

# REPRESENTING THE DEAD

Epitaph Fictions in Late-Medieval France

HELEN J. SWIFT



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# REPRESENTING THE DEAD

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REPRESENTING THE DEAD  
EPITAPH FICTIONS IN LATE-MEDIEVAL FRANCE

HELEN J. SWIFT

D. S. BREWER



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*For Sophie and Richard*



## Contents

List of Illustrations	viii
Acknowledgements	x
Note on quotations	xi
List of Abbreviations	xii
Chronology of epitaph fictions	xiii
 Introduction: Representing the Dead	 1
1 Framing Identity: ‘je suis’ and ‘cy gist’	37
2 Identity and/as Echo: the ‘ <i>Belle Dame</i> ’ <i>querelle</i> and <i>Le Jardin de plaisance</i>	91
3 Dying to be told: storytelling and exemplarity ‘selon le stile Jehan Bocace’	146
4 Placing the Dead: Cemeteries, Hospitals and Temples	201
Afterword: Illustrating the dead	265
Coda: Re-Member Me	305
 Appendix: Early Editions of the <i>Jardin de plaisance et fleur de rethorique</i>	 307
Bibliography	308
Index	323



## Illustrations

### Plates (between pages 162 and 163)

- Plate 1** George Chastelain, *Le Temple de Bocace*, Paris, BnF, fr. 1226, fol. 7r  
**Plate 2** George Chastelain, *Le Temple de Bocace*, Paris, BnF, fr. 1226, fol. 68r  
**Plate 3** George Chastelain, *Le Temple de Bocace*, Paris, BnF, fr. 1226, fol. 15v  
**Plate 4** George Chastelain, *Le Temple de Bocace*, Paris, BnF, fr. 1226, fol. 24r  
**Plate 5** George Chastelain, *Le Temple de Bocace*, Paris, BnF, fr. 1226, fol. 29r

### Figures

- Figure 1** Jean Du Pré, *Le Palais des nobles dames* (Lyon: n. pub. [1534]),  
 fol. A1v; Paris, BnF, Rés. Ye 1254 205
- Figure 2** Jean Bouchet, *Le Jugement poetic de l'honneur femenin* (Poitiers:  
 Jean and Enguilbert de Marnef, 1538), fol. E7v; Paris, BnF, Rés. Ye 363 206
- Figure 3** Olivier de La Marche, *Le Chevalier délibéré* (Gouda:  
 Collaciebroeders, c.1489); Geneva, Bibliothèque Jean Bonna 271
- Figure 4** Olivier de La Marche, *Le Chevalier délibéré*, Chifflet  
 manuscript, fol. 24v; Geneva, Bibliothèque Jean Bonna 272
- Figure 5** Olivier de La Marche, *Le Chevalier délibéré*  
 (Paris: [Guy Marchand or Antoine Caillaut] for Antoine Vérard, 1488);  
 Geneva, Bibliothèque Jean Bonna 274
- Figure 6** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 38v 279
- Figure 7** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 87r 280
- Figure 8** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 107r 281
- Figure 9** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 109v 283
- Figure 10** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 126v 284
- Figure 11** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 115r 286
- Figure 12** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 118v 287
- Figure 13** Octovien de Saint-Gelais, *Le Séjour d'honneur*, Paris, BnF,  
 fr. 12783, fol. 122r 288

<b>Figure 14</b> Laurent Desmoulins, <i>Le Cymetiere des malheureux</i> (Paris: Michel Le Noir and Jean Petit, 1511), title page; Paris, BnF, Rés. Ye 1353	291
<b>Figure 15</b> Laurent Desmoulins, <i>Le Cymetiere des malheureux</i> (Lyon: Olivier Arnoullet, 1534), title page; cliché Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, Rés 800034. Crédit photographique Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, Didier Nicole	293
<b>Figure 16</b> Martin Le Franc, <i>Le Champion des dames</i> (Lyon: [Guillaume le Roy?], 1485), fol. B7r; Paris, BnF, Rés. Ye 27	296
<b>Figure 17</b> Martin Le Franc, <i>Le Champion des dames</i> (Lyon: [Guillaume le Roy?], 1485), fol. C3r; Paris, BnF, Rés. Ye 27	297
<b>Figure 18</b> Martin Le Franc, <i>Le Champion des dames</i> , Paris, BnF, fr. 12476, fol. 15r	299
<b>Figure 19</b> Martin Le Franc, <i>Le Champion des dames</i> , Paris, BnF, fr. 841, fol. 16v	300
<b>Figure 20</b> Martin Le Franc, <i>Le Champion des dames</i> , Bibliothèque municipale de Grenoble, MS.352 Rés., fol. 40v	301
<b>Figure 21</b> Martin Le Franc, <i>Le Champion des dames</i> , Bibliothèque municipale de Grenoble, MS.352 Rés., fol. 30v	303

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This book is testament to the intellectual productivity of teaching-led research. It results from a brainstorm on a scrap of paper in January 2014 in response to a colleague's email about lecture course intentions for the following academic year; I scribbled the word 'death'; the rest followed. I spent that January and February in Paris, just around the corner from Montparnasse Cemetery, as part of a two-term sabbatical that produced the first draft of the book. It was the most research fun that I have ever had, and I thank here all those who made it possible and nourished it along the way. My supportive institutions, the Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford and St Hilda's College, set me off on leave, and several wonderfully supportive individuals in those places allowed (and, at times, ordered) me to keep my distance and focus on research: Daron Burrows, Sophie Marnette (whom I also thank for the email about lecture courses), Will McKenzie, Georgina Paul, Lynn Robson and Pauline Souleau. I thank my students for many, many tutorial hours of fruitful perseverance through Villon, and my own medieval French tutors from when I was an undergraduate, especially Jane Taylor, for sparking my taste for the macabre. In the course of the project I benefited from the sage advice of many kind scholars, especially Adrian Armstrong, Guyda Armstrong, Kenneth Clarke, Philippe Frieden, Nick Havely, Neil Kenny, Sophie Marnette, Susie Speakman Sutch, Craig Taylor and Sethina Watson, and the scholarly generosity of Emma Cayley, Miranda Griffin, Sylviane Messerli and Laëtitia Tabard. My readers at Boydell provided invaluable constructive criticism, and I am grateful for their incisive remarks as well as for the publisher's support in the production process, with special thanks to Caroline Palmer. Several repositories furnished images for the book, and I thank especially Jean Bonna for his permission to reproduce material from his private collection.

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## Note on quotations

I quote from a variety of medieval French editions, manuscript sources and early printed books. When quoting directly from a manuscript or an early printed book, I distinguish between *i* and *j*, *v* and *u*, expand abbreviations, such as those denoted by the tilde, modernise punctuation and normalise the long *s*, the ampersand and the Tironian sign to modern usage. My editorial practice follows Foulet and Speer, *On Editing Old French Texts*. When quoting from a critical edition of a text or its translation, I respect the conventions observed by the modern editor/translator in question. My own editorial interventions in quotations are signalled by square brackets.

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations for the book's principal corpus appear in the Chronology of epitaph fictions. Full references for works listed below may be found in the Bibliography.

CUP	Cambridge University Press
<i>DCVI</i>	Giovanni Boccaccio. <i>De casibus virorum illustrium</i>
<i>Des cas</i>	Laurent de Premierfait. <i>Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes</i>
<i>DMC</i>	Giovanni Boccaccio. <i>De mulieribus claris</i>
<i>Fates</i>	Giovanni Boccaccio. <i>The Fates of Illustrious Men</i> , trans. Louis Brewer Hall
<i>Inf.</i>	Dante Alighieri. <i>Inferno</i>
<i>Met.</i>	Ovid. <i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>OM</i>	anon. <i>Ovide moralisé</i>
OUP	Oxford University Press
<i>Purg.</i>	Dante Alighieri. <i>Purgatorio</i>
<i>RR</i>	Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. <i>Le Roman de la rose</i>
st.	strophe
v.	verse (for clarity, given the number of prosimetra under examination, I use 'line' to denote a line of prose and 'verse' for a line of poetry)

## Chronology of epitaph fictions

I include after each entry, where applicable, the death date of the person commemorated (or primarily/ostensibly commemorated), followed by the abbreviated form of the title used in this book. For simplicity of reference, the list below indicates only the first known or estimated date of publication; it does not take account, for example, of the later appearance in print of an earlier-fifteenth-century manuscript work or of re-editions of printed texts.

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 1424        | Alain Chartier. <i>La Belle Dame sans mercy</i> (BDSM)  |
| 1425–26     | Baudet Herenc. <i>L'Accusation contre la Belle Dame sans mercy</i> (Accusation)                   |
| 1426–30     | anon. <i>La Dame lealle</i> (DL)  |
| 1430        | Achille Caulier. <i>La Cruelle femme en amours</i> (CF)   |
| before 1441 | Achille Caulier. <i>L'Ospital d'amour</i> (HA)  |
| c.1442      | Martin Le Franc. <i>Le Champion des dames</i> (CdD)   |
| 1441–47     | Pierre de Hauteville. <i>La Confession et Testament de l'amant trespasé de deuil</i> (Confession) |
|             | ———. <i>La Complainte de l'amant trespasé de deuil</i> (Complainte)                               |
|             | ———. <i>L'Inventaire des biens demourez du decés de l'amant trespasé de deuil</i> (Inventaire)    |
| before 1450 | George Chastelain. <i>L'Oultré d'amour</i> (OA)   |
| before 1454 | ———. <i>Les Epitaphes d'Hector</i> (EH)   |
| 1457        | René d'Anjou. <i>Le Livre du cœur d'amour épris</i> (LCAE)  |
| 1459        | Jacques Milet. <i>La Forest de Tristesse</i> (FT)   |
| before 1460 | anon. <i>Les Erreurs du jugement de la Belle Dame sans mercy</i> (Erreurs)                        |
|             | anon. <i>Le Debat sans conclusion</i> (Debat)   |
| 1461        | George Chastelain. <i>La Mort du roy Charles VII</i> (d.22 July) (MRC)                            |
|             | Simon Gréban. <i>L'Epitaphe du feu roy Charles septiesme</i> (d.22 July) (EFRC)                   |
| c.1461      | François Villon. <i>Le Testament</i>  |
| before 1463 | ———. <i>L'Epitaphe Villon</i>   |

- 1463 [Pierre Michault?]. *Le Purgatoire d'amour* (PA)
- 1463–65 George Chastelain. *Le Temple de Bocace* (TB)
- 1465 ——. *L'Épitaphe de Messire Pierre de Brezé* (d.16 July) (EMPB)
- 1467 Jean Molinet, *L'Épitaphe du duc Philippe de Bourgogne* (d.15 June)
- . *Le Trosne d'honneur* (Philip the Good, d.15 June) (TH)
- 1483 Olivier de La Marche. *Le Chevalier délibéré* (CD)
- 1489–94 Octovien de Saint-Gelais. *Le Séjour d'honneur* (SH)
- 1491? Jean Molinet. *Le Donnet baillié au roy Charles VIII* (Donnet)
- 1494 ——. *L'Épitaphe de Philippe de Crèvecoeur* (d.22 April) (EPC)
- 1495 André de La Vigne, 'Épytaphes et complaints du duc de Vendosme' (Francis of Bourbon, d.30 October) (ECDV)
- [1501] *Le Jardin de plaisance et fleur de rethorique* (JdP)
- 1501 André de La Vigne. *Les Complaintes et Épitaphes du Roy de la Bazoche* (Pierre of Baugé, d.16 June) (CERB)
- Antitus. *Le Portail du Temple de Bocace* (Louis of Montfaucon, d.1501) (PTB)
- 1503 Jean Lemaire de Belges, *Le Temple d'Honneur et de vertus* (Pierre II of Bourbon, d.10 October) (THV)
- 1507–8 ——. *Épitaphe en maniere de dialogue de feus de memoire eternelle, messire Georges Chastelain autrement dit l'Aventureux, et maistre Jean Molinet* (Chastelain, d.20 March 1475; Molinet, d.1507)
- 1511 Laurent Desmoulins. *Le Cymetiere des malheureux* (CM)
- 1517 Jean Bouchet. *Le Temple de Bonne Renommée* (Charles de La Trémoille, d.16 September 1515) (TBR)
- 1522 ——. *Le Labirynth de fortune et Sejour des trois nobles dames* (Arthus Gouffier, d.1519) (Labirynth)
- 1528 ——. *Les Anciennes et modernes gesnealogies des Roys de France et mesment du Roy Pharamond, avec leurs epitaphes et effigies* (AMG)
- 1534 Jean Du Pré, *Le Palais des nobles dames* (PND)
- 1535 Jean Bouchet, *Epistres, Elegies, Epigrammes et Épitaphes, composez sur et pour raison du deces de feu tresillustre et tresreligieuse Dame Madame Renee de Bourbon* (d.8 November 1534)
- 1538 ——. *Le Jugement poetic de l'honneur femenin et sejour des illustres, claires et honnestes dames* (Louise of Savoy, d.22 September 1531) (JPHF)



## Introduction: Representing the Dead

In 1501, under the title *Les Complaintes et Epitaphes du Roy de la Bazoche*, André de La Vigne framed within a dream-vision narrative a set of laments and epitaphs in memory of Pierre of Baugé, who, recently deceased, had held the title of ‘the King of the Basoche’, the head of the guild of legal clerks of the Palais de Justice.<sup>1</sup> In the text, members of that society, represented by a personification (‘la Bazoche’), issue apostrophising invective against death and are themselves apostrophised in an exhortation to collective lament: ‘Plourez, plourez, plaignez, lermes gectez’ (v. 198 [Weep, weep, lament, shed tears]). Following this complaint, personified representatives of the societies of four other cities are seen, the persona tells us,<sup>2</sup> bringing forward ‘les epitaphes que cy après s’ensuyvent’ (v. 462 [the epitaphs which follow hereafter]). Each eleven-verse verse epitaph offers tribute to the late Pierre and presents itself deictically as being inscribed into his tomb:

Sous ceste amère, dure et dolente pierre  
Gist nostre Roy basilical, dit Pierre.

(*CERB*, vv. 463–4: the Bazoche of Toulouse)

[Under this bitter, hard and woeful stone lies our King of the Basoche, called Pierre.]

Pierre’s identity thus lies homonymically both beneath and in the stone (‘pierre’). Having read all eight epitaphs (each representative offers two), the persona awakes. The way in which the epitaphs function is far more complex than this simple plot summary suggests: they are exploited by de La Vigne as a potent textual tool for reflecting on the literary composition of identity and on processes

<sup>1</sup> In *Recueil de poésies françaises des XV<sup>e</sup> et XVI<sup>e</sup> siècles: morales, facétieuses, historiques*, 13 vols (Paris: Jannet/Franck/Daffis, 1855–78), ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and James de Rothschild, XIII (Paris: Daffis, 1878), pp. 383–413. English translations of quotations are mine throughout, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> By ‘persona’, I mean the first-person voice of a text, a literary *je* who usually fulfils a narrating function and is often denoted in medieval French by the term ‘l’Acteur’. I prefer ‘persona’ to ‘narrator’ as a default term because a narrating role is not exclusive to the first-person voice – it can be fulfilled by other characters; correspondingly, the persona does not always or only narrate. The term ‘persona’ derives from the Latin for ‘mask’, on which, see below, p. 50.

of commemoration. The vital role of the reader in all of this is evoked by the Basoche of Bordeaux:

Pour les passans du long cest ambulacre  
 Est et sera pourtraict le simulacre  
 Du noble Roy, que Mort nous veult oster  
 Vif en vertus, plus hault volant qu'un sacré. (*CERB*, vv. 474–7)

[For those who pass along this ambulatory, there is and will be portrayed the effigy of the noble King, whom Death wanted to take from us shining [lit. alive] in virtues, more elevated than a saint.]

The 'passans' designate, on one level, the physical passers-by, like the persona, who activate the text of an epitaph through their reading of it in the here and now of their present moment of viewing, and who would see, in a funerary monument setting, the effigy of the deceased adorning his tomb. On another level, though, the 'passans' also represent the reader passing through the text of the poem, who puts together imaginatively the identity of the departed through her/his reading of the sequence of epitaphs as a collectivity. This identity is a construction that perpetuates elements of the life of the individual beyond death ('vif en vertus'). That the eight *onzains* are to be understood collectively is signalled by the Basoche of Dijon:

Soubz ce sercueil, le recueil de la plume,  
 Par divers vers deçà et delà plume  
 L'orde vilaine [...]. (*CERB*, vv. 540–2)

[Beneath this sarcophagus, the shelter of his excellency, foul vileness despoils this side and that with vicious worms [...].]

Wordplay in these verses invites a literary reflexive reading. 'Recueil' can mean 'shelter' or 'protection', but can also denote an action of 'gathering together', making of 'le recueil de la plume' a periphrastic description of the coffin as what 'gathers together' the deceased's remains, taking 'la plume' as an honorific antonomasia for Pierre. As such, it activates a metatextual understanding of 'recueil' as a collection of writings, such as the eleven epitaphs themselves, which, through their texts, are constituting deictically Pierre's resting place. 'L'orde vilaine', through further periphrasis, denotes Death, who is said to be scouring with worms Pierre's decaying body. Exploitation of homonymy between 'vers' ([worms]) and 'vers' ([verses]) was commonplace in medieval poetry about death,<sup>3</sup> but is handled more specifically here to direct us how to set

<sup>3</sup> As in the various poems bearing the title *Vers de la mort* by Hélinand de Froidmont, Robert Le Clerc and Adam de la Halle: see Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Les Vers comme héritiers: aspects de la poétique du testament aux XIV<sup>e</sup> et XV<sup>e</sup> siècles', *Il Cadavere/The Corpse, Micrologus*, 7 (1999), 345–57, pp. 356–7.

about reading the epitaphs, apparently by picking elements off different verses here and there ('par deçà et delà'). What is going on, in fact, is a complex variation on an acrostich: across all the *onzains*, the last letters of the last word of each verse or succession of verses, when put together, spell out a further commemoration of Pierre, a requiem blessing: 'Requiem eternam dona dona [*sic*] eis domine et lux perpetua luceat eis'.<sup>4</sup> For example, verses 463–4, quoted above, furnish the 're' of 'requiem'; verses 540–1, the 'e' of 'eis'. The epitaphs together thus perform, in miniature, a mass of the dead for the deceased. The complexity does not end there. After the Basoches have presented their verses, the persona sees some people 'faire entr'eulx une contre epitaphe' (v. 557 [making between them a counter-epitaph]), bringing a contrary representation of Pierre's character to bear. However, the persona outsmarts them by discerning that '[...] mieulx disoient qu'ilz ne pensoient dire' (v. 561 [[...] they said more than they thought they were saying]): he perceives the possibility of recuperating a positive meaning from their intended negative portrayal, by reading the decasyllabic verses of their *huitain* 'cyrographe' (v. 555 [chirograph]) in a different arrangement from how they initially appear. A continuous, sequential reading of the eight 4+6-syllable verses deprecates those who mourn Pierre's death, but a reading across the verses (4+4+etc. and 6+6+etc.) commends such commemoration and prayer as befitting 'tel personnage' (v. 566 [such a figure]). The persona's strategic reading method thus seems to implement an approach inferable from a further literary reflexive inflection of the Basoche of Dijon's epitaph, interpreting 'par divers vers deçà et delà plume[r]' as '[to] pluck across different verses, on one side [i.e. of the caesura] and on the other'.

De La Vigne's textual machinations provide a useful, if dizzyingly virtuosic, introduction to this book's approach to late-medieval French literary epitaphs. We immediately see raised in *CERB* several issues that will be key to my understanding of how these epitaphs function: their integration into fictional narrative; their plurality in respect of a single individual (if we thought we already had enough with eight in the main body of *CERB*, we find two more after the end of the dream-narrative (vv. 620–38)); the scope of meaning of 'epitaphe' and its relation to 'complainte'; a vibrant literary reflexivity; emphasis on processes of meaning creation rather than, or at least in addition to, the end product; interplay between the categories 'living' and 'dead' that breaks them down into a range of senses; play with features of language and versification that activates an awareness in the audience of their active role in constructing an identity for the deceased.

## Death and identity

The topic of this book is the representation of the dead in late-medieval narrative fictions, specifically in a sub-genre of texts that I call 'epitaph fictions', by

4 The phrase is the introit in the liturgy for the mass of the dead.

which I mean works (usually verse or prosimetra) that use fictional resources (a dream-vision framework, characters appearing in voice and/or body from beyond the grave, personifications, literary landscape topoi, etc.) to explore the relationship between death and identity. The epitaph lies at the fulcrum of this relationship, as a text that reports death, records a more or less developed memory of the deceased and may be presented as inscribed in her/his gravestone. Death is an acme moment in the definition of identity. There is obviously a strong didactic dimension to this definition in the context of medieval *artes moriendi* that urge readers to make urgent moral and spiritual reparation in the face of impending death, so as to ‘die well’ with safe passage into the Christian afterlife.<sup>5</sup> But I am thinking of identity more generally, as relating to name, renown and reputation: that is, understood as ‘what one person means to another person, for another person’.<sup>6</sup> In this regard, death both threatens identity, jeopardising posthumous survival (one dies and one’s name may be lost to posterity, forgotten or misremembered), and also constitutes a condition for its creation as a founding moment of life definition. Such definition may occur at the hands of others, like the Basoche representatives in *CERB* acting as third parties in relation to deceased Pierre, or may be self-driven, being prescribed in anticipation of one’s own death, most familiarly in the context of testamentary fictions like Pierre de Hauteville’s *Confession et Testament de l’amant trespasé de deuil* (1441–7) or François Villon’s *Testament* (c.1461). The ‘self’ in each of these literary instances is that of the projected persona – de Hauteville’s bereaved lover and Villon’s hardluck vagabond ‘povre Villon’. In the case of both, death is essential to the formation of identity: the elaborate *amant martyr* posture of the former, and the latter’s enabling fiction that he is a dying man. Epitaph fictions might thus be seen as a sub-category of Donald Maddox’s ‘fictions of identity’ which stage ‘specular encounters’ – meetings with, for example, another individual that ‘occur at a major intersection of selfhood with a crucial new perspective on its own identity’.<sup>7</sup> Death is an extraordinarily major intersection, the new perspective on identity that it introduces being posthumous. In first-person testamentary fictions, the encounter is reflexive: the ‘I’ observes the ‘I’ dying and, in the complex narrative structure of Villon’s *Testament*, even observes the ‘I’ dead in the ‘Ballade de conclusion’<sup>8</sup>’s invitation to attend the funeral of the now-deceased testator-persona, which is pronounced in a voice that sounds tantalisingly *like* that persona, not least given the ballade’s recurrent rhyme in ‘-illon’.<sup>8</sup> Our consciousness, when reading the ‘Ballade de conclusion’, of this echo of the persona points to a vital characteristic

<sup>5</sup> On the broader role of *artes moriendi* in civic culture, see Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380–1540* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Miranda Griffin, *Transforming Tales: Rewriting Metamorphosis in Medieval French Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p. 79. I am grateful to the author for giving me access to a pre-publication copy of her chapter on Echo.

<sup>7</sup> *Fictions of Identity in Medieval France* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> See Jane H. M. Taylor, *The Poetry of François Villon: Text and Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), pp. 33–57. I discuss the ‘Ballade’ further in Chapter 1, p. 44.

of identity: in a sense, it is always already dead – a belated construct of an individual that will always be catching up with, and will never be one with, that individual. As Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet notes of testamentary writing, it is ‘une composition, sur la décomposition, la personne, une *persona*’ [a composition, on decomposition, the person, a *persona*];<sup>9</sup> posthumous name, renown and reputation should never be mistaken for *being* someone as they were in life; they are effigial compositions – ‘simulacres’, to quote *CERB*.

It should not surprise us, then, that the nature of the identity generated is neither monolithic nor permanent. There has been a tendency to see the literary epitaph to be concerned with fixing identity as ‘le lieu d’une vitrification de l’écriture car il s’agit d’une transformation destinée à rendre le texte imperméable à l’histoire’ [the site of a vitrification of writing since it concerns a transformation designed to make the text impervious to history],<sup>10</sup> ‘l’ultime stabilisation du Temps par l’écriture’ [the ultimate stabilisation of Time by writing],<sup>11</sup> supposed to ‘fixer pour l’éternité la vérité poétique’ [fix poetic truth for eternity],<sup>12</sup> with its textuality being ‘une pratique mémoriale, embaumante, qui fixe, qui immobilise, qui retient, qui conserve’ [a memorialising, embalming practice that fixes, immobilises, retains and conserves].<sup>13</sup> An important contextual factor influencing such views has been a sense of late-medieval writers’ attitude towards reputation becoming a proto-Renaissance, humanist celebration of fame captured in writing: ‘l’être écrit’ [being in writing],<sup>14</sup> a Petrarchan triumph over time and death intended to ‘réparer par la facture du poème la fracture de la mort’ [repair by the creation of the poem the rupture caused by death].<sup>15</sup> Late-medieval Burgundian and French court writers, retrospectively dubbed *rhétoriciens*, have been seen to exemplify this trait, for example in Jean Lemaire de Belges’s *Építaphe en maniere de dialogue* (1507–8) in honour of his predecessors as Burgundian *indiciaire* Jean Molinet and George Chastelain. Lemaire lauds the commemorative role of writing as he describes his forebears’ achievements: ‘Ceulx cy font les gens vivre, et la mort ont vaincu’ ([They make people live, and have conquered

<sup>9</sup> *L’Écriture testamentaire à la fin du moyen âge: identité, dispersion, trace* (Oxford: Legenda, 1999), p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Jean-Didier Urbain, *L’Archipel des morts: le sentiment de la mort et les dérives de la mémoire dans les cimetières d’Occident* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1998), p. 207.

<sup>11</sup> Estelle Doudet, *Poétique de George Chastelain (1415–75): un cristal mucié en un coffre* (Paris: Champion, 2005), p. 528.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Poirion, ‘Les Tombeaux allégoriques et la poétique de l’inscription dans *Le Livre du cœur d’amour épris* de René d’Anjou (1457)’, in *Écriture poétique et composition romanesque* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1994), pp. 399–414, p. 404.

<sup>13</sup> Urbain, *Archipel*, pp. 195–6.

<sup>14</sup> Doudet, *Poétique*, p. 622. Edelgard Dubruck perceives an evolution in poetic representation, from viewing death as mortality to privileging instead immortality and the afterlife: *The Theme of Death in French Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1964), p. 152.

<sup>15</sup> Sophie Garnier, ‘Rhétorique de la consolation dans la déploration funèbre des grands rhétoriciens’, in *Les Funérailles à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean Balsamo (Geneva: Droz, 2002), pp. 389–402, p. 397. For Petrarch and fame, see Philip Hardie, *Rumour and Renown: Representations of Fama in Western Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 439–84.

death)).<sup>16</sup> This verse's central caesura around which life and death pivot in a chiasmic arrangement adds an undeniably neat pithiness to Lemaire's declaration. However, that is not the whole story: whilst Lemaire and others *are* clearly engaged in the business of memorialising, they are interested in its processes, agencies and mechanisms in a way that opens up such statements interrogatively rather than accepting them as closing down the question of 'la conquête du livre' [the victory of the book]:<sup>17</sup> *how* are people made to live? In *what sort* of life? And how does this relate to their status as dead in more nuanced ways? Later in the same poem, Lemaire stages a question and answer about preservation of the *indiciaires*' deeds:

– Ou sont leurs monuments et precieux tombeaux?  
– En la bouche des bons, et en leurs escriptz beaux. (vv. 33–4)

[– Where are their monuments and precious tombs? – In the mouths of the good, and in their fine writings.]

The answer is not quite as clear-cut as might first appear in its deployment of the familiar 'building as text' metaphor: for instance, it envisages an important role for oral transmission alongside the written word,<sup>18</sup> in terms of agency, who are the 'bons': eminent writers, or people more generally who are morally upright? And is there a possibility left open here for self-inscription, if we take the 'leurs' of the second verse of the couplet to refer back to that of the first?

Literary epitaphs are certainly an example of 'écriture monumentale' [monumental writing],<sup>19</sup> insofar as they are often operating as, or juxtaposed with, funerary monuments (effigies, insignia, relics, etc.), but we should beware of confusing 'monumental' with 'monolithic'. The epitaph is a site of tension between fixity and fluidity. On the one hand, it performs a memorialising function: representation of someone at the last, and intended to last; it may also be seen as unitary and discrete: 'une forme close et syntaxiquement autonome' [an enclosed and syntactically independent form].<sup>20</sup> On the other, it is inherently open to interpretation and response by dint of its audience-oriented nature: as Robert Favreau puts it, 'l'épithaphe est faite pour être lue' [the epitaph is made to be read].<sup>21</sup> Its

<sup>16</sup> *Œuvres*, ed. Jean Auguste Stecher, 4 vols (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1969), IV, p. 320, v. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Doudet, *Poétique*, p. 622.

<sup>18</sup> See David Cowling, *Building the Text: Architecture as Metaphor in Late Medieval and Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> Poirion, 'Tombeaux', p. 400.

<sup>20</sup> Philippe Maupeu, *Pèlerins de vie humaine: autobiographie et allégorie narratives, de Guillaume de Deguileville à Octovien de Saint-Gelais* (Paris: Champion, 2009), p. 575.

<sup>21</sup> *Épigraphie médiévale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), p. 45. On the audience-oriented nature of literary epitaphs in the early modern period, see Neil Kenny, *Death and Tenses: Posthumous Presence in Early Modern France* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), pp. 116–33. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to discuss my project with Neil in the early days of its genesis, and am grateful to him for stimulating conversation on deixis.

deictic markers become those of the individual positioned in front of it, whether a character within a fiction transcribing the ‘cy gist’ ([here lies]) of a tomb or the eventual reader of a text appreciating the ‘cy’ of ‘cy gist’ as the text itself; we recall the implied address in *CERB* to ‘les passans’ for whom ‘*est et sera pourtraict* [my italics]’ the image of the dead King. The epitaph recounts the end of a life, but is at the same time the starting point for its immediate and future audience’s appreciation of the identity representing that life: ‘l’*épitaphe*, notamment dans un cadre fictif, est le point de départ d’une autre parole qui la glose’ [the epitaph, especially in a fictional framework, is the starting point for another utterance that glosses it].<sup>22</sup> In my decision to study *narrative* texts, I am thus particularly interested in the context in which a given epitaph is represented as being produced, received and transmitted.

An individual epitaph is often a fixed-form lyric, like *CERB*’s *onzains*, but its narrative integration into a situation of other voices and agencies inevitably compromises the extent to which it can be perceived as ‘self-contained’ and ‘syntactically autonomous’. For example, one might compare two epitaphic works written by Jean Molinet in memory of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy (d. June 1467): a thirty-six-verse *Épitaphe*, a lyric item,<sup>23</sup> and the prosimetrum *Trosne d’Honneur*, which narrativises the Duke’s demise,<sup>24</sup> not simply according him honours but also playing out an imagined process by which he accrues various facets of renown whilst journeying upwards through several heavens, conversing with their occupants, to sit in honour on the eponymous throne.<sup>25</sup> Epitaph fictions’ degree of development of their narrative scenario varies considerably, from a minimal degree of presentation in dialogue form (like Lemaire’s *Épitaphe en maniere de dialogue* or Chastelain’s *Épitaphe de Messire Pierre de Brezé*), often with some framing commentary by a third-person persona, to elaborate fictions in which the persona as protagonist plays a full narrative role in the fictional world, travels through a landscape, engages in a mission and has multiple encounters with people and representations (inscriptions, buildings, paintings, tapestries, etc.), such as René d’Anjou’s *Livre du cœur d’amour épris* (1457) or Octovien de Saint-Gelais’s *Séjour d’honneur* (1489–94). What these narratives have in common is that they dramatise the process by which an individual life becomes an *exemplum*, by which a dead body becomes a text – that is, by which an epitaph is produced. I say ‘an’ epitaph advisedly, since a further factor attenuating fixity and unitariness is their plurality, as we already saw in *CERB*. One epitaph is but

<sup>22</sup> Doudet, *Poétique*, p. 596.

<sup>23</sup> *Les Faictz et dictz de Jean Molinet*, ed. Noël Dupire, 3 vols (Paris: SATF, 1936–39), I (1936), pp. 34–5. See Adrian Armstrong, ‘Avatars d’un griffonnage à succès: L’*épitaphe* du duc Philippe de Bourgogne de Jean Molinet’, *Le Moyen Âge*, 113.1 (2007), 25–44.

<sup>24</sup> For a contrary view, which sees the *Épitaphe* as more narrative than the *Trosne*, see Philippe Frieden, *La Lettre et le miroir: écrire l’histoire d’actualité selon Jean Molinet* (Paris: Champion, 2013), pp. 31–5, p. 32.

<sup>25</sup> *Faictz et ditz*, I (1936), pp. 36–58. In early printed editions of Molinet’s work, the *Épitaphe* is integrated into *TH* as a kind of epilogue (A. Armstrong, ‘Avatars’, p. 29).



one version of an identity, and we shall encounter in this book several cases of multiple epitaphs being dedicated by a writer to a single figure – such as Simon Gréban's *Épitaphe du feu roy Charles septiesme* (after 22 July 1461; six under the umbrella of one) or Jean Bouchet's *Epistres, Elegies, Epigrammes et Epitaphes, composez sur et pour raison du deces de feu tresillustre et tresreligieuse Dame Madame Renee de Bourbon* (1535) – and the different relationships apparently intended to be entertained between them. For instance, in Gréban's *Épitaphe*, three fresh epitaphs are composed (by personified virtues) for the King when his corpse is moved to a new location for burial.

An epitaph can also be seen to lie on the cusp between life and death as a threshold monument, which, akin to an effigy, looks both backward and forward:<sup>26</sup> it recalls certain particulars (such as social rank, character, lineage) of the individual who has now died, as well as having regard for that person's fate in the afterlife through formulaic expressions such as 'Dieu ait garde de son ame' [may God protect his soul].<sup>27</sup> This is perhaps a useful moment to remind ourselves of the prevailing medieval understanding of death, not as an end, but as a moment of transition into another phase and mode of being; death is still part of the story of someone's life. Scholars of medieval death remind their readers of this difference from a modern, assumed-to-be non-Christian perspective: 'la mort n'est pas envisagée comme terme mais comme passage' [death is envisaged not as an end but as a transition].<sup>28</sup> They are right to do so, but it is interesting also to consider how, with modern biomedical developments (cryopreservation; organ transplant; life-support machines; prostheses) and pneumatic technologies in cybernetics, death is no longer necessarily conceived of as a definitive final frontier, and important questions are being asked today about the boundaries between states of being, life and death.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, we should be precise as to what kind of 'passage' we are dealing with in medieval terms, as it has both material and spiritual dimensions. There is some evidence that 'Northern Europeans viewed the dead body not as suddenly severed from life, but rather as losing contact slowly and deliberately with the spirit that once animated it' for up to a year after death.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> For effigies in this regard, see Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London: British Museum Press, 1996), p. 93; Elizabeth A. R. Brown, 'Royal Bodies, Effigies, Funeral Meals, and Office in Sixteenth-Century France', *Il Cadavere/The Corpse, Micrologus*, 7 (1999), 437–508, p. 449.

<sup>27</sup> See also Doudet, *Poétique*, pp. 593–4.

<sup>28</sup> Fabienne Pomel, *Les Voies de l'au-delà et l'essor de l'allégorie au moyen âge* (Paris: Champion, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 112–15; Michael Camille, *Master of Death: The Lifeless Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator* (New Haven, CT/London: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 245.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, 'Royal Bodies', pp. 438–9; Michael Camille, 'The Image and the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies', in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 62–99, p. 84. See also Patrice Georges, 'Mourir c'est pourrir un peu ... Intentions et techniques contre la corruption des cadavres à la fin du moyen âge', *Il Cadavere/The Corpse, Micrologus*, 7 (1999), 359–82.

In a Christian world-view,<sup>31</sup> life itself is a journey from and (back) towards God: as Amé de Montgesoie states in his *Pas de la mort* (before 1465), ‘l’omme est ung voyageur passant’ ([man is a passing traveller]).<sup>32</sup> In this light, death is also not a negative notion: it is to be feared if it is approached in the wrong state – that is, unshriven – but death itself can be seen as the motor that encourages contrition, hence de Montgesoie’s persona’s musing address to personified death:

Tu es la dame mains amee  
En qui plus grand valeur habite;  
Car se n’estoit ta force eslite,  
Nul ne seroit de pechié quitte. (*Pas de la mort*, vv. 243–6)

[You are the least-loved lady in whom the greatest value lies; since if it wasn’t for your perfect power, no-one would be absolved of sin.]

Death is thus, in many respects, a relational term.<sup>33</sup> First, in the sense that the attitude adopted towards it depends upon one’s engagement with other ideas, beliefs and practices – hell, purgatory and paradise; sin, repentance and grace; but also love more generally, thinking of the many *amant martyr* characters in late-medieval poetry who long for death as release from amorous malady:

En attendant garison ou la mort  
Au lit de pleurs où je gis presque mort.<sup>34</sup>

[Awaiting cure or death, in the bed of tears in which I lie almost dead.]

This couplet constitutes the refrain of a rondeau by Jean Robertet and thus, through its cyclical repetition, articulates the lover-persona’s agony suspended in a near-death state portrayed as worse than actual death, which would be the equivalent of a cure for his sickness.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, death is relational in that it depends on what precisely we are denoting when we refer to someone as ‘dead’: a spiritual state of sin; the very moment of corporeal demise; the intermediate state of the body prior to resurrection; or the encroachment of death into life, as represented poetically through graphic depiction of *signa mortis*, such as Villon’s

<sup>31</sup> What Claude Blum calls the ‘récit invariant chrétien’ [invariant Christian narrative]: *La Représentation de la mort dans la littérature française de la Renaissance*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Paris: Champion, 1989), I, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> In Thomas Walton, ‘Les Poèmes d’Amé de Montgesoie’, *Medium Ævum*, 2.1 (1933), 1–33, v. 281.

<sup>33</sup> Blum, *Représentation*, I, pp. 9–10.

<sup>34</sup> Jean Robertet, *Œuvres*, ed. Margaret Zsuppán (Geneva: Droz, 1970), rondeau IV, pp. 86–7, vv. 1–2.

<sup>35</sup> ‘Je gis’ perhaps deliberately echoes the epitaphic incipit ‘cy gist’, on which, see Chapter 1.

testator-persona's sense of life having ebbed away and death having galloped in to take its place:<sup>36</sup>

Je congnois approucher ma seuf,  
Je crache blanc comme coton  
Jacoppins groz comme ung estuef.<sup>37</sup>

[I feel my thirst approaching, I spit cotton-white gobs as large as a handball.]

The grotesque simile exaggerating the size and density of his spittle is supported in its vibrancy by harsh velar [k] alliteration, while the base physicality of the overall image jars in register with the choice of lexeme to designate death: 'seuf', echoing the final thirst of Christ's agony on the cross.<sup>38</sup> In this example, we see a key characteristic of death for literary representation: its rhetorical vitality and its dynamism,<sup>39</sup> what Estelle Doudet calls 'la fécondité paradoxale d'un discours de mort' [the paradoxical fecundity of a discourse of death].<sup>40</sup> Death lends vigour to description through a macabre aesthetic; it populates medieval literature with a host of characters to provide vivid demonstration of moral lessons – suicides, tragic lovers, Christian martyrs, warrior heroes, faithful wives. It also affords the dead the opportunity to speak out from beyond the grave about their own life: to adopt a posthumous perspective on their biography, to articulate their own epitaph.

### The literary epitaph

This all brings us to a central question: what, in my understanding, is an epitaph? In its function, it is a statement of identity from a posthumous perspective, whether that be the deceased's own point of view expressed in the first person (uttered after the moment of death or composed in anticipation, as in the epitaphs prescribed in testamentary fictions), or a third-person vantage point, like that of the personified Basoches on Pierre of Baugé in *CERB*. In its form, definition is more difficult. Ian D. McFarlane made clear in 1986 the bagginess of the term for designating a particular genre: having assessed the difficulty of determining defining characteristics according to metre, theme, tone or links with the epigram

<sup>36</sup> The persona's chief opposition is between the pleasures of youth and the pains of old age, but 'vieillesse' and 'mort' seem to hold some synonymy, in that the privations of old age are represented as death's intrusion into life.

<sup>37</sup> *Testament*, in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, with Laëtitia Tabard (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), vv. 729–31.

<sup>38</sup> John 19:28.

<sup>39</sup> See Christos Tsagalis, *Epic Grief: Personal Laments in Homer's Iliad* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2004), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *Poétique*, p. 596.

(of which it was traditionally understood as a sub-form),<sup>41</sup> he concluded that only a minimal definition is possible: it concerns death, and it varies considerably in length.<sup>42</sup> More recently, Adrian Armstrong has reaffirmed this malleability, which we may see, for instance, in the variety of voices staged in epitaphs (in Molinet's case, anyone from a duke to a dog), and in formal diversity, such as use of dialogue.<sup>43</sup> In establishing the parameters of his corpus for analysis from amongst Molinet's works, Armstrong opts to confine himself to those poems that the textual tradition has defined as epitaphs, whilst recognising that, as McFarlane states, 'the term itself was loosely used to cover various types of funereal verse; and the epitaph, highly porous, invaded and was invaded by a host of neighbouring genres or subgenres'.<sup>44</sup> Would we be wasting our time, then, to linger on generic definition? Any proposed criteria will only ever be partially adequate, but let us spend a little time discussing a couple of characteristics that seem incontrovertibly fundamental and may help us probe further the more significant question of epitaphs' purpose: what writers may have been doing in deploying the form in their narrative fictions.

First, an epitaph is about someone, human or otherwise: it presents a character, whether a projected persona ('[je] suis') or an observed third person ('cy gist'). Serving the memory of this figure, it thereby exists in close relation with the *plainte funèbre*, a similarly baggy genre which Claude Thiry concludes to be definable in terms of subject matter: a 'mort fâcheuse et importune' [an unfortunate and inopportune death], for which the complaint provides both lamentation and consolation as a didactic piece.<sup>45</sup> We find several works that combine in their titles, or seem to see as interchangeable, the terms 'építaphe' and 'complainte'. A poem by George Chastelain about Hector and Achilles is transmitted as both *La Complainte d'Hector* and *Les Épitaphes d'Hector*.<sup>46</sup> De La Vigne's commemoration of Pierre of Baugé is entitled *Les Complaintes et épitaphes du roy de la*

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Sebillet's *Art poétique* (1548) states that epitaphs 'ne sont autres qu'inscriptions de tombes, ou épigrammes sépulchrauz' (ed. Félix Gaiiffe; updated by Francis Goyet (Paris: Nizet, 1988), p. 113 [are none other than tomb inscriptions or sepulchral epigrammes]) and also remarks on their very variable length, finding examples extending up to forty verses in Clément Marot's corpus (which is Sebillet's primary reference point for his generic definitions). We shall see in Chapter 1 that Jean Bouchet uses the term 'építaphe' almost synonymously with 'építaphe' in several works, including his *Jugement poétique de l'honneur féminin* (1538) and the *Epistres, Elegies, Epigrammes et Épitaphes* composed for Renée of Bourbon; as A. Armstrong notes, the primary significance of the term for Bouchet concerns the inscriptional character of the poems, especially in the case of short inscriptions: *JPHF* (Paris: Champion, 2006), p. 103; Armstrong's remarks draw on Jennifer Britnell, *Jean Bouchet* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1986), pp. 53–5.

<sup>42</sup> 'The Renaissance Epitaph', Presidential Address of the MHRA, 10 January 1986, *Modern Language Review*, 81.1 (1986), xxv–xxxv, p. xxxiii.

<sup>43</sup> 'Un cimetière bigarré: les épitaphes poétiques de Jean Molinet', in *Texte et contre-texte pour la période pré-moderne*, ed. Nelly Labère (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2013), pp. 187–201.

<sup>44</sup> McFarlane, 'Renaissance', p. xxv.

<sup>45</sup> *La Plainte funèbre* (Brepols: Turnhout, 1978), p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Doudet, *Poétique*, p. 100.

*Bazoche*: are we supposed to distinguish between different parts of the poem as assimilable to the two different genres, or is it a collective title? I think there is some identifiable difference of emphasis or inclination between the two, which may help us to grasp what the epitaph, as distinct from the complaint, is trying to do with the identity that it commemorates, particularly in the case of third-person pieces. I build here on McFarlane's note that 'for some the elegy might differ from the epitaph in that it said more about the feelings of the bereaved or mourners than it did about the deceased'.<sup>47</sup> Another poem by de La Vigne acts as a case in point, his 'Epytaphes et complaintes du duc de Vendosme' that appears in *Le Voyage de Naples*, an extensive prosimetrum depicting Charles VIII's Italian campaign of 1494–95.<sup>48</sup> For the first 107 verses of *ECDV*, the persona is primarily concerned with the emotional response of those still living and their connection to the deceased Duke, expressed through exclamation, apostrophe, concentration on what has been lost and grief-stricken sorrow: 'Helas! il est du monde trespassé' (v. 4795 [Alas! He has passed from this world]); 'O Atropos, pourquoy as tu celle ente / mortifiée [...]?' (vv. 4802–3 [O Death, why have you killed off this scion?]); '[...] du moys / Non pas de l'an le dueil ne cessera' (vv. 4876–7 [...] mourning will not cease this month nor even this year]). Then, at verse 4903, the poem seems to re-start in a different mode, which is signalled by repetition of the opening verse (v. 4795) in less exclamatory vein: 'Or est il mort et pieça trespassé' (v. 4903 [Now he is dead and passed away a while ago]).<sup>49</sup> What follows focuses more on constructing the Duke's identity in exemplary terms ('le chief d'honneur, le pillier de noblesse', v. 4927 [the pinnacle of honour, the pillar of nobility]), as well as recording his date of death and invoking God's blessing on his resting place: '[...] que le corps et le lieu / Sa bas en terre soit en la garde de Dieu' (vv. 4953–4 [...]) may the body and its place there below in the earth be protected by God]). I would thus see the first section of *ECDV* to tend

<sup>47</sup> 'Renaissance', p. xxxiii.

<sup>48</sup> Ed. Anna Slerca (Geneva: Droz, 1982), vv. 4795–954. The *Voyage* was not an autonomously circulating work, but formed part of the turn-of-the-sixteenth-century anthology *Le Vergier d'honneur* (first known edition c.1502–3), of which de La Vigne is credited as author alongside Octovien de Saint-Gelais (and unnamed 'others'), and to which he contributed the vast majority of pieces. The 'Epytaphes et complaintes' feature in the principal edition consulted (Paris: n.pub., n.d.: Oxford, All Souls College, ii.5.3) at fols o3v–o4v. Two further epitaphic verse items appear in the *Vergier*: Saint-Gelais's 'Complainte et epitaphe du feu Roy Charles dernier trespassé', commemorating Charles VIII (fols p6r–q3v; Saint-Gelais's only identified piece in the volume), and an anonymous 'rondeau et epythaphe de Monseigneur d'Aspremont en Poitou' (fol. Br). Note that the *Vergier*'s foliation spans two sequences of signatures in the edition used for reference: a–v lower case followed by A–P upper case, which I reflect in my page numberings.

<sup>49</sup> This pick-up seems to be signalled visually in the presentation of the poem in the *Vergier d'honneur*: v. 4903 is accorded the first large initial letter ('O') (fol. o4r) since the 'H' of 'Helas' (v. 4795) on the facing page (fol. o3v). Other editions consulted do likewise.

towards the manner of a complaint, and the second, with its greater emphasis on representation of the deceased, to be more epitaphic.<sup>50</sup>

Comparison with earlier literary epitaphs, notably those of Arthurian romances, is perhaps helpful to further delineate the treatment of identity in later cases. As Régine Colliot has explored, romance epitaphs, inscriptions discovered by a hero in or on a tomb, were prophetic in nature: they reveal an identity yet to be fulfilled that incites the reader (typically a passing knight) to action, to take up the sword and undertake a mission.<sup>51</sup> They are thus also concerned with identity formation, but prospectively rather than retrospectively, before all performable physical action by the living has been completed and what remains is a careful action of reading and reflection by others.<sup>52</sup> Common to both earlier and later instances is the principle that epitaphs, like tombs, open up rather than close down the deciphering of meaning: they 'are made [...] to be opened, and read by whoever must read them'.<sup>53</sup> Such reading must needs be careful given the ways in which the literary epitaph may be used to adopt an interrogative as well as an affirmative approach to identity. We may see it in twelfth-century romance already to enquire and challenge, since the epitaph as it were poses the question of who should lie there ('Qui [...] giroient' / 'Ci girra [...]')<sup>54</sup> in order to elicit a response from its diegetic reader in relation to that posited identity. In later medieval examples, as A. Armstrong explores briefly with regard to Molinet's first-person pieces, structure and word patterning can be manipulated to invite us to question the trustworthiness of the 'nécrologue' [necrologist] and her/his selection and interpretation of the life events and experiences recorded in the epitaph: 'Molinet développe son discours funèbre tout en le déconstruisant' [Molinet develops his funerary discourse at the same time as deconstructing it].<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> One might also, for instance, compare George Chastelain's *Déprécation pour Pierre de Brezé* with his *Épitaphe de Messire Pierre de Brezé* (*Œuvres*, ed. Joseph-Bruno-Marie-Constantin Kervyn de Lettenhove, 8 vols (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1971), VII, pp. 37–65, 67–73).

<sup>51</sup> 'Les Épitaphes arthuriennes', in *Bulletin bibliographique de la société internationale arthurienne*, 25 (1973), 155–75.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cerquiglini-Toulet's comparison, along similar lines, of Arthurian cemeteries with their later-medieval counterparts: *La Couleur de la mélancolie: la fréquentation des livres au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle, 1300–1415* (Paris: Hatier, 1993), pp. 130–1.

<sup>53</sup> Cerquiglini-Toulet, '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 Poirion and Nancy Freeman Regalado (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 224–39, p. 239.

<sup>54</sup> For example, in a cemetery in Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Chevalier de la charrette* are found tombs 'qui les nons de ces devoient / Qui dedanz les tonbes giroient' (ed. Charles Méla (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1992), vv. 1861–2 [which depicted the names of those who would lie in these tombs]); the conditional tense becomes future as the inscription is read and transcribed: '[...] Ci girra Gauvains, / Ci Looys et ci Yvains' (vv. 1865–6 [...]) Here will lie Gauvain, here Louis and here Yvain).

<sup>55</sup> A. Armstrong, 'Un cimetière', p. 193.



What enables such manipulation is, as we saw in the virtuosic case of de La Vigne's treatment of Pierre of Baugé, use of the epitaph for complex linguistic manoeuvring, especially when in verse form. This brings us to our second incontrovertible characteristic: epitaphs are verbal compositions. Historical epitaphs became more wordy in the fifteenth century; Elisabeth Crouzet-Pavan explains this extension as an increasing safeguard against oblivion: 'épitaphes-fleuves [...] qui, pour plus de précautions contre la mort et l'oubli, s'essaient à ressaisir et à transcrire, dans ses épisodes principaux, la vie du défunt' [very lengthy epitaphs [...] which, as a greater safeguard against death and oblivion, endeavour to capture and transcribe, in its principal episodes, the life of the deceased].<sup>56</sup> Literary epitaphs are frequently wordier still, and engage in a range of rhetorical games in their construction. One important factor in common between historical and literary examples is how, whether brief or extensive, an epitaph stands as 'l'unité narrative d'une vie' [the narrative unity of a life], to adopt Paul Ricoeur's terminology.<sup>57</sup> The 'narrative' element applies even if the form in which it is delivered is a fixed-form lyric, since any element of biographical information, however minimal, such as the statement 'trespassa le [date]' [died on [date]], helps to make up what Paul Zumthor called a 'récit latent' [latent narrative],<sup>58</sup> and, in turn, to return to Ricoeur: 'le récit construit l'identité du personnage, qu'on peut appeler son identité narrative' [the narrative constructs the identity of the character, which one can call her/his narrative identity].<sup>59</sup> The elements that might be seen typically to constitute the basic kit of a historical medieval French epitaph's text are:

'Cy gist [name]' + (biographical indications: social rank, relationships) + (sometimes mention of role fulfilled 'en son vivant') + 'trespassa/deceda le [date]' + (formula of exhortation/intercessory prayer, e.g. 'priez Dieu pour son ame')<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> 'Post-face', in *La Mort écrite: rites et rhétoriques du trépas au moyen âge*, ed. Estelle Doudet (Paris: PUPS, 2005), p. 173. See also, from a cultural historical perspective, Philippe Ariès, *L'Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), pp. 213–30 (the evolution in attitudes towards death that Ariès posits, characterised by greater fear of death as an enemy in the later Middle Ages, could be seen to underpin Crouzet-Pavan's reasoning); Urbain, *Archipel*, pp. 193–222; 235–9; and, drawing on documentary work across cemeteries of Paris, *L'Épitaphier du vieux Paris: recueil général des inscriptions funéraires des églises, couvents, collèges, hospices, cimetières et charniers depuis le moyen âge jusqu'à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 3 vols (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1890), I, p. vi.

<sup>57</sup> *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Seuil, 1990), p. 193.

<sup>58</sup> 'Les Narrativités latentes dans le discours lyrique médiéval', in *The Nature of Medieval Narrative*, ed. Minnette Grunmann-Gaudet and Robin F. Jones (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1980), pp. 39–55, p. 41.

<sup>59</sup> *Soi-même*, p. 175.

<sup>60</sup> This sample template was compiled based on a survey of epitaphs in *L'Épitaphier du vieux Paris*. I do not claim any peculiarity to medieval France; one need only look at Roman funerary inscription to see a similar epitaphic format, often including the deceased's name, age at death, biographical details, a conventional character description, some formula such as



Literary examples, using as their opening verb either *gesir* or *estre*, may adopt a similar minimal template, for instance when an epitaph is appended to the end of a longer poem, as in the case of de La Vigne's *CERB*: after the close of the fiction, in which personified Basoches contributed epitaphs for Pierre of Baugé, two further texts appear, one in Latin and one in French. The nine-verse vernacular piece furnishes a concise record of Pierre's life and death: it opens with a naming formula, followed, in apposition, by phrases denoting rank and social status, role and some evocation of virtuous character through asyndetonic enumeration of epithets:

Cy gist Pierre de Baugé, filz très sage  
De grant lignage, bien formé de corsage,  
Beau personnage et advenant de mesme,  
De la Bazoche Roy de noble parage,  
Franc de courage, begnin, doulx, courtois, large. (*CERB*, vv. 630–4)

[Here lies Pierre of Baugé, a very wise son of great lineage, in excellent physical shape, a fine figure and also gracious, King of the Basoche of noble birth, virtuous in character, benign, gentle, courteous, generous.]

Thereafter, we learn concisely his age at death (v. 635), lineage (v. 636) and the date on which he expired (vv. 637–8). Precisely what makes a given epitaph 'literary' in such cases is an interesting point: are we assessing the text itself (for instance, the greater or lesser development of *how* an identity is shaped, rather than a more straightforward statement of its particulars) or the context in which it appears (such as attached to a dream vision)? The question is further complicated by the fact that epitaphs in certain texts were designed to be – or, so far as we know, actually were – incorporated into real funerary practice. Lemaire dedicated his *Epitaphe* for Chastelain and Molinet to one Charles Le Clerc, who had offered to have it engraved or painted bedside the late writers' tombs.<sup>61</sup> The rubric of the rondeau at the close of de La Vigne's *ECDV* claims that it 'fut mis sur le sercueil [...] du dict seigneur' (before v. 4955 [was placed on the coffin [...] of the said lord]), namely Francis of Bourbon (d.1495).<sup>62</sup> De La Vigne, who served as secretary to Anne of Brittany from 1504, also composed a series of *Epitaphes en rondeaux de la Roynie* (1514), which were apparently embroidered into her funeral drapes in St Denis, and the whole set were published as a pamphlet

'hic cubat' [here lies] and salutation purportedly addressed by the dead to the living (e.g. 'vale, viator' [farewell, passer-by]): Alison E. Cooley, *The Cambridge Manual of Latin Epigraphy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), p. 128; John Edwin Sandys, *Latin Epigraphy: An Introduction to the Study of Latin Inscriptions*, 2nd edn, rev. S. G. Campbell (Cambridge: CUP, 1927), pp. 60–3.

<sup>61</sup> Le Clerc was treasurer of wars for Margaret of Austria, Lemaire's patron at the time (see below, n. 100). See Adrian Armstrong, *Technique and Technology: Script, Print, and Poetics in France 1470–1550* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), p. 139. Armstrong also considers the extent to which Bouchet's epitaph poems served as genuine tombstone inscriptions (p. 198).

<sup>62</sup> See also Garnier, 'Rhétorique', p. 389.

after the ceremony.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, the rondeaux were reprinted a decade later in honour of the late Queen Claude, Anne's daughter, with appropriate changes to the particulars of name and date of death (though seemingly no concern for the impact of these modifications on the rhyme scheme).<sup>64</sup> We saw above how several epitaphs could be devised for the same person; in this case, the same several epitaphs serve two people. The issue of the positioning of an epitaph has obvious implications for how we construe the spatial deixis in its opening formula 'cy gist'. 'Cy' will always denote the text itself in whose verbal composition the identity of the person commemorated is located linguistically, but alternative extratextual designations may also accrue.<sup>65</sup>

A third factor that might usually be seen to define an epitaph is its status as a text: definitions in medieval French dictionaries anchor it thus as 'une inscription funéraire' [a funerary inscription].<sup>66</sup> Whether or not we see it to have been inscribed in or around a tomb, at base we conceive of it as a written piece. However, I wish also to consider epitaphs delivered orally by figures from beyond the grave: not ghosts, but the ambulant, talking dead, whose utterances could be classified as epitaphs through etymological justification, with reference to the Latin root *epitaphium* or 'funeral oration'.<sup>67</sup> That said, it is not orations that concern me so much as speeches and gestures performed by dead people which define their identity through posthumous reference to their life (and an acute consciousness of their death), and whose immediate audience is a persona who has been tasked – by the figures themselves or by a third party (such as a personified virtue in a dream) – with transcribing their first-person words; ultimately, therefore, a written record is accomplished.

### Voice, text, identity

Mention of voices speaking from beyond the grave in dialogue with a persona immediately conjures up a rich medieval literary inheritance in the form of Dante

<sup>63</sup> *Recueil de poésies françaises*, XII (Paris: Daffis, 1877), pp. 105–27.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Annette Tomarken, "'Icy dessous': la rhétorique de l'épithaphe dans la génération Marot", in *La Génération Marot: poètes français et néo-latins (1515–1550)*, ed. Gérard Defaux (Paris: Champion, 1997), pp. 299–313.

<sup>66</sup> *Dictionnaire du moyen français*, version 2015 (DMF 2015). ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine <<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf>>; Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 10 vols (Paris: Vieweg/Bouillon, 1880–1902), IX (Paris: Bouillon, 1898), p. 498.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Niall Livingstone and Gideon Nisbet's discussion of the Classical epigram, which began with inscriptions, but with the intention that these 'would be read, probably aloud': *Epigram* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 5, 25–30. An etymological argument is interesting in relation to the orality of 'epitaph': the ultimate Ancient Greek root 'epitaphion' could be seen to denote either a written or a spoken piece, depending on how one interprets its constituent elements: 'taphos' means tomb, while 'epi' can mean 'on, at, over', and so could designate something placed *on* the tomb or something uttered *over/beside* it.

Alighieri's *Commedia* and Giovanni Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*. We think of Dante's pilgrim being accosted by Bertran de Born's severed talking head: 'Tu che, spirando, vai veggendo i morti' ([You there still breathing, looking at the dead]),<sup>68</sup> or Boccaccio's persona being bombarded by demands for representation from the unfortunate dead who seek inclusion in his catalogue, which entails, in the case of Brunhilda, an argument as to the truthfulness of her self-reported story.<sup>69</sup> Examination of late-medieval epitaph fictions in this light, and, indeed, consideration of the very scope of what an epitaph is in relation to these models, uncovers an under-explored pertinence of Dantean and Boccaccian influence on the French material. Perhaps most obviously, and as we shall explore in detail in Chapter 3, we encounter specific responses to *DCVI* in George Chastelain's *Temple de Bocace* (1463–65), Antitus's *Portail du Temple de Bocace* (1501) and Laurent Desmoulins's *Cymetiere des malheureux* (1511). More generally, we find the talkative dead (whether ambulant or inscribed first persons), such as Petrarch in the cemetery of René d'Anjou's *Livre du cœur d'amour épris*:

Pour ce ay je fait faire tombe presente,  
Soubz laquelle je gis, de ce ne me veulx taire.<sup>70</sup>

[For this reason I had this present tomb made, under which I lie – about this I don't want to be silent.]

We encounter voices speaking to establish their identity in order to serve a purpose beyond simply ensuring preservation of their name and renown: whether seeking intercessory prayer, like the pleas in *Purgatorio* by shades such as Belacqua,<sup>71</sup> or presenting the didactic value of the decline of their life towards death, as when Boccaccio's persona apostrophises Dido as a model of chastity: 'Uno quippe ictu [...] mortales terminasti labores, famam occupasti perennem' ([Truly with one blow [...] [you] put an end to mortal travail and achieved immortal fame]),<sup>72</sup> or sees Xerxes coming towards him bemoaning his pride (*DCVI*, III.v). The case of Xerxes, and of *DCVI*'s tales more generally, reminds us that the reputation that the dead request to have set down can be a negative representation of themselves:

<sup>68</sup> *Inferno*, ed. Emilio Pasquini and Antonio Quaglio, 16th edn (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), XXVIII.131. I follow Mark Musa's translations for all three books: *The Divine Comedy*, 3 vols (London: Penguin, 1984).

<sup>69</sup> I thank Guyda Armstrong and Kenneth Clarke for their guidance in navigating secondary criticism on Boccaccio's *DCVI*.

<sup>70</sup> Ed. Florence Bouchet (Paris: Librairie générale française, 2003), vv. 1612–13.

<sup>71</sup> Ed. Emilio Pasquini and Antonio Quaglio, 12th edn (Milan: Garzanti, 2007), IV.130–5.

<sup>72</sup> Ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci and Vittorio Zaccaria, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, 10 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1964–83), IX (1983), II.xi. Translations of *DCVI* are based on *The Fates of Illustrious Men*, trans. Louis Brewer Hall (New York: Ungar, 1965). Hall's text is an abridged version, and the style of translation, whilst very readable, can be quite loose; my interventions are indicated by square brackets.

they embrace the instructional value for others of their posthumous perspective on their life as an exemplary downfall. The question of audience becomes more complex with epitaph fictions of the ambulant dead, since their relay of narrative voice, in which posthumous self-representation is caught up, concerns not only a future reader but also an immediate, diegetically present listener; the latter is charged with communicating the tale and, as we shall see in works such as Jean Du Pré's *Palais des nobles dames* (1534), is thereby depicted wielding control over how the deceased's words are recorded.

Epitaph fictions that stage a 'live' conversation between the living persona and dead characters vary in how they represent the status of the latter, and two different models are offered by Dante's and Boccaccio's fictions. The *Commedia*, in part given its insistence on how the pilgrim's understanding is deficient because there are things he cannot yet know until he has passed beyond mortality, distinguishes the persona as a living man from his interlocutors, who are emphatically dead,<sup>73</sup> as when Charon the ferryman addresses him:

Et tu che se' costí, anima viva,  
Partíti da cotesti che son morti. (*Inf.* III.88–9)

[And you, the living soul, you over there, get away from all these people who are dead.]

These 'morti' are, of course, animated: the fictional framework of journey and dialogue, concerning what the persona sees and hears, requires the dead to be visible and audible, but we are repeatedly reminded of their irregular corporeality: how their bodies ('corpi') cast no shadow on the ground (*Purg.* III.28) and exist as shades ('ombra', XXV.101). Overall, their difference from the pilgrim in terms of their ontological status is clearly marked. This is not the case in Boccaccio's text: in his vision, the deceased are classified, whenever a collective noun is used, not as 'dead', but often as 'unfortunates' ('infelices') or 'mourners' ('fluentes') – their status defined by the import and tone of the story that they (and/or the persona) tell about themselves, the attitude they have adopted posthumously to their own life.<sup>74</sup> Both Italian authors' approaches give rise to interesting questions, developed by later medieval French writers, about how identity is forged as an interrelation between voice, text and body, about how we construe the status

<sup>73</sup> But not universally so: Fra Alberigo and Branca d'Oria are not yet dead in body, but hell has already taken possession of their souls, a state of affairs explained in response to the pilgrim's question: '[...] or se' tu ancor morto?' (*Inf.* XXXIII.121 [...]) are you already dead?]).

<sup>74</sup> Petrarch's *Triumphus Mortis* (1351–52) can be seen to straddle the two: in a vision, the persona beholds a landscape full of dead people ('piena di morti', I.74) who have fallen from felicity to misery (I.79–81) for having fixed their hopes on mortal things ('in cosa mortal', I.85): in Francesco Petrarca, *Trionfi, Rime estravaganti, Codice degli abbozzi*, ed. Vinicio Pacca and Laura Paolino (Milan: Mondadori, 1996), pp. 267–346.

of a voice that states ‘je suis mort’ and about the importance of storytelling for the constitution of selfhood.<sup>75</sup>

### Storytelling and selfhood

This last point requires some discussion, since, in the case of oral self-representations that are not called epitaphs in their textual tradition, but which I have decided to label thus, one might equally perceive elements of (auto)biography, obituary or *exemplum* when they have been set down in writing by the persona. Why is it appropriate, indeed fruitful, to cast them specifically as epitaphs? Biography is a genre concerned with ‘a chronicle of the subject’s life’;<sup>76</sup> the self-presentations of characters in my fictions are at least as, if not more, pre-occupied with the subject’s death: not so much the simple fact that they have died as the posthumous perspective that speaking from beyond the grave opens up on their existence (including, in certain cases, knowledge of events that have occurred since the moment of death) and the implications for their life story of the manner of their death. The term ‘autothanatography’ came into use in the early 1980s to account for writing *from* rather than simply *of* death, denoting ‘the dead’s own accounts of their own deaths’.<sup>77</sup> As critics exploring this mode of representation have discussed, autothanatography configures the possibility for speaking from beyond the grave,<sup>78</sup> which is often construed as a characteristically modern literary trope.<sup>79</sup> Its pertinence to medieval epitaph fictions is readily discernible from critics’ extrapolations of the implications of telling one’s life from the point of view of death.<sup>80</sup> For example, Dominique Rabaté describes how this enables one to ‘se dire comme totalité achevée’ [speak of oneself as a completed whole], and assesses the necessary conditions, in temporal terms, for such self-articulation: ‘pour pouvoir se dire tout entier il faudrait être dans le temps et hors du temps’ [to be able to speak of oneself as a whole one must be in time and

<sup>75</sup> Medieval selfhood is, of course, an immensely complex and contested issue (Binski, *Medieval Death*, p. 16). Virginie Greene effects an insightful sifting of critical perspectives (*Le Sujet et la mort dans ‘La mort Artu’* (Saint-Genouph: Nizet, 2002), pp. 169–76), while Maupeu unpicks the categories ‘subject’, ‘individual’ and ‘person’ in the context of autobiography in allegorical narrative (*Pèlerins*, pp. 12–17).

<sup>76</sup> Sergei Averintsev, ‘From Biography to Hagiography: Some Stable Patterns in the Greek and Latin Tradition of Lives, Including Lives of the Saints’, in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St Clair (Oxford: OUP for the British Academy, 2002), pp. 19–36, p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> Ivan Callus, ‘(Auto)thanatography or (Auto)thanatology? Mark C. Taylor, Simon Critchley, and the Writing of the Dead’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 41.4 (2005), 427–38. Callus’s article forms part of a special issue, edited by Susan Bainbridge, on the relation between autobiography and death.

<sup>78</sup> Dominique Rabaté, ‘Énonciations d’outre-tombe (Poe, Faulkner, Beckett, Bernhard)’, in *Poétiques de la voix* (Paris: Corti, 1999), pp. 55–75, p. 57.

<sup>79</sup> Rabaté, *Poétiques*, p. 56; cf. Marie-Chantal Killeen, *En souffrance d’un corps: essais sur la voix désincarnée* (Quebec: Nota bene, 2013), p. 51, n. 2.

<sup>80</sup> Rabaté, *Poétiques*, p. 57.

outside time].<sup>81</sup> A less helpful facet of ‘autothanatography’ is, I think, its initial element ‘auto-’, which may risk leading us into two false assumptions: first, that the enunciating ‘I’ is the sole or primary agency shaping the account of death, and, second, that the identity composed by a first-person epitaph lies in continuity with the living person whose story is being told, rather than being a fresh construct: a ‘personnage’. As we shall see in Chapter 1’s conspectus of epitaphs from across my corpus, their structure as an ‘identity narrative’ frequently makes chronological leaps across a life/death story and is necessarily selective in what events or thematic concerns are highlighted – in relation to its particular context of appearance and given the relatively short space available within its frame.

Bouchet refers to the form of the epitaphs that adorn his palace of noble ladies in *JPHF* as being ‘tant briefz, et abstrainctz’ (v. 1359 [so brief and concise]), a reference to their length (which averages twelve verses) but also, one could say, to their status as ‘abstracts’ of a person’s life: a compressed account whose manner of composition invites as much attention as the matter chosen to be included in it.<sup>82</sup> This sense of abstraction fits with the idea of a ‘short obituary’, coined by Christos Tsagalis to speak about the *Iliad*’s ‘brief necrological vignettes dedicated to a dead warrior, Greek or Trojan, of little or no importance to the plot, in most cases reported in direct speech’.<sup>83</sup> Homer’s longest short obituary spans forty-three verses.<sup>84</sup> An important stylistic feature that these share with my epitaphs is their absence of sentimental terminology or explicitly stated pathos.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, both Tsagalis and Jasper Griffin consider them to have affinity with the later practice of funerary epigrams.<sup>86</sup> ‘Short obituary’ could thus stand reasonably well as a term for the epigraphic utterances that we find in late-medieval fictions, except that ‘epitaph’ fits better in respect of three specific features: the focus of the narrative on constructing an identity which is itself (the process of construction) and her/himself (the subject being composed) of significant importance in terms of plot; the deictic implications of a given utterance (‘je suis’, ‘cy gist’) that is being presented for display, and potentially serving as funerary monument; and the ensuing essential dynamic of communication between deceased subject and ‘passant’ that makes it ‘exhibée comme objet de lecture’ [displayed as something to be read] and contributes to its liminal status – ‘l’építaphe apparaît comme une écriture de l’intermédiaire, entre vie et mort, entre fixité gravée et mouvement de

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., pp. 57–8.

<sup>82</sup> The collocation appears again, without ‘briefz’, at v. 3770: ‘abstrainctz Epigrammes’. On the foregrounding of manner over matter in the presentation of voices from beyond the grave in a different verse genre, see Pascale Chiron, “Quant le défunt prend la parole”: voix d’outre-tombe dans les épitres en vers du premier XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle”, in *De bonne vie s’ensuit bonne mort: récits de mort, récits de vie en Europe (XV<sup>e</sup>–XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles)*, ed. Patricia Eichel-Lojkine and Claudie Martin-Ulrich (Paris: Champion, 2006), pp. 43–59, p. 57.

<sup>83</sup> *Epic Grief*, p. 179.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., pp. 187–8.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 188; J. Griffin refers to them simply as ‘obituaries’: *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 141–3.



glose qu'elle inspire' [the epitaph appears as a kind of liminal writing, between life and death, between engraved fixity and the commentative movement that it inspires].<sup>87</sup>

A sense of 'glose', and thus the epitaph's potential to function as a narrative vehicle for conveying knowledge or instruction that merits commentary, could encourage us to approach it as a type of *exemplum*. Late-medieval literature is awash with exemplary tales of Classical, Biblical, historical and contemporary literary figures who are usually having stories told about them because they are dead – or are being treated as dead, in the case of fictional characters whose life and death are a matter of literary contrivance. Such tales furnish complete narrative units, the life being recounted having ended, from which lessons can be drawn. For a given *exemplum*, any or all of its subject (such as the tale of Dido as model for chastity), its manner of telling (the shaping of the narrative) and its message (implicit in the shape of the tale and often rendered explicit at its close) may be of prime importance. To be clear, the sense in which I'm considering *exemplum* in relation to epitaphs is as storytelling about a character, recognising 'the exemplum's specificity as narrative',<sup>88</sup> and not the term's more shorthand use to denote the simple citation of a figure by name, who is only implicitly subtended by her/his identity narrative, such as when Amé de Montgesois enumerates a list of characters struck down by Accident, a henchman of Death:

Le roy Saül, Acab, Cressus,  
Edipus, Hercules, Cathon,  
Odrater, Nabot et Artus,  
Jule Cesar, Agamenon,  
Hanybal, Pompee, Sampson,  
Socrates, Cyrus, Laumedon  
Et mains aultres sont mis a fin  
Par Accident, le tien affin. (*Pas de la mort*, vv. 113–20)

[King Saul, Ahab, Croesus, Oedipus, Hercules, Cato, Herod, Naboth and Arthur, Julius Caesar, Agamemnon, Hannibal, Pompey, Sampson, Socrates, Cyrus, Laomedon, and many others are brought to an end by Accident, I hold it true.]

In Boccaccio's *DCVI*, characters' identity narratives (spoken by them or accorded to them as third-person tales by the persona) are presented to a didactic end, as lessons in managing one's fate, and so have an exemplary function, yet I have chosen to call them epitaphs. It is, I think, a question of treatment. A tale may be an *exemplum*, such as an account of the suffering of the unrequited lover in Alain Chartier's *La Belle Dame sans mercy* (1424) as an exemplification of tragic love, but may not be an epitaph if its focus rests on thematic import and not on

<sup>87</sup> Doudet, *Poétique*, pp. 594, 593.

<sup>88</sup> Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 4, 33.