2 November 1391, as a consequence of a hunting accident).⁴ Not only did Othon spend long periods of his life in Spain and, much more importantly, in England, but his service to both the Count of Savoy and the English court involved numerous political and military expeditions that gave him a certain understanding of the life of courtly societies and chivalric values in important European cultural centres. Considering the international network in

chapter: Denis Renevey, 'Savoy and the Marquisate of Saluces', in *Europe: A Literary History 1348-1418*, ed. by David Wallace, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 125-39.

² *John of Gaunt's Register*, ed. by Sydney Armitage-Smith, 2 vols, Camden Third Series, 20-21 (London: Offices of the Royal Society, 1911), I, 4; quoted by Piaget, pp. 14-15.

³ Unless indicated, translations are my own.

⁴ See Piaget, pp. 16-20.

which he was a significant participant, one is struck by the fact that Gérard d'Estavayer, a local knight of comparatively minor social status, succeeded in challenging Othon to a judicial duel that led to his death in 1397.

Othon's reasonably well-documented life provides us with a full perspective on some facets of his personality. First, there is no doubt that, as a man on the periphery of the centres of European power, his political and military achievements were outstanding. If the long relationships some of his predecessors maintained with important European houses facilitated his own participation in the affairs of European aristocratic life, the long-lasting recognition and praise that his contemporaries accorded him leave no doubt as to the level of his personal achievements. Second, his political and military successes, and the contacts he was able to forge with some of Europe's leaders, were motivated and inspired by an idealisation of chivalric values in a rapidly changing world.

The manner of his death in Bourg-en-Bresse speaks volumes about Othon's attachment to and faith in the traditional chivalric code of honour. Claude Berguerand's research has brought to light only two judicial duels attested in Savoy after Othon's (in 1406 and 1422), with only vague indications of how a duel was to be conducted according to local judicial procedures.⁵ There is unfortunately no literary account of the particular circumstances of Othon's death.⁶ However, according to the evidence of other cases, the defeat of one of the protagonists in a judicial duel did not have to end with his death. Indeed, a duel could end with the making of confession, or with the removal of the parties from the space that had been officially prepared for the duel. One could also be declared to have lost if one refused to take part or absented oneself. Much more than his life was at stake for Othon when he participated in this duel. Defeat would entail the family's loss of rights: in Othon's case, his wife and his two sons, the latter having already left the country once the duel was arranged, lost the seigniorial domains of Grandcour, Cudrefin and Sainte-Croix.⁷ Was Othon in a position to contest the procedure that Gérard d'Estavayer put in train? Were he legally bound

⁵ See Claude Berguerand, *Le Duel d'Othon de Grandson (1397): Mort d'un chevalier-poète savois à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Cahiers Lausannois d'Histoire Médiévale, 45 (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 2008), pp. 98-99.

⁶ The visual descriptions of the Spiezer and Berner Chronicles date from 1482 and 1485 respectively; see Berguerand, pp. 209-10.

⁷ See Berguerand, pp. 96-100.

by it, could he possibly have chosen a second exile in England? Othon was motivated primarily by the preservation of his own fame, and that of his entire family; his commitment to chivalric ideology caused his downfall.

However, chivalric ideology, combined with astute political acumen, also helped shape the international reputation of the Grandson family. Unlike most nobles from the Pays de Vaud, several Grandsons took part in the crusades. Othon I de Grandson (d. 1329), brother of Othon III's grandfather, was at the siege of St John of Acre in 1291. Guillaume de Grandson, father of Othon III, advisor and protégé of Amédée VI, the Green Count, is the first knight listed as belonging to the new Order of the Collar, created between 1362-64, as mentioned above, and which brought together fifteen fine knights in the common cause of excellence and bravery in battle. There were, most likely, both secular and religious motives behind the establishment of the Order; Amédée needed to motivate, and cement ties between, his best knights in his crusade against the Turks in the East.⁸ The presence of Guillaume and of the Grandson family during Amédée's crusade is well attested. Guillaume is accompanied by his son Othon III, his nephew Jacques de Grandson-Pesmes and a bastard son, also called Jacques.⁹ Amédée's crusade started with the count leaving Venice on 29 June 1366. After a trip down the Adriatic sea and up the Aegean sea in the direction of Constantinople, the Savoyard troops took possession of Gallipoli. After wintering by the Black Sea, they obtained the release of John V Palaeologus from the Bulgarians and returned to Venice in 1367. The count then went to Rome to give an account of his crusade to Pope Urban V.

The role played by Othon III, only in his twenties at the time, is not known in any detail. What is pertinent rather is the fact that, as the son of Amédée's first lieutenant and his first knight of the Order of the Collar, he

⁸ For a history of the Order of the Collar, see Dino Muratore, *Les Origines de l'Ordre du Collier de Savoie dit de l'Annonciade* (Genève: Julien Editeur, 1910); see also Fréd.-Ch. Dubois, *Les Chevaliers de l'Annonciade du Pays de Vaud* (Genève: Archives héraldiques suisses, 1911). There is no evidence that Othon III de Grandson was a member of the Order; his name does not appear in the lists provided by the following sources: F. Capré, *Catalogue des chevaliers de l'Ordre du Collier de Savoie, dict de l'Annonciade [...]* (Turin, 1654); A. Todaro della Galla, *Collezione degli statuti, ordinanze ed editti, editi ed inediti, del nobilissimo ordine supremo della SS. Annunziata*, Palermo 1907. I am grateful to Thalia Bréro for providing me with information and relevant bibliography on the foundation of the Order of the Collar.

⁹ For the 1366 crusade account, I partly translate and summarise Bernard Andenmatten, *La Maison de Savoie et la noblesse vaudoise: Supériorité féodale et autorité princière* (Lausanne: Société d'Histoire de la Suisse Romande, 2005), pp. 347-51.

must have been close enough to the centres of power to be influenced by the crusading ideology that motivated the Green Count's campaign. Later in his career, Othon's father, Guillaume, was involved in a remarkable feat of chivalry that showed the extent of his influence and reputation in the eyes of his superiors, first Amédée VI, and after him, Amédée VII. On the occasion of the siege of Sion in Valais in 1384, he took the initiative of dubbing Amédée VII, then twenty-four years old, followed by a general dubbing ceremony involving more than 140 knights. Such an act shows the degree of respect his sovereign and his peers felt for Guillaume. All these events attest to the international dimension of the Grandson family and to their acumen in combining practical political skills and chivalric ideology.¹⁰ Following the death of his father in the late 1380s, Othon succeeded him in the position of advisor and close protégé to Amédée VII. In 1385, Philippe de Mézières called on Othon to play an important role in his Order of the Passion of Jesus Christ, a new religious and military order whose mission would be to regain the Holy Land. Philippe de Mézières's initiatives were triggered by his contacts with the Lusignans, kings of Cyprus and Jerusalem.¹¹ The Grandson family is distinguished from the rest of the nobility of the Pays de Vaud by virtue of its international reputation and the influence it exercised over the Savoyard counts. Othon's involvement in international political affairs attests to a mindset on the part of a certain branch of the nobility that prioritizes ambitious European projects supported by chivalric ideology above vassal service. Othon de Grandson's life is a perfect example of the ideological drive that led the European nobility to embark on such ambitious, possibly utopian, missions.

Othon's fame on the battlefield complemented his excellent reputation as a courtier, as several contemporary textual witnesses attest. Christine de Pizan describes Othon as 'gracieux', 'loialuz' and dedicated to serve, praise and love ladies. Her focus on these attributes bears testimony to the qualities expected of European courtiers. There is no reason to doubt that Othon's grace, respect and faithfulness were manifest in his many encounters with aristocratic ladies at various European courts. However, I also believe that Christine de Pizan, immersed as she is in textual culture, offers her praise on the basis of Othon's textualized codification of his own idealised self in his own corpus. Jean Le Maingre's (1366-1421) own praise of Othon traditionally blends service to love with deeds of arms. More specifically, Le Maingre

¹⁰ See Andenmatten, p. 302.

¹¹ See Berguerand, p. 10.

explicates Othon's military prowess as the consequence of how service in love empowers virtue. Interestingly, Othon is favourably compared to the fictional characters of Tristan and Lancelot. His assessment blends the historical Othon with the fictional 'I-voice' of his poems that is assumed to be Othon himself. Le Maingre's 'comme on dit de messire Othe de Gransson' also refers to Othon's emerging fame, circulating undoubtedly orally and textually, and based on Othon's textual output as well as on oral and written memory of his deeds. The Marquis of Santillane, Don Ono Íñigo de Mendoza (1398-1458) praises Othon in a way that highlights both his chivalric and literary deeds.¹² Othon's pseudo-debate with Florimont de Lesparra, who was also made captive in Spain, offers an interesting representation of the encounter between two lover-knights.¹³ The pseudo-debate, most probably composed during their time in captivity, offers an interesting representation of Grandson and Lesparra as lover-knights, with the background of their Spanish captivity in particular, and historical events in general, reminding us of their political involvement in European affairs.¹⁴

I would like to argue that modern assessments of medieval literary figures, and more especially knight-poets, are flawed if they fail to consider the socio-political circumstances and the status of these particular writers. However useful a poetic assessment of Othon's poetry in isolation may be for his modern audience, it does not reflect the way in which he was perceived by his peers, whose assessment of the author would have been based as much on social status, acquired fame, good moral behaviour, and international reputation, as on the quality of his literary productions. This essay therefore calls to account previous assessments that base their judgement purely on literary grounds. Indeed, such a narrow perspective can enable neither a full and objective assessment of Othon de Grandson's impact on his contemporaries, nor a proper appreciation of the extent of the influence his corpus had on later medieval love lyrics.¹⁵

¹² See *Les Oeuvres poétiques de Christine de Pizan*, ed. by Maurice Roy, 3 vols (Paris: SATF, 1891), II, 8-9, quoted in *Oton de Granson: Poésies*, ed. by Joan Grenier-Winther (Paris: Champion, 2010), pp. 17-20.

¹³ See 'Pseudo-Tençon entre Oton de Granson et Florimont de Lesparra', in Grenier-Winther, pp. 509-13.

¹⁴ This poem is found in Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya, MS 8, but Grandson's stanzas are also found as part of his 'Complainte de l'an nouvel'; see Grenier-Winther, p. 513.

¹⁵ See James Wimsatt, *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

For example, studies of Chaucer's own relationship with Othon often forget that Othon was one of the leading knight-poets of his time.¹⁶ Comments on Othon by Christine de Pizan, Le Maingre and the Marquis of Santillane constitute valuable evidence of medieval perceptions and critiques of knight-poets. The extent of the literary influence of Othon in Spain further adds to the evidence in favour of a new appreciation of his contribution to the international language of love in general, and the nature of his relationship with Chaucer in particular.¹⁷ I contend that Chaucer's unconventional and unorthodox treatment of matters of love in texts such as *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The House of Fame* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, rests partly on the English poet's sense of social ineptitude at endorsing the role of a lover-knight, thus imposing a narratorial perspective in these texts that is outside of the love experience itself. In each of these poems, the narrator observes from the periphery the power relations generated by love and echoes Chaucer's own peripheral situation as an outsider to the royal court, working, among others, as controller of the customs, and clerk of the king's works later in his life. As Pearsall shows, these jobs were no sinecure and the move from controller of the customs to clerk of the king's works was in no way a 'reward for a favoured poet'.¹⁸ As part of his clerky duties, Chaucer would have been involved in hiring and paying workers, supervising the works themselves, providing for repairs of building, and arranging for their protection. If Chaucer had contacts with more prominent court figures, and if they appreciated his poetic achievements, the court and its preoccupations were nevertheless not the focal point of his professional activities. Considering Chaucer's socio-professional context, the posture of lover-narrator

¹⁶ However, Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), to which this article is indebted, now offers a new paradigm for a reassessment of Anglo-French cultural relationships. Butterfield includes Grandson's friendship with Chaucer as part of her argument for a cultural focus on the space of exchange between England and the continent, rather than on Chaucerian constructions of a sense of Englishness; see esp. pp. 175-76.

¹⁷ For a study of Othon's influence in the Iberian peninsula, see Grenier-Winther, pp. 17-20. David Wallace sees interesting connections between Chaucer and Deschamps: both start from humble origins, serve as squires, work as administrators, and serve in the Hundred Years War; these similarities accentuate the difference of status between Chaucer and Grandson; see David Wallace, *Premodern Places: Calais to Surinam, Chaucer to Aphra Behn* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 52-53.

¹⁸ See Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 210.

in his writings was not a credible option. By contrast, Othon's social status allowed him to play most elegantly, if conventionally, with the language of love, situating his narrators at the heart of love affairs; for instance, he reveals in the form of an acrostic the lady's name, 'Isabel', in his 'Souhait de Saint Valentin', a poem that receives further attention later in this essay.¹⁹ Othon's status allows for such games, leaving his readership in a state of playful indecision as to whether the lady is an idealisation or an historical character.²⁰ Chaucer's narratorial standpoint in *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess* is outside of any direct experiential participation in love affairs. In *The Book of the Duchess* he attends on, and reports the utterances of, his fictional superior, the Man in Black. The panegyric of the lady, unmatched in medieval English literature, is offered by the Man in Black himself, leaving the fictional narrator on the sidelines.²¹

Grandson's literary achievements aside, Chaucer could only recognize him as his social superior: a sophisticated courtier, a knight-in-arms fully engaged in European warfare, advocating crusade against the infidel, or sent on diplomatic missions by the most powerful European courts.²² On the matter of love, Othon, like some of his contemporary lover-knights, emulates Arthurian models. Chaucer's social position did not allow him such performance and one should therefore not underestimate the likely degree of admiration (even envy) Chaucer must have felt towards Grandson. 'Flour of hem that make in Fraunce' (82) says Chaucer of him in 'The Complaint of Venus': this direct accolade on the part of Chaucer speaks volumes about the esteem in which Othon was held.²³

'The Complaint of Venus', a loose translation of Othon's 'Cinq balades ensuyvans', is fascinating testimony to Chaucer's own situatedness with regard to the textual encoding of the love experience.²⁴ While the narrator

¹⁹ See Grenier-Winther, pp. 60, 219.

²⁰ 'Isabel's identity has not yet been established convincingly. See Grenier-Winther, p. 219, who refers one to Piaget.

²¹ On the eulogy of Blanche, see Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer*, pp. 88-93.

²² Grenier-Winther, p. 16.

²³ *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); all references to Chaucer are to this edition, by line-number cited parenthetically in the body of the essay.

²⁴ For a fine close reading of Chaucer's translation practice in 'The Complaint of Venus', see Helen Phillips, 'The Complaint of Venus: Chaucer and de Graunson', in *The Medieval Translator 4*, ed. by Roger Ellis and Ruth Evans (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994), pp. 86-103. For an assessment of cultural tensions and exchanges taking place during the

of the 'Cinq balades ensuyvans' takes the position of the loving subject, that of 'The Complaint', by effecting a gender reversal and attributing the complaining voice to Venus, removes any possibility of connecting the I-voice with the authorial self of Chaucer. The way in which he makes use of Othon, sometimes borrowing very loosely, sometimes translating word for word, dispensing at times with huge chunks of text, reminds one of his skilful use of Boccaccio when writing *Troilus and Criseyde*. It is interesting to note how Chaucer imitates as closely as possible the games of *adynata* dear to both Othon and his follower Charles d'Orléans.²⁵ The gender reversal drives him to re-construct a panegyric that serves to describe knightly prowess, rather than female beauty and constancy. The assimilation of material from the untranslated ballades into Chaucer's shorter rendering is also testimony to a skilful poetic technique. Chaucer's 'Complaint' is not an improvement on Othon, nor is it a lesser piece, literarily speaking. Rather, it suggests that its author, socially ill-equipped to endorse the 'I-voice' of the courtly tradition, has constructed a textual subject removed from an authorial self.

By contrast, the praise of Othon as courtier and perfect knight, such as Christine de Pizan provides in *L'Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* and *Le débat de deux amans*, contextualizes Grandson's poetic achievements by constructing him as the equal of those idealised knights of Arthurian fiction, endowed with all the attributes of knightly and courtly perfection.²⁶ Anticipating the reputations of courtly figures such as Charles d'Orléans and Thomas III de Saluces, Othon de Grandson epitomizes the new late medieval embodiment of chivalric values, highly influenced by Arthurian mythology and the crusade ideology of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Hundred Years War between England and France, with reference to Chaucer, Deschamps, and Grandson, see David Wallace, 'Chaucer and Deschamps, Translation and the Hundred Years' War', in *The Medieval Translator / Traduire au Moyen Âge 8*, ed. by Rosalynn Voaden, René Tixier, Teresa Sanchez Roura, and Jenny Rebecca Rytting (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), pp. 179-88. For a discussion of Eustache Deschamps' ballade 893, making reference to his problematic entrance into Calais with Grandson in August or September 1384, see Wallace, *Premodern Places*, pp. 54-57; Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, pp. 140-43, uses the Calais ballade to discuss 'the complex negotiations around linguistic difference', with Grandson being given the use of the language of Eustache's enemy.

²⁵ See Catherine Attwood, 'La Dialectique amoureuse chez Othon de Grandson', in *Othon de Grandson, chevalier et poète*, ed. by Jean-François Kosta-Théfaine (Orléans: Paradigme, 2007), pp. 85-101 (p. 87).

²⁶ See Heather Arden, 'Othon de Grandson and Christine de Pizan: Love's Martyrs', in *Othon de Grandson, chevalier et poète*, pp. 103-21 (p. 116).

In view of these facts, it is most likely Chaucer considered Othon de Grandson to be his superior as an agent in the dissemination of the international language of love. That view must have been shared more generally in the fifteenth century, as the evidence of Othon's influence, in the company of Machaut, Chartier and Deschamps, attests. The Savoyard knight from the Pays de Vaud must have held an enviable position as a significant contributor to the dissemination of courtly ideals, as is corroborated by his major piece, *Le Livre Messire Ode*.²⁷ The poem plays very subtly with courtly textual subjectivity by negotiating different representations of love, with the main protagonist fervently devoted to his single love, even if it is unrequited, while the 'lover of the birds', another significant character of *Le Livre*, initially recommends a lighter form of love, changing ladies as circumstances allow. The meeting between the protagonist and the lover of the birds is a climactic moment of *Le Livre* and leads the latter to acknowledge his error. Courtly love is challenged but undamaged and the text endorses and emphasizes the suffering and pain of the lamenting 'I-voice' as unrequited and devoted lover.²⁸

Other, more challenging, courtly negotiations take place with the elaboration of the St Valentine tradition.²⁹ The difficulty of identifying the origins of the St Valentine celebration shows how the dissemination of the language of love in the late medieval period was a question of complex interaction. I would like to nuance Grenier-Winther's claim for Grandson as its inventor, and suggest the institution of the tradition was a joint, communal effort, which took place in England at the royal court, and which saw Grandson, Chaucer, Gower and Clanvowe actively engaged in its elaboration.³⁰

²⁷ Grenier-Winther, pp. 383-486; see also p. 65.

²⁸ Jean-François Kosta-Théfaine, 'Le Livre Messire Ode d'Othon de Grandson ou l'écriture fragmentaire d'un discours amoureux', *Germanisch-Romanistische Monatschrift*, 53.3 (2003), 355-61.

²⁹ Jack B. Oruch, 'St Valentine, Chaucer, and Spring in February', *Speculum*, 56.3 (1981), 534-65; Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of St Valentine* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

³⁰ Grenier-Winther, pp. 111-13; for Gower, see his *Cinkante Balades*, nos 34 and 35 in *John Gower, The French Balades*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011), also available electronically at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/yrgfcint.htm> (last accessed 10.12.2012); for Clanvowe's 'The Boke of Cupide, God of Love', see *Chaucerian Dream Visions and Complaints*, ed. by Dana M. Symons (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004), ll. 80 and 282; also available electronically at: <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/sym1frm.htm> (last accessed 10.07.2015). For a discussion of the roles played by these authors in the fabrication of the Valentine

Whatever the case may be, Grandson and Chaucer provide interesting but very different perspectives on the Saint Valentine tradition. If Chaucer is far less prolix than Grandson on the subject, he is also the one who provides the most formal information about the St Valentine's day celebration, first of all in 'The Complaint of Mars':

The glad nyght is worth an hevy morowe –
Seynt Valentyne, a foul thus herde I synge
Upon thy day er sonne gan up-sprynge.

Yet sang this foul – I rede yow al awake,
And ye that han not chosen in humble wyse,
Without repentyng chesech yow your make. (12-17)

In *The Parliament of Fowls*, St Valentine's day is mentioned four times, at strategic points in the poem (309-10; 320-22; 386-89; 683-85). After passing by the temple of Venus, the narrator finds Nature presiding over an assembly of birds. Although she occasionally loses control of the debates enacted by the birds, Nature's role in overseeing the matchmaking is essential to its proper advancement:

'Ye knowe wel how, seynt Valentynes day,
By my statut and thorgh my governaunce,
Ye come for to cheese – and fle youre wey-
Youre makes...' (386-89)

The joyful celebration that is marked by the birds' singing a roundel of French origin towards the end of the poem is of a piece with the Valentine tradition of choosing and serving a lady for a year that becomes a playful fifteenth-century aristocratic pastime. Charles d'Orléans, made prisoner by the English at Agincourt in 1415, provides abundant evidence of the practice in his own Valentine poems.³¹ However, the avian celebration in *The Parliament of Fowls*

tradition, see Kelly, pp. 64-77; see also two works by Haldeen Braddy: *Chaucer and the French Poet Graunson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1947), and 'Chaucer and Graunson: The Valentine Tradition', *PMLA*, 54.2 (1939), 359-68.

³¹ BnF MS fr. 25458 contains seventeen Valentine poems, all but four written by Charles d'Orléans; see for example B66, R3, R6, R74, R127, R128, R223, R263, R270, R292, R377, C66; in *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans and his Circle: A Critical Edition of BnF MS Fr. 25458*, Charles d'Orléans' *Personal Manuscript*, ed. by John Fox and Mary-Jo Arn, with an excursus on literary context by Stephanie A. V. G. Kamath (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2010); on the Valentine poems and allusions in his Middle

is marred by the aristocratic birds' failure to choose a mate. Nature allows the formel eagle to delay her choice until the following year. As a consequence, she is without a partner and, unlike the lower birds, the aristocratic community of *The Parliament of Fowls* does not contribute to the common good through the act of procreation. The tenor of this poem thus subverts several of the principles of the Valentine tradition evident in other poems. First, the lower-class birds here hijack the playful game of choosing a mate, which is usually enacted by aristocratic characters. Second, what should be an aristocratic pastime serving to regulate a specific code of conduct among the educated and well-bred is made the means to preserve the avian species. Third, the Valentine celebration that begins with a gathering of birds fails to move to its central concern, which is the encounter between human aristocratic characters on the specific day of Saint Valentine. Chaucer's single extended representation of the St Valentine tradition thus completely subverts it.

A passage from Othon de Grandson's *Le Livre messire Ode* may have helped Chaucer in his deconstruction of the celebration.³² The central part of this poem (1137-1523) shows the main protagonist and the lover of the birds arguing about two different concepts of love, one based on the blind faithfulness of the lover towards his beloved, and the second one based on the more playful and sporadic form of love inspired by the St Valentine game.³³ The lover of birds, having been in love from an early age with a sparrow hawk ('esprevier', 1207) is distracted by the wonderful flight of a peregrine falcon ('faulcon pelerin', 1280). Trying to catch this second bird, the man sees a third bird, a male hawk ('tiercellet', 1299) that successfully seduces the peregrine falcon. Their departure leaves the lover desperate and with no one to love, for: 'Qu'avoye, pour vouloir changier, / Perdu du tout mon esprevier...' (1327-28) [Wanting to change, I have for ever lost my sparrow hawk]. As Othon reveals in the end the figurative quality of his bird ('Si estoit une damoiselle' (1496) [She was a lady]), the topic of courtly concepts is brought to the fore of this poem's concerns. In Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* (quite

English writings, see *Fortunes Stabilnes: Charles of Orleans' English Book of Love. A Critical Edition*, ed. by Mary-Jo Arn (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994), esp. pp. 56-57.

³² I am here building an hypothesis that goes against Wimsatt's suggestion that Grandson's *Livre Messire Ode* was written after Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* and 'Complaint of Mars'. As Wimsatt himself suggests, his arrangement of the order of composition of the Valentine poems and the resulting influence each Valentine author has on the other is purely speculative: see Wimsatt, p. 237.

³³ Grenier-Winther, pp. 423-36.

apart from the gender reversal in comparison to Othon), Chaucer shuns the typological solution and thus prevents too easy a transposition from avian to human considerations. Restricted to the avian world from which Chaucer does not provide an escape, courtly concepts are challenged by the comic and the subversive. The Valentine setting of Othon's poem as 'L'endemain de saint Valentin / Que tous oyseaulx veullent chanter' (1246-7) [The day after Saint Valentine, when all birds want to sing] appropriately gives prominence to birds as part of the contextualization of the debate about courtly concepts, treated with utmost seriousness by the protagonists of the poem.³⁴ The acrostic poems *Le Songe Saint Valentin* and the *Souhait de Saint Valentin*, which spell out 'Isabel' in their first six lines, are marked by a similar form of authenticity as the *Livre messire Ode*. As in the latter, *Le Songe* conflates avian and human dimensions to offer a moral commentary on the human perception of love. People have '...le sens cler et loyal / Pour congnoistre le bien du mal' (351-52) [... a clear and constant sense in order to distinguish good from evil], and so the dreamer narrator of this poem learns how to love with a subtle heart. He shows concerns for unsuccessful lovers, and his specific geographical reference 'Soyent englois ou alemens, / De France né ou de Savoye' (404-05) [Be they English, German, from France or from Savoy] points to his sense of belonging to a community invested in the international language of love that rises above national considerations.

Ballade XXX, with a direct address to 'Saint Valentin', situates the narrator among this community of loyal lovers, for whom the saint has already worked miracles:

Saint Valentin, humblement vous supply
 Qu'a vostre jour me soiés en aye,
 Et me faites avoir le doulx octry
 Ou il n'a rien que bien et courtoisie
 Et bonne foy, c'est jeu sans villenie.
 Bien y povés voz myracles monstrer,
 Car de plusieurs vous ferez ouvrir
 Et requerir de maint loyal amant,

³⁴ Grenier-Winther, p. 474; Brussels, Bibliothèque royale, MS 10961-70, instead of 'Que tous oyseaulx veullent chanter' (1247), has: 'Que tous oyseaulx prenennt leur per', which is close to Chaucer's 'Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make' (310). The chronology of Grandson's and Chaucer's works being difficult to disentangle, it is impossible to identify one as the source of inspiration for the other.

Së en ce cas m'estez bien aidant.

Or m'y aidez, tresdoulz saint debonnaire. (1-10)

[Saint Valentine, I humbly beg you that on the occasion of your day you come to my aid and that you make it possible to get the kind granting (of the gift of love) where there is only good and courtesy and good faith; this is a game without any dishonesty. You can as well show your miracles; for you will make many loyal lovers work and request the same, if you help me well in this case. So, please help me, very sweet noble saint.]

The narrator of most of Othon de Grandson's Valentine poems shows a sense of belonging to this international community of lovers. The poems fashion a persona that is devoid of satirical elements and which can easily lend itself to refashioning. The unsuccessful and melancholic lover lamenting his fate on the day of Saint Valentine as depicted in the *Complainte amoureuse de Saint Valentin de Grandson* contributes to the new directions that Valentine poetry takes in the fifteenth century.³⁵

The flowering of Valentine literary activities in France and Spain owes much to Othon de Grandson. 14 February 1400 marks the foundation of the loving court ('la cour amoureuse') of Charles VI, which unequivocally associates the saint with love.³⁶ In 1401, in her *Dit de la Rose*, Christine de Pizan describes the foundation of the Order of the Rose by Louis d'Orléans, father of Charles, on the day of St Valentine.³⁷ Christine de Pizan later writes two ballades and one virelai on the theme of St Valentine. She is followed by Jean de Garençières who, in his ballade XV, imitates the *Ballade de Saint Valentin* by Grandson. Lydgate composes three poems on the theme, inventing a new genre, the 'valentin'. Guillaume Fredet, René d'Anjou, Guillaume de Monceau, Jean d'Estouteville and the poet Aznar Pardo from Valence write poems dedicated to the literary celebration of St Valentine. Charles d'Orléans, who owned a manuscript of Othon de Grandson, also writes fourteen Valentine poems.³⁸

³⁵ See Grenier-Winther, pp. 515-21, esp. the final stanza.

³⁶ Carla Bozzolo and Hélène Loyau, *La Cour amoureuse dite de Charles VI*, 3 vols (Paris: Le Léopard d'Or, 1982-92); see esp. I, 1-6.

³⁷ For an edition of *Le Dit*, see *Poems of Cupid, God of Love; Christine de Pizan's 'Epistre au dieu d'Amours' and 'Dit de la Rose'; Thomas Hoccleve's 'The Letter of Cupid'; George Sewell's 'The Proclamation of Cupid'*, ed. by Thelma S. Fenster and Mary Carpenter Erler (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

³⁸ See Fox and Arn, *Poetry of Charles d'Orléans*, pp. lii-liiii; Grenier-Winther, pp. 111-14, offers a summary of the most important points developed by Oruch, 'St Valentine', pp. 556-62.

The praises of Grandson by Froissart, Chaucer, and Christine de Pizan, are often dismissed as addressing the courtier and the knight, not the poet.³⁹ Wimsatt negotiates Chaucer's 'Flour of hem that make in France' by providing a series of contexts in which 'flour' refers primarily to chivalric deeds, and assuming that Chaucer is addressing Grandson's knightly qualities, rather than his 'making'. Whether or not 'flour' serves to define knightly deeds, rather than poetic activity, it does not need to be interpreted as Chaucer depreciating Othon's poetic achievements. On the contrary, the line reminds us that, like Chaucer, one should embrace Othon's poetic output as that of a knight-poet, whose fame spread throughout European courts and regions.

Chaucer's move away from aristocratic literature led him to explore generic variety in a very audacious way, with the successful composition of the *Canterbury Tales*. I agree with Wallace in thinking that this exploration of social and generic varieties was achieved in parallel to his recognition and acceptance of the 'peculiarities of his own social condition'.⁴⁰ Yet his practice in the act of ventriloquizing the deeds and words of his Canterbury pilgrims epitomizes a literary technique that he had to assume in his early career as a socially unfit poet of love who had to articulate the lover's voice in a roundabout way. However productive of one of the most innovative literary perspectives in English literature, this very idiosyncratic poetic stance did not facilitate imitation and one can rightly question the extent of Chaucer's influence in, for instance, the dissemination of the St Valentine tradition in European courtly circles, including England.

On the other hand, Grandson's output, once relieved of the burden of exclusively literary and poetic judgements, can be read in a new light, one that illuminates the range of his influence and impact in the world of European courtly literature. Such a perspective allows one to recognize his significant participation in the circulation of ideas and influences that travelled between various European courtly circles, and more particularly between England and Francophone Europe.⁴¹ Chaucer looked up to Othon de Grandson, both as a knight and a courtly love poet, and so did several authors before and after him.

³⁹ See for instance Wimsatt, pp. 210-41. Although it provides much useful information, I believe the study suffers from a modern literary *a priori* that prejudices any objective assessment of Grandson's poetry.

⁴⁰ See Wallace, *Premodern Places*, p. 61.

⁴¹ Wimsatt, p. 219, for instance, considers that, apart from the 'Complaint of Venus', adaptations usually went from Chaucer to Grandson, 'for the very good reason that Chaucer was much the better and more practised poet'.