A Continuum from Medieval Literary Networks to Modern Counterparts:
The Attractions and Operations of Social Networks.

Submitted by Peter James Knowles to the University of Exeter
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Signature: .................................................................
Abstract

While the benefits of analysing social networks within the wider humanities are becoming more accepted, very little work of this kind has been done in medieval studies. This thesis seeks to begin to fill this lacuna by considering the advantages of examining historical moments through the lens of ‘network’. Focusing on the later medieval world (in particular c.1300-1520), but also drawing on parallel evidence from the modern day, it demonstrates how the paradigm of ‘network’ allows a more nuanced reading of, predominantly literary, historical moments, which in turn reveals a deeper understanding of collective social thinking and behaviour. This new methodological approach is threefold, drawing on analytic tools from various disciplines. It blends historical contextual investigation with literary analysis, and frames the results in the sociological and anthropological theories of belonging, exchange, and play.

The thesis is structured around four case studies, each of which demonstrates a particular form of network formation, and also shows how far these networks reflect their respective cultural milieus and influences. Three medieval chapters focus on what I term ‘literary networks’, a concept ripe for network analysis thanks to the highly participatory nature of medieval literature, and thus theoretically comparable to modern networks based around information exchange. Across the thesis, instances of formal, informal, and virtual networks are considered from medieval France and England, as well as the twenty-first century West. This combination of interdisciplinary method and structure allows innovative new readings of underappreciated sources, whilst also highlighting a transhistorical continuum of universal appeals to social networks: namely, the satisfaction of the human need to belong, the facilitation of competitive play, and the opportunity to acquire social capital and build reputations. This investigative synthesis between medieval material and more modern network evidence reveals that, while realised through unrecognisably altered technologies and experiencing some resultant disruptions, these fundamental appeals of social network membership, in part, remain constant between the two periods.
Acknowledgements

I have a list of people to thank here that is so long I think even the most gushing of Oscar winners would probably baulk at the sight of it. While there are countless individuals, institutions, and even complete strangers who have helped me bring this piece of work to fruition in some way, I have to start with Emma Cayley. I’m sure most doctoral students say this, but in having Emma as a lead supervisor I really don’t think I could have been any more fortunate. Right from the beginning, Emma has unwaveringly believed in me and supported my ideas for the project – and given that her only prior experience of me was as a Masters student who scrawled questionable Latin puns on the whiteboard each week, that’s no mean feat. Working with Emma these past three years has been a total joy: she is incredibly generous with her time; has gotten me involved in everything from designing Anglo-Saxon iPad apps to showing Scottish wine critics around Exeter Cathedral; and has helped me craft a thesis which is far from traditional, and which I am incredibly proud of. Of everyone here, I unashamedly want to thank Emma most: for being a fantastic supervisor, but also for becoming a true friend.

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There are many other academics who have supported me professionally, socially, and personally during my PhD. Sarah Hamilton and Jane Whittle not only
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They say you should save the best till last, so to an extent that’s what I’ve done. I couldn’t have written this thesis without the support and love of my friends and family, of which there are far too many to thank in person here (if this were the
Oscars they’d be playing the music and ushering me off stage by now, for sure) but I have to pick out a special few. Harry McCarthy, who has been in my life pretty much exactly as long as I’ve been working on this project, has helped me in more ways than I care to go into here, so I’ll keep it brief. Thank you for being you, Harry, and far more importantly thank you for proof-reading each and every word of this thesis multiple times. I appreciated it more than I probably ever let on, especially when you pointed out that I was actually going to need some evidence in the first half of chapter four. And finally to Mum, Dad, and Laura. I’d like to think you all know how important you’ve been to me these past three years (and for a good few before that) without having to say it here, but I will anyway. Your support means everything to me, and I couldn’t have done it – any of it – without you all. Thank you.
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>BHR</td>
<td>Bibliothèque d'Humanisme Et Renaissance</td>
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<tr>
<td>BNF</td>
<td>Bibliothèque nationale de France</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMC</td>
<td>Computer-mediated communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>CUP</td>
<td>Cambridge University Press</td>
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<tr>
<td>FL</td>
<td><em>The Floure and the Leafe</em></td>
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<td>OUP</td>
<td>Oxford University Press</td>
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<td>SNA</td>
<td>Social Network Analysis</td>
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Introduction

‘And all the brethren must help, comfort, and counsel one another in faith, and in
loyalty, peace, love, and harmony’.\(^1\)

‘One of the greatest strengths of *LittleBigPlanet* in general is that our community is
generally very friendly and will be willing to help you out with anything you want to
do’.\(^2\)

The establishment of a puy in London in the late thirteenth century and the
release of Playstation 3 game *LittleBigPlanet* in 2008 seem, at first glance, to be
historical moments separated by an unbridgeable gulf of space, time, and
technologies. Yet there is an anthropological concept which does in fact link this late
medieval poetry competition to the community which formed around what has
become one of Sony’s flagship video games: that of the social network. The London
Puy (a close examination of which forms the basis of the first chapter of this thesis)
saw individuals from the literate echelons of the city come together under oath to
establish an annual competition crowning one member as composer of the best
*chant royal*. The liminary quotation which opens this chapter is taken from the
statutes composed as regulations for the Puy, and powerfully illustrates the shared
values of mutual support and social cooperation which the founders hoped would
characterise their newly formed network. Similarly, the second quotation, from an
interview with David Dino, one of the designers of *LittleBigPlanet*, reveals the co-
operative and supportive network which developed among players of the game: a
game which crucially allows for those players to create and share their own levels of
play.\(^3\) Both of these events bring to light a form of social network which sees
members come together in a productive means of competitive play, as well as

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\(^1\) Andrew Horn, *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, ed. by H. T. Riley, 3 vols (Rolls Series, 1859-62),
II, p. 219.

\(^2\) Matthew Codd, ‘Interview with LittleBigPlanet 3’s David Dino’, *NZGamer.com Features* (December
[accessed 21 July 2015].

\(^3\) For more on this puzzle platform game and its user-generated content, see: Emma Westecott,
‘Crafting Play: Little Big Planet’, *Loading… The Journal of the Canadian Game Studies Association* 5
(2001), 90-100.
promoting a communal sense of exchange and care. In doing so, they also highlight some of the key theoretical foundations of this thesis.

Philosopher Georg Simmel wrote that ‘society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interaction’, a principle which has been adopted by many over the subsequent decades. The notion of ‘network’ embodies this theory, as it denotes a framework of individuals who are all connected in some way by exchange. This simple yet precise definition hints at the universality of networks as a concept: wherever and whenever there are people who form interlinked relationships based on interaction and exchange of some kind, there are networks. As such, networks can be studied as coherent constructs across historical time and geographical space. This is not to say that all networks adopt the same forms and principles across these considerable variables, rather that they can be studied alongside one another thanks to a shared descriptive vocabulary. In the two brief examples considered above, for instance, similarities are immediately, perhaps surprisingly, recognisable: both facilitated playful production (one of chants royaux pieces, the other of game levels); both required formal membership (one via the swearing of an oath and membership fee, the other through purchase of the original game and online registration); and both encouraged social exchange (one in the form of hearing and judging poetic performances, the other through the playing and rating of user-generated levels). This thesis explores the advantages of analysing historical moments through the theoretical lens of ‘network’. While it focuses on medieval sources which have yet to be exploited to their full potential, the transferability of this methodological framework also allows modern-day networks to be considered in parallel, and encourages us to question how far the attractions of social network membership have remained constant across the centuries.

Social Networks and the Humanities

Today, social networks are ubiquitous in their technology-based forms, and this is the kind of network which immediately comes to mind when someone talks of a ‘social network’, with Facebook and Twitter being perhaps the most prominent

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However, this thesis seeks, in part, to address social networks within their more sociological, anthropological, and historical senses. The word ‘network’ has an illuminating etymology. It first appears in the English language Tyndale bible of 1530, a combination of the nouns ‘net’ and ‘work’. To take each of these component parts in turn, the first, ‘net’, derives directly from the Old English ‘nette/nett’. First recorded in use around 888 in King Ælfréd’s translation of Boethius, the term typically referred to a fishing net, a type of more general fabric netting, or a spider’s web. The ultimate root of these terms appears to be the Proto-Indo-European root ‘ned’, meaning to twist or to knot in some way. Its cognates include the Sanskrit ‘nahyati’ (binds, or ties), and the Old Irish ‘nascim’ (with a sense of binding, or obligation). The term thus brings with it an inherent sense of intertwining and knotting into a web of connections and also, more intriguingly, some hint of entering into an obligation, and being bound by these ties.

‘Work’ stems directly from the Old English word ‘weorc/worc’, indicating something that is done, an action performed by someone, proceedings, or other business. More specifically, it could mean the opportunity to expend labour in some useful or remunerative way. The ultimate root again lies in the ancestral Proto-Indo-European language root ‘werg’, essentially meaning ‘to do’. Its most prominent cognate was the Greek ‘ergon’, meaning simply ‘to work’. Here then, the incorporation of ‘work’ into the word ‘network’ gives a sense of exactly that: work, activity, and the achievement of something considered useful. Combined together, these etymological foundations of the term ‘network’ point to a constructed entity, an interconnected web of sorts which is both actively worked towards, and then worked within by those involved.

Tellingly, the current definitions given by the *Oxford English Dictionary* for ‘network’ are dominated by one word: ‘interconnected’. For instance, the entry for a network composed of people (the kind under scrutiny in this thesis) reads: ‘An
interconnected group of people; an organization; spec. a group of people having certain connections.\(^9\) More specifically, the current study explores the concept of social network above all others, and it would be practical here to define precisely what is meant by ‘social network’ as it is deployed across the following chapters, since it is a term open to variable interpretations. The term ‘social’, in its most common contemporary use, indicates human interactions which are ‘marked or characterized by friendliness, geniality, or companionship with others’.\(^{10}\) While there is an element of this geniality in both the medieval and modern networks under consideration, in that they are formed and joined for predominantly benevolent motives, the dominant intended sense of ‘social’ is here drawn from its definition within the social sciences. Thus, social networks are ones which develop from ‘the relationships between human beings or social groups that characterize life in society’ more widely.\(^{11}\) The social networks under examination across this thesis, then, reflect groups of interconnected people which form in largely benevolent circumstances, and promote a particular form of social intercourse and exchange between their members. This definition is enhanced below, as it incorporates the more precise language and principles offered by social network analysis.

While increasingly commonplace in the social sciences, making social networks the focus of studies such as this is a practice still in its infancy in the wider humanities, and in particular in the field of medieval studies. Some of the major historians of late medieval English local political society use elements of network-focused analysis more or less explicitly as a means of studying their respective evidence bodies. Christine Carpenter calls most overtly for the use of network theory as an approach to the study of gentry society in her 1994 article ‘Gentry and Community in Medieval England’\(^{12}\). In it, Carpenter acknowledges the mathematical limitations of the ‘haphazard’ information available on the medieval period, but suggests that network theory can ‘focu[s] the questions to be asked and the means of asking’ when it comes to examining the gentry. In particular, she writes that such an analysis would force historians to consider the strength of ties between members of the gentry, question which of these had real meaning at the time, and assess the

\(^9\) ‘network, n. and adj.’, OED Online (OUP, March 2015), [accessed 3 April 2015].
\(^{10}\) ‘social, adj. and n.’, OED Online (OUP, March 2015), [accessed 3 April 2015].
\(^{11}\) Ibid.
levels of mutual trust that they prompted.\textsuperscript{13} Other scholars adopt a similar kind of prosopographical approach in their research; for example, tracing witness names in charters and wills, or examining particular ‘factions’ at court. In this vein, notable examples include Simon Payling’s consideration of the political and economic ties of the greater gentry in late medieval Nottinghamshire, and David Carpenter’s discussion of the eruption of factions in Henry III’s court.\textsuperscript{14} These scholars, along with several others, seek to reconstruct aspects of late medieval political networks in a bid to understand their workings more comprehensively. My work further nuances this approach in two key ways: it examines networks in other spheres besides the political, and also seeks to discover why individuals are particularly drawn to more peripheral social structures.

One recent work which lays further foundations for this kind of approach is the collaborative collection of essays \textit{Cities, Texts and Social Networks}, 400-1500.\textsuperscript{15} In it, Carol Symes echoes another principle that emerged in the work of those political historians discussed above, arguing in favour of a historical continuum between the medieval and the modern, discrediting a more stringent sense of historical periodization which has, at times, ‘affected the interpretation of historical facts’.\textsuperscript{16} The continuum to which she refers is one of individual agency, and she criticises scholars who still hold that ‘most medieval people lacked agency, intellectual curiosity, the ability for formulating opinions, or even opportunities for self-expression’. Instead, Symes proposes that ‘the people who shaped the medieval public sphere were [...] active participants in the making of meaning’.\textsuperscript{17} Rosemary Horrox presented the same argument in the conclusion to a collection of essays on the social history of England from 1200 – 1500, noting that none of the contributors were ‘in the business of trying to identify some medieval/modern divide’ when it came to social awareness.\textsuperscript{18} This appreciation of agency in the medieval urban population allows

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item [\textsuperscript{13}] \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 366-7.
  \item [\textsuperscript{15}] Caroline Goodson, Anne E. Lester, and Carol Symes, \textit{Cities, Texts and Social Networks}, 400-1500: \textit{Experiences and Perceptions of Medieval Urban Space} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p. 301.
  \item [\textsuperscript{16}] Carol Symes, ‘Out in the Open, in Arras: Sightlines, Soundscape, and the Shaping of a Medieval Public Sphere, in Goodson and others, eds, \textit{Cities, Texts, and Social Networks}, p. 301.
  \item [\textsuperscript{17}] \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 301-2.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Symes’ and her collaborators to present a reconstruction of contemporary society as produced by human interactions and their resulting networks, rather than through finite political hegemony or legal pronouncements, as had previously been argued by others.\textsuperscript{19} While this work paves the way to a fruitful new methodological approach involving networks, and thus begins to reconcile a hitherto under-exploited academic opportunity, none of the included essays focuses on specific networks. Rather, this (undoubtedly solid) consideration of networks serves more as a framing device for wider discussion on medieval experiences and perceptions of urban spaces.

A more frequently explored concept within the field of medieval studies, and one with close theoretical links to networks, is that of community. In his pioneering work of 1983, \textit{The Implications of Literacy}, Brian Stock first introduced the model of textual communities.\textsuperscript{20} Focusing on an examination of eleventh- and twelfth-century outbreaks of heresy, Stock charted how new interpretations of sacred texts prompted new social communities to emerge in a society which was still split between traditions of orality and a revitalised and rapidly spreading reliance on literacy. The sacred texts in question served both as a bridge between these two aspects of society and also as the foundations of emergent communities. As literate intellectuals (who would soon after be painted as heretical leaders) provided new interpretations of scripture for the illiterate, who enthusiastically adopted them, a sense of social enfranchisement, which was incompatible with traditional lines of authority, built up, and thus new community factions developed. Although this is a highly useful and innovative reading of a historical moment, it places the contemporary triggers of these communities, and the subsequent implications of their presence in society, at the heart of analysis, as opposed to the establishment, organisation, and workings of the networked structures themselves.

Similarly, 2011 saw the publication of an edited collection in honour of scholar Mark Davies’s career, which focuses on historical instances of intellectual communities and partnerships.\textsuperscript{21} In the collection, contributors explore the collaborative nature of intellectual pursuits within the humanities: one of the defining

\textsuperscript{19} Goodson, Lester, and Symes, \textit{Cities, Texts and Social Networks}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Intellectual Communities and Partnerships in Italy and Europe}, ed. by Danielle Hipkins (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012).
features of Davies’s research. Instances of ego-centric communities (that is, groupings of people who form around a particular person or people) are charted across the period studied: from the end of the medieval era through to the nineteenth century. The concept of ego-centric networks is further explored below. These communities all had foundations in the dialogue, collaboration, and partnerships forged among educated circles, and the resulting relationships which built up between these individuals. While a useful broader approach for its acknowledgement that it is relationships that build communities, and therefore networks, it is only the first essay, dealing with an ‘anti-astrological brotherhood’ in fifteenth-century Italy, which lies within the medieval timeframe. In a similar way to Stock’s textual communities, analysis focuses far more on the intellectual output and content of the communities studied. The current thesis, however, is primarily concerned with the more deep-rooted structures and attractions of networks as historical phenomena.

As such, while the analysis over the following chapters undeniably engages with the principles of individual agency and groupings built on the resulting interpersonal relationships presented in works such as those considered above, the foundations of my analysis are orientated firmly around the concept of network, and people’s experiences of it. While the case studies considered are all literary in nature, and so call for literary analysis, I also draw on my training as a social historian throughout the thesis. This blend of literary analysis and historical examination ensures that the evidence is considered sympathetically, and in a way which never loses sight of the individuals involved, each of whom had their own personal motivations, aspirations, and fears as human beings. As a result, this thesis also incorporates theoretical elements from the schools of social psychology, anthropology, and sociology, and it is within the third of these that a methodological paradigm already exists which places the notion of social network at the heart of inquiry: social network analysis.

Social Network Analysis

If using social networks as grounding for research and analysis in the humanities is currently somewhat uncommon, then the use of social network

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22 This approach is in part inspired by the work of, among others, Janet Nelson, who across her career has encouraged scholars to read documents not simply as faceless data-providers, but instead as the output of a working society of individuals. For instance, see ‘Crisis of Authority’.
analysis as a principle is positively rare. A paradigm of constantly increasing influence in sociology, SNA has evolved into the form in which it is known today over the course of the last century. While the exact moment the notion of ‘social network’ first came into use among researchers of social structure is unclear, it was in the 1930s that researchers and theorists began to adopt the established ideas of structural thinking in their work. This was particularly noticeable in German sociology, with leading figures such as Simmel beginning to emphasise the formal properties of social relations (as noted above). A new vocabulary was pioneered to describe these relations, with studies referring to points, lines, and connections in their descriptions and analyses of the social structure. These ideas went on to influence many of the central figures in sociology across the 1940s and 1950s.

A significant development came in the 1950s as researchers at the University of Manchester sought to recognise the concepts of conflict and division in their work, and in doing so challenged the traditional sociological emphasis on harmony and accord in networks. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s American researchers began to refine SNA further by promoting more algebraic models for representing and analysing structures. SNA placed graph theory firmly at its heart, a theory arguably pioneered by Leonhard Euler in the eighteenth century which allows networks of any sort to be represented as a graph comprised of points and lines. In social network analysis, then, the points represent individuals or other social actors, with the lines connecting them representative of their particular relationships. By the 1970s SNA was beginning to become widely used in specific areas; for instance, many American researchers began using it to explore the power and influence of the banking sector in the corporate world. Later in the 1970s attention was turned to the examination of community structures, a move which helped revise long-held attitudes of

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26 On which, see: Frank Harary, *Graph Theory* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969).
communities as forged according to geographical area to ones built around personal relationships.\textsuperscript{27}

In more recent years, SNA has been used to analyse everything from political networks and social movements, to criminality and terrorism. In the 1990s and 2000s, proponents placed a particular focus on the relationship between individual agency and the structural features of social networks. Around this time SNA was also meaningfully adopted by a cluster of researchers outside of sociology for the first time: physicists. Not only did this prompt a wider interest in network analysis (particularly in the wake of the World Wide Web’s inception), but it also saw these physicists’ study of network dynamics and change over time feed back into more sociological applications of the model.\textsuperscript{28} Today, SNA represents an entire scientific community, with a traceable intellectual lineage, and a functioning institution which publishes journals, textbooks, and dedicated computer software to aid researchers in their work.\textsuperscript{29} The question now becomes how exactly such a mathematically focused and data-rich model of analysis can be of use in the present thesis exploring networks from a distinctly humanities perspective.

While the algebraic analysis of vast data groups in which SNA usually deals is evidently not best suited to the often scantly-evidenced Middle Ages, the core principles of this analytic perspective are. As Peter Carrington and John Scott astutely note in their handbook on social network analysis, it is ‘neither a theory nor a methodology. Rather, it is a perspective or a paradigm’.\textsuperscript{30} Accordingly, it is built upon the understanding that social life is created primarily by relations between people, and the patterns which they form. This approach has two fundamental advantages for projects such as the current one: it encourages researchers to consider networks as the result of relational causation, as opposed to being more spontaneous groupings of individuals, and also recognises the differing levels of internal commitment and external influence at play in any one network. Both of these principles allow existing debates, including those to be explored throughout the

\textsuperscript{27} For an example, see: Barry Wellman, ‘The community question: The intimate networks of East Yorkers’, American Journal of Sociology 84 (1979), 1201-31.
\textsuperscript{29} For more on the evolution of social network analysis, see the comprehensive introductory chapter to: The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis, ed. by Peter J. Carrington and John Scott, (London: Sage, 2011), pp. 1-8.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 22.
thesis, to be reconceptualised, meaning more complex conclusions can ultimately be reached. A more detailed explanation of these principles is thus of benefit, before a demonstration of how exactly networks are defined using social network analysis.

A crucial differentiation to make when qualifying the benefits of SNA is that between ‘group’ and ‘social network’. A group can be defined by a particular attribute (for instance, men, Conservatives, football players) or as a recognisable collection of individuals in a physical space (for instance, all the individuals in the same shop at a precise given moment). A social network is different: while it similarly involves a collection of people, by contrast it additionally includes a specific set of connections between the people in this group. So, while all men, or all the shop’s customers, form a group with no links besides these arbitrary attributes, those in a social network are linked by something specific which deeply defines their relationship. These ties, and the patterns which they form, are more important than the individuals involved, as it is these ties which allow networks to achieve things and behave in ways that disconnected individuals simply cannot. It is in this way that social structures are formed: through networks. This understanding is what allows social network analysts to argue that causation is located not within the attributes of individuals, but rather in the social structure itself. In other words, instead of suggesting that people who act similarly do so as a result of their possession of common attributes, SNA shows that these attributes are themselves a result of their similar positions in the social structure. Attributes develop in response to the constraints, opportunities, and perceptions created by these similar positions.

The second key feature of SNA is its recognition of the heterogeneity of networks. That is, that networks never operate in isolation, no two are identical, and nor is the experience of each member of a particular network ever the same. Members of networks are rarely, if ever, solely affiliated with that one network. While seemingly obvious, this is an important statement to make when considering historical networks in particular. When using evidence to chart a specific network, it grants the reader and researcher a continued awareness that the current case study was not an individual’s sole purpose in society. They would also have been part of

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other, perhaps interconnecting, networks. As well as fighting the oversimplification of intertwining networks, SNA also maintains the internal complexities of individual networks. Crucially, certain members are more or less committed than others, and as a result are seen as more or less of a valuable asset to the network by its other members. Similarly, entire networks enjoy varying levels of productivity: the formation of a network alone does not guarantee the 'greater than the sum of our parts' mentality described above. Some networks are more cohesive than others, some are more welcoming than others, and some are quicker to expel erring members than others. Social network analysis, by placing its emphasis on network relations and their resulting structures, encourages researchers to consider all of these variables usefully.

The more nuanced appreciation of social networks' unique natures offered by social network analysis, along with its recognition that individuals within them experience different levels of commitment and are not exclusively associated with a single network, are the two elements at the heart of the following analysis of historical social moments. However, not only does SNA provide these principles, it also provides a concrete language for defining and modelling these networks and their boundaries. It does this through nodes and relations. ‘Node’ is the term given to the individual social entities which make up a network, that is, the people who make up its membership. Nodes can be selected for analysis on the basis of position, event, or relation, or most commonly using a combination of these. The relations are the social links between these nodes which make up the social network. Generally, these relations can be defined according to four categories: similarities, social relations, interactions, and flow.³³ This process of defining nodes and relations is expanded upon below when social network analysis’ specific place in defining the case studies to be examined is defined.

Social Network Analysis in the Humanities and the Current Thesis

Some attempts have already been made to exploit the benefits of this analytical perspective in studies grounded in the humanities. One particularly encouraging demonstration of such a deployment can be found in the 2014 work

³³ Ibid., p. 12.
Social Networks and Music Worlds. The editors acknowledge from the outset that this kind of analysis is still at an ‘emergent state’ within the wider humanities, but the work proceeds to provide evidence of some crucial benefits available to researchers willing to engage with social network analysis. Following an introductory chapter which details the founding principles of the methodology, a collection of contributor essays covers case studies from francophone rap music to the links between social class and musical taste in contemporary England. Across these essays, various advantages of SNA are visible: it is used as a comparative lens, it negotiates well with other approaches (including qualitative and statistical analysis), it proves useful for considering both formalised and non-formalised networks, and it reveals how networks can be understood as inherently creative and productive structures. All of the contributing essays deal with networks from recent years, and so most have access to full and detailed records. That being so, while it presents several promising advantages, the wider study does demonstrate the need for as full a dataset as possible for pure SNA to prove truly effective.

Where SNA has been deployed in the sphere of medieval studies, success and external reaction has been more mixed, even when there are uncommonly detailed datasets. Perhaps the most widely cited medieval instance of this approach in wider scholarship is John Padgett and Christopher Ansell’s 1993 article ‘Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici’. The study was possible thanks to the extensive nature of the surviving records pertaining to Renaissance Florence. Padgett and Ansell sought to appraise how exactly it was that the Medici came to power in the wake of the 1378 Ciompi Revolt, despite the presence of a powerful oligarchy which had taken control of the city. Where other researchers had previously sought explicit advantageous strategies deployed by the Medici across this period, Padgett and Ansell considered networks as strategies, astutely noting that at any one moment there would have been any number of potential new network links and formations available to the Medici, not merely the ones which ended up being recorded. Their analysis thus centres on a network in which the nodes are the powerful families of contemporary Florence, since families formed such influential economic and political

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34 Social Networks and Music Worlds, ed. by Nick Crossley, Siobhan McAndrew, and Paul Widdop (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).
35 Ibid., pp. 1-13; 40-88; 104-21; 145-64.
unities. The selected attributes of these nodes which Padgett and Ansell choose to focus on are net wealth, the number of seats each family held on the council, and the number of active business and marriage relations to other nodes. Through the resulting social network analysis it is shown how, although ostracised in the late fourteenth century, the Medici subsequently formed political, marital, and mercantile ties to families outside of the sprawling and unorganised ruling oligarchy. As a result, they formed a smaller, yet ultimately tighter and stronger, spoke-like network which allowed them successfully to enact far swifter and more coherent action during the fiscal and political turmoil of the early fifteenth century.\(^{37}\) This study, an encouragingly novel deployment of SNA in medieval studies that has been well-received in wider scholarship,\(^{38}\) further reinforces some of the fundamental principles regarding the analysis of social networks: that there is always the potential for shifts in their structure, and that there are multiple layers of influence and membership to be found within them.

A less frequently discussed and more cautiously received study was *Commercial Agreements and Social Dynamics in Medieval Genoa*, a 2009 work by Quentin Van Doosselaere.\(^{39}\) Doosselaere’s book is firmly grounded in the realm of economic history, and adds to the wider academic discourse questioning how society evolved from its feudal roots to a more capitalistic economy. The study charts Genoese traders’ tendencies to sail where they knew that they could count on an established social network.\(^{40}\) Ego networks — that is, networks which have at their centre a particular person — are also used as a means to examine the credit networks established by these traders, for instance that of Martino de Albaro. This analysis confirms that those who were better connected held the strongest positions in such networks, and that ‘those receiving and extending credit had longer careers’.\(^{41}\) Doosselaere uses the SNA software UNICET’s algorithms to demonstrate the strength of this core class. While the presentation and interpretation of concrete data is universally praised by reviewers, and the likelihood of it prompting further research in the area is applauded, the need to keep case studies of this kind focused

\(^{39}\) Quentin van Doosselaere, *Commercial Agreements and Social Dynamics in Medieval Genoa* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).
\(^{40}\) Doosselaere, *Medieval Genoa*, p. 78.
\(^{41}\) Ibib., pp. 143-4.
also emerges. One reviewer describes his ‘lingering concerns over the author’s efforts to identify structural features of these networks, such as cohesiveness and family centrality, when he repeatedly insists these are sample data, the representativeness of which is near impossible to assess’.\footnote{Paul D. McLean, ‘Book Review: Commercial Agreements and Social Dynamics in Medieval Genoa by Quentin Van Doosselaere’, \textit{American Journal of Sociology} 116 (2010), 307-9 (p. 309).} This is true, and serves as a clear reminder of the need to outline precisely how far specific case studies can be seen as representative of wider network trends.

One final project of note here is ongoing at King’s College London, and it seeks to use SNA on the considerably detailed ‘People of Medieval Scotland’ database. This database comprises over 8,600 contemporary documents from 1093 – 1314, including 6,014 charters which bear witness to 15,000 people and institutions. With more narrative sources, such as those which survive for England and France, scant for Scotland, this collection of data represents the most vital resource for studying Scottish history across this period.\footnote{Matthew Hammond, ‘Introduction: The Paradox of Medieval Scotland, 1093-1286’, in \textit{New Perspectives on Medieval Scotland, 1093-1286}, ed. by Matthew Hammond (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press2013), pp. 1-52 (p. 7).} The project’s researchers, Cornell Jackson and Matthew Hammond, are analysing a combination of ego-networks and two-mode networks (which here plot both charters and their witnesses) in a bid to understand the role which social networks played among the contemporary Scottish elite.\footnote{‘Use of Social Network Analysis to Explore the People of Medieval Scotland’, \textit{Digital Humanities Congress} (2014) <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/dhc/paper/22> [accessed 22 July 2015].} The project has already made some noteworthy findings through this deployment of social network analysis. Duncan II Earl of Fife, for instance, although already known to historians, has now been shown to have held a far more central role in charter witnessing than was previously thought, witnessing the second highest number of charters and having the highest number of co-witnesses ‘by far’. This analysis alone has not, however, been able to explain why it was that he held such a prominent role. Through plotting the network of all those nodes who witnessed more than twenty charters, the researchers have been able to reveal a timeline of geographical concentrations and norm-sharing cliques. Finally, the central role that the royal courts played in the diffusion of Scottish regal sicut clause innovations has also been uncovered. This is another promising study, although at this early stage it appears that some of the findings reported here would
benefit further from a combination of SNA and a more traditional form of examination.

This concise appraisal of humanities studies which have already attempted to incorporate SNA into their approaches demonstrates that the methodology can prove fruitful in the discipline. New and thought-provoking conclusions have been reached from existing source bodies, and the advantages of combining network analysis with other forms of analysis, using it for comparative purposes, and its justified acknowledgement of networks’ fluid and productive natures all signal that it is of great potential benefit. These benefits have yet to be sought in any form of literature study, however. This is largely due to the importance of detailed data sets for pure social network analysis, visible both in the success of those which have access to them, and in the pitfalls of those which do not. Questions of representativeness also abound, although it is fair to note that this is so often the case in any kind of medieval analysis engaging with limited sources. My study therefore is not presented as an exercise in full social network analysis. Rather, it recognises its core research values and incorporates them into a theoretical framework built upon more traditional means of literary and historical analysis. Heeding the warnings of those medieval studies already published, these case studies are also not heralded as fully representative of the wider network typologies defined below; instead, they are closely considered examples of these typologies.

In this way, my analysis of social networks across both periods willingly acknowledges that the following case studies are exactly that: snapshots of networks not operating in isolation. Other networks exist in parallel, and members of one are equally often members in them. Notably, the examples considered across this thesis are all somewhat peripheral in nature, in that they are not their members’ primary means of association. This raises further research questions around what these non-essential networks offer their members that more professional or kin-based iterations cannot. In an attempt to address such questions, emphasis is placed on the interactions between the nodes of a network as a means of conceptualising social life. In this way, both the importance of social ties and the subsequently enduring human drive to form them are historically contextualised.
All of the networks studied across this thesis are populated by human nodes. In defining each network, its nodes are identified through a combination of their social positions and relations to historical events. The principal medieval networks considered all enjoyed some form of literary aspect, and as a result either formed around particular cultural moments or groups of similarly positioned people with common intentions. The more modern networks, including the eighteenth-century Kit-Cat Club, while not always as literary-focused in their motivations, share this kind of collaborative social formation. The nodes in all of these creative literary networks are predominantly linked by relationships of interaction and flow. This continuum of exchange is made up of transfers of information in several guises, including social conversation, evolving thematic tropes, and overt competition. It is this kind of flow that produces the literature and cultural ideals which form the primary evidence examined across this thesis. It is often important to note the directional flow of these relationships, that is, whether information passes one way or both ways between specified nodes. Such a consideration proves particularly significant in the fourth chapter, as the sprawling nature of some modern social networks impacts how information flows through them. Toward the beginning of each case study, the network under scrutiny is defined in the terms outlined here, ensuring analytical continuity.

Here, then, is the investigative framework built around the concept of social network which is used to examine the literary social networks of late medieval France and England alongside modern-day counterparts. The framework allows analysis to concentrate firmly on the two key aims of this project. Its founding principles focused on social interactions and multi-layered network engagement allow historical moments to be reframed as reflections of the wider cultural spaces and times in which they formed. The lens of ‘network’ thus provides a more nuanced understanding of these historical moments than would otherwise be available. Second, its uniform analytical vocabulary facilitates the meaningful comparison of these networks, and allows us to gauge whether there is an overarching socio-psychological continuum which continues to encourage people to join these more peripheral social networks.

Categories of Network
Now that a means of defining and analysing individual networks is in place, it is important for comparative purposes to be able to categorise them more broadly. As such, there are three essential forms of social network which I have identified, that is, three categories into which historical instances of social network can be sorted: formal, informal, and virtual. These classifications are not completely inflexible; for instance, some networks defined primarily as informal may have some attributes which fit the formal template, and, as is seen in chapter three, virtual networks often draw largely on formal models for inspiration. However, they are a useful means of organising, defining, and comparing the networks to be considered across this thesis, and ultimately all instances of network will fall into one of the categories of this tripartite paradigm.

The terms ‘formal network’, ‘informal network’, and ‘virtual network’ do currently exist in some scholarly circles, however, they do not refer to the particular concepts for which I use them in the present study. Formal and informal networks are used in communication studies, wherein formal examples are structured and regulated ways of disseminating information, such as a company’s internal hierarchical mail system, while informal networks are those which most would refer to as ‘the grapevine’: non-structured communication between individuals on a non-official basis.⁴⁵ While I draw slightly on these definitions with regard to how ‘official’ a network appears, I propose my own definitions more applicable to the current focus on structure and form of a network, as opposed to purely informational flow. ‘Virtual network’ also exists as a specific term, here in the field of computing. Virtual networking refers to a technology that facilitates the control of remotely located computers or servers over the internet.⁴⁶ Clearly this has far less use in a study which examines medieval instances of network, so again I provide my own more universal definition, one which is not confined to modern technology.

Formal networks are the most explicitly acknowledged kind of network, and will often be openly referred to by members and non-members in those or equivalent terms. The dictionary definition of formal as ‘done or made with the forms recognised as ensuing validity; explicit and definite, as opposed to what is matter of tacit

understanding’, is here illuminating. As such, all the nodes comprising the network agree to join on explicit and regulated terms, which usually involve some form of promise, bond, or other documented means of registration. The period of membership often has a finite timescale placed upon it, or it is anticipated that the network will survive into perpetuity. Whichever is the case, this timescale is again explicitly stated and made known to all members. Formal networks generally operate on a tightly defined hierarchical basis, with levels and positions of increasing authority available, meaning that different nodes may enjoy more or less influence within the network. Formal networks, then, are those which are openly self-defining as networks, adhere to a rigid, usually hierarchical, structure, and promote a sense of mutual obligation among their component nodes. Examples in the medieval world would include the Cistercian monasteries of the high middle ages, with their enforced entry vows of celibacy and obedience, and hierarchy of positions including abbots, priors, and brothers, while the two hundred thousand plus members of the Women’s Institute make up an impressive instance of a modern-day formal network.

Informal networks represent a far less official coming together of nodes, as the definition for informal suggests: ‘not done or made according to a recognised or prescribed form; not observing established procedures or rules; unofficial; irregular’. Accordingly, informal networks often do not refer to their collective selves as a network, and potentially may not even knowingly consider themselves one. There are often no prescribed entry requirements, as informal networks are far more likely to emerge spontaneously from particular moments or events. Where formal networks strive to impose a sense of equality or fixed hierarchy on their nodes, the internal relations of informal examples are generally more mercurial. The lack of any fixed hierarchy can make nodes all the more aware of, anxious about, and inclined to

negotiate with their perceived social status within the fluid network structure. The informal category covers the most diverse collection of networks, as there is no universal predetermined or expected value on membership numbers, output, goals, or anticipated period of activity. In contrast to their more finitely structured formal counterparts, informal networks are unofficial and fluid groupings, often spontaneous in their emergence, and do not knowingly adhere to any pre-defined structural template. Today, the general contributors to a particular online discussion forum board such as those found at Mumsnet could easily be categorised as nodes of an informal network, while the contributors to the Querelle de la Belle Dame sans mercy provide a medieval example of the same.

Virtual networks are the most difficult to define broadly, since there are no tangible relations made, nor physical records left of them ever having existed in society. Again, I draw on the definition of ‘virtual’ in my approach: ‘that is such in essence, potentiality, or effect, although not in form or actuality. In later use also: supposed, imagined’. Despite this intangibility, these networks do exist in some form in reality as more aspirational constructs seeking to emulate the structures of formal networks. Virtual networks are those charted and recorded in some way by individuals or groups, and they are thus created, if never physically established. A medieval instance of this kind of network would be the so-called Cour Amoureuse of 1400, considered at various points across this thesis, while the concept of fantasy football teams provides a corresponding modern point of reference, as players with no vocational connections in reality are brought together in a virtual team network.

In essence, a virtual network is to some extent an imagined network – constructed in

56 The official UK Premier League hosts a particularly popular example, ‘with over 3 million players’. ‘Fantasy Premier League’, *The Official Website of the Premier League* <http://fantasy.premierleague.com/> [accessed 2 October 2015].
principle by a person or collection of people, but never actually manifesting in the real world. Were they to manifest in reality, they would cease being virtual, instead becoming formal or informal networks. Here, then, is the tripartite model which frames the chapters of this thesis. Not only does it provide a coherent vocabulary with which to discuss the organisation of social networks, it also allows wider arguments to be made on the relative advantages and disadvantages of these differing social structures.

*The Perceived Benefits of Network Membership*

While social networks provide the fundamental analytical framework of this thesis, the discussion of each case study is built around three specific areas of interest: the human need to belong, the facilitation of competitive play, and the provision of cultural capital and enhanced social reputation. These are the key perceived benefits of network membership which emerge across my study, and they draw on the disciplines of sociology, socio-psychology, and anthropology. This being so, it would be beneficial to consider each in turn here to clarify the intertwining theories deployed across the following chapters.

*The Human Need to Belong*

Most sociology is founded on an assumption that individual humans have a need to belong, and to enjoy the social bonds and exchange that follow. This standpoint has been evaluated most convincingly and in most detail by social psychologists Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary, in their 1995 article ‘The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation’.\(^57\) Citing John Donne’s oft-quoted statement that ‘no [person] is an island’, Baumeister and Leary acknowledge that their hypothesis is not a new one, and instead move to evaluate it critically for the first time in the light of considerable empirical evidence. They succinctly define the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation ‘to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships’ which are built on ‘frequent, nonaversive interactions within an ongoing relational bond’.\(^58\) They proceed to argue that this need is characterised by two core aspects: that people seek to ‘form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting,
positive, and significant’ relationships, and that the ensuing interactions ‘take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other’s welfare’.\textsuperscript{59} This need stimulates goal-directed activity in order to satisfy it, and in the present study that activity manifests as the formation of, and subsequent participation in, social networks.

More recently, evolutionary anthropologist Sarah Hrdy argues in her 2009 work \textit{Mothers and Others} that an even deeper, emotional drive predicts a uniquely human kind of empathy and mutual understanding that she terms ‘hypersociality’. Building her hypothesis around the prevalence of alloparents (someone of either sex who contributes to the upbringing of someone else’s offspring) in human societies, Hrdy posits that the level of social trust displayed by a mother through engaging in this form of co-operative offspring raising reveals a level of trust in others’ benevolence only seen in humans.\textsuperscript{60} Essentially, this reading of human behaviour (which draws from evidence from genetics, palaeontology of fossil record, and developmental psychology, among others) suggests that social support has been crucial to the wider human success story, and that compared to our closest primate relatives, humans are uniquely cooperative. This emotional inclination toward social cooperation and support may well be a founding influence on the psychological human need to belong, and certainly helps explain why people are drawn so universally to social network structures.

Returning to the need to belong, Baumeister and Leary cover substantial ground in their article, using existing observational studies to support the different aspects of their hypothesis. Some of these are of particular note here, as they can be seen in play in the case studies which make up the following chapters. They propose, for example, that for their case to be proven bonds should form relatively easily and not require any specific circumstances or prerequisites. Among the evidence cited is that of Leon Mann, who noted that every society on earth features people belonging to smaller primary groups involving face to face, personal interactions. Free from any geographical or cultural constraints, Mann argues, such

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Ibid.}
bond formation must be a universal motivation. This reasoning suggests that the need to belong does not derive from other needs, circumstances, or events, and so must be a fundamental component of the human psyche. Similarly, negative effects have been recorded in people who are deprived of a sense of belonging, indicating that it is indeed a need as opposed to a desire. Studies by Sheldon Cohen and Thomas Wills have shown that just being part of a supportive social network, even if that network doesn’t explicitly provide some kind of assistance, reduces stress, while Anita DeLongis and others demonstrated that married couples were less likely to experience health problems following stressful events than other, unmarried, subjects.

Furthermore, people have been shown to dedicate a considerable amount of cognitive processing to the formation of bonds, and are equally reluctant to break bonds once they are in place. Baumeister and Leary note that ‘intelligent thought is generally recognized as the most important adaptive trait among human beings’, and so it should follow that a need as strong as that to belong would demand sizeable cognitive processing. The medical- and memory-focused studies cited confirm that information related to relationships is indeed processed in a special way by the brain, perhaps even prompting a ‘cognitive merging of the self with particular other people’. This evidently points toward the need to belong being a deeply ingrained and highly specialised feature of human life. Intriguingly, Hrdy, in her evolutionary study, argues that a drive for social unity and cooperation even predates the development of such modern cognitive behaviours in humans. She suggests that our hominid ancestors became ‘emotionally modern’ before they migrated out of Africa sometime within the past 200,000 years. Although, as one reviewer of Hrdy’s work noted, this hypothesis is practically impossible to conclusively prove, it is convincingly argued, and adds evolutionary weight to the theory that humans are wired to form stable, cooperative social bonds as satisfaction of a need to belong.

64 Baumeister and Leary, ‘Need to Belong’, p.504.
65 Hrdy. Mothers and Others, pp. 77-11, 273-96.
The unwillingness to break these bonds similarly emphasises this need. In many recorded encounter and training groups, participants are documented as actively resisting the notion that the group will dissolve once the course has finished. For instance; they assure one another that they will continue meeting after the group’s actual purpose has been fulfilled. The fact that very few of these reunions actually come to fruition suggests that they are a natural resistance to the perceived threat of disbanding.66

Baumeister and Leary collect empirical evidence of this kind from several differing fields in support of their argument for the need to belong, and their cumulative findings indicate that such a need is indeed a fundamental motivation for human beings. As such, this motivation is something which can be considered throughout the case studies of this thesis as one of the key benefits which attract people to social networks. It is particularly prominent in both the statutes of the London Puy (chapter one) and the literary deployment of the flower and leaf motif (chapter three). This element of my analysis therefore fits into the wider scholarly discourse surrounding the need to belong. It also provides further evidence for Baumeister and Leary’s conclusions, as well as answering their call for similar evidence to be sought in other fields. For, as they note, as a fundamental motivation, the need to belong should ‘influence a broad range of human activity, and hence it should be capable of offering viable and consistent interpretations of patterns observed in historical, economic, or sociological studies’.67 By making it one of the three key investigative tools of this literary-historical thesis, I agree that this is the case.

Competitive Play

The second benefit to joining a social network uncovered through the examples considered across this thesis is their facilitation of competitive play. Just as social psychologists have studied the need to belong, anthropologists have long considered play (and by extension games) to be a key feature of human culture. The seminal works on the subject remain Johan Huizinga’s Homo Ludens, and Roger

Caillois’s *Les Jeux et Les Hommes.* Writing in 1938, in *Homo Ludens* Huizinga argues passionately and convincingly that play is a defining feature of human culture. He proposes that play does not need to serve some other purpose beyond the act of playing itself, as psychologists had posited, rather that the inherent and irrational ‘fun’ of play sets it aside as undeniable, seen as it is across species, continents, and centuries. Of particular note for the current thesis is Huizinga’s consideration of contest and winning, as he phrases it: ‘The pleasurable feeling of satisfaction mounts with spectators […] A person who gets a game of patience “out” is doubly delighted when somebody is watching him. In all games it is very important that the player should be able to boast of his success to others’.

This element of competition in play was also highlighted by Caillois in 1958. Disputing Huizinga’s assertion that all play activities could be assimilated into one form (the agôn, or competitive struggle), Caillois suggests that play in fact takes many forms, of which agôn is but one. Referring to games which require skill and strategy, he establishes agôn as the opposite to the Greek counterpoint concept of alea, which denotes games of pure chance. It is this sense of skilled, competitive play, which Huizinga first proposed and which Caillois later nuanced, which this thesis argues is one of the fundamental draws of social networks. As both also imply, the bragging rights which accompany victory are equally important, and this is something I consider below through the concepts of social capital and reputation.

This sense of play is especially pertinent to the poetics of the later medieval period, as has been demonstrated by several pioneering works in the field by Jane Taylor, Adrian Armstrong, and Emma Cayley. Across this period, in French circles particularly, the predominant literary form was a participatory poetics. In her study on Villon, Taylor states that ‘late medieval poetry draws its drive from what [she calls] a poetics of engagement: debate, response, provocation, competition’. Literary production was thus not solely an act of self-expression, rather, it was the result of a series of social relations which allowed poets to engage knowingly with and respond

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70 Ibid., pp.49-50.
to one another’s work. Cayley built upon this principle, and work by Armstrong, proposing a culture which she termed the ‘collaborative debating community’: a ‘productive and dynamic social entity’ which found its coherence in its written responses to other texts, and the subsequent material collections of those responses.⁷³ Most recently, Armstrong has argued that French poets between around 1420 and 1530 formed something of a ‘virtuous circle’, an economic term denoting ‘a cycle whose iteration reinforces the positive momentum of events’.⁷⁴ Literary competition and collaboration, Armstrong posits, fostered escalating innovation among the poets, resulting in an increase in the formal skill and technical intricacy ascribed to wider French poetry. In short, within the literary communities studied by these scholars the poetic output should not be seen as the work of a lone author, but rather the result of a wider collaborative effort. There are parallels which can immediately be drawn to modern social networks, which are more often than not open affairs, and prone to spawning collaborative memes which are developed and assigned meaning by the wider community.

This model of participatory poetics as encouraging a climate of collaboration and competition makes such literary sources as are considered in this thesis ripe for exploring the competitive play element of social networks. Largely, I do not approach the sources in the same manner as these previous studies have done; rather, I shift the focus onto the network structures themselves in an attempt to demonstrate exactly how they facilitated such competitive play. As proposed above, in doing so I am further able to explore these instances of competitive play from a new analytical standpoint. In short, this thesis does not explicitly set out to examine examples of formal and rule-bound games in the medieval or modern communities examined.⁷⁵ Rather, through its consideration of selected social networks, it reveals that they invariably facilitate this kind of competitive play (as is seen most clearly in chapters two and four). With play already established as a fundamental aspect of human culture, it therefore follows that this facilitation is one of the key perceived benefits of social networks which attracts people to them.

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⁷⁵ For instance, as in: *Games and Gaming in Medieval Literature*, ed. by Serina Patterson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
Cultural Capital and Social Reputation

While satisfaction of the need to belong and facilitation of competitive play were analytical points of interest from the very outset of this project, a third perceived benefit of joining social networks has emerged during research: the acquisition of cultural capital and social reputation by the nodes of those networks. The notions of social and cultural capital have been deployed in various forms by practitioners since its rise to prominence in the wake of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s seminal 1986 essay ‘The Forms of Capital’. Bourdieu argued for three main types of capital available to humans: economic, social, and cultural, later also adding symbolic capital. The current thesis follows Ludwig Lachman’s definition of capital as ‘in its most basic sense […] a set of assets capable of generating future benefits for at least some individuals’. The individuals here are the nodes of the social networks under examination, who have the opportunity to amass cultural capital and social reputation (as further defined below) to achieve their personal goals more easily.

Bourdieu proposed that capital manifests itself in three main forms: objectified, habitus, and embodied. Objectified capital is materially represented in physical objects in the real world. Embodied capital sees the key principles of a field incorporated into a person’s very being, as both principles of consciousness and physical behaviours. Habitus represents a middle ground between the two, as it does not have any physical existence in the world, rather incorporating attitudes and dispositions. To illustrate this using the circle of poets writing for Louis XII of chapter two, the objectified capital can be found in presentation manuscripts, printed editions, and public reading events; embodied capital manifests in the poets themselves as cultivated skill, taste, and the desire for recognition; while the habitus takes the forms of knowledge of the poetic canon, awareness of genres, and knowledge of the ‘rules of the game’. It is the notions of habitus and embodied capital which are most relevant to the current thesis, as these are the concepts which many social network members hope will see them progress in some fashion when successfully assimilated.

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In my consideration of the capital and reputation available to those who subscribe to social networks I draw on two different approaches. The first comes from James Coleman, who presents social capital as found within the structures of social groups. Coleman’s conception of capital suggests that closed networks are more likely to ‘generate incentives for cooperation, trust, and mutual support among their members’. If a node in a network does not act in this manner, then they run the risk of falling foul of sanctions from the other nodes, which then dramatically restricts their ability to continue acting productively within that network.\(^{79}\) In the following medieval case studies, centred on literary production as they are, it is cultural capital that is found in network structures in this way. For the poets at Louis XII’s court, were one to find himself isolated from the wider network of collaborative composition, he would have no platform to showcase his own skill, nor any means of tracking literary trends. As a result, he would have struggled considerably to continue contributing meaningfully to the exchange, and subsequently amass the cultural capital necessary to further his literary career.

The second approach is articulated by Nan Lin, who proposes that actors ‘are motivated by instrumental or expressive needs to engage with other actors in order to access these other actors’ resources for the purpose of gaining better outcomes’.\(^{80}\) In other words, nodes in a social network are on some level consciously aware of the mechanisms of indirect reciprocity playing out around them (as is seen in chapter one in particular). In my analysis, I further develop this particular notion of social capital. I propose that when joining a social network, the universal resource on offer is not necessarily linked to specific other nodes and the resources to which they have access, and so indirectly accessed in an explicit way by the new node. Rather, it is the broader respectability that being part of a recognisable group, or network structure, inherently brings with it. The nodes of the network thus perceive that their social reputation is enhanced through their choice to join. Essentially, not only does network membership enable a synergistic sharing of resources among nodes, it is also a resource for cultural capital in itself. This is something which the more aspirational virtual networks of the thesis demonstrate.

\(^{79}\) Detailed in: *Music Worlds*, ed. by Crossley et al., p.5.

The third perceived benefit to participation in a social network, that relating to capital, is therefore twofold. First, social networks offer cultural capital assets to members which are drawn from the particularities of that network’s exchange relations and the wider cultural space in which it is situated. This cultural capital, once amassed through participation, can then be translated into personal advantage in the node’s wider affairs. This personal advantage manifests in what I refer to as ‘social reputation’ across the thesis. Second, additional enhancement to a member’s social reputation is often available through the very association with a social network, and also his/her actions therein. As a result, the node’s social standing is elevated, especially in the eyes of other network insiders, but perhaps also those outside of that particular social structure.

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Across the case studies of this thesis analysis of the social networks involved is centred around an investigation of how far these three benefits to membership are perceived and fulfilled. Evidently, this is by no means an exhaustive list of the factors which attract people to forming and joining social networks. While other specifically contextual benefits are outlined where possible, there are inevitably additional strong draws on the network members of these case studies which are not considered here – peer pressure, or family ties, for instance. These, however, are far less tangible in the singular and inconsistent records of the medieval instances considered, and so would not be as useful for comparative purposes as the satisfaction of the need to belong, facilitation of competitive play, and provision of cultural capital and social reputation prove to be.

**Thesis Structure**

The primary analytical focus over the following chapters is, therefore, the concept of the social network. Working with the principles and language of social network analysis, each case study provides an opportunity to discuss how late medieval literary networks (c. 1380-1515) were structured and operated, and also what their perceived benefits were, that is, what fundamentally drew people to forming and joining them. From a methodological standpoint, the thesis demonstrates how studying historical cultural moments in this manner can offer new, fruitful interpretations. For analytical variety and in the interests of scope, case
studies are drawn from each of the three identified categories of network: formal, informal, and virtual. As discussed above, each of these case studies examines how far social networks provided their members with specific benefits, identified and drawn from a range of disciplines. To a greater or lesser extent, each of the networks under scrutiny satisfied the socio-psychological human need to belong, facilitated exchange through competitive play, and provided the opportunity to amass cultural capital and increase social reputations. These aspects combine to form the theoretical foundations of the project.

Chapter one examines the fourteenth-century London Puy, a formal medieval network. The nodes of this network have been selected by the event of the Puy’s formation. As such, these nodes are all literate members of London society who came together under oath to create a network which would not only entertain its members, but which it was hoped would raise London’s prestige, too. The relations which formed between these nodes can be defined mostly through interactions related to official Puy business, but there undoubtedly also would have been some element of kinship to them as bonds and alliances formed over time. The outcomes of this network were the annual Puy feast and *chant royal* contest, and also the *chants* themselves, though only one of these is known to have survived. My analysis attempts a theoretical reconstruction of the whole network, for while no details of specific membership are known, the statutes provide a clear account of the network’s hierarchy and structure. This is the only network considered here which is known ultimately to have fractured, and analysis considers why exactly this may have been. Through this consideration, the importance of capital and reputation for the nodes of the Puy network becomes starkly apparent.

The second chapter turns to an instance of informal network, that of the courtly poets writing for Louis XII during his conflict with Pope Julius II. The nodes of this network were identified in part by this event (the king’s ongoing dispute with Julius), but also by position, since they were all necessarily socially placed close to the king (or to someone who was) at the time. The relations which formed were primarily of flow, as literary motifs and trends were adopted and re-energised by the participating poets. However, there must also have been an element of interaction, and, as is seen, pre-existing kinship relations also played their part. The outcome of this network was the literary exchange which it facilitated, and thus also the final
pieces of poetry that were produced. The cross-section of the network which I explore could be seen as an ego-network centred on Louis himself, since all the pieces were directed at him. However, since he was not an active participant in its productive nature, it is better described as an ego-network stemming from Jean d’Auton, author of the piece which prompted this literary exchange. The wider whole network of poets writing for Louis is also referred to, and it is one dominated by the facilitation of competitive play.

The final medieval chapter presents two kinds of network. While the focus is on the virtual networks of flower and leaf created by four poets across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these poets themselves constitute an informal network akin to that described in chapter two. The main avenues for exploration, though, are the dual virtual networks of flower and leaf. The nodes here are identified purely through the constructed event of selecting either the flower or the leaf for some kind of courtly team game. The relations which arise from this formation are largely based around the flow of playful exchange which follows, and the interaction which encourages this. The scope of this network is a little harder to quantify. In some ways each instance is a whole network, albeit a temporary one, as in each piece all those who side with either motif are noted. However, if all the compositions are taken together, as they are in the chapter, these individual moments of network formation become ego-networks, which in turn form part of a wider transhistorical whole network of anyone who at one time or other is said to have held with the flower or the leaf. In this respect, both Charles d’Orléans and the Knights of the Round Table are both part of the whole leaf network at different moments, as both are assigned it in different compositions, and the implications of this are discussed. In considering these networks, the strong impact of the human need to belong is brought to the fore.

The fourth chapter of this thesis represents something of a departure from the norm. Thanks to the interdisciplinary nature of its methodology, the uniform means of interpretation offered by social network analysis, and the work I have undertaken in the modern creative heritage sector, an opportunity to compare the medieval meaningfully with the modern presents itself. Building upon the principles of social networks discussed across the preceding medieval-focused case studies, the final chapter questions how far a continuum is visible between medieval and modern-day
network structures of this kind. The continuities and disruptions of this continuum are examined, with particular attention paid to the perceived benefits of network membership, the applicability of my network categorisations, and the internal operations of today’s networks facilitated by computer mediated communication. The existence of this continuum is further emphasised with a succinct examination of the eighteenth-century Kit Cat Club, a Whig drinking association which forms the content basis of the digital prototype that accompanies this thesis (see appendix A). The chapter concludes with an evaluation of internet trolling, a practice seemingly alien to the medieval networks which the thesis considers, but one which in fact represents the principles behind social networking pushed to their extremes.

In this way, the thesis aims to address two overarching themes. First, the methodological benefits of studying historical moments through the lens of social networks are assessed, and second, an argument is made for the presence of a continuum of social-networking principles from the medieval period through to the present day. A combination of historical research and literary analysis, framed through theoretical principles drawn from the disciplines of sociology, social psychology, and anthropology, sits alongside the experiences of working with a modern cultural institution to form this exploration of social networks in later medieval France and England, and suggests how far they can be aligned with corresponding manifestations today.
Chapter One

A Formal Network: The London Puy in its Cultural Context

Et le jour dou siege, ne doit nuls ester en la compagnie, manger, ne demorer, ne oier chaunter, sil ne soit de la compagnie.¹

(And on the day of the great sitting, none may be or stay in the company, nor eat, nor hear the singing, if they are not part of the company.)

So reads one of the first statutes laid down by the organisers of the London Puy in the late thirteenth century. Not only does it concisely hint at the practicalities to be considered in establishing a regular social gathering of this kind, but it also touches on the strongly-enforced exclusive nature of the Puy’s network. This chapter examines the first type of network to be considered within the thesis: the formal. This is the manifestation of network which actively advertises itself to the wider world thus, as a clear and distinct group of people, who are joined together in an identifiable network organised by precisely defined motives, rules, and purposes (such as the statutes quoted from above). Analysis reveals that these networks were, to a considerable extent, a manifestation of the human need to belong, considered in the introduction, of late medieval society. The late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century statutes of the London Puy provide a rich example of one such network, allowing access to both the aspirations and the practicalities of establishing a formal city-based network through two successive sets of regulations. Puys were literary contests held by societies established to promote religious devotion alongside poetic competition. An introduction to the concepts of this medieval phenomenon illustrates how they functioned as social networks. Related formal poetic organisations (the Consistori de la sobregaia companhia del gay saber of Toulouse, and Charles VI’s shadowy Cour Amoureuse) are also included to provide as complete a picture as possible.

When examined in the context of their potential antecedent and contemporary influences, the statutes of the London Puy illuminate exactly what it was the Puy’s members were hoping to gain from their membership. The chapter then draws to a close with a close reading of the Puy’s statutes, paying particular attention to the type of language used, the differences in tone between the two sets, and the themes of tangibility, tradition, homosociality, and reality. When brought together, this analysis not only provides an informative view on the notion and practicalities of a formal medieval network, and how it sought to sate the intrinsic human desire for interaction, but also demonstrates the advantages of studying a cultural moment such as the Puy through the methodological lens of “network”.

**Guilds and Confraternities**

There are few detailed modern surveys of competitive literary pucs available in the English language, so it would be beneficial to open this chapter with a concise but informed survey of their history and common characteristics. This in turn helps to bring to the fore the principal themes which inform the ensuing discussion of formal networks. Guilds and confraternities are two manifestations of social organisation which deserve to be highlighted when discussing the emergence of the pucs, not because they provide a distinct trajectory of antecedents, but rather because of their shared components and structures – especially compelling in the confraternities.

While each term encompasses a wide range of contemporary definitions, a necessarily simplified overview of each reveals distinct foundations of these formal medieval networks. Guilds were primarily economic associations which sought to regulate particular professions and trades. They developed around the later twelfth century, with some scholars citing Frankish drinking associations and Carolingian caritases as their loose predecessors. Guilds fell into three main categories: craft (for the various productive workers of a city), merchant (the earliest guilds were for

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traders, who were often also money lenders and landowners), and professional (for those with academic or equivalent qualifications, such as judges and physicians). While differences in politics, regions, and economic conditions essentially meant no two guilds were the same, they tended to operate with the same aims: regulating training and entry, working conditions, competition, and relations with the wider civic community. Membership was a matter of choice, but it afforded the protection of the formalised guild network: a financial membership fee enforceable through Church courts, along with subsequent adherence to the guild’s statutes, allowed access to an organisation which not only helped protect one’s economic interests, but also provided forums for social interaction such as the annual feast. There were also spiritual aspects to guild life, with Steven Epstein noting 'no medieval guild was devoid of religious or charitable concerns'. He goes further, suggesting that while economic prosperity was the primary goal of the guilds, they also shared the same spiritual care for their members as confraternities did, summarising: ‘virtually every guild was also a confraternity but […] many of the latter were purely religious associations.

That being so, what defined a confraternity? As indicated above, confraternities were formalised religious networks organised and administered by lay, but with the support of clerical, men and women, intended to foster spiritual piety and wellbeing. Confraternities first appear in narrative evidence in the eighth and ninth centuries, with statutes and charters surviving from the tenth. These pious organisations were centered on the local church, and the cult of its patron saint, and are recorded as going by various names: consortio (consortia), fraternitas (fraternities), religio (rules), caritas (charities), and even gilda (guilds). Sarah Hamilton cites their key principles as ‘charity, prayer, and almsgiving’, with a particular emphasis on prayers for those members who had died. These prayers would be undertaken by all members of the confraternity according to their ability, an

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5 Ibid., p. 974.
act which helped to foster ‘social ties not just in this life, but with those in the next’. There were also statutes which encouraged shared hospitality, for instance at the annual feast (a common feature emerging across these formal networks) each member had to contribute to both the candle used for the Mass, and the food and drink to be consumed. Fines could even be enforced on confraternity members if the beer was not up to scratch, or if they insulted other members. As is seen below, it is from these voluntary networks, seeking to promote both personal and shared piety among their members, that the puys would emerge.

Both guilds and confraternities share key elements of the formal networks considered in this chapter: clearly defined entrance conditions, regular meetings for members, shared obligations to be respected, and clear advantages for the individual. In guilds, these advantages were economic and political, while confraternities offered more spiritual, religious rewards. Although it is not the case that modern-day trade unions emerged as a natural successor to medieval guilds, it is impossible not to register the similarities. Today in the United Kingdom around six million people belong to some kind of formal trade union network, each with the intention of safeguarding the integrity and security of their chosen profession. These structures (in particular in their medieval manifestations) also serve to bring people together, providing a forum in which to form the crucial social bonds and relationships which are sought in such an intrinsic manner. Although the puys would emerge from the notion of confraternity, by the time the residents of London chose to establish their own, the primary objective had tellingly shifted well away from shared religious piety, to the formation of a network built around a feeling of social interaction and connection almost for its own sake.

The Continental Puys

The term ‘puy’ itself has a contentious history. The long-held view that ‘puy’ in relation to societies promoting poetry competitions originated thanks to the first example being held at a town named Le Puy has been discredited by scholars, in particular by Gérard Gros and Rosanna Brusegan, authors of the two principal works  

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on the Continental puys. Both note its etymology, stemming from the Latin *podium*, which itself came from the Greek.\textsuperscript{12} Gros charts the contemporary history of the word, and concludes that in the High Middle Ages it had come to have three key definitions: that of a stage, or platform; that of a literary gathering (particularly associated with the phrase ‘*prince du puy*’); and in a sense neighbouring that of the ‘Academy’. He continues to note that thanks to its Latin heritage, the word also carried a sense of technical reference and classical allusion which would have appealed to those adopting it.\textsuperscript{13}

Brusegan charts a somewhat different history for the term, turning her attention to the sphere of ecclesiastic architecture. Her research shows evidence of the term in relation to the raised area of a medieval church reserved for the altar and religious relics (particularly those relating to the cult of the Virgin, which would have so much influence on the puy organisations), and also the raised platform on which such relics could be paraded among the faithful, a means of raising them high so the public could better enjoy their healing qualities.\textsuperscript{14} Brusegan determines that the term ‘puy’ soon lost its original semantic meaning relating to the Marian tradition tied to ecclesiastic spaces, instead becoming ‘un fossile utilisé comme synonyme de confrérie consacrée à la Vierge’ (a fossil used as synonym for those confraternities dedicated to the Virgin).\textsuperscript{15} It would seem the precise linguistic route taken by this word to represent the puys discussed by scholars today lies in an amalgamation of these two proposals. As outlined below, the origins of the majority of French puys did indeed lie with *confréries* established explicitly to honour the Virgin, a kind of confraternity which would soon become synonymous with poetic contests. To these groups, a word such as ‘puy’ with its ecclesiastic, specifically Marian undertones, and also its clear allusion to the staging and platforms of classical performance, must have presented itself as a natural fit for the description of their annual contests.

It is worth noting that current agreement on what exactly ‘puy’ refers to is still somewhat unclear in modern scholarship. This is largely due to some of the later *confréries* to organise puys including the term in their names, such as ‘The Puy of the Immaculate Conception’ at Rouen, as the competitions increasingly became

\textsuperscript{12} Gros, *Prince du Puy*, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 26.
\textsuperscript{14} Brusegan, ‘Culte de la Vierge’, pp. 33-4.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 34.
such groups’ principal raison d’être. In this chapter I use ‘puy’ to refer to the annual literary competitions and festivals organised by these groups, as opposed to deploying it as an all-encompassing term for the group and its literary events, as some scholars do.\textsuperscript{16} This clarification will be particularly important when discussing the London Puy, as their self-identification appears to have been a particularly calculated and considered move.

In northern France the increasing trend of praising the Virgin Mary, alongside a wider twelfth- and thirteenth-century explosion in local religious cults centred on saintly relics, is something which Brusegan cites as crucial to the success of the puys. The confraternities which formed around these relic cults emerged on the one hand as part of ‘un vaste programme clérical de propagande religieuse’ (a vast clerical program of religious propaganda), but at the same time, the ‘nouvelles formes d’organisation municipale trouvent dans les confréries religieuses un terrain propice au développement des idéaux bourgeois’ (new forms of municipal organisation found in these religious confraternities provided fertile ground for the development of more bourgeois ideas).\textsuperscript{17} It was from this exciting climate of shared devotion and regular social gatherings that the carités and confraternities holding puys developed – for the most part this is how puys came to be, as a particular component of certain confraternities, however some later instances (such as London) focused entirely on facilitating puys, to the point of including the term in their names.

The earliest surviving concrete evidence of a puy takes the form of accounts documenting the foundation of the Confrérie des Jongleurs et des Bourgeois d’Arras composed in 1194, referring back to the days of Bishop Lambert (1093-1115).\textsuperscript{18} Although some twentieth-century scholars referred to puys beginning in southern France (for instance at the town of Le Puy, explaining the aforementioned etymological confusion)\textsuperscript{19}, it has since been shown that there is no evidence for this – the early puys were exclusively a northern French phenomenon. Established

\textsuperscript{16} Incidentally, this distinction supports Carol Symes’ theory that Arras’s puy was just one element of its wider carité, as opposed to a separate poetic body. See Carol Symes, \textit{A Common Stage: Theater and Public Life in Medieval Arras} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), pp. 217-8.
\textsuperscript{17} Brusegan, ‘Culte de la Vierge’, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{18} Symes, \textit{Common Stage}, p. 86.
around the turn of the twelfth century, the example at Arras is by far the most examined of the puys, in both French and English studies. This is likely due to the appealing combination of a well-documented origin story (in both Latin, and later the vernacular); surviving examples of poems and songs composed for the puy; and Arras’s own position as a fertile arena for literary production, thanks to its thriving economy and ensuing cultural boom.\(^{20}\)

The founding myth of the Conféérie which would spawn the Arras puy is typical of many others. It sees the Virgin Mary, having forewarned two feuding jongleurs, appear to the bishop one Sunday evening bearing a candle capable of curing those suffering from an outbreak of ergot poisoning, sometimes known as Saint Anthony’s Fire. Similarly, the Arras statutes read: ‘Et pour la remembrance de cest miracle, estabirent li jugleor une confrarrie et un charité…’ (And to maintain the memory of this miracle, the jongleurs established a confraternity and carité).\(^{21}\) According to legend the Puy de Rouen was also established in the Virgin’s honour around 1070, after she saved the lives of William the Conqueror and his crew as they were caught in a mighty storm at sea while returning from England.\(^{22}\) And in Valenciennes, according to the 1550 account of Louis de la Fontaine, Mary again performed a miraculous curing of the plague. On the evening of the Nativité de la Vierge (September 8\(^{\text{th}}\)) 1008, the Virgin and a host of angels appeared and draped a huge red net across the town, stretching between the sites of two chapels.\(^{23}\) By the time H. d’Outreman wrote his Histoire de la ville de Valenciennes in 1639, the chapel erected by the confraternity of the puy in honour of this miracle still boasted a ‘chandelle de cire formée des gouttes, qui decoulent de la chandelle miraculeuse d’Arras’ (a wax candle formed from drops which came from the miraculous candle of Arras).\(^{24}\) Here we see not only a similarity in origin myths between these early puys and their parent structures, but also a purported physical connection between some of them.


\(^{21}\) Brusegan, ‘Culte de la Vierge’, p. 42.


\(^{24}\) *La Musique aux Pays-Bas avant le XIX\(^{\text{e}}\) Siècle: Documents Inédits et Annotés*, ed. by Edmond Vander Straeten (Brussels: G. A. Van Trigt, 1872), p. 43.
Most of the northern French puys established across the late Middle Ages are known to have been dedicated to the Virgin Mary: for instance those at Douai (1330), Amiens (1388), Abbeville (late fourteenth century), and Dieppe (fifteenth century). Others, including the example active by the mid-fourteenth century at Lille which held a Marian feast in mid-August, that of Tournai which had championed Marian piety since at the latest 1340, and the Puy de la Confrérie des Orfèvres found in fourteenth-century Île-de-France, which enjoyed strong ties with the cult of the Virgin, all further attest to the strongly pious complexion of the puys. Nigel Wilkins, in his appraisal of the French lyric art, similarly concludes that the puys ‘were generally of religious origin’, while Brusegan agrees that similar circumstances led to puys appearing in ‘mainte autre ville’ (many other towns). This seems to be how the puys were born: from groups of people coming together in mutual companionship, with the intention to provide both religious and social support to one another, as was the traditional aim of the earlier confraternities. The formation of these confraternities in climates of rich bourgeois mentalities allowed their subsequent annual literary contests to flourish alongside the more usual elements of a confraternity, such as providing communal masses for their members, supporting destitute members, and guaranteeing proper services for the dead of the company. The revised statutes for the Puy de Valenciennes of 1426 demonstrate this sense of mutual aid, declaring:

...si quelque confrère ou plusieurs tomboient en povreté, et n’auroient moyen de vivre, soit par infortune, perte, vieillesse ou débilité, tous les autres frères sont tenus leur donner en aulmosne tous les mois à six deniers tournois, et au jour de leur feste, les quatre princes leur donneront chacun une honneste écuelle de viande...

(if any or several of the fellows fall into poverty, and do not have the means to live, either through misfortune, loss, old age, or disability, all the other brothers are bound to give them six deniers tournois each month in alms, and on the day of their festival the four princes [of the puy] will give them each an honest bowl of food).

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26 Gros, Prince du Puy, pp. 45-8.
29 Gros, Prince du Puy, p. 43.
That the literary puys emerged from such confréries is of particular note, for although in some cases the contests of song, poetry, and plays would surface as their most prominent features, their origins as formal networks focused on the spiritual and communal wellbeing of their members highlights from the outset the desire for mutual support and interaction underpinning these groups.

So, what form did the puys run by these confraternity networks rooted in the social milieu take? It is important to note that while there are common features to be found across the vast majority of the northern French puys, each enjoyed its own particularities and quirks of character. Each, however, took the form of an annual festival, involving the poetic competition and a grand feast. The festival would take place on one of the five days of the Marian calendar: February 2\textsuperscript{nd} (Purification of the Virgin); March 25\textsuperscript{th} (Annunciation by Archangel Gabriel); August 15\textsuperscript{th} (Assumption into Heaven); September 8\textsuperscript{th} (Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary); and December 8\textsuperscript{th} (Immaculate Conception).

The puy at Dieppe, for instance, took place on the Assumption, while the Rouen puy took place in correspondence to the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Whatever the day assigned to a particular puy’s celebration, the festival would always comprise two main features: some form of literary contest, and an accompanying feast. Accordingly, come the day of the Purification of the Virgin, the statutes for the puy at Amiens dictate that the prince du puy must organise a ‘disner solemnel’ (formal dinner) for – among others – his predecessors, and selected religious and rhetoricians, while it has already been seen how the elected princes at the Valenciennes puy were held to provide an ‘honest’ meal for their members who had fallen on hard times. While the annual feast remained a constant feature of the puys, it was in the particular means of poetic competition that they differed most.

Taking the examples of what were potentially the three most successful of the northern French puys, this variety quickly reveals itself. For Rouen, the surviving statutes for the Confrérie de l’Immaculée Conception which held the annual puy reveal a well-structured day of competition with prizes for different categories. For

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30 Brusegan, ‘Culte de la Vierge’, p. 41.
the participant ‘qui aura fait le meilleur champ royal’ (who has composed the best
chant royal) goes ‘la palme de victoire’ (the victory palm leaf) – a symbolic prize,
which, having been held for the ensuing year, would then be redeemed at the next
puy for ‘la somme de Cent solz tournois’ (the sum of one hundred sols tournoi) prize
money.33 Similarly, ‘a celuy qui aura fait le meilleur epygramme en latin […] ung
chappeau de laurier redimable par la somme de quatre livres tournoi’ (to the one
who has composed the best Latin epigram a cap of laurel redeemable for the sum of
four livres tournois), while the composer of the ‘meilleure ballade en francoys’ (best
ballade in French) won ‘une rose redimable par la somme de trentecinq solz’ (a rose,
redeemable for the sum of thirty-five sols).34 These symbolic prizes, all
iconographically related to the Virgin, served both as recognisable markers of the
cultural capital won by poets through individual success, and also as reminders of
the devotional foundations of the contest.35 This kind of prize-giving tradition can still
be seen today, in particular among formalised sporting networks. The Ashes trophy,
for instance, fought over by England and Australia’s cricket teams every two years,
embodies both the principles seen in Rouen’s prize list: a facsimile of the symbolic
urn returns with the winning team to their home country between tournaments as a
marker of their victory, while the ashes it is said to contain (that of a cricket bail from
one of the first tests) are a reminder of the competition’s heritage. It is cultural
artefacts such as these which further promote competitive play and exchange in
formal networks by investing them with tangible historical meaning.

In Amiens, the creative process was somewhat different, and the choice of
poetic medium limited to the vernacular. Before the annual feast of the puy the
current prince would create a ‘tableau’ (a painting or scene) of a mystic Marian
allegory, which would be hung in the cathedral, and provide the theme and refrain for
the chants royaux and ballades to be entered into the competition.36 As the statutes
state, the winner will be he who ‘fera le meilleur chant royal selon le refrain du tablel’
(composes the best chant royal according to the refrain from the tableau).37 Not only

33 Leo X, Approbation et confirmation par le pape Léon X des statuts et privilèges de la confrérie de
l’Immaculée Conception, dite Académie des Palinods, instituée à Rouen, ed by H. Boissel (Rouen:
34 Leo X, Approbation et confirmation, pp. 45-6.
35 For more on the puy at Rouen, see: Denis Hûe, La Poésie palinodique à Rouen (1486-1550) (Paris:
Champion, 2002).
37 Lecocq, Histoire du théâtre en Picardie, p. 191.
are the permitted genres more limited than those of Rouen, they are judged
differently too. Whereas there the judging took place as part of the feast, in Amiens
the winner is chosen behind closed doors, and announced the day after. The prince
gathers together ‘maistres et rhétoriciens expert en rhétorique’ (masters and
rhetoricians expert in versification), and goes to a ‘lieu secret et convenable, pour
examiner les chans royaux lesquelz lui arount esté présentez au disner’ (a secret
and suitable place, to judge the *chants royaux* with which he had been presented at
dinner). The winner would then be announced at a Mass for the company the next
day. 38

Finally, the puy at Arras organised by the *carité* there underwent a thematic
overhaul as time went on. These literary contests began as an exercise solely in
Marian devotion, as seen in Rouen, Amiens, and the vast majority of other northern
French puy – including Valenciennes, whose statutes reveal that after the annual
dinner, participants ‘reciteront les vers qu’ils auront dreschez a l’honneur de la
Vierge’ (will recite the verses which they have composed in honour of the Virgin). 39
Over the course of the thirteenth century, however, the impetus on Marian
compositions gave way to what Gros labels a more ‘laïque et profane’ (secular and
non-devotional) form of poetry. 40 The lessened involvement of the clergy over later
generations is cited as a potential reason for this shift in tone, and while the Arras
*carité* retained its wider dedication to the Virgin, the new, less strict thematic focus of
its puy meant that it attracted attention from surrounding areas, and soon became
the most renowned literary event of its time. In just these three brief examples, it is
striking how this template for facilitating a participatory network (urban, often
bourgeois membership; mutual support; annual meetings; a grand feast; competitive
lyric composition) allowed for such peculiarities to emerge according to the traditions
and cultural circumstances of each. These individual interpretations of exercises
practiced across different instances of a similar kind of organisation are an enduring
feature of formal networks. In modern-day universities the network of students
graduating in any given year will all experience a graduation ceremony, but, thanks
to the particular traditions, specialities, and leadership of each home institution, each
set of graduates will enjoy a different overall experience.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
These peculiarities aside, each and every puy provided the same, fundamental service: an implicit but crucial structure within which people could meet, interact, and strengthen lasting social bonds. By attaching this structure to the existing religious infrastructure of an area, itself seemingly so perpetual and secure, participants could feel safe in the knowledge that their new formal network was not likely to break up any time soon. This sense of a stable, enduring framework in which people could meet frequently and amiably, enjoying a shared concern for the mutual welfare of the group, reads as an almost textbook means of satisfying the omnipresent need to belong. This, one of the strongest internal driving forces for human activity, must be considered among the explanations for why the concept of puy proved so popular within confraternities across the high and late Middle Ages. And it was not only the puys, situated as they were in the contemporary histories of guilds and confraternities, which comprised the sum total of formal literary networks in late medieval France. Before turning to the London Puy, with all its quirks and subtleties, it would be sensible to conclude the current discussion by considering other formalised literary structures which existed relatively contemporaneously, some of which drew on the examples set by the puys more explicitly than others.

A particularly direct influence of the puy competitions can be seen in the *Consistori de la sobregaia del gay saber* (usually translated as the ‘Consistory of Joyous Knowledge’), established in Toulouse in 1323. Originally a private arrangement of seven amateur troubadours from the burghers and lesser nobility who would gather on Sunday afternoons to recite and improve their compositions, this practice was publicised in November ready for a poetic competition to be held on the first of May 1324. The intention of these ‘VII trobadors de Tholoza’ was to preserve the troubadour lyric tradition. Accordingly, there was to be a more learned, academic tone to proceedings than can be seen in the puys, as while a prize of a golden violet was on offer for the best composition, instruction in vernacular poetry was also promised, as well as readings from the seven self-styled *mantenedors* (maintainers, upholders), on which the gathered audience could also comment and advise. As their invitation declared: ‘Et adonx auziretz chantar | Et legir

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de nostres dictatz | E se y veztez motz mal pauzatz | O tal re que be non estia, | Vos ne faretz a vostre guia’ (And then you will hear some of our compositions sung and read, and if you perceive there an ill chosen word or anything that is inappropriate, you will change it as you see fit). The event was a success, with the aldermen of Toulouse’s subsequent financial support ensuring it became an annual, three-day contest, with many practical elements similar to the puys.

The more academic tone to the Consistori is of particular note here, as it indicates a strong, internal desire for this network to present itself as exclusive and intellectually independent. As Laura Kendrick has highlighted, the conventions for the Consistori at times borrow heavily from rituals found in contemporary universities. Any member who won one of the three main prize categories, for example, was a candidate for the distinction of ‘bachelor of joyous knowledge’. Candidates would be publically examined on May 3rd, and had to successfully prove their knowledge of the Leys d’Amors, before being awarded the degree. Similarly, if a member had won the prize in all three of the main categories, he could apply for the title ‘doctor of joyous knowledge’. On the same day as potential bachelors, the doctoral candidates had to give a public lecture on their interpretation of the Leys, and then defend their work. The Leys d’Amors themselves are also of interest. Compiled by Guilhem Molinier, the Leys were essentially a treatise on poetics and grammar which served as the rulebook for the Consistori. Between around 1323 and 1356 the Leys went through various redactions, and Sarah Kay has demonstrated how quotations from classical troubadours become less prominent across this process, making way for new forms of quotation. Both these points indicate a network which was keen not only to forge its own sense of identity in later medieval Toulouse, but also to provide a framework of recurring social exchange for its members, built around its literary principals.

The wider context of this contest is notably different to that of the northern French puys: Toulouse was still reeling from the effects of the Albigensian Crusade, which meant its Occitan culture was now tainted with the label of heresy, and

constantly under the watchful eye of the Inquisition. As Armstrong and Kay point out, the staging of a poetry competition which promoted the consideration of religious themes in Occitan languages was thus ‘tantamount to an act of cultural resistance’. While this political aspect to the Consistori is less central to the present argument (and has been convincingly dealt with by other scholars), the evolution of this competitive network is undeniably interesting. John Haines demonstrates that the history of the Consistori shows ‘the decline of Occitan song well’, as by the late fifteenth century its name had already changed to the classically inspired Jeux Flouraux in popular use, with the last prize for an Occitan song awarded in 1513. The fact the competition survived these contemporary cultural shifts in language suggests that the strength of desire to engage competitively and belong to an organised network ultimately outranked its founding members’ more political-linguistic motives for its participants.

While the evidence for the real-world functioning of the Consistori is indisputable, scholars are less agreed on the definite nature of alleged late medieval ‘Courts of Love’ beyond the literary page. Certainly, there was a lengthy literary tradition for such a concept, in which poets would write of mock-legal proceedings, in which a lover or his lady would present a complaint or defence on some matter of love-related behaviour, and receive judgement from a jury of noble ladies or personified virtues. Popular around the dawn of the fifteenth century, there has been considerable scholarly debate over whether such courts existed in the real world. Nineteenth-century attempts to trace the predecessors of such institutions to twelfth-century Champagne, for instance, have now been conclusively discredited. Perhaps more likely is the suggestion that while such strictly defined courts may not have existed, they could have done so on a far smaller scale, as groups of educated ladies gathered locally to discuss love debate poetry while their husbands or suitors

45 Armstrong and Kay, Knowing Poetry, p. 41.
were absent. These questions around the authenticity of seemingly formal networks is something which will inform much of the analysis in the third chapter on virtual networks.

Leaving this wider question of authenticity for a moment, the best-documented example of a court of this nature is the *Cour Amoureuse* of Charles VI, for which a set of statutes survives from 1400. This ‘court’ certainly was not intended to function as considered above, hearing cases of love from wronged individuals. Rather it was envisioned to serve as a formal, structured network which provided its courtly and educated members a platform for poetic exchange and competition (much as the Puys did for the class below).\textsuperscript{50} David Hult has cited the historical context in support of this, claiming it may have been established as a pleasant distraction from a period of deadly pestilence, an outbreak of which is referred to in the statutes themselves.\textsuperscript{51} There was to be a definite hierarchy within the network. For instance, the first statute declares that ‘seront esleus vignt et quatre chevaliers escuiers et autres, ayans expert congnoissance en la science de rhetorique’ (there are to be elected twenty four knights, squires and others, having expert understanding of the science of versification), who would in turn preside over a ‘joieuse feste de puy d’amours […] le premier dimenche de chascun moys’ (joyous feast for the puy of love on the first Sunday of each month) at which small crowns and chaplets of silver would be awarded to the best compositions.\textsuperscript{52}

The similarities to the Puys here are impossible to miss, right down to the use of the word itself to describe the frequent days of poetic competition in the statutes. This similarity has also been noted by Daniel Poirion, who comments on the shared tendency toward formal and institutionalised organisation.\textsuperscript{53} Alongside these statutes have survived a long list (across six manuscripts) of around 950 individuals who were reportedly members of this network from 1400 to 1440.\textsuperscript{54}

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\textsuperscript{51} *Debate of the Roman de la Rose*, ed. by David F. Hult (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 8.

\textsuperscript{52} *La Cour amoureuse, dite de Charles VI*, ed. by Carla Bozzolo and Hélène Loyau, 3 vols (Paris: Léopard d’or, 1982-92) I, p. 36.


occurrences remains conjecture, as only fleeting references to it appear in other contemporary documents. Its existence in such a detailed form does reveal at the very least the intention and enthusiasm to establish exactly the kind of formal network under examination here, however. Members were to be assigned clear roles, a calendar of events was drawn up, there was a distinct purpose to the contest (the exhortation of ‘toutes dames et damoiselles’) and clear rewards for achievement in said purpose, and membership was made clear, with each participant’s coat of arms displayed in the hall housing the contests, ready to be defiled should they seriously fail to comply with any of the statutes’ ordinances.

The most intriguing point for the current discussion is that while no supplementary documents have survived (examples of poems, records of the monthly meetings), these statutes have done. At the very least, this formalised network seems to have been instigated to provide a platform for the ruling, aristocratic class to gather together and compose, discuss, and pass judgement on poetry. Yet none survives along with the statutes and membership lists. This is even more telling, as the statutes are quite clear that the winning poems each month should be copied out into a ‘registres’, ‘pour les montrer en temps a venir, quant il plaira a ceux qui le requerront et vaurront’ (so that they may be examined in times to come, by those who need or wish to do so). The failure of these records to be preserved (if, indeed, they were ever made) would seem to be a fairly strong indication that for the members of this network it was the facilitation of regular contact which was valued most. While they were educated enough to appreciate and experiment with literary composition, it was by no means their primary motive. As such, in both of these examples the draw of social interaction through a formalised network centred on competitive literary enterprise is arguably the key impetus for involvement. As with the puys, for their late medieval participants this fed the fundamental human need to belong and form real interpersonal attachments, and in doing so facilitated competitive play and provided the opportunity to acquire associated cultural capital: the three fundamental appeals of networks as discussed in the introduction. To gain better access to the existence of this mentality in such formal, literary networks it must be considered how exactly it was that prospective

55 *La Cour amoureuse*, ed. by Bozzolo and Loyau, p. 36.
members felt they could benefit from inclusion. The resource with which to do this lies across the Channel, within the statutes of London’s late thirteenth-century puy.

Current Scholarship on The London Puy

The puy established in London, likely in the latter half of the thirteenth century, has been largely neglected by modern scholars, especially in comparison to its northern French counterparts, particularly that of Arras. The London Puy is largely absent from French scholarship, only being referenced in passing in studies which focus on the French evolution of the puys. The only work amounting to a full-length study of the Puy is Anne Sutton’s 1992 article ‘Merchants, Music and Social Harmony’. Sutton clearly aims to use the article to bring the Puy to wider scholarly attention, pointing out that it ‘has been neglected as an oddity in English and London history’. Sutton approaches the statutes of the Puy in a purely documentary fashion, and offers only a limited comparison of the two sets. The majority of the article then moves away from the statutes, and is instead left over to a convincing argument for the Arras puy’s influence on London, a more conjectural attempt at identifying potential members, and finally a short consideration of why exactly Andrew Horn included the statutes in his customs book (see below). Sutton followed this article with a chapter in a collection on London in the Middle Ages, in which she suggests that a London inn known as the Tumbling Bear may have provided a setting for the Puy, whose membership was comprised largely of mercers. By her own admission, the ‘threadbare and circumstantial nature of this scenario is self-evident’, and it cannot be confirmed with the current sources available. These are the only two studies solely dedicated to the London Puy, and while credit is due to Sutton for the solid narrative groundwork achieved in them, they leave the potential for closer analysis of the statutes themselves untapped.

In the few remaining examples of English scholarship in which it features, the Puy is included in one of two contexts: in relation to the history of London, or in

58 Ibid., p. 1.
59 Ibid., pp. 6-13.
relation to the works of Chaucer. The most detailed exploration of the former comes from Arthur Bahr, who uses the surviving statutes in the most innovative way. Looking at selected statutes and the wider political context, he considers why London administrator and chronicler Andrew Horn included them in his fourteenth-century collection of custom documents at a time when the Puy had already disbanded. He concludes that Horn’s aims were part cautionary, part aspirational: while the London Puy had failed to achieve longevity, and lessons were to be learnt there, he sought to highlight that ‘a more proper or well-executed form of literary play might have positive social consequences’.61 Other references to the Puy are more incidental. Anne Lancashire for instance negotiates with Sutton’s work, providing an overview of the Puy and its extant statutes (described as a ‘significant case of a civic elite turning to performance’) as an example ‘related only tangentially to London civic theatre’, the focus of her wider study.62 Similarly, Ardis Butterfield categorises the London Puy as a ‘lyric cultural import from France into London’s mercantile community’, just as Sutton suggested.63 This supports her wider aim in the chapter, to document ‘cross-Channel poetic communities’ between thirteenth and fourteenth-century England and France. In her chapter in a volume proposing new readings of Chaucer’s poetry, Helen Cooper mentions the Puy only in passing, citing its Anglo-Norman statutes and single surviving song as evidence for the strength and culture of ‘Anglo-Norman poetry’ present in the contemporary milieu of ‘Chaucer’s London grandparents’.64 One other brief consideration of the Puy appears in John Fisher’s biography of John Gower, as he considers whether the organisation could have survived long enough for Gower to have been affiliated with it. Ultimately, due to the insubstantial and hypothetical nature of the evidence, he concludes that the Puy had probably ceased to exist by 1320, a view with which Robert Yeager concurs.65

In an earlier piece Cooper makes the London Puy a central component of her research, however, suggesting the functioning of the Puy is ‘illuminating for Chaucer’s poetry in general and the Canterbury Tales in particular’. While she notes some explicit similarities between the Puy and the competition the pilgrims embark on (‘literary judgement, the provision of a supper paid for by the members of the compagnie, and acceptance of the authority of the prince’), the key point she makes is that the Puy reveals ‘the existence of a sophisticated interest in and audience for poetry not just at court or among the aristocracy, but in its immediate urban context’. Cooper acknowledges that it was unlikely but ‘not impossible’ that the Puy itself survived into Chaucer’s lifetime, instead proposing that this wider urban interest in poetry could have ramifications when explaining Chaucer’s choice to compose in English rather than Anglo-Norman French, which Cooper proceeds to explore accordingly.66 Finally, Robert Raymo cites Cooper’s analysis at length, before suggesting that not only can the Puy’s existence illustrate a contemporary urban enthusiasm for poetry, but knowledge of it, alongside its French counterparts, may have encouraged Chaucer to ‘diversify his characters socially and professionally beyond the literary conventions of estates satire and to vary the metrical forms of the tales’.67 Again, as with Sutton’s studies, while offering useful insights into contemporary London and the Puy’s potential continued influence on Chaucer’s cultural world beyond its dissolution, these works offer little in the way of close textual appraisal of the London Puy’s statutes.

The London Puy

The surviving evidence for the London Puy comes from the Liber Custoram compiled by Andrew Horn (c.1275–1328), administrator, chronicler, and city chamberlain of London.68 Horn took great interest in collating documents relating to the administrative and judicial history of London and England. Ralph Hanna suggests that his books came to be seen as important models for contemporary London book-making, especially in his practice of making selections from various

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potentially miscellaneous materials, rather than just the presentation of set texts.\textsuperscript{69} There is no reason to assume Horn was a member of the Puy, for, as Hanna notes elsewhere, he did represent himself on the page at moments of his work in which he had been involved, as ‘a kind of legalist hero’.\textsuperscript{70} He makes no such comment on the Puy, however. The \textit{Custoram}, in which Horn collected all manner of customs and more narrative records related to the history of London, provides us with two separate sets of statutes for the London Puy, one of which clearly postdates the other, as it repeatedly refers back to ‘les primers Estatuz’ (the first statutes), and expands upon and nuances many of them. Their very presence in the \textit{Custoram} suggests that the Puy was considered a significant feature of urban London life for a time (Horn was city chamberlain, after all), and together they reveal a fairly comprehensive overview of its conventions and procedures.

The network’s given title is ‘Le Feste de Pui’ (The Puy Festival, or Feast), and it was dedicated to God, all saints, the King and his barons.\textsuperscript{71} There was a six pence membership fee, to be paid upon entry, followed by an annual twelve pence fee on the day of the sitting, though this was waivable for members who came armed with a newly composed \textit{chant} (p. 216). Further fees, or fines, were applicable to members who missed the feast days, or defaulted on their financial obligations. If seven years passed with no payment, that member was at risk of being expelled from the network (p. 222). By the time the second statutes were introduced, there was a common Puy chest, which held both the financial provisions and official records for the network (p. 220). Each year the Puy would select a new Prince, chosen for his loyalty and good reputation. The Prince would be aided in all matters by twelve fellow members of the network, whom he chose again on the grounds of their reputation and establishment within the city (pp. 216-7). A clerk was also chosen to oversee all of the Puy’s administrative matters, for an annual wage of twenty sterling shillings. His personal address was to be known to all other members, and equally he could summon them for official business at any time (p. 221).

This information represents the best plotted image of the formal Puy network available to us. The nodes were all members of London’s literate, urban population

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 72. 
\textsuperscript{71} Horn, \textit{Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis}, p. 216. All further references to this text are included in the main text, and all translations are mine.
with enough disposable income to manage the various fees and charges. Although there is no record of who exactly these members were, this is how these nodes have been selected, through their association with the Puy event itself. The relations between these nodes would have been defined by the general interactions and flow of chants facilitated by the operating of the Puy, though it should be noted that bonds of kinship were likely to have pre-existed among certain nodes, and would also have further developed over time. There was a distinct hierarchy in place, with the Prince at the top, his twelve advisors and the clerk a level below. The remaining member nodes were supposedly all equal below that. As is seen, however, not only did the Prince node lose much of his authority as time went on, but inequalities and personal aspirations among the wider nodes of the network would ultimately contribute to its fracture.

On the morning of the Puy’s annual sitting and feast (originally held around Easter, but later moved), all members of the network were to gather at St. Helen’s priory, and say a solemn Mass for both their dead companions, and all other Christian souls (p. 222). Then the Puy feast would begin. No women were allowed to take part, nor any man who wasn’t a recorded member of the Puy’s network. First of all the new Prince was to be elected. Then, members who had brought new songs (which explicitly had to be sung chants royaux) would perform them from seats draped in gold cloth, in a room decorated simply with flowers, leaves, and rushes (p. 226). Six or seven of the associates would then help both princes decide which song was to win the silver crown for best composition (p. 226). Dinner would then be followed by a horseback procession through the city, and a short dance at the Prince’s house. Any leftovers from the feast would be donated as alms to charitable causes across the city, such as the hospitals and Newgate prison (p. 227). Away from the feast, the network paid a chaplain to pray each day for its members, and latterly raised money for the building of a new chapel. Should any member die during the year, he would be expected to bequeath the Puy some of his wealth, and the rest of the network were to gather together for his burial (p. 218). This represents the essential blueprint for the Puy’s organisation.

Aside from these two sets of statutes, there is one other surviving piece of tangible evidence for the existence of the London Puy. Now held in the National Archives is a single manuscript leaf containing the only song known to have been
composed for the Puy, by one Renaus (Renaud) de Hoiland. It was brought to the attention of the historian and antiquary Thomas Wright during the compilation of his 1844 work *Anecdota Literaria*, by the Reverend Joseph Hunter. Hunter had found it, according to Wright, 'in a bundle of miscellaneous Exchequer documents in her Majesty's Remembrancer's Office'. This document has since received curiously little attention in scholarly circles, however. In 1860 Robert Williams made reference to it, noting of its author: 'Hoiland…wrote songs that retained their popularity through many generations of singers and hearers'. This claim is unsupported, however, and more recent attempts to trace the song's composer have proved unsuccessful. Christopher Page reproduces the first stanza in *The Cambridge Guide to the Arts in Britain*, but has little else to say on the matter. Sutton also refers to the manuscript, questioning whether it did in fact originate from the Puy, seeing as its 'author has not been identified in London records and the text does not agree with the details of the statutes'. Any such doubt is swiftly discredited upon inspection of the manuscript: as Cooper notes, it is in Anglo-Norman, and maintains the general conventions of a chanson; it includes an illustration of a crown at the head of the text; it refers explicitly to a 'pui'; and it was discovered in Exchequer records. In addition, the material condition of the manuscript corresponds with certain details of the statutes completely, as is demonstrated below. Cooper uses the song itself as evidence for the wider culture of spoken French in fourteenth-century London, and provides a useful transcription and translation of the piece. The materiality of the document itself has not yet been documented or considered.

The leaf is around 177 x 182 millimetres, with a written area of roughly 163 x 168 millimetres – exact measurements are difficult owing to the manner in which the manuscript has been cut. It is made of animal skin parchment, and the song has been copied onto the hair side. The song is titled with the composer's name, which is

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72 The National Archives: E 163/22/I/2.
75 Cooper, ‘Southwark Poetic Companies’, p. 115, n. 17.
split in half by the crown illustration symbolising the piece’s victory at the Puy, all in red ink. Red ink is also used for the musical staves which accompany the first stanza, and for the first, capitalised, letter of each stanza and the envoy. The musical notes and the rest of the lyrics are in black, the lyrics copied in a smart, neat bastard hand of the thirteenth century. The document was evidently intended to be clearly presented, as toward the top right of the leaf faint traces of ruled scoring remain, which match the spacing dimensions of the text which follows. The only evidence which really supports Page’s claim that it was ‘copied too soon after a feast’ is the deleted ‘doleir’ toward the start of the fourth stanza. It is perhaps too fanciful to suggest that the greasy looking circular mark around the same area is gravy, or some other foodstuff smudged from the hand of the Puy’s clerk as he wrote out the song.

Particularly tantalising are the tiny remains of cropped script in the top right-hand corner of the manuscript. The parchment has been sliced crudely across the top, and in the far corner can be seen the bottom half of perhaps two words, seemingly in the same hand and physical style as the song which follows. This poses the question, was this once a larger manuscript onto which the scribe copied multiple songs from a particular year, ready to then divide them up into individual songs? Such an explanation is certainly plausible, but unless any additional songs are unearthed in matching style, it unfortunately cannot be proved.

There are, however, more concrete conclusions which can be drawn from the physical state of this one surviving song, ones which concur strongly with some of the Puy’s statutes, suggesting that these regulations were indeed followed. Notably, the back of this manuscript was left blank, indicating that it was not intended to form part of some codex or other bound collection. The likely reason for this can be found in the statutes, which state that the new prince should ‘maintenant face atacher de souz son blazon la chauncoun qe estoit corounee le jour qil fut eslu novel prince, apertement et droitement escrite’ (forthwith attach below his shield of arms the song that was crowned on the day that he was elected as the new prince, plainly and correctly written, pp. 224-5). If the winning song was to be displayed on the wall, to leave the back of the parchment it was copied onto blank thus makes complete sense.
This hypothesis can be taken a step further, when the reverse of the manuscript is also scrutinised. The parchment has clearly been folded over, roughly into quarters, at some point. The second quarter down is markedly grubbier than the others, suggesting that it was left exposed to more damage, that is to say it was the section of parchment which remained uncovered wherever it was stored. Again, the statutes are potentially informative here, as they hold that no member of the Puy should be allowed to perform their entry for the year, ‘desques a taunt qil veit la chauncoun corounee dreinemen en lan prochainement passe devaunt honoure a son dreit, en la manere avaundite’ (until he has seen the song that was crowned in the last year just past honoured according to its right, in the aforesaid manner, p.225). Essentially, the winning song had to be displayed at the Puy feast not only in its victory year, but also the following year. It is not unfeasible that Hoiland’s song was taken down from the wall one year, then folded up and stored somewhere (perhaps the communal chest) ready for display the following year. This is, of course, somewhat conjectural; however, I hypothesise that the synchronicity between the prescribed actions in the statutes and the physical traces which have been left on the manuscript point toward this being evidence that winning Puy songs were indeed displayed at successive annual festivals. The very fact it has survived at all indicates that it must have been considered important at some point, and the argument for re-display seems a strong potential explanation for this. Together with the statutes, this represents the total extant evidence for the London Puy’s organisation and activities. A closer reading of Horn’s statutes reveals more of what truly made up this late medieval formal network.

A Puy for Puy’s Sake?

The most striking feature of the London Puy is its complete inversion of the Continental puys’ foundations. As demonstrated above, in northern France confraternities emerged around local religious centres, usually in honour of the Virgin Mary, and puys evolved as more social sub-elements of these religion-focused networks. It soon becomes apparent from the London Puy’s statutes that the facilitation of social competition, interaction, and engagement far outranks any
spiritual or religious intentions. The structural composition of the statutes in part reflects this. In the first set the first four paragraphs all give prominence to practical issues around the election of key members and the form of the contest, while more religious considerations are left to the fifth and final; for example, the provision of a chaplain ‘por chauter pur les comfreres’ (to sing for the brothers), and of ‘une chandoile [...] qe Dieux e Nostre Dame voille sauver et garder tute la compaignie’ (a candle [so] that God and Our Lady are willing to protect and guard all of the company, p. 219). Similarly, a mere five of the thirty-one second statutes relate to spiritual obligations, such as Mass, alms giving, and the establishment of a chapel. Assuming Horn did not alter the order or content of the statutes (and there is no obvious reason why he should have done), this textual prominence of the secular, non-religious statutes speaks volumes as to how this formal network identified itself.

There are other, more internal indicators that the London Puy had as its foundations social, secular exchange, rather than the practice of piety. There are, admittedly, nods to the religious traditions and conventions of the northern French puys: both sets of statutes are introduced with a partial dedication to Mary (titled ‘Madame Seinte Marie’, and ‘Nostre Dame Seinte Mary’ respectively: pp. 216, 219); there is the aforementioned chaplain who sang for the members’ souls; and the provision of a yearly candle is a definite reference to Arras. However, these allusions are largely incidental, they only appear briefly, and dramatically lose out in page space to the remaining conventions. Notably, the protective candle was introduced by ‘Johan de Chesthounte, le tierz prince’ (the third prince), indicating it was not an original feature of the network, instead only being instigated in the third year of its existence. The given name of the network places the poetic competition at the fore, in ‘Le Feste de Pui’ there is no reference to a wider carité or contrérie, just the sociality of the feast and the Puy. The change of feast date from a religious holiday to one a week later, so that all those traders who would otherwise be attending the ‘feire de Sainte Ives’ (the annual Saint Ives’ market) could attend (p. 228), confirms this disregard for the establishment of any religious reverence.

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78 It is worth reiterating here, as asserted in the introduction, that the following findings on the London Puy are not intended to be applicable to medieval puys more generally, but rather are the result of a close examination of this particular social network.
Furthermore, the very first reason given for establishing the Puy is reputational, so that ‘la ville de Lundres soit renomee de touz biens en tuz lieus’ (the city of London may be renowned for good things in all places, p. 216). In addition to this, its chosen Prince is explicitly selected on the grounds that ‘li Pui en soit ensaucie, et meintenue, et sustenu’ (through him, the Puy will be exalted, protected, and supported, p. 217). Essentially, the Prince’s responsibilities are to the reputation and security of the network itself, not any inherent pious obligations, and that success was to be measured against the renown it won London as a secular city. More specifically still, there is a distinct emphasis on the importance of the annual competition throughout the statutes. Set two declares that the ‘Pui est maintenue e establie principaument pur un chaunsoun reale corouner’ (Puy is maintained and established principally for crowning a chant royal, p. 224), a declaration strengthened by the waiving of the annual fee for those who compose a new one for the sitting, as laid out in the preceding set. Upon reading the statutes, the London Puy emerges as a network focused almost entirely on its social organisation and competitive elements, with only a token inclusion of the more religious aspects found in the French puys. The next logical question must therefore be, what was the fundamental allure of a puy of this nature?

The answer, somewhat paradoxically, lies with the rare moments where a religious tone can be detected in the statutes – in particular, a monastic one. Through their choice of language, just occasionally the compilers of these statutes reveal their inherent aspiration for a formal network built on a paradigm of monastic sociality, but without the pious obligations. This is clearest at two moments, one from each set of statutes. In the opening declaration of the first, after stating that the goal of the Puy is to enhance London’s renown, the wording continues: ‘et por ceo qe jolietes, pais, honestez, douceur, deboneiretes, e bon amour, sanz infinite, soit maintenue’ (and in order that good fellowship, peace, honesty, kindness, and true love, may be maintained without limit, p. 216). Here, the familiar ideals of a Christian brotherhood, peace, truth, order, and mutual love, are transposed into the entirely secular-driven network of the Puy. Similarly, part way through the second set, one statute reads:

E qe tuit lui compagnion de Puy soient bons natureus et loiaux, aidaunt et conseillaunt chascun le autre, quant il serra de ceo fere requis, en touz poinz et en
touz lieus; aussci come confreres entrealiez par lour foiz, qe de ceo fere sont il tenuz.

(And that all the companions of the Puy are to be good natured and loyal, helping and counselling each other, when the need to do that is required, in all matters and in all places; just as brothers united by their faith, that they are held to do this, p. 224)

Here this underlying sense of monastic brotherhood is even stronger still, the text building a distinct sense of a self-serving community which cared for its own no matter what (unless a member broke the law of the land, as the statute quickly proceeds to point out). The use of the phrase ‘aussci come confreres’ is especially telling; in this puy network was intended all the mutual support, closeness, and reliability of existing but closed-off monastic fraternities, but with none of their taxing religious obligations. Such an aspiration can be seen in the surviving monastic rules, for instance the most studied and ubiquitous rule of the middle ages, that of Saint Benedict. On the topic of communal support, the Rule states:

[...] there is a good zeal, which keeipeth us from vice [...] Let monks, therefore, exert this zeal with the most fervent love; that is, “in honour preferring one another.” Let them most patiently endure one another’s infirmities, whether of body or of mind. Let them vie with one another in obedience. Let no one follow what he thinketh good for himself, but rather what seemeth good for another. Let them cherish fraternal charity [...].

This extract, titled ‘Of the good zeal which Monks ought to have’, perfectly illustrates the feeling of community being asked of the Puy’s membership. Ideally, every member should support, care for, and respect all others, putting the needs of the group before their own. As shall be seen later in the chapter, this was an easier goal to commit to paper than to practice in reality, but for now the intention’s influence is clear nonetheless. Whether to draw parallels between the Prince and his twelve chosen associates to the original Christian fraternity of Jesus and his twelve disciples is to take such a reading a step too far is probably open to debate, but one worth considering all the same.

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This associational line of influence was likely mediated between its monastic origins and its place in the Puy statutes by the early London guilds. Clear analogues for the London Puy in particular, guilds were gathering strength and presence in London across the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. They had evolved from the earliest ‘gilds’, which were established from the fifth to the tenth centuries during the Germanic settlement of Western Europe. These gilds played an important role as social organisers in these new territories, and many of their statutes are exact mirrors to those of the Puy. Anthony Black has described them as ‘mutual support groups’ for example, documenting their tendency to swear oaths to the organisation as a whole, not a single leader, as well as the similar language used to describe themselves: ‘friendship’, and ‘confrates’ being two prime examples.80 Such gilds were already present in London by the tenth century.81 Around the time the Puy was established, these groups were evolving into more trade-focused guilds, the earliest of which were those of the weavers and the bakers, granted charters before 1130 and between 1154 and 1162 respectively.82 Within these guilds can be found direct influences on the Puy, for instance regular feasting, communal-identification and promotion, and more spiritual elements which served to bring members together (at least in theory). Thus the aspirational sense of community present in the Puy’s statutes was almost undoubtedly influenced by the ideal of monastic life, brought into contact with its members through the analogous institutions of the early London guilds, of which many would likely also have been a part.

Further evidence for this can be found in the linguistic choices made across the two sets of statutes for describing both the complete network of membership, and also its individual participants. In particular, the words deployed with varying frequency in these senses are ‘compaignie’, ‘confrarie/confraternite’, and ‘commun’ for the entire network, and ‘compaignoun’ and ‘comfrere’ for its individual members. The moments in which these terms are used in the statutes are crucial to our understanding of them as promoting this monastic ideal of conviviality. Overwhelmingly, ‘compaignie’ is used to denote the wider group, and ‘compaignouns’ its individual members. Whereas the French puys such as Rouen

81 Ibid., p.5.
referred to their founding groups mostly as ‘confraternite’ or ‘carité’, here in the London statutes a term with far fewer religious connotations is favoured. The term has many prospective translations, including company, society, association, and band, but not one of them relates to practicing piety. Similarly, ‘commun’ is used in the sense of ‘community’ when discussing the rejection of poor subjects by the network. The dominance of these terms within the statutes further indicates the enthusiasm for the social, secular elements of this network over any sacred ones.

Where the other terms are used (and this is only in six places across both sets of statutes), it often corresponds with the statutes' brief moments of religious consideration dealt with above. There is a spate of four ‘confreres’ and two ‘comfraries’ throughout the statute which introduces the protective candle placed in the local chapel, for instance. Perhaps the scribe felt this vocabulary more appropriate for such a topic, or maybe he was drawing on French sources more likely to use such phrasing, seeing as the provision of a candle was a popular feature of many of their puy. ‘Confraternite’ is similarly used when describing the Mass to be held for the souls of departed members (p. 222). Interestingly, the remaining use of terminology with a more religious edge comes at moments where a community spirit of sorts is encouraged of the Puy. ‘Confreres’ is present when the members are entreated to maintain a good spirit to one another (p. 224); ‘confrarie’ when the obligation to support the Puy in all matters upon entry is discussed (p. 216), and once again when declaring that non-members must not be present at the sitting (p. 217); and finally ‘confraternite’ is selected whilst outlining the governing structure of Prince and his twelve advisors, for the benefit of the Puy (p. 220). This focused use of terms other than the secular ‘compaignie’ further demonstrates the certainly implicit, perhaps even subconscious, desire for a network which took care of its own, and enjoyed an almost secretive sense of being insiders of a group.

This discussion of the London Puy as a network striving for the monastic ideals of close community and togetherness reaches its conclusion with the posing of one further question – what ultimately drove its members to form such a network in the first place? A potentially troublesome demand, it is made somewhat more

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83 See: Leo X, *Approbation et confirmation.*
accessible by considering the Puy as exactly that, a network. When the statutes are read in their contemporary context of regulating the regular coming together of the network’s members, the sociological theory of homosociality proves enlightening. One particularly telling statute in the second set explains that women are not permitted to attend Puy meetings or sittings: ‘nule dame ne autre femme ne doit estre a la graunt [siege] du Pui, par le resoun ke doit [...] honurer, cheir, et loer trestotes dames [...] au taunt en lour absence come en lour presence’ (no lady or other woman may be present at the great Puy sitting, for the reason that men must honour, cherish, and praise all women as much in their absence as in their presence, p. 225). On one level, this is a clear, yet obfuscatory, indication of male social desire to gather without the presence of women. As the statute also reveals that the ‘honeste pleisaunce de bone dame soit droite matiere et principale enchesoun de chaunt roiale’ (honest pleasure of good women must be the proper object of and principal reason for the chants royaux, p. 225), a more complex picture is revealed. Not only are the male members of this network meeting without women, they are also using the exaltation of women as a conduit for these homosocial gatherings.

There are other, more incidental, indications that the London Puy was a homosocial network which predominantly sought to promote male social exchange and interaction. In the opening declaration, the Puy is given as first and foremost ‘loial amour ensaucier’ (promoting loyal friendship, p. 216). To place a clause such as this in the opening sentence speaks volumes: woven into the very fibre of this network was the hope that it could promote the formation and endurance of social bonds. More subtly, this can be seen in the statute which decrees that should the Prince die between feasts, all members of the network should gather at his funeral, and the ‘corps du prince mort ne seit enterre devaunt qe la compaignie eit eslu un novel prince’ (body of the dead prince is not to be interred before the company has elected a new prince, p. 225). There is a palpable sense here that the social bonds which formed through membership of the Puy’s network transcended, and were felt strong enough to demonstrably assert themselves over, those of the family network. The dead prince’s relatives and other friends (importantly undoubtedly including women) had to wait until members of the Puy network had completed their ritual, and

in doing so achieved their own form of closure, before they could lay him to rest, as would normally be their business. That said, the Puy network should not be seen as one which was homosocial to the extent of existing primarily to perpetuate male dominance within a patriarchal society. Reading these statutes, with their undertones of a monastically-inspired brotherhood and community, and the close attention they pay to fostering lasting bonds between members, a less aggressive conclusion is reached. This formal network, drawing inspiration from the continental puys but focusing firmly on their convivial elements, was one which would satisfy both their desire for homosociality, and also the wider socio-psychological need to belong.

The tangible way in which the desire for this kind of formal network manifested itself serves as an apt way to draw the current discussion of the London Puy’s fundamental nature to a close. This was a network which had to exist in the real world, it could not simply remain in the minds of its members. Obviously, attending the annual meetings and other Puy business would serve this purpose to an extent, but some of the statutes reveal the need for other, more tangible points of network representation. The clearest symbol of this network is the ‘commune huche’ (common chest) introduced in the second statutes. A kind of central depository, the chest was to be kept ‘en sauf lu […] dedenz la cite de Loundres’ (in a safe place within the city of London, p. 220). It held everything from financial provisions, fines, and fees, to full membership lists and copies of the statutes themselves. Only the Prince, along with two others carefully selected from his twelve advisors, were to have a key, and each year ‘li viel prince […] rend sa clef de cele huche au prince novel (the old prince is to give his key to this chest to the new prince, p. 220). This symbolic gesture is one of several which signified the crowning of the new Prince each year, with their newfound access to the tangible representation of the network representative of their governance over it.

Also introduced was the position of clerk. His role was partly administrative, but partly to ensure that the members of the network always had access to one another. As such, he was to ensure that ‘il face assavoir as compaignouns son ostel certain, ou le puisson trover totes houres qil averont de lui afere’ (he makes his personal lodgings known to the companions, where they may find him at all hours that they have business with him, p. 221). What kind of business this may be is hinted at in a later statute which insists that the clerk be in possession of copies of
the Puy statutes and expenses transcripts. With the common chest under lock and key, if members wanted to check the official line on anything, or perhaps challenge or defend an imposed fee, it would be to the clerk that they had to turn. This sense of constant availability worked both ways, as the clerk had to know ‘les osteus des compagnouns’ (the companions’ residences) also, so that he could ‘prestement somoundre quelque heure que li prince et li xii compagnoun voillent’ (present summons at whatever hour that the prince and the twelve companions wish, p. 221). This level of almost forced availability makes sense not only on a practical level (in late medieval London if you did not know where someone could be found, you had no other certain means of contacting them), but also on a psychological one. It has already been explored how the founders of the London Puy were striving to establish a network which could facilitate above all else social exchange and interaction. For this to exist, there had to also exist a feeling that active members could never be completely cut off from the network. Physical features such as the common chest, and the halls in which meetings were held, would help this, but most important was the ease of personal access provided through the figure of the clerk, who served as both a constant port of call for members, and also the instigator of more widely attended moments.

Obligations, Aspirations, and Realities

The second half of analysis moves away from the fundamental ideas and agendas behind the establishment of the London Puy, exploring instead what can be learned of the experience of being part of the network. A defining part of this experience was undoubtedly located in the regulations and obligations set out for members in the statutes, all of which those members were ‘obliger par sa fiaunce’ (obliged by their oath) to uphold (p. 216). Many of these were practical: for instance if the Prince was to be out of the city on the day of the sitting, then ‘il doit lesser un souffisaunt compagnoun en son lieu’ (he must leave behind a capable companion in his place, p. 217); and should any lower members be absent, they still had to pay towards the feast, ‘xii deniers’ for those who were still in the city, and ‘i iii deniers’ for those who had gone further afield (p. 218). Members were also obliged to attend any wedding, funeral, or ordination of their fellows, with the statutes tellingly proclaiming that to miss such occasions following an explicit summons from the clerk was ‘la
chose qe pluis ad descomforde et defete la compaignie’ (the thing that most saddens and undoes the company, p. 221).

It also becomes clear that a member’s obligations to the Puy were for life. The twelve advisors to the prince were expected to hold the position ‘tres tut leur temps’ (all the way through their lives, p. 220), while any ex-member returning from a move overseas (the only given way of being freed from oath) was ‘tenuz de paier les arrerages’ (bound to pay all his arrears, p. 218). On the subject of lifetime obligations, the statutes contain some frankly intimidating advice on the issue of bequeathing wealth to the Puy. In the first set, a member is encouraged to ‘leisser de ses biens pur Dieu et por aumosne a la […] Pui’ (leave behind of his goods for God and as alms to the Puy, p. 218). In the second statutes, however, this is expanded upon: members of the network ‘qui suffisanz sont de avoir’ (who are of sufficient means) who fall gravely ill and wish to give their testament are to be visited by ‘lui princes, ov ii des xii compaignouns’ (the prince, along with two of the twelve companions, p. 223-4). It is their task to ‘lur amentive de lur fois qil ount plevies a la compaignie, e les amoneste qil devisent aucune chose’ (remind them of their faith which they have promised the company, and to instruct them that they should leave something, p. 224) to the benefit of the Puy. Here we see dying members of the Puy essentially being press-ganged into leaving portions of their estate to the network on their deathbed. This, if nothing else, shows just how seriously the Puy took the personal obligations of its members. This was an often expensive, potentially time-consuming, and stringently regulated group of which to be a part. The expected social gains of capital, competitive play, and sense of belonging which came from joining must, therefore, have been high.

This notion of perception is an important one, and something about which the existence of two subsequent sets of statutes speaks volumes. With late medieval documents such as these statutes, it is often far easier to spot the original aspirations of a group than it is the realities. While there are no narrative records of how the Puy conducted itself in practice, the subtle additions, amendments, and cautionary warnings of the second statutes compared to the first offer a rare glimpse

into the actualities of a formal medieval network at work. Although in part reflecting the complications that will inevitably arise in any durable organisation, I believe that the shift between the first and second statutes takes place on such a fundamental level that it suggests a far deeper level of disquiet. For example, in the opening declaration of the second statutes, a change in tone is immediately apparent. Whereas the first focused on the benefits and potential glories the Puy could bring to London and its members, here negative language is now interspersed, instructing members to ‘ire et rancour, felonies, et tuz vices anientir, et pesauntes oblier’ (put an end to anger, rancour, perfidies, vices, and to forget suffering), and never to ‘defaille ne deschese’ (forsake nor abandon) either set of regulations (pp. 219-20). Instantly these statutes take on a less optimistic, more cautionary feel to their predecessors. In addition to this, the statutes themselves take on a more legalistic feel, as whenever they refer to themselves, the word ‘Estatutz’ is capitalised in the second set, whereas in the first it was not.87

The role of the prince in particular comes under fire. In the second new article, after the introduction of the common chest, the band of twelve advisors, who were previously only elected to support the prince where necessary, are handed a great deal more responsibility. Once elected, it is clearly stated that ‘li princes rien ne face qe touche la compagnie sanz la presence de ii ou de iii de cele dozieme, qi puissent ses fetz tesmoigner’ (the prince may do nothing touching the company without the presence of two or three of this twelve, who can witness his acts, p. 220). The use of ‘rien’ here is key: the prince has been stripped of any semblance of autonomy that he was afforded by the first set of statutes. How the princes had behaved in the interim period to ensure such a damning loss of power cannot be known for sure, but needless to say decisions must have been made, and actions taken, which were not deemed to be in the common interests of the Puy. Later in the statutes it also becomes apparent that the princes have been throwing ever more elaborate and expensive feasts, in an attempt to outdo the previous year’s affair. Strict guidelines are imposed for the day of the feast as a result: the hall is to be sparsely decorated, the menu is to be the same each year, and the prince may not hold subsequent dinners or elaborate after parties (p. 227). This is a common point of discussion in those studies of the Puy which do exist, and so is only briefly included here. It serves

87 For example, ‘estatut’ on p. 219, and ‘Estatuz’ on p. 220.
as another indication that the role of Prince was not being fulfilled in line with the non-antagonistic spirit of fellowship described in the earlier statutes.

It was not only the Princes who had been falling short of the original statutes’ aspirations, either; reality had seemingly exposed shortcomings in the rest of the company’s behaviour. There are increasing references to the exclusion of members who find themselves on the wrong side of the law. For instance, if one of the twelve advisors ‘par aventure de forfeture de la pais nostre Seignour le Roy de Engletere’ (through forfeiture of the peace of our Lord the King of England) is expelled from the group, another must be elected immediately (p. 220). Similarly, the only occasion on which mutual support should not be offered to a fellow member is in cases ‘qe sont encuentre la pees e la corune nostre Seignour le Roy’ (that are against the peace and crown of our Lord the King, p. 224). Perhaps more importantly, warnings against transgressions within the society also appear, not least the threat of expulsion for those who defaulted on their payments for seven years encountered above. Other misdemeanours seem to have included the reneging on promises of gifts and donations to the Puy, since come the second statutes ‘un roule soit fait’ (a record must be made) and placed in the communal chest of such assurances, and also of the failure to attend the summons of the clerk, particularly for ‘les assembles pur mort, pur esposaille, ou pur avancement des compagnouns’ (the assemblies for the death, marriage, or promotion of companions, p. 221). This may well be evidence that the undertakings of the Puy simply proved too much for some of its members, drawn in by the alluring promise of a brotherly, social network, but faced with the stark reality of a Puy which actually demanded a great deal of its members.

Having considered the likely realities of Puy life against their original aspirations, it seems almost inevitable that degrees of hierarchy and distinctions would evolve in formalised networks such as this. Clearly, the election of a Prince and twelve advisors (and to a lesser extent, the clerk) to positions of authority invoked a certain level of distinction between these nodes and the rest of the network, and evidence has already been examined which suggests the Princes in particular may have attempted to stretch these positions of influence to their extremes. As a result, whereas the Prince node’s relations with the rest of the network would have once been largely directed outward, they became far more undirected, as he became far more accountable to his advisors, and their opinions
and advice. Within the statutes there is also an underlying sense that the individual wealth of the Puy’s members may have proved a further trigger for unofficial partition and distinction. One statute reads that all expense incurred on feast days were to be borne in common by the Puy, except for “pris la queyntise le prince e de ceux qe queinter se voelent le jour du graunt siege, a lour propre custages” (the price of the prince’s outfit, and of those who wear what they want on the day of the great sitting, that comes from their own expenses, p. 226). The fact that some members were choosing to wear their “what they want” on feast days implies that there was otherwise some form of dress code, perhaps indicating an attempt at maintaining a sense of equality among the nodes of the network. That members chose to ignore this code and come wearing their own, no doubt elaborate, outfits indicates an enthusiasm to transpose personal levels of external wealth onto the Puy network.

The third from last statute presents a more subtle means of displaying external wealth within the Puy network, and thus causing internal fracturing and potentially even resentment. In order to establish a chapel in the name of the Puy, each of its members is called upon to make a weekly charitable donation. The statute gives this as “les plus riches chescun Samedi un dener, et les autres chescun obole, ou ceo qe lui plerra, soulam ses aises et sa richesse” (each Saturday, the richest one penny, and the others a halfpenny each, or whatever they like, according to their means and wealth, p. 227). Thus a sliding scale of wealth, and its associated ability to contribute, is established. While in theory such a progressive tax, or levy, may seem the most sensible way of raising the largest possible amount of money, it should be considered how such a system must have operated in practice. On the one hand, might the wealthier members have felt that they were contributing exponentially for the same benefits as those donating less? Conversely, the poorer members may have felt inadequate in their donations, or could even have experienced stirrings of resentment toward their richer counterparts. One is reminded of the biblical lesson of the widow’s mite, which saw wealthier Christians donating large amounts in grand displays, while a poor widow quietly donated just two mites, all she had.88 Since it has already been seen that the Princes were willing to go to great expense to impress and outdo their fellow members, it is completely plausible that the rest of the network’s wealthy participants might have

88 Mark 12, 41-44.
done so on a smaller scale. The London Puy did not survive long at all compared to its continental counterparts, and it must be considered that these potential conduits for internal fragmentation were a potentially fundamental contributing factor to its eventual failure.

Membership of a Formal Network

Across this chapter, the statutes of the London Puy have been explored for evidence of the attraction and operations of a late medieval formal social network. Set against the context of the more religious French puys, the London Puy has emerged as an enthusiastic but flawed example of a late thirteenth-century society’s attempted satiating of the human need to belong. As seen in the introduction, Baumeister and Leary noted that this need ‘should stimulate goal-directed activity designed to satisfy it’. According to its statutes, the Puy thus provided the opportunity for educated London residents to come together in a temporally stable framework, through which they could frequently establish familiar social bonds, within a mutually supportive environment. The annual sittings and other more regular meetings would have fostered personal relationships, and, perhaps most crucially, the annual chant royal contest provided the opportunity for competitive play which saw individual achievements recognised and validated by an interested audience. The willingness of members to pay the fees they did, and follow (or rather, have the intention to follow) the Puy’s various codes and regulations further suggests that the positive effects resulting from participation in the network were anticipated as being considerable.

It is also interesting to note how, even in such a short-lived network, traditions seem to have quickly emerged for the London Puy. The placing of the previous year’s chant royal beneath the current Prince’s coat of arms, the ritual crowning of new princes involving singing and a procession through the hall, and the horseback parade through London following the annual feast all indicate a network which had built up a sense of ceremony and inclusive knowledge around itself. The horseback parade is particularly important, as the network would inevitably have been advertising itself as exactly that to the rest of the city. Coupled with its particular rituals, and the statute considered above which meant no non-member could be

present at Puy meetings, a distinct dichotomy of insiders and outsiders becomes apparent. To be part of this network gave its members a sense of belonging enjoyed only through involvement in the Puy. By parading through the city after their feast, the participants were carefully advertising their Puy membership to outsiders. To see the horseback procession of this convivial, no doubt merry network, the rest of the public might have experienced any number of feelings: respect, admiration, jealousy, resentment, dismissal. Whether the attitude be positive or negative, a distinct ‘us versus them’ barrier would have been established between those in the Puy, and those not. Not content with simply enjoying the feeling of belonging the Puy offered, its participants felt the need to publicise their membership to the wider society. This is a feature which can be seen across networks from most temporal spaces and times: along with a sense of belonging to a network comes a sense of pride, which prompts participants to show their membership off to the rest of the world. The bearing of crests and emblems practiced by medieval chivalric orders, as discussed in chapter three, and associated modern-day military insignia specific to particular regiments and corps are examples of this kind of outward identification.

Ultimately, however, the Puy failed. It seems beneficial to conclude this chapter with a consideration of why this was. Throughout the above appraisal of the London Puy as a formal network an underlying, but fundamental, tension seems to have gradually emerged. It is a tension of reputation. On the one hand, there is the reputation of the Puy as an organisation, and by extension, the whole of London. As has already been noted, the introductory paragraph of the first set of statutes gives one of the Puy’s primary goals as promoting the renown of London as a city, through the honourable society. Alongside this are the items which declare both the prince and all other members should strive to maintain the success and stability of the Puy above all else. On the other hand, however, are each and every individual member of this network’s own hopes for reputational gain. For while the need to belong has been shown to be a robust driving force behind membership of the Puy, other human interests including reputation and social capital, particularly prominent in the
politically charged urban environment of fourteenth-century London, cannot be ignored.\textsuperscript{90}

The notion of indirect reciprocity is useful here, as it illustrates well the more practical, selfish reasons members may have had for joining the Puy. In its simplest form, indirect reciprocity dictates that help is more likely to be given to those with a good, well-observed reputation. Essentially, whereas direct reciprocity promotes the ‘you scratch my back, I scratch yours’ mentality, indirect reciprocity follows that ‘you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch someone else’s, or ‘you scratch my back, and someone else will scratch yours’. The logic is that if everyone knows you never give anything in return in social exchanges, no one will ever give you anything in the first place, hence, reputation is crucial.\textsuperscript{91} This theory helps explain the complex social interactions which would have been operating whenever the members of the Puy network met. As has been shown, membership fees of the Puy were not cheap, and the emphasis on song composition indicates a substantial level of literacy. The members of the Puy were therefore inevitably drawn from the higher ranks of London’s urban society: businessmen, traders, and figures of civil authority.\textsuperscript{92} In attending the Puy, these high-powered city dwellers were attempting to raise their own reputation by engaging with a socially elite ‘in crowd’, hoping to boost and expand their standing in the city’s various other networks of influence. The clearest way to do this was to make known your reputation, and thus a constant game of one-upmanship reveals itself. This would all only serve to intensify the feelings of resentment which were emerging as the internal hierarchies and wider lack of commitment revealed in the second statutes appeared within the Puy.

This hypothesis is supported by evidence from the aforementioned socio-religious guilds which emerged across the fourteenth century, in the wake of the Puy. These guilds had incredibly similar aims to those given by the Puy statutes, including annual feasts, a strong sense of exclusivity, and pledges for mutual support. Traditional scholarship on these formal networks has tended toward the socially

\textsuperscript{90} For more on the concept of reputation in the medieval world, see: \textit{Fama: The Politics of Talk & Reputation in Medieval Europe}, ed by Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Small (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

\textsuperscript{91} For a useful introduction to indirect reciprocity, see: Martin A. Nowak and Karl Sigmund, ‘Evolution of indirect reciprocity’, Nature 437 (2005), 1291-1298.

\textsuperscript{92} Sutton, for instance, argues convincingly that former London mayor Henry le Waleys had ties to the Puy, see: Sutton, ‘Merchants, Music’, p. 4.
optimistic, portraying them as communally resilient groups whose members supported one another and always acted for the common benefit. More recently, however, Marion Turner has cast serious doubts on these claims. Her argument that these guilds had ‘an ethos of religious and social cohesion that masks mutual suspicion and individualism’, and the portrayal of the London Puy provided here by close analysis of the statutes are mutually supportive. Turner, for instance, uses the example of the guild of Saint Thomas, Canterbury. Its ordinances include a lengthy section on the regular feast days which paints a far from socially cohesive picture: members are to stay away from the ale stores, for fear they will steal it; they should not attend drinking sessions wearing a tabard or cloak, for fear they may be concealing weapons; the ale cup must not be hogged; no noise should be made, nor should any members fall asleep; and no one is to remain behind once the alderman has left, again presumably to deter thievery.

This is by no means an isolated account, either. In Bishop’s Lynn, the Gild of Saint John the Baptist prohibits members from ‘jang[ing] in time of drynk’ (presumably a means of heckling other members, or simply acting raucously), and anyone ‘who-so is rebel ageyns ye alderman, or ageynes sister or brethren’ at any meeting was to be fined. Across the country, similar clauses were entered into guild statutes in an attempt to control members’ behaviour: in Exeter a very specific section outlines fines for any tailors guild member who ‘dysspysse anoder, callenge hym knaffe, or horson, or deffe, or any yoder mysname’ (despises another member, calls him a good-for-nothing, or whoreson, or knave, or any other insulting name). Evidently, these slightly later guilds were struggling to cope with exactly the same tensions which plagued the London Puy. Bringing together the social, economic, and often no doubt political elite in formal networks such as this, whilst providing a forum for social exchange and interaction, also brought together a myriad of personal reputations, intentions, misgivings, and suspicions in one place, often with highly disruptive consequences.

95 Ibid., p. 144.
97 Ibid., p. 315.
One final point to consider as to why the Puy in particular fractured is the concept of something akin to market saturation. It has already been seen that guilds (for all their associated shortcomings) began appearing exponentially across the thirteenth and particularly the fourteenth century in London. It is entirely possible that the Puy, or rather its core conventions for interaction and exchange, was duplicated and outcompeted by its analogues, especially the emergent trade guilds. Perhaps these networks, with their clearer economic advantages and access to the key figures of their associated profession, were ultimately found to provide a greater payoff than the Puy. In this way, other networks such as the guilds proved far more durable than the Puy, which dissolved relatively quickly. Formalised social networks, such as the London Puy, must provide their members with suitable incentives in order to forestall a natural tendency toward network fracture. This is the fundamental conclusion drawn from this reading of the two successive sets of Puy statues: that in a network such as this, the demands placed upon members must be seen as appropriate to the perceived returns on offer. In the case of the Puy, this gap was evidently too large, since as a network it failed to become a substantial and established social structure.

Any explanation for why, exactly, the Puy fell victim to this kind of fracturing must remain speculative. The cultural capital sought by members through the establishment of such a novel and untested poetry competition on English soil may not have been as valued as they had initially hoped. Reading the two successive sets of statutes, some members appear to have struggled to follow their regulations, while others seem to have flouted them altogether in favour of resentment-inducing displays of wealth, resulting in internal social fragmentation. On an economic level, the Puy was not a cheap network to be a member of. When the weekly alms amounting to over 4s, the annual sitting fee of 1s (plus a share of any remaining expenses), and other regular payments for the prayers of the chaplain and the constant burning of a candle are combined, membership must have cost well over seven shillings, or eighty-four pence. For perspective, this figure is roughly equivalent to two month’s wages for a skilled professional builder in fourteenth-

98 Fracturing is a key concept in social network analysis thanks to the wider social effects it can have. For more, see: The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis, ed. by Peter J. Carrington and John Scott, (London: Sage, 2011), p. 19.
century London. Add to this the expected ‘gifts’ to the network, and the encouraged deathbed donation, and it becomes apparent that the Puy was asking a considerable investment of its nodes. All of these explanations (a combination of which was most likely to blame for the Puy’s fracturing) reveal the same root cause for failure, however: a fundamental discrepancy between the initial demands of membership and the subsequent expected social and cultural returns.

The London Puy’s statutes have provided us with a rare opportunity to appraise the psychological driving forces, aspirations, and realities of a relatively intense formal network structure. Although intended in part to provide for the key attractions of social networks (most prominently the facilitation of competitive play and satisfaction of the need to belong), the Puy was destined to remain ephemeral, and eventually to fracture completely. This is a risk that plagues formal networks in particular: the ultimately arbitrary nature of their regulations makes them more rigid and uncompromising structures than the organic informal and idealised virtual networks considered in chapters two and three. These more fluid structures generally place fewer strict demands on their members, making their ensuing payoffs more attractive. In this light, it seems that having literature as the sole focal point for a network which demanded so much, both financially and socially, of its members simply did not present enough of a network-sustaining pay off to make it a worthwhile endeavour for those nodes. In comparison to the emergent formal guild alternatives, the Puy actually had little to offer its members; trade guilds provided their members with professional solidarity and support, while religious guilds offered religious community and its associated spiritual capital. This, in part, suggests why the continental puys discussed at the beginning of this chapter thrived where London’s did not. The puys of northern France were rooted in wider religious communities and cultures, and so offered their participants a kind of spiritual return in addition to literary competition, which made the demands placed upon them seem more justified.

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Chapter Two

An Informal Network: Court Poets Writing For Louis XII

Part I: Réseaux, Rhétoriqueurs, and a Royal Rivalry.

…du plaisir des lectres ne me frustres.¹

(...do not deny me the pleasure of letters.)

The sense of eagerness to engage in literary exchange found in this adjuration from court poet Jean Lemaire de Belges in 1511 indicates a sociological enthusiasm for interaction that underpins social networks of all kinds. This chapter explores the concept of informal network, structures which, while not regulated by formal rules and regulations, can still be identified as definite groups of individuals coming together in some common enterprise, and forming social bonds as a result. The need to belong is again seen as a driving force in the formation of these networks, and a close reading of their competitive play elements illuminates both their inner workings and their members’ motivations for amassing cultural capital. The network under examination is that of the poets who wrote in support of French King Louis XII during his early sixteenth-century conflict with Pope Julius II. Once I have charted the network, analysis focuses on a specific case study, a particular moment of ludic exchange from four poets of the wider grands rhétoriqueurs network. Their response to this political standoff was a collection of collaborative poems based around heroic figures and the mythical Elysian Fields. Throughout the chapter, I also introduce a fifth poem which forms a part of this poetic exchange, but which has until now been neglected by scholarly studies.

The chapter is divided into two halves: the first focuses on the wider definition and workings of the network, while the second examines the more focused case study of one moment in its productive history. Accordingly, part one sketches the political and cultural background to the wider early sixteenth-century political dispute, and considers the nuances and contours of this network. This reveals the nature and

¹ Jean Lemaire de Belges, L’epistre du roy trescrestien Loys douziesme à Hector de Troye chef des neuf preux, vv.559-67.
importance of the interaction which it facilitated for its nodes. The case study of five poems is then introduced, and its material reception analysed. Part two provides a more in-depth analysis of this heroic epistolary cycle, illustrating how this contemporary informal network functioned. When considered through the established theoretical framework involving approaches to ludic experiences of play alongside more traditional literary analysis, the content of these compositions helps assess how the decisions made within them can, at times, reflect the nature of their authors’ real-world network. Finally, the concluding analysis draws together these themes through an exploration of the individual poets’ experiences of the game, by engaging with ideas of performative play, subjectivity, and avatars.

History and Historiography

The fierce rivalry between King Louis XII of France and Pope Julius II (later to be nicknamed ‘The Fearsome Pope’ and ‘The Warrior Pope’) was arguably the greatest political issue gripping western Europe in 1510. In December 1508, Julius had formed an alliance with Louis along with the Holy Roman Empire and Spain known as the League of Cambrai, which sought to subdue the Republic of Venice’s influence in northern Italy. By mid-May 1509 a French force led by Louis had defeated the Venetian troops at the Battle of Agnadello, and the French comfortably occupied Venetian lands as far east as Brescia. Months of military and political struggle ensued, and come early 1510 Julius had become sufficiently worried about the increasing French influence in Italy that he offered his previous enemies the Venetians an alliance, in a bid to help him drive the French out.²

Fighting continued between the two sides in the following months, and by June 1511 Julius was so desperate to end Louis’ influence in Italy that he called a Holy League against the French. His old allies Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, both eager for further territorial gains themselves, soon joined the League, and by the close of the year so had England under Henry VIII. French fortunes against this new alliance were mixed in the months before and indeed after Julius’ eventual death in February 1513. During his war with the pope, Louis went so far as to call a (largely ineffective) General Council of the Church at Pisa in 1511, under the guise of

tackling abuses within the institution, but with the real goal of winning support for deposing Julius through conciliar authority.³

Unsurprisingly, poets affiliated in some way with the French court were quick to write in support of Louis’ actions; it was, after all, a controversial move for a Christian king explicitly to engage in war with the head of the Church, let alone call for his deposition.⁴ As Jennifer Britnell has shown, Louis was already known actively to encourage works which celebrated his political actions and their justification before this quarrel with Julius began dominating his foreign policy.⁵ This emerging political situation therefore provided these writers with a fresh opportunity to set pen to parchment in a bid to impress their King. Scholars have, up until now, treated this brief period in courtly literature’s history within the stricter sphere of literary studies. As already mentioned, Britnell (the first explicitly to highlight four of this chapter’s five poems as a coherent collection of works)⁶ sought to determine whether these pieces written against Julius constituted a propaganda campaign, concluding that although the term ‘propaganda’ holds currency when discussing the early sixteenth century, they ultimately did not have a wide enough circulation, with only a tiny proportion actually put to print, to have a noteworthy effect on public opinion.⁷

The first work to contain an exploration of these particular ‘anti-papal poets’ was Cynthia Brown’s Shaping of History and Poetry.⁸ Throughout the book Brown argues that over time the nature of second-generation rhétoriqueurs (a category into which our poets largely fall) works changed: they began with a distinct focus for currying favour with potential patrons, then shifted tack to composing instead for a general public. Brown’s chapter on these writers (and also the rest of the book) fits well into the wider body of work attempting to rehabilitate the style of the

³ Ibid., pp. 210-212.
⁴ For more on the difficulties of representing the king during this period, see: Nicole Hochner, Louis XII: les dérèglements de l’image royale (1498-1515) (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2006).
rhétoriqueurs as poets, long dismissed by scholars.\textsuperscript{9} Returning to Britnell, in her chapter ‘Antipapal Writing in the reign of Louis XII’, she makes the figure of Julius II her focus for linguistic analysis, assessing how each author dealt with the sensitive issue of portraying the head of the Church as an enemy to the faith.\textsuperscript{10} Finally, and most recently, in his \textit{Virtuoso Circle} Adrian Armstrong makes brief reference to the conflict between Louis and Julius in his conclusion, as part of a wider discussion on the rhétoriqueurs and their broader promotion of French Kings around this time. His main argument relates to the expertise of this group of poets, and their desire to display their accumulated knowledge of poetry, and as such his consideration of these poems is concise and focused on technical merit.\textsuperscript{11}

In short, the current trend regarding the literature written in support of Louis’ war with Julius has been first to examine the technical content of these poems, in a bid to illuminate the wider style of the rhétoriqueur network, and second to appraise their handling of attacking Julius as pope, leaving a path towards a fruitful new appraisal untrodden. Through a case study of the heroic Elysian Fields poems, the interdisciplinary approach of this thesis can be used to explore the socio-cultural environment in which they were composed. In doing so, an informal medieval network is revealed, along with the various levels of competitive play which it facilitated.

\textit{The Informal Socio-Literary Network}

The network to be considered is made up of those poets associated with the French court who wrote in support of Louis XII during his conflict with Julius II. It is important to note from the outset that these poets also formed parts of other, overlapping, networks, as implied by the wider principles of social network analysis considered in the introduction. For example, all would have been nodes in the network of courtly, vernacular poets who wrote in support of Louis throughout the entirety of his reign, and also some formed further nodes in the network of all those today considered grands rhétoriqueurs. While these wider networks are touched


\textsuperscript{11} Adrian Armstrong, \textit{The Virtuoso Circle: Competition, Collaboration, and Complexity in Late Medieval French Poetry} (Tempe (Arizona): ACMRS, 2012), pp. 164-166.
upon, to consider the full extent of our poets' places, relations, and influences within them across the entirety of their working lives would be an undertaking far beyond the scope of this thesis. Hence the focus is on those poets who wrote in support of Louis specifically against Julius from 1510-1513, though anecdotal evidence is drawn from relevant individuals' whole careers in exploring this informal network. Another point of clarification is that only detailed examples from the lives of the poets whose works are considered below are looked at. Other French poets, such as Pierre Gringore and André de la Vigne, contributed works similarly focused on vindicating Louis' actions against Julius, and so also formed nodes of the wider network in question. However, as they were not involved in the epistolary cycle currently under examination they do not feature in the current illustration of it. Finally, in a similar vein, it must not be forgotten that there may well have been others who would have been considered a part of this network, contributing their own works, but due to the perils of time and preservation have been lost from the historical record of the period, and so must remain consigned to modern invisibility.

The five members of this informal network who make up the present case are Jean d’Auton, Jean Lemaire de Belges, ‘A. de Mailly’, Jean Bouchet, and Guillaume Cretin. D’Auton was the most prominent of these poets at the contemporary French court. Having won the support of celebrated literary patron Anne of Brittany, Louis’ wife, he soon became Louis’ own chronicler and historiographer. Lemaire was similarly appointed to Anne’s patronage in February 1512, following a relatively long stint at, amongst others, Margaret of Austria’s court. Here is a distinct example of a poet inhabiting two overlapping networks during his career; when Lemaire left Margaret’s court, he did not cut all ties with it, and so continued to hold a place in its associated networks. ‘A. de Mailly’ is the least accessible of the five, with no record of other compositions besides this: he receives particular attention below. Jean Bouchet was a provincial procureur and poet based in Poitiers. He never succeeded in achieving royal patronage, but his principal literary patron was Louis de la Trémoille, who presented him and his works at Louis’ court. Finally, Cretin was

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similar to Lemaire, as a poet and churchman under the protection of the French court at the time of writing, and later winning Louis’ particular favour in 1514 and becoming one of his aumôniers ordinaires.\textsuperscript{16}

At its heart, this group of poets formed an informal and strategic interest-based network which facilitated literary production and ludic interaction. The nodes of the network were the individual poets who composed literary pieces in direct response to Louis’ conflict with Julius, and so have been selected through both their social proximity to the court and participation in this cycle. The relations which comprised the network were defined by interaction and flow, since through poetic exchange themes, conventions, and motifs were played with in attempts to display poetic aptitude and amass cultural capital. These poetic pieces were the network’s tangible outcomes, the physical artefacts which remain as evidence of its existence. As explored below, the nodes of this network were also connected by some pre-existing bonds of kinship, adding a further dimension to their intertwining relations. This was not, however, a primarily recreational network, as the London Puy was intended to be. Instead, it was one which emerged fundamentally to allow its members to further their careers through literary production. Through displaying their specialisation and achievement in verse epistle composition, the poets could amass the vital cultural capital needed for such progression.\textsuperscript{17} Capital would have been measured both through mutual appreciation and praise within the network, and also, more importantly, through the approval and support of potential prestigious courtly patrons. In building up a positive reputation within the network, poets would have appeared more attractive to patrons, who by welcoming them into their cultural inner circles could enjoy their reputation by association. Although Louis may appear the central focus of this enterprise, his passive role in proceedings means the group is best described as an ego network surrounding D’Auton, author of the piece which prompted all subsequent literary contributions.

This network is of particular interest to the current thesis, as the real-world benefits of increased reputation through amassed cultural capital (in the short term), and resultanty winning the patronage of a prestigious and wealthy figure (in the

longer term), are relatively visible. To take some examples from the poets of our case study, it is clear that these benefits improved their livelihood, and allowed them to continue earning a comfortable wage through a vocation which they enjoyed. When D’Auton was made *historiographe et chroniqueur du roi* under Louis XII, he received as reward the income of the abbey of Angle in Poitou, as well as regular pensions and donations for each new poetic or historic work he produced.\(^\text{18}\) This sustained him not only during his active years, but also throughout his retirement, as he took up religious life there after leaving the court in 1515. Lemaire enjoyed similar consideration when serving under Margaret of Austria. When he took on the role of *indiciare* at the court, his annual wage is recorded in 1507 as being 240 *livres tournois*. In addition to this, in 1509, Lemaire wrote to Margaret requesting a quiet retreat at the university of Dôle, so that he could complete several works in honour of her and her house – he also had two young nephews to care for at the time. Margaret granted this request, and in an order providing for his support at Dôle she wrote: ‘a ceste cause nous vous ordonnons que durant ledict terme et espace de unze mois vous paiez a nostredict indiciare ses gaiges accoustunez de six solz pour jour’ (for this cause we confirm to you that during the aforesaid space and term of one month, you will pay our said *indiciare* his usual wages of six *sol* a day).\(^\text{19}\)

Similarly, Cretin is recorded in contemporary court records as receiving 240 *livres tournois* in 1514, and he maintained this wage into Francis I’s reign up until 1522. His wage in 1518 is recorded as 400 *livres tournois*; however, such a large figure may be down to scribal error.\(^\text{20}\) There is also evidence that Cretin felt able to appeal directly to his patron for extra means to help sustain him; for instance, in his *Dudict Cretin au Roy Loys Douziesme* he writes: ‘je recommande | Mon petit cas, et que je vous demande | Ung seul loppin’ (I recommend to you my small case, that I ask you for a single plot of land).\(^\text{21}\) While it is not known if Louis granted him the land he desired, this example of a poet able to present such a petition indicates the wider tangible benefits of amassing capital and securing patronage.

As a network, two particular levels of competitive play are relatively visible already: there is the more play theoretical environment present, as individuals within

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\(^{19}\) Munn, *Contribution to the study of Lemaire*, p. 56.


the network implemented strategies in attempts to further their careers, and then on a more personal level can be found more ludic, performative displays within the poems themselves. With regard to the former, it can best be explained using the game theoretical terminology of cost, risk, and reward. In the case study under examination below, the greatest risk was taken by D’Auton, in composing the first piece which so clearly called for reply. This risk came not within the particular informal network case study here, for it was D’Auton’s composition which called that into existence. Rather he risked derision from his existing networks of patrons and fellow poets, should his efforts at propaganda be deemed incompetent. It would have been a damaging blow to his capital and reputational status if subsequently no one deemed it worthwhile to respond. Similarly, the four poets who did choose to respond each took their own risk, now within the emergent informal network of this case study: their pieces had to be seen to match or outdo D’Auton’s in terms of quality, else their own reputations could take a hit. The costs for each were the time and effort put into writing, along with the more tangible expenses on manuscript production. The rewards were considerable enough to make these costs and risks viable, though, namely the aforementioned potential increases to reputation within the network, and their associated pay-offs in terms of patronage and further employment.

This more competitive element is of particular note, given that four of the five poets under consideration in this network were members of the **grands rhétoriqueurs**, another contemporary informal network. These poets did not identify themselves as ‘**grands rhétoriqueurs**’; rather, they were ascribed this name by nineteenth-century scholars, seeking to reassess their contribution to, in particular, Humanist and Renaissance French literature. As Pierre Jodogne explores in his excellent article, the literary landscape of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries was dominated by a particular type of writer: ‘**dont les orateurs, historiens et poètes des règnes de Charles VIII et Louis XII sont les représentants les plus accomplis**’ (of which the orators, historians, and poets under the reigns of Charles VIII and Louis

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22 It is worth noting that, as with so many informal networks, no single node in this **rhétoriqueur** network would have been personally connected to every single one of the others.
XII are the most accomplished representatives). These career writers were neither popular nor aristocratic; rather, they were university-educated clerks or laymen who socially advanced themselves through the inner circles of Burgundian and French courtly, princely, or royal patrons. Their primary audience ranged from poet to poet, some aristocratic (such as Jean Marot's) and others more bourgeois in nature (for instance Pierre Gringore's). Those in the former category were often paid to champion their patrons' interests and celebrate their victories. In addition to the four poets dealt with here, at times other members of this rhétoriqueur network included Georges Chastelain (?1405 – 1475) Jean Meschinot (1422 – 1491), Jean Molinet (1435 – 1507), Octavien de Saint-Gelais (1468 – 1502), André de la Vigne (1470 – 1515), Pierre Gringoire (1475 – ?1539), and Jean Marot (?1463 – 1526).

These individuals, who are now widely agreed to have been active from around 1460 to 1540, were noted for their versatility of genre, with a predilection for histories, panegyric, and moral pieces. They worked in both prose and verse, and often covered overtly political themes in their compositions. They are well documented as frequently experimenting in verbal games, issuing response pieces, and building intertextual cycles around each other's poetry, often influenced by existing vernacular traditions. Armstrong, for instance, has noted that their work is 'not merely influenced by existing poetry; it is often explicitly conceived and presented as a response to it'. Their work saw them craft compositions which played with imagery, structures including acrostics and rebuses, and linguistic features such as rhyme and assonance, in a bid to uphold and improve their standing as practitioners of seconde rhétorique. Although not contemporarily

24 Ibid.
28 As such, the rhétoriqueurs complement the wider current trends of scholarly thought which perceive later medieval French poetry as participatory, considering the collaborative and competitive elements of its nature; its context as a shared, public experience; and its strong definition as a literary genre, one with clear traditions and conventions which invited play. For key works on this theme, see: Emma Cayley, Debate and Dialogue: Alain Chartier in His Cultural Context (Oxford: OUP, 2006), and Jane Taylor, The Poetry of François Villon (Cambridge: CUP, 2001).
29 Armstrong, The Virtuoso Circle, p. xiv.
30 Griffin, ‘Second rhetoric’, p. 156.
christened with a particular title as the troubadours or jongleurs were, this shared awareness of form, style, and social background made it easy for the rhétoriqueurs to identify as a connected and interacting literary group. In addition to the instances given below, Lemaire in his Concorde des deux langues describes Meschinot, Molinet, Chastelain, Saint-Gelais, and Cretin together as 'poètes, orateurs et historiens de la langue française' (poets, orators and historians of the French language). There is a strong connection here to Gruber’s model of the dialectic of troubadour poetry. Focusing on intertextuality, Gruber illustrated how each successive troubadour assimilated the poetic structures and conventions of his predecessors and contemporaries into his own text. Thus, each work is the output of an initiated group, usually inaccessible to the non-initiated: a notion he termed the hermetische Lyrik. In their use of structure, theme, and inspirations, the same was true of the grands rhétoriqueurs, and these poets serve as the foundation for the network under consideration in this chapter.

This shared attitude and literary interaction meant that many of the poets considered in this network were brought into regular physical and mental contact with others, both before and after the specific case study under examination here. For example, having studied literature at Paris in his younger years, Lemaire first met Cretin in Villefranche, Beaujolais in 1498, and it was this encounter which Lemaire cites as one of the defining moments in his decision to become a career poet. Similarly, D’Auton and Bouchet were well-acquainted: it was D’Auton who instructed Bouchet in rhetoric. Around the time these poems were written, D’Auton took up official duties as the abbot of Angle-sur-Anglin, which was close to Bouchet’s provincial home of Poitiers, and the two remained friends for years after. It is not a stretch to imagine that D’Auton introduced Bouchet to the present cycle. In 1521, while avoiding the plague in Poitiers, Bouchet sent D’Auton a manuscript copy of his Labyrinthe de Fortune to read through and check for errors. Bouchet even wrote an epitaph when his friend died, a piece which gives us much of the bibliographic

36 Guy, Histoire de la poésie, p. 274.
information we have on the poet. Clearly, the poetic conversation to be explored in the following case study is one of a number of threads linking these figures; other dynamics such as personal admiration and respect also fuelled, and were in turn fuelled, by the network.

Looking at this informal network, there is also evidence of its wider contours and activity to be found beyond the present five poet case study. Armstrong, for instance, has highlighted a playful late fifteenth-century exchange between Cretin and fellow *rhétoriqueur* Jean Molinet. Cretin began the correspondence by sending Molinet a stanzaic poem reproaching him for not sending him any recent compositions. Molinet duly responded, after which there was a further reply from each correspondent.37 Their exchange not only highlights the lines of communication facilitated by this network, but also hints at its wider scope: in Molinet’s first reply he makes reference to another *rhétoriqueur*, Octavien de Saint-Gelais. A final link to draw in discussing Molinet is that he was also the literary mentor of Lemaire, and the two spent time together at Valenciennes. In this one example, we see members of the network linked via composition, reputation, and personal bonds. It was not uncommon for members of the network to reference and compliment each other in their works; for example, in his *Plainte sur le trepas de Guillaume de byssipat* Cretin writes, ‘Abbé d’Auton, et maistre Jehan Le Maire, | Qui en nostre art estes des plus expers’ (Abbot of Auton, and Master Jean Lemaire, who are the most expert in our art).38 Later in the piece he also praises ‘Bigue et Villebresme, | Jehan de Paris, Marot et de la Vigne’ (Jacques de Bigue, Mâché de Villebresme, Jean de Paris, Jean Marot, and André de la Vigne, vv.548-9), further illustrating that this was a network in which members were particularly familiar with each other’s activities and compositions. The poets also had common correspondents outside the established active network: Jacob’s edition of D’Auton’s chronicles cites the less influential poet Jean Gervaise as a frequent writer to both D’Auton and Bouchet.39 Jodogne has summarised the communication of these *rhétoriqueurs* perfectly, noting that: ‘Une partie abondante de leur production consiste en épîtres en vers ou en prose dans lesquelles ils se complimentent ou se critiquent avec bienveillance. Il existe entre eux une authentique sodalitas, un véritable esprit de corporation’ (A large part of

38 Chesney, *Oeuvres*, p. 91 (vv.541-542).
39 Jacob, *Chroniques*, p. xiii.
their production consists of verse or prose epistles in which they compliment or critique each other with benevolence. There exists an authentic *fraternity* between them, a real spirit of cooperation).40

Here, then, can be seen the wider network of individuals writing poetry at this time forming lasting bonds with one another in the pursuit of their common interests. As considered in the preceding chapter’s formal Puy network, there is an associated element of homosocial interaction also present among these writers. Here this homosocial desire is made manifest in a slightly more subtle way, however. The work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on the topic builds on that of René Girard, who explored the notion of an ‘erotic triangle’, that is, the interaction of two rivals (usually male) in their quest to win a beloved (usually female).41 He suggested that ‘the bond between rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of actions and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved’.42 Sedgwick nuances this model and applies it to her exploration of homosocial desire found in English literature, considering the continuum between homosocial and homosexual through selected works. While there are no erotic or homosexual undercurrents present in this network, Sedgwick’s model can help to illuminate the anthropological pleasure which these writers took from creating participatory works. In replacing the ‘beloved’ for a patron (here Louis XII), it is easy to see how such a network facilitated interaction: whilst writing in an attempt to win Louis’ continued support, the poets were also able to correspond and interact with one another, which facilitated competitive play and strengthened their social bonds. This is a more indirect means of satisfying the need to belong, and one of the key ways in which this network is more informal than those of the more stringently regulated examples considered under the label ‘formal’.

This network was not necessarily founded on such personal and vocational bonds, however, as the presence of ‘A. de Mailly’ in our current study shows. He is undoubtedly an individual worthy of inclusion in our analysis, for in composing an epistle he made a move in the literary game, but he was not a *rhétoriqueur*, not even

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a poet by trade. As I argue below, he was likely a nobleman and knight at the court, but, whatever his story, the fact that he does not appear under the protection of any patron of the period, nor do we have any other surviving compositions from him, implies that he was not a successful poet. However, his epistle’s inclusion in a collection alongside those of D’Auton and Lemaire suggests that this informal network in particular could act as a facilitator for any literate individual in the cultural courtly space to at least make an attempted move in this wider cultural game. His success, or rather here, lack thereof, is not relevant at this stage; it is the basic opportunity to amass some cultural capital that this network provided which is important.

Here, then, is the formation and testing of social bonds. As these poets interacted within the conventions of their informal literary and socio-cultural network, so they formed lasting friendships and more vocational links. That is not to say, however, that all those involved in the network were personally acquainted. While there is primary evidence for the enduring bonds cited above, some, such as Mailly, may never have actually met their fellow members, or even been career poets. This was a strategic interest network which, while helping to form and solidify social bonds, did not do so at the expense of at least offering outsiders the chance to display their skill, and potentially welcome them as insiders. With the wider socio-cultural network defined, analysis now turns to one particular moment in its history, the case study of the heroic epistles in support of Louis XII.

**Heroic Epistles**

Until now, in the studies which have referenced the poems to be considered, scholars have proposed a cycle of four works. Each is an epistle written as if to or from a correspondent currently residing in the Elysian Fields, the resting place of the heroic in Greek mythology. In proposing the inclusion of a fifth poem, however, I aim to take the focus away from the setting of Elysium, and re-establish it on the development of the epistles’ correspondents. The poems all either directly or indirectly relate to Louis’s quarrel with Julius and mix mythological imagery with contemporary historical details. The poems have received relatively little attention in scholarly works, with most only appearing in one edition or collection each. The pieces of both D’Auton and Lemaire are found in Armstrong and Britnell’s
comprehensive edition of 2000.\textsuperscript{43} The poem by Bouchet is present in a nineteenth-century collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century French poetry compiled by Anatole de Montaiglon.\textsuperscript{44} Cretin’s work is located in an edition by Kathleen Chesney entitled \textit{Oeuvres Poétiques de Guillaume Cretin}.\textsuperscript{45} Access to Mailly’s epistle came from a microfiche copy of the full St Petersburg manuscript.\textsuperscript{46} All further references to these poems are taken from these editions.

The poem which prompted this literary game arrived in August 1511, and was penned by royal historiographer D’Auton. Titled, \textit{Epistre faicte et compose aux Champs Elisées par le preux Hector de Troye la grand, transmise au trescrestien Roy Loys douziesme de ce nom}, the piece is written as if from legendary Greek hero Hector of Troy.\textsuperscript{47} Writing to Louis himself, Hector confirms the popular contemporary theory that the French royal house was descended from his blood, and thanks the king for continued promotion of both their reputations through his military successes. He reveals to Louis the riches which the Greek gods have promised him, and reports that even Pluto, god of the underworld, fears a French invasion. The piece closes with a call for a reply.

A reply emerged three months later in November 1511, titled \textit{L’épistre du roy trescrestien Loys douziesme à Hector de Troye chef des neuf preux}.\textsuperscript{48} Written by court poet Lemaire, this is the closest in style to D’Auton’s of the three response poems. It takes the form of a direct reply from Louis to Hector. Lemaire adopts a more playful approach to the format and context, bringing a strong Christian focus to his piece, while simultaneously assuring Hector that he need not worry about his pagan beliefs. Lemaire paints Louis as the defender of not just the Christian Church, but also Hector’s homeland of Troy, betrayed by the Greeks and currently in the hands of the Turks. Louis recounts how God guided him at the battle of Agnadello,

\begin{quote}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Recueil de poésies Françoises des XV\textsuperscript{e} et XVI\textsuperscript{e} siècles\textsuperscript{a}}, ed by Anatole de Montaiglon, vol. 3 (Paris: Guiraudet et Jouaust, 1856), pp. 56-71.
\textsuperscript{45} Kathleen Chesney, \textit{Oeuvres Poétiques de Guillaume Cretin} (Paris: Librairie de Paris, 1932), pp. 240-244.
\textsuperscript{46} I am grateful to Adrian Armstrong for this access to his microfiche copy of the St Petersburg manuscript (Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, fr. F. v. XIV). Quotations from this manuscript and other pre-modern sources have been normalized in accordance with standard editorial practice – for instance, u/v distinguished, and certain punctuation added.
\textsuperscript{47} Hereafter: D’Auton, \textit{Épistre par preux Hector}.
\textsuperscript{48} Hereafter: Lemaire de Belges, \textit{Épistre du roy}.
\end{quote}
before going on to show that Julius has betrayed both his faith and his loyal followers. He also expands on D’Auton’s reference to Louis’ Trojan lineage, by documenting Hector’s son Francus’ conquering of Western Europe.

The third poem is the hitherto unstudied piece by ‘A. de Mailly’, entitled: *Epistre par le Dieu Mars transmise au Roy Loys XIIme*. The piece, from March 1512, takes the form of an epistle, written as the Roman god of war Mars to Louis, praising him for his invincibility, and once again highlighting that blame ultimately rests with Julius for their dispute. In a departure from the first two poems, Mars is presented as writing from the ‘cieulx’ above, not the Elysian Fields. However, when one considers the use of the epistle format with Louis as recipient, the inclusion of familiar themes, the reference to characters such as Hector (Mars confirms to Louis that he is the ‘vray succesieur’ of Hector), and the content related to Louis’ quarrel with Julius, it is clear that this poem was intended as a move in the game started by D’Auton.

Half a year later, in September 1512, procureur and Poitiers based writer Bouchet wrote his piece, *Epistre envoyée par feu Henry, roy d’Angleterre à Henry son fils, huytiesme de ce nom, à present regnant oudict royaume*. Again renovating the correspondents by moving away from heroic figures and Louis, in Bouchet’s epistle the dead king Henry VII, currently at rest in the Elysian Fields, writes to his son Henry VIII, who has allied himself to the Pope against France. Henry VII reprimands his son for going against his wishes, the French having helped secure his son’s place on the English throne during his reign. He also emphasises the mutinous nature of the English population through a long account of kings from 642 AD onwards. Again, there is also a strong attack on Julius’ actions, before a final plea to his son not to go against the French.

The fifth and final poem arrived sometime in early 1513 from courtly poet Cretin, entitled *Dudict Cretin au nom du Duc Charles de Bourgonge aux Bourguignons, Holandois, Zelandois, Flamengz et Barbançons*. Again introducing new correspondents, Cretin directly echoes the theme of mutinous peoples present in the previous epistle, as the deceased Charles the Bold writes to his former

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49 Hereafter: Mailly, *Epistre par le Dieu Mars*.
50 Hereafter: Bouchet, *Epistre par feu Henry*.
51 Hereafter: Cretin, *Au nom du Duc Charles*. 

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subjects, in a similar vein to Bouchet’s Henry, warning them not to oppose the French king. He details his own foolish attacks on French soil, and claims that they brought him and his land nothing but disgrace and shame. Moreover, as Charles is in the Elysian Fields also, Hector has sought him out and challenged him to a duel to defend his descendent Louis’ honour. Charles has one month to deter his former people from revolt in order to avoid the bout with one of mythology’s greatest heroes, hence the letter.

Until now, the poems of D’Auton, Lemaire, Bouchet, and Crépin have been taken as the ‘full’ cycle, as described in Britnell’s 1969 article. However, Mailly’s has every right to sit alongside those four for analysis. It is a 102-line epistle found, to my knowledge, in only one manuscript collection: a presentation piece for Louis’ wife Anne, now held in St Petersburg.52 This particular collection is examined across the chapter; however, both the thematic content of the poem, and the fact that it directly follows both D’Auton’s original piece and Lemaire’s response in this collection, suggest strongly that it was conceived to be considered in the light of this particular cycle.

Why then, has this poem been so neglected in modern studies? It received a brief historical appraisal in G. Tournoy-Thoen’s 1973 article ‘Fausto Andrelini et la cour de France’, in which she unsuccessfully attempted to trace the author, and convincingly dated the piece to March 1512.53 Otherwise, the piece is only included in lists of the St Petersburg manuscript’s contents, sometimes with a brief one- or two-sentence description.54 I suggest, thanks to a recently digitised work from 1767 tracing the genealogy of the noble Mailly house, that the author is one Antoine de Mailly. The son of baron Jean de Mailly III, this knight can be traced as having strong connections with Louis’s court at the time of the epistle’s creation. His mother, Isabelle d’Ailly, was the sister in law of Marie de Clèves, widow of Louis’ father, Charles d’Orléans.55 In 1505 Antoine inherited the title of Chevalier et Baron de

52 Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, fr. F. v. XIV.
Mailly from his father, as well as his position of Chambellan du Roi.\textsuperscript{56} In 1508, his marriage contract was signed by Louis, while Queen Anne was a dame d'honneur at the ceremony; she also made a gift of 5,000 écus to the new couple, payable over four years.\textsuperscript{57} Evidently, Antoine was close to the court, and his position as chambellan would have ensured him regular access to both the king, and the current affairs of his courtiers – most probably including his regularly employed writers. A final piece of evidence suggests Antoine was known to the other poets in this network, and comes in a 1525 poem by Cretin, written in the aftermath of the battle of Pavia, which saw Louis’ successor Francis I taken prisoner. In it, having denounced many of the French troops as cowardly and self-centred, Cretin names some who have handled themselves with honour – one of these being 'd’Auchy'.\textsuperscript{58} At the time of writing, Antoine counted Seigneur d’Auchy among his titles, and so is likely the target of Cretin’s praise. Thus, I hypothesise the author of the third epistle of this cycle to be the knight and gentleman, Antoine de Mailly.

The reason this epistle has not received further attention to date is likely because it was not written by a bona fide rhétoriqueur. Mailly was not a career poet, and as an aristocratic knight did not hold the same social background and ambitions as the rhétoriqueurs did, and so was not an initiate of their particular poetic world. Therefore, he would not have qualified for secondary studies such as those referenced above by Armstrong, Brown, and Britnell, which focused on rehabilitating the rhétoriqueurs as a credible area of study. As discussed, the fact that Mailly was not a rhétoriqueur is, for the present study, even more important than if he had been. Since we are predominantly concerning ourselves here with the socio-cultural network these writers formed, as opposed to the conventions and style of the literary constructs they operated within, the presence of an ‘outsider’, as it were, is intriguing. He was clearly not an established part of the more universal interest network formed by the prolific contemporary poets who wrote as a means of supporting themselves, but yet was still able to contribute to the literary game it facilitated.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 72
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Chesney, \textit{Œuvres}, p. 173 (v.966).
When it comes to explicit textual proof that the members of this informal network were indeed actively in possession of and considering one another’s works in something of a literary game, Bouchet provides perhaps the most useful indication in his piece. As Henry VII apologises for his lack of finesse at the close of his epistle, he refers to the first two of the cycle as ‘epistres […] Depuis ung an par nous veues et leues’ (epistles seen and read by us for a year, vv.163-4). His use of the first person plural is of particular interest here. Throughout his epistle, Bouchet uses the singular ‘je’ when referring to Henry VII and ‘te’ when addressing Henry VIII; in fact in the two lines following this quotation both make a reappearance. Since he is evidently not, therefore, addressing both himself and his recipient, it stands to reason that he may well here be making reference to the other members of this socio-literary network centred around Louis XII. For those in permanent residence at the court, they would undoubtedly have had access to copies of the first epistles composed, or at least heard them read aloud. Those who were a part of the network but not so frequently at court – such as Bouchet himself – would have had to have been shown or sent the manuscripts by other interested parties (potentially here his friend D’Auton): the very existence of Bouchet’s composition proves that this practice occurred. Likewise, Bouchet’s reference to ‘nous’ as seeing and reading the epistles, coupled with the continued production of responses into 1513, proves that this was an active poetic game given attention by the network.

Material Reception

The final piece of evidence indicating that these were a series of five cohesive poems intended for presentation in something of an extended courtly game is revealed by consulting their material reception. While each of the poems enjoyed a very different history following their composition, when each is historically contextualised it becomes apparent that the primary purpose of these pieces was courtly consumption. Interacting with the archival work undertaken by scholars including Armstrong and Britnell, the manuscript and print history of these five epistles is taken in turn and analysed alongside contemporary events for both France and the individual authors involved.

D’Auton’s piece boasts the most surviving manuscript copies at five, currently held at St Petersburg, Vienna, Geneva, and two in Paris – both held at the
Bibliothèque Nationale de France, one in the Rothschild collection. The St Petersburg collection is that discussed above, also containing the two subsequent poems in the cycle, while the Vienna manuscript also contains Lemaire’s response piece (along with various other pieces from before and after these poems were written, likely making it a court-based compilation). The Geneva manuscript may have been the original copy, or at least a copy taken down when it was presented in court, as it only contains D’Auton’s piece, but doesn’t name him. The Paris manuscript sees the epistle opening a richly compiled presentation collection proclaiming to be of D’Auton’s own poetry, but which in fact also contains the work of various other contemporaries. Finally, the Paris Rothschild copy is something of an enigma, finding a less than perfect copy of the epistle somewhat out of place alongside a series of anonymous love-based pieces. There are no print copies, a deficiency which can be explained by D’Auton’s retirement following Louis’s death in 1515. Having been given the revenues from the abbey of Angle in Poitou, to which he retired, the former royal historiographer would not have wanted for additional income. Furthermore, as he re-entered the religious life, reproducing pieces supporting papal enemies may not have been so well received in his new social circles. Here is strong evidence suggesting that his epistle was only ever intended for courtly consumption.

Moving to Lemaire’s piece, a somewhat different material reception emerges. There are three extant manuscript copies, two of which are the St Petersburg and Vienna collections noted above. The third is currently held in Glasgow. A collection of his own poetry, dedicated to Louis de Cleves, this manuscript likely represents Lemaire seeking a new patron following both Louis and Anne’s deaths. He was not so far into his career that he could take retirement as D’Auton had done, and so had to source further work. In the manuscript, he indicates that the epistle was a response to D’Auton’s first piece, but does not include the full text of his predecessor. Lemaire as an enterprising poet seeking a continued income is further strengthened by the epistle’s appearance in no fewer than sixteen printed editions of

59 In the order given, these are: Saint Petersburg, National Library of Russia, fr. F. v. XIV. 8.; Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 2579.; Geneva, Bibliothèque de Genève, ms. 179; Paris, BNF, ms. fr.1952; Paris, BNF, coll. Rothschild, ms. 2819 (IV. 6. 25). For a comprehensive overview of these manuscripts, see Épistres, ed. by Armstrong and Britnell, pp. xlix-ix.

60 Glasgow, Hunterian Museum, ms. Hunter 12 (S. 2. 2). Again, see Épistres, ed. by Armstrong and Britnell, pp.IV-VI.
Lemaire’s work across the century, in collections entitled ‘œuvres assez dignes de veoir’ (works quite worthy of seeing). The epistle, however, is never printed alone, and nor is it contextualised in more than an introductory line explaining that it was a response piece. In the initial few editions we bear witness to Lemaire as an active poet embracing the emerging print medium, realising the importance of showcasing his individual authorial identity to a wider public. The epistle is included simply as a clear example of his skill, rather than for any contextual or historical relevance it may have held for a wider public audience. Subsequent editions were republished by printers without authorial input from Lemaire, however.

The third poem, Mailly’s, is only found alongside D’Auton’s and Lemaire’s in the St Petersburg manuscript. As indicated above the three are in chronological order, and identically presented, suggesting that at the time of compilation they were appreciated equally by whoever commissioned this document, potentially Anne herself. Since this was evidently not the original copy of Mailly’s composition, it must be assumed that he assented to having his piece included (no doubt a proud moment for the amateur author), and any such original copies have since been lost. The piece likely does not appear anywhere else because it was not penned by a career poet: once Mailly had presented it at the court, he would have had no need either of preserving his originals, or of releasing copies to a wider audience.

The original manuscript copy of Bouchet’s piece has also been lost. Two pirated print editions appeared very close to the time of its writing. No date, author, or place of printing is included, and both contain various typographical errors. In 1544 another unofficial version appeared, this one, printed in Lyon, had been brought up to date, replacing the figures of Louis and Julius with François I and the Emperor of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Eventually, Bouchet himself included the piece in a compilation of his work published in 1545. The names were

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61 For an accessible example, see Jean Leamire de Belges, *L’Epistre du roy à Hector de Troye et autres œuvres assez dignes de veoir* (Paris: Ambroise Girault, 1529). Also, see *Épistres*, ed. by Armstrong and Britnell, pp.lxi-lxxxiv.
changed back to Louis and Julius, though other minor alterations from the Lyon version were still present. This may well have been because the original manuscript copy had already been lost by this point, or at least was no longer in Bouchet’s possession. That this poem was pirated so frequently can be attributed to its nature. While written as an epistle, at 1180 lines the piece is well over twice the length of any of the other four poems, and is far more focused on history and well-constructed, legalistic argument. In it, Henry portrays the English in a strongly negative manner, as rebellious beasts that kill their kings with little or no consideration, while the French are praised as being loyal, strong, and an ideal to which other kingdoms should aspire. This increased patriotic leaning would have made it more appealing to the wider French reading public than the other poems. Bouchet was, as a provincial poet, likely more actively involved with publishers and printers, and this increased contact may explain how someone acquired the original manuscript, and printed it without permission.

Again, the original manuscript copy of Cretin’s piece presented at court has presumably been lost. In fact, it only seems to survive in the printed edition of his Chantz royaulx, oraisons et aultres petitz traictez, issued in 1527, around two years after his death. So, why was it not published sooner? Generally, print publication was never a priority for this court-orientated poet, with very few of his pieces appearing in editions during his lifetime. Additionally, as the final entry into the cycle, Cretin’s piece draws most heavily on the thematic and linguistic themes of the previous four, subtly and often quite ingeniously subverting many of these themes throughout the piece. Cretin may have feared that the skill of his work could have appeared diminished to an uninitiated audience, unfamiliar with the preceding four poems. This is one potential explanation as to why he might have kept it to himself while alive, before an enterprising publisher acquired and included it in the posthumous collections of his works in an attempt to be as complete as possible.

Here then, we see how four of the five poems seem to have their conceptual hearts and souls in the courtly manuscripts on which they were originally penned.

66 England was, of course, one of the traditional enemies of France following the devastation of the Hundred Years War, and at the time Bouchet composed his epistle Henry VIII had allied himself with the Holy League against the French.
D’Auron, Mailly, and Creten never had them circulated in print editions. Bouchet’s piece, likely due to its stylistic nature, was pirated three times, but only put to print once by its author, almost thirty years later in a single-author collection. As for Lemaire, although he included his epistle in sixteen of his printed editions, this reveals more about his innovative nature as a poet interacting with a new medium than it does about his epistle’s relevance to a wider audience. These were a coherent cycle of epistles written solely for dissemination at court, a playful way of supporting the king during a period of international strife which gave their authors the pleasure of poetic engagement.
Part II: The Heroic Epistles In depth

Writing, Correspondence, and News

This collection of poems forms represents both ludic, and the game-theoretical iterations of competitive play. It is ludic because the poets chose to interact with the content in a particular, playful, way. As poets either present at the French court, or aspiring to be so, it was clear that they had to tackle the issue of Louis’ dispute with Julius. How they went about it was not so clear-cut. They could have written more direct adulatory pieces under their own names or in a more non-specific voice, but they chose to use the heroic epistle. In making this choice, first contributor D’Auton implicitly established a space of play and set out unspoken rules for any who wished to join him in the game. The space of play was the epistle format itself, and the rules were that it had to draw on the themes of classical and heroic mythology, whilst dealing with the contemporary medieval issues. In his opening poem he makes the ludic elements of his intentions explicit, explaining that the purpose of his epistle is:

seullement pour t’esjouyr et duyre
A passetemps nouveau, pour te desduyre
Et te faire mutations et changes
De cas divers et nouvelles estranges
Que je transmetz à toy.

(only to make you rejoice, and lead you to new pastimes, to entertain you and offer you an account of the ups and downs of the different events and unfamiliar news that I send you, vv.7-11)

He later notes that from his epistle, Louis could ‘faire jeuz et riseés’ (make games and jokes, v.87). Evidently, D’Auton intended his epistle to spur on his contemporaries in the network to attempt their own response pieces, and to adopt the conventions which he had set down. Whereas the Puy’s conventions were enshrined in its legalistic statutes, here the ‘rules’ are far more informal. Those who played most skilfully would receive not only cultural capital within the network of their peers and fellow players, but also the opportunity to experience a real-world pay-off in the form of favour from the king.
Clearly, the choice of epistle as a format is crucial, and there were several factors at play here. An informal network is, like its formal and virtual counterparts, influenced to an extent by its surrounding cultural space. What is currently popular or fashionable becomes something which all hoping to impress strive to produce, or even embody: cultural (and social) capital is on offer for anyone who can successfully assimilate the trend into their work. Therefore, the first move in a game such as the literary one under examination here is the most important. If D’Auton had failed to select a format which prompted replies from his fellow poets, the social element of the game would have been lost before it had even begun. But D’Auton did not fail in this respect. In picking the epistle to frame his written support for Louis, he tapped into the most prevalent literary trend at the contemporary French court.

Epistle writing has a rich and important historical context, worth sketching here. Described by Yvonne LeBlanc as ‘a monologic work written for a specific addressee whose relationship to the letter writer inspires its theme and style’, the epistle as it was known to the medieval mind had its roots in ancient Greece and Rome. The letters of Cicero, for example, are one of the key sources of information on the late Roman Republic, and Ovid famously composed his *Heroides*, three collections of verse epistles considered below. Early Italian humanist writers adopted and adapted the format in the medieval period, priding themselves on their new appreciation of the *ars dictaminis*, the formal art of prose composition. The flourishing of the practice in France can be traced in particular through figures such as Coluccio Salutati, chancellor of the Republic of Florence, who in his official capacity helped spread the Italian Renaissance’s appreciation of classical epistles to his French counterparts.

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71 On Salutati in particular, see Ronald Witt, ‘Medieval “Ars Dictaminis” and the Beginnings of Humanism: a New Construction of the Problem’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 35 (1982), 1-35.
Furthermore, in 1496, *rhétoriqueur* Octavien de Saint-Gelais translated Ovid’s *Heroides* from Latin into French. This was the first time the *Heroides* had been available to consult in the vernacular, and they become particularly popular as a result. At the court of Louis XII, there was also an Italian-born poet, Fausto Andrelini, in Queen Anne’s literary circle. His Italian background and tendency to write independently means he is not today considered a *rhétoriqueur*. Andrelini had studied in Bologna and Rome, before moving to France to teach poetry at Paris, and subsequently found a place at the royal court. He wrote epistles in Latin verse, including three for Anne herself, which she had translated into the vernacular so that she could read them. Andrelini was one of the first in France to create new heroic epistles, and so this enthusiasm for the genre at court, coupled with the easy access to the classical great Ovid’s work provided by Saint-Gelais’s translation, heralded the heroic epistle as a viable and popular genre to exploit in support of Louis XII. As a brief aside, it was not only the epistle which was a popular feature in contemporary courtly circles: one only has to visit Louis’ châteaux at Blois and examine the surviving artworks, tapestries, and sculptures to see how important classical, heroic imagery was at court during this period. The alleged connection of the French nation to Troy was a particularly popular trope, as indicated by Lemaire’s three volume work *Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye*, which charted the European nobility from Noah, to Priam, and then from Hector to Francus, and was published between 1511 and 1513. The inclusion of heroic imagery within the epistles would have made them even more appealing, and likely to impress at court.

It is of particular note here that the *rhétoriqueurs* formed such a collaborative and interactive network of poets: as shown above they were in contact with one

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another and formed (often playfully competitive) relationships to other members within the network. The epistle reflects the network in its inherent dependence on communication and correspondence. The epistle as a structure can therefore be seen as acting as a direct mirror to the nature of this socio-literary network, whilst also serving as the foundations of the poets' efforts. Through each of the five poems the text is punctuated with such talk; for instance, in D'Auton's piece Hector explains that he is able to send his writings from the Elysian fields to Louis' court: ‘que moy, qui suys mort […] puisse transmettre ainsi | Là mes escriptz’ (that I, who am dead, could send my writings there in this way, vv.83-85). The piece ends with a direct call for a response: ‘Quand tu auras veu et leu mon escript, | Que tu veuilles le prande pour semonce | De me donner sur ce quelque response’ ([I hope that] when you have seen and read my writings, you will want to take it as an invitation to give me some response on this matter, vv.546-8). Evidently, this adheres to the epistolary convention of calling for reply, but it is also a genuine request to the other poets of his network, further indication that this piece would likely be read by several of its members.

Accordingly, Lemaire makes the image of such communication equally explicit in his reply: ‘Or revenons à ton epistre belle […] Par lequel tu me semons et me poings | Que je responde à chascun de ses poins […] Et te informer de tout le myen affaire’ (Now we return to your beautiful espistle, by which you summon and direct me to respond to each of its points, and to inform you of all my affairs, vv.93-8). Here the responsive nature of correspondence with which the poets themselves were familiar is clearly visible. In Bouchet’s piece, this theme is presented from another angle; although not a direct reply to either of the first two entries in the game, Bouchet aligns himself with them, and in doing so implies that he has read them: ‘Ici conclus, faisant fin à ma letter, | Qui n’est tissue en si eloquent mettre | Comme les deuix d’Hector au roy de France | Et dudit roy à Hector’ (Here I conclude, putting an end to my letter, which is not formed from such eloquent metre as the two from Hector to the king of France, and that of the King to Hector, vv.1157-60). Whilst adhering to the traditional medieval trope of praising the work of others (particularly those more experienced than you), Bouchet’s apology here also suggests that individuals in the network were often party to communications and productions exchanged between its other members.
The use of the epistle supports the conclusion that this informal network is one which encouraged interaction and correspondence between its members, as it brings such exchanges to the forefront of their more ludic writings. However, there is a more subtle way in which the epistle served, and to an extent reflected, the efforts of these poets. The key ludic foundation of these particular epistles is the notion of connecting two seemingly alien and distant cultural spaces: the court of Louis XII and the classical mythological world of figures such as Hector. In creating new heroic epistles, however, these authors are not simply aligning alien worlds within their texts, but also outside of them, as they seek to align themselves with the great classical writers of epistles, and in particular Ovid. In placing themselves theoretically alongside these authors who held such esteem in the network’s collective mind (particularly with the ‘epistle renaissance’ occurring at Louis’s court), D’Auton, Lemaire, Mailly, Bouchet, and Cretin sought to win a place for themselves in the illustrious literary history of the epistle, and win the capital which went with that. The use of the epistle format then is of paramount importance. As a popular feature of contemporary courtly culture, it not only provided a fertile and attractive arena for competitive play, but also ensured the maximum pay-off in terms of cultural capital within and beyond the network. It allowed the poets to utilise their own experiences of being part of a corresponding network to enrich their writings on the matter, and it also meant that these writers could orientate themselves within a far greater, less-tangible cultural network: that of individuals who had composed heroic epistles, not just contemporarily, but across the centuries.

Alongside the choice of epistle format, each poem is punctuated with references to individuals and groups writing, corresponding, and circulating information in a more general sense. In D’Auton’s piece, for instance, Hector stresses that his words, not his current situation, are what is truly important: ‘Mais ne te chault si j’ay peine ou repos; | Oy s’il te plaist seulement mon propos’ (but it does not matter to you whether I am in pain or at rest, please just listen to my words only, vv.101-2). Earlier, in the opening stanza, he implores Louis: ‘Si te suppli que ne facez refus | De mien escript’ (I beg of you not to refuse my writing, vv.13-4), again indicating that in this work it is less the contextual narrative which should impress the reader, but rather his skill in presenting it. Lemaire adopts this motif in his response, and utilises it in a slightly more playful manner, as 480 lines into his 568-line poem
he declares: ‘Et ce suffist pour t’advertire des choses | Tout simplement, sans grans
textes ou glouses’ (and it suffices to inform you of these things all simply, without
great texts or glosses, vv.481-2). Lemaire is here almost parodying D’Auton’s claim
that only his words matter, by suggesting that it is in fact the topics he covers
(France’s descent from Troy, Louis’ prowess in battle, Julius’ wrongdoing) which are
important. The fact that it appears so late in his richly descriptive and dramatized
piece indicates that he was just as aware as D’Auton was of the importance of his
literary composition, lending his proclamation an ironic tone.

Bouchet takes this consideration of text and intention further in his piece by
having Henry VII distance himself from the style of Hector and Louis’ writings. He
declares that the distance between his and D’Auton and Lemaire’s pieces ‘est trop
grand’ (is too great, v.1161), highlighting his predecessors’ ‘grans termes plaisans et
acceptables’ (pleasing and acceptable grand words, v.1162). In one move, Bouchet
both integrates himself with the literary precedent set by the first two poets, whilst
indicating that he still has his own personal identity. Bouchet’s piece is just as
suffused with poetic features as the two he references (not to mention twice as long),
so this comment adheres to the traditional medieval literary convention of
underplaying poetic skill and talent. In this context, however, it does more than that.
It is important to note that Bouchet was the only poet of the five definitely not actively
involved in Louis’ court, or under his patronage. There may, therefore, be an sense
here of his addressing this issue: the declaration comes in the last twenty lines of his
piece, so would have been one of the lasting impressions it gave to readers,
including the king. Lacking royal patronage, Bouchet stood to gain the greatest real-
world pay-off if his work was well-received, so it seems plausible that he should want
to ensure that his position as an outsider from the court was known. He ends his
piece with a final plea to his son Henry VIII: ‘je te prie, regarde la substance | Tant
seulement, et non la consonance, | Et te retire de la folle entreprinse’ (I pray of you,
see the substance alone, and not the euphony, and retreat from this mad enterprise,
vv.1169-71). Again, the late appearance of such a request suggests an element of
irony, as it did with Lemaire. Here, though, Bouchet adds a further layer of context to
his bluff; in-game, in the established epistolary constructs it would indeed suit Henry
for the epistle to be taken by his son as a clear-cut instructive piece, but out of game,
in the eyes of his contemporaries and potential patrons, Bouchet’s linguistic and poetic skills are just as crucial as those of the others.

Cretin, in the final poem of this game, adds a more immediate contextual dimension to the wider consideration of the importance of words in this network. He strips away all references to his writing being better or worse than others’, be they ironic or not, as well as any instruction to focus on a particular element of his writing. Charles instead pleads with his former subjects to cease acting against the French king, else Hector has promised to engage him in a duel. Accordingly, he closes his epistle to them with the phrase: ‘donnez foy et creance a l’epistre | Que vous transmetz, et acquerez le titre | De vrayz vassaulz et serviteurs feables’ (give faith and belief to the letter that I am passing onto you, and take on the title of true vassals and faithful servants, vv.153-5). Here, the importance of writing is incorporated more subtly than in the other examples given. By lending Charles’s correspondence with his subjects an element of immediacy, and the potential to affect an outcome in the ‘real’ world, Cretin reveals the inherent power of words. Just as a well-crafted and convincing epistle from Charles could change his subjects’ behaviour and save him from a confrontation with the mighty Hector, so could a well-formed epistle from Cretin win him prestigious cultural capital within his network, and the potential for future patronage. In playfully inviting his readers to become his cultural vassals or subjects, he also implies (with an eye to his own potential patronage) that he knows exactly what it takes to be a ‘vray vassal et serviteur feable’.

This power invested in words is further displayed by the number of groups of people shown writing throughout the poems. D’Auton’s piece in particular emphasises this motif, perhaps because as the first entry into the game he sought to establish the arena of play as one where words, writing, and the dissemination of those works were paramount. There are several references in his piece to Hector either being aware of, or surrounded by, authors at work. In one particular extract Hector describes the presence of poets with him in the Elysian Fields:

Et ne me croiz, demande-le aux poetes
Qui sont icy reposans leurs espris
Avecques moy en ce joyeus pourpris,
Lesquelz ont ja fait maintz vers heroicques
Sur tes œuvres et dictez rhetoricques,
En recitant maintes choses mirables
Dignes de loz et tiltres honorables
[...]
En leur escript, tout composé par mettre.

(And not believing me, ask it of the poets who are here resting their spirits with me in this joyful area, who have already made many heroic verses and verse composition about your exploits, by reciting many admirable things, are worthy of prize and honourable titles in their writings, all composed in meter, vv.254-62).

There are two key points to be made here. Primarily, it is hard not to read this as a direct parallel between the author and his creation. Hector, writing his epistle, is surrounded by many gifted wordsmiths, worthy of ‘tiltres honorables’, who have documented and celebrated Louis’ political actions. In the real world D’Auton, writing his epistle, was equally surrounded by a network of individuals doing exactly that. As Britnell has shown, Louis was a keen promoter of pieces which resemble modern-day propaganda in their tone, and this is a key component to the network which we are examining here. D’Auton is acknowledging that his fellow poets are skilled at their craft, whilst also, in including them in his piece, inviting them to make a tangible contribution to the game.

This group is seemingly returned to in the last nine lines of the poem, as Hector leaves ‘du surplus’ (any more) in the hands of ‘fluens orateurs | Qui de tes faictz sont scribes et aucteurs’ (fluent orators, who are the scribes and authors of your deeds, vv.568-70). These writers are themselves residing in the Fields, ‘en ce joyeux pourpris’ (in this joyful area, v.256), the second key point to be made here.

Whilst the Elysian fields were classically portrayed as places which fostered arts, poets and writers themselves are rarely portrayed as residing there.77 In this, and the other poems in this collection, however, the playing field is levelled by the epistle format – authors are portrayed as sitting alongside princes, kings, heroes and even gods. Earlier in the piece, other individuals are also portrayed in the celestial home of the gods themselves writing poetry: ‘Faisans lassus comptes et passetemps | De tes

77 Noted poets were, certainly in earlier French literature, regularly portrayed as residing in richly descriptive poetic cemeteries, such as the cemetery of love, but not the Elysian Fields. For more, see: Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, ‘Portraits of Authors at the end of the Middle Ages: Tombs in Majesty and Carnivalesque Epitaphs’ in The Medieval Author in Medieval French Literature, ed. by Virginie Greene (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 157-72 (pp. 164-5).
oeuvres qu’ilz ont veu de leur temps’ (spending their time making accounts of your achievements, which they saw whilst alive, vv.145-6). These writers are of particular note, as they are not poets by trade; they are the recent fallen who knew of Louis, including counts, lords, dukes, and even kings. Here is another instance of poetry providing a common ground for the literate to interact on: in one sense those who were not wordsmiths by vocation could engage, and in another sense, poets could be seen to operate on the same level as kings and counts. This question of poetry as a leveller is one which is returned to in detail later in the chapter.

Various references to circulating news and writings found across these poems complete this appraisal of the theme of the written word and correspondence. This also illuminates the importance of the informal network structure as a facilitator for communication, both within the fictional world of the poems, but also for the poets creating them. Cretin’s piece, for instance, sees Charles the Bold write his epistle not in direct response to another epistle, but instead to the more generic ‘rapport’ (as in news, or even rumour) which is circulating regarding Louis’ war with the pope:

‘Comme rapport courant quand et le temps, | En publiant les guerres et contentz | Qu’entretenez, m’ait donné congnaisance’ (as speedily circulating reports of the time, in publicizing the wars and conflicts that you wage, have made me aware, vv.9-11). Here is an indication that within a network it was commonplace for members to have a communal awareness of relevant news and events to act upon. In a similar fashion, later in the piece Hector has clearly also heard similar reports, as it is said of Louis: ‘Que bruyt en volle hors toutes nations | Tant vers les cieulx que es basses mansions’ (that talk of him flies so much from all nations, as much toward the heavens as the lowest houses, vv.87-8). As a result of hearing both of the glory of Louis, and presumably the reports of Charles’s former peoples’ actions against him, Hector decides to confront Charles over his subjects’ loyalties: ‘Or s’est voulu celluy Hector embatre | Gecter son gage, affin de me combater | Pour soustener la querelle de France’ (Now this Hector has decided to get involved, and throw down a challenge in order to fight me for supporting the war with France, vv.103-5). Here is evidence of information circulating through the network of the fictional Elysian fields, and through that comes an appreciation of the importance of news travelling through

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78 D’Auton refers directly to King Frederick of Naples (d.1504), Duke Ludovico of Milan (d.1500), and Count Berault Stuart of Aubigny (d.1508) in his list, for example.
the real informal network of the poets: it had the power to inform, to instigate competition, and to shift opinion. In doing this, it also had the ability to create sub-networks of sorts, facilitating moments of production such as the epistle case study under consideration here. The same phenomenon is visible in modern internet forums such as Reddit, which see certain news stories, images, or videos take on new lives as memes.\(^7^9\) Once adopted by the informal online network, these artefacts are assigned a new, deeper meaning as they are manipulated, shared, and interpreted for entertainment purposes.

Lemaire emphasises this importance of communication in the sign-off to his epistle. Clearly, he is adhering to the literary conventions of both epistles specifically, and wider medieval poetics, in calling for a reply. Calls for continuation were prominent conventions of debate poetry in particular, but also other verse compositions, as authors deferred verdicts and employed non-committal techniques of closure in a bid to continue their linguistic games into perpetuity.\(^8^0\) Consequently, Lemaire’s repetition of such a call and the strong personal desire for a response reveals more than just his following of literary convention. He emphasises his wish for a reply three times in the closing stanza: ‘S’il y a riens de nouveau que tu saiches, | Je te requires que point ne le me caiches […] Par luy pourras aucunefoys m’escrire […] Et du plaisir des lectres ne me frustres’ (if there is anything new that you know I ask of you to hide nothing from me; by him you could sometimes write to me; and do not deny me the pleasure of letters, vv.559-67). In calling for Hector to conceal nothing from him, in suggesting his messenger for their correspondence, and in his final plea not to frustrate him the pleasure of letters, Louis illustrates two key points regarding Lemaire’s intent. First, the thinly-veiled call for further response pieces in the heroic cycle is aimed at creating a larger, and more influential cultural game for him to be a part of, and enjoy the rewards of. Second, the repeated and passionate desire for further correspondence implies a more personal wish for the game to continue: here again the human need to belong is revealed, manifest via a homosocial desire for further interaction, and one which networks such as this accommodated.

\(^7^9\) Both Reddit and internet memes are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

D’Auton’s opening epistle integrates the spreading of news and information firmly within his text, making it seem less remarkable and perhaps less forced than other efforts. For example, the flow of information regarding the French military campaign against the pope is explained by Hector: ‘Ja long temps a que j’ay tes oeuvers sceues | Et par plusieurs les nouvelles receues’ (it has already been a long time that I have known of your deeds, and from many have I received this news, vv.150-6). He proceeds to list several of those he has received the news from, allowing the reader to picture the ‘nouvelles’ making its way through the network, from its point of origin with Louis, to Hector in foreign climes. Toward the beginning of the piece, still referring to Louis’ successful war efforts, Hector notes that: ‘si n’est pas qu’icy courent nouvelles’ (it is not only here that news is circulating, v.59), indicating that news of Louis’ exploits are circulating not only through the networks of which he is a part, but also further afield. This impression is confirmed as Hector reveals that the news has even reached the underworld: ‘Oyant Pluto parler de son dommayne | Horriblemente se tourmente et demayne, | Criant “Haro! qui est celuy de quoy | L’on parle tant…?’ (hearing talk of his domain, Pluto is horribly worried and thrashes about, crying “Lo! Who is this one of whom everyone talks so much”, vv.381-4). By suggesting that news has travelled so far as the mythical underworld D’Auton signals both the wider power of networks to inform not only themselves, but also individuals connected less tangibly, seen here through the contributions from the more provincial Bouchet and the amateur poet Mailly. In portraying the news of Louis’s achievements as passing around a network of deceased souls close to the king, but also by less formal contact to Hector in the Elysian Fields and Pluto in the underworld, D’Auton illustrates both how information flows within a network, but also how it has the potential to spread to individuals, and even other networks, beyond that. This potential extends to the possibility of changing behaviour, too: almost cyclically, the further the news spreads, the more Louis’ reputation is enhanced, and as a result the original news becomes of increasing importance.

The nature of epistles, the importance of the written word, the pastime of writing as a communal affair, and the awareness of information and news circulating around this informal network are all crucial elements across this literary cycle. The St Petersburg manuscript referred to across this chapter enforces these motifs through its illustrations. Each of the three epistles included opens with an illustration:
D’Auton’s has Hector in full armour handing his composition to a messenger, while Lemaire’s appears to show Louis dictating his piece to a scribe, while a messenger waits in the wings. This textual evidence, supported by such imagery, reveals a number of important issues related to the concept of an informal medieval network. First, communication and correspondence are a critical factor in such networks. The poets discussed here sought to align themselves not only with each other in the playing of the game, but also with the prestigious tradition of heroic epistle writing in order to win cultural capital and potential tangible rewards. This, in turn, suggests how important this level of competitive play was within such networks: it satisfied a more ludic desire to interact socially with other nodes, but also provided an opportunity to impress in the real world, through the implementation of strategies which could advance them in the wider game of life. Even further beyond this, success offered a chance to be written into the cultural history of the period itself, a different, less tangible pay-off, the effects of which can still be seen in work such as the present thesis.

Ludic Linguistic Flair

The more ludic aspect of competitive play within these poems reveals much about the nature of this network. As already discussed, as rhétoriqueurs, four of the five contributors had a rich precedent of participatory poetics, which saw them acknowledge and attempt to build on each other’s work in their quest to amass capital. Cretin emphasises this importance of the written word by demanding in his epistle: ‘Machez ces mots’ (chew on these words, v.72). By making the otherwise ungraspable concept of words physical, he elevates their importance. One way this ludic interaction can be seen is through the poets’ use of catalogues, or lists. The rhétoriqueurs had implicitly, through their previous work, established the predominant epistolary form to be decasyllabic rhymed couplets, which allowed for the inclusion of multiple catalogues. It is interesting to note that the first four poems of this cycle adhere to this structure, but Cretin’s final piece adopts rhyming couplets of only nine syllables each. When read alongside the other four pieces, this creates a somewhat jarring effect well suited to the subversive nature of his piece, further discussed below. All five of the poems, however, do involve catalogues of some kind, and it is interesting to see how each author utilises this particular poetic asset.

In his opening epistle, D’Auton includes four notable catalogues: the dead supporters of Louis (vv.108-25); the rewards promised to Louis by the gods (vv.165-208); the beasts which gather in support of Pluto (vv.432-52); and various heroes and leaders from history (vv.343-55). There is a sense here of D’Auton demonstrating his proficiency in this particular convention – as the first poet he had to set the bar, as it were. While all four serve to illustrate non-critical points, the last of the examples is the most skilful. In contemplating who could be powerful enough to fell so many enemy soldiers in battle, D’Auton implicitly glorifies Louis’s calibre by association: he is put on the same footing as the heroes ‘Hercules, | Hector, Jason, [et] Theseus’, and the rulers ‘Dayre, Cyrus, Alexandre, […] Pompée […] Artus le preux’ (Darius, Cyrus, Alexander, Pompey, and worthy Arthur, vv.344-50).

Conversely, in his response piece, Lemaire chose to rely on a single catalogue, perhaps aiming for a sense of quality over quantity. Whereas D’Auton used catalogues to illustrate asides, Lemaire takes the convention and weaves it expertly into the main thrust of his narrative. In describing how the French came to take up residence in contemporary France, he lists numerous peoples and places relevant to the mythological French story: ‘Turcs […] troyen territoire […] Grecz […] fleuve Thanays […] fleuve Dunoe […] Bude en Hongrie […] les Francs de Cycamber […] Sicambriens […] les Hongres et Geldoys […] Pannonye […] basse Germanye’ (Turks, Trojan territory, Greeks, the river Don, the river Danube, Buda in Hungary, the Francs of Cycamber, Cycambrians, The Hungarians and those from Guelders, Pannonia, lower Germany, vv.415-46). Lemaire thus demonstrates a more subtle and nuanced wielding of the catalogue than D’Auton did, by using it to drive his geographic narrative itself, not just enhance it.

Mailly, as the most inexperienced writer, does not use the catalogue to showcase his skill, but instead imitates D’Auton’s use of it, most likely in an attempt to show that his epistle was to be considered alongside of it. He uses mythological figures including ‘Palas […] Mercure […] Argus […]et Juno’ (Pallas (or Athena), Mercury, Argos, and Juno, vv.35-38), to praise Louis, following D’Auton’s lead directly in not only convention, but also the type of detail used. Bouchet, however, uses the catalogue in a new way, one which sought to demonstrate his own, personal, skill set. He uses catalogues often, and in concise form; for instance, ‘Les Bourgoinons, Brebançons, Bourbonnoys, | Les Tourengeaux, Beruiers et Bretons’
(the peoples of Burgundy, Brabant, Bourbon, Tours, the Berry, and Brittany, vv.884-5). Trained as a procureur, Bouchet would have been proficient in forming detailed arguments supported by as much evidence as possible, and here he merges this experience with his more poetic output, resulting in the compressed but informed catalogues present in this more historical epistle. The alliteration of this particular catalogue, something unseen in the previous three examples, reveals the skilled poet at work. Finally to Cretin, who succeeds in using the catalogue in a new fashion still, indicating to readers that he was just as capable of rejuvenating the convention as the other writers in this cycle. Towards the middle of his piece, Charles lists all of the hateful crimes which he committed or caused against the French, including destroying towns, castles, towers and fortresses; imprisoning and weakening many; desecrating monasteries; deflowering virgins; attacking orphans; and leaving widows weeping (vv.44-58). First, Cretin neatly shows his appreciation of the literary catalogue by including a smaller sub-list (of the buildings he destroyed) within the main list of his actions. Second, and more interestingly, Cretin uses the catalogue to remind his courtly audience that although in his work Charles is portrayed as sympathetic to Louis, he was in fact a menace to the French crown while alive, and therefore retains his reputation as an enemy to the country. It is these extra levels of nuance which make Cretin’s use of the catalogue the most inventive, and therefore impressive, of the cycle.

Turning to imagery rather than convention, an important theme which permeates the language of each of these five poems is that of growth, and flowering. My analysis of this negotiates with Sarah Kay’s improved revival of autobiographical assumption. She notes that she considers ‘that the time of insertion into rhetorical and linguistic tradition influences self-presentation […] and that historical factors such as […] relationships with authors and patrons, leave perceptible traces on the subjective voice’.\textsuperscript{82} That is to say, it would be somewhat naïve to assume everything contained in these five poems directly mimics their authors’ own experiences and aspirations, be it consciously or subconsciously. However, as shown above with regard to epistles, correspondence, and literary production, the thematic choices made by these authors represent a strategic move in the wider game to achieve recognition and acquire capital for their work. In adhering to the plausible constructs

of epistle writing (if not in their mythological context, but in form and presentation), it seems practical that the poets would have drawn on their own experiences and awareness in some way.

This imagery of growth and flowering connects the ludic, literary elements contained in this case study to the capital-related decision to make an entry into it in the first place. The deployment of language pertaining to expansion and flourishing is one of various in-game ludic components with which the poets could engage. Each attempted to use the language in imaginative ways, showcasing their poetic skill, and in doing so increased the likelihood of a favourable response to their efforts, resulting in a cultural pay-off. In doing so, each poet was also using this language as a metaphor for that very pay-off in the real world. As is demonstrated, the ways in which they portray growth relates closely to what they stood to gain if they were considered proficient. Notably, this use of nature metaphors anticipates later works such as French poet and critic Joachim du Bellay’s 1549 piece *La Deffense et illustration de la langue françoys*. Here, Du Bellay directly combines his promotion of vernacular French poetry with metaphors of cultivation, writing:

‘Et qui voudra de bien pres y regarder, trouvera que nostre Langue Francoyse n’est si pauvre, qu’elle ne puysse rendre fidelement ce qu’elle emprunte des autres, si infertile, qu’elle ne puysse produyre de soy quelque fruict de bonne invention, au moyen de f’industrie et diligence des cultiveurs’.

(And he who will care to look closely, will discover that our French tongue is not so poor that it cannot render faithfully what it borrows from others, not so unfertile that it cannot produce of itself some fruit of good invention by means of the industry and diligence of its cultivators).83

In this way, Du Bellay crystallises earlier thought on renown found in works such as the current epistles by comparing the production of well-formed French verse to the life-sustaining bounty of nature.

In the first piece of the cycle, D’Auton uses this imagery to describe the respective worlds which Hector and Louis are inhabiting: Louis’s kingdom is

described as a ‘monde | Des champs flouriz et de terre feconde’ (world of flowering fields and fertile earth, vv.11-12). This description of Louis’s world as fertile and flowering, made aurally pleasing with the soft alliteration of ‘flouriz’ and ‘feconde’, reflects his standing as a celebrated king, and also associates him with ideas of growth and prosperity. The Elysian Fields more obviously lend themselves to descriptions of beauty and flourishing, and Hector accordingly notes: ‘par mes biensfaictz mys | Es champs floriz’ (through my good deeds I have been put there in flowering fields, vv.92-3). Similarly Lemaire describes them as the ‘beau champ Helisée’ (beautiful Elysian Fields, v.302), before later noting that only ‘fruictz ambrosiens’ (ambrosial fruits, v.556) are known by those at rest there. This use of language suggesting both parties are in flourishing environments not only creates a sense of equality, but is also one of the themes which is most played with by the poets in this cycle.

In his response piece, Lemaire is the first directly to link the established theme of flowering in-game to the existing image of the French fleur-de-lis in the real world. In a sequence which sees God give the French a vision of their alleged ancestral homeland Troy, Louis records that: ‘là endroit noz fleurons embelliz | Fussent plantez, nos armes et noz liz’ (in that place made our flowers planted there more beautiful, our weapons and our fleurs-de-lis, vv.485-6). Here Lemaire directly relates the plight of the French to the notion of success and prospering: in having Louis see such patriotic and militaristic iconography planted in the ground of the mighty Troy, he combines the established ludic theme of growth, existing imagery from French tradition, and contemporary references relevant to the French military campaign the piece is supporting. Thus, Lemaire neatly outdoes D’Auton in this sense, with a more rounded and impactful in-game deployment of the theme. He also, interestingly, reverses this imagery, portraying the villain of the piece, Julius II, making camp in a space the polar opposite of that which Louis and Hector are enjoying, a space where the conditions would be sure completely to stunt any potential for growth: ‘Fermer son camp en temps rudde et divers, | Illec souffrir le plus dur des yvers’ (making his camp in harsh and diverse conditions, the suffering the hardest of winters, vv.367-8, my emphasis). The repeated hard ‘d’ and ‘t’ dentals here serve as a linguistic

representation of this harsh environment, and by extension the flawed moral space Julius is occupying. In setting up an antithesis to Louis’s flourishing greatness, Lemaire adds another dimension to this particular imagery, further displaying his skill, and amassing cultural capital.

Cretin, in his poem to the subjects of Charles the Bold, develops this imagery further still. He acknowledges the way in which the previous poets have utilised the theme; for example, he references the ‘beau Champ Elizee’ (v.96) as D’Auton had it, and comments on the ‘splendeur du beau lys’ (splendour of the beautiful fleur-de-lis, v.133) of France as Lemaire established it. However, earlier in the epistle, as he first berates his erstwhile subjects, Charles labels them: ‘faux, desloyaulx seducteurs, | Simulateurs, ypocrites, menteurs, | Seminateurs d’ordure et zizanie’ (false, disloyal seducers, simulators, hypocrites, liars, sowers of obscenities and discord, vv.15-7). His deployment of multiple sibilant ‘s’ and ‘z’ sounds here reinforces his damnation of his erstwhile subjects’ subterfuge against his name. The use of the noun ‘seminateur’ as double entendre is also crucial. Normally indicating a sower of seeds, which would go on to spawn flowers, or perhaps crops, here the subjects are sowing obscenities and discord. Cretin has completely subverted the positive imagery of growth present in the other epistles, and in undermining it with the ridicule of obscenities, has created a far darker iteration better suited to the more bleak tone of his piece. This demonstrates one of the ways in which the poets on this network approached the competitive play which it prompted. Their skilled deployment of the imagery of growth offered a means by which they could attempt to win cultural capital within their informal social structure.

This imagery of growth and flourishing is also combined with that of renown and reputation by the poets, in displays which can be read as metaphors for the cultural pay-off available to them in the real world. The motif of renown runs through the heart of each of the compositions, and understandably so. As befits heroic epistles, their characters – kings, gods, and mythical heroes – are already surrounded by an inherent reputation, built from their (real or fictional) exploits and activities, and this celebrated status permeates each of the poems. In Bouchet’s piece, Henry VII refers to Louis as ‘Roy de France, duquel le grand renom’ (King of France, whose great renown, v.57), while D’Auton quotes Louis’ allies as declaring: ‘Que par sus tous il emportoit le bruit’ (above all others he gained the greatest
renown, v.150). Mailly allows Mars a self-promoting introduction, celebrating his: ‘prouesses faict d’armes et renom’ (acts of prowess, feats of arms, and renown, v.5), while Lemaire’s Louis praises the scale of reputation Hector still has in the world: ‘Et ou jadis tant de louenge acquis | Que tout le monde en parle jusqu’à ores’ (and where you have already acquired so much renown, that everyone speaks about it up till this day, vv.108-9). Cretin takes a slightly different tack, again subverting the established language of his predecessors by having Charles explain how his actions actually damaged his reputation, and brought shame on his lands: ‘je n’en rapportay fors | Confusion, honte, hayne, et vergongne, | Perte et dommaige au pays de Bourgongne’ (I brought nothing but shame, hatred, disgrace, loss, and pain to the country of Burgundy, vv.64-6). Again here, the power of network structures as a maker and breaker of reputations comes to the fore, as depending on the nature of the news and stories circulating regarding an individual, so their name takes on more or less currency.

This theme is often found directly entwined with that of growth discussed above; for instance, in Bouchet’s piece, Henry talks of the flourishing honour of the French kingdom, as embodied in: ‘la couronne / Qui de vertu, d’honneur et biens fleuronne’ (the crown, in which virtue, honour, and good flower, v.56). Here the language of growth is directly applied to virtuous characteristics, which win respect in the wider world. The clearest example of this comes towards the beginning of D’Auton’s epistle, as he explains that even though Hector’s body may be rotting in the ground, his renown is still flourishing:

Car si le corps en la terre pourrist,
Le renom croist par le monde et florist
Comme ung spectacle ouvert, cler, et tresample,
Pour demourer perpetuel exemple
Des vertueux par tiltres apparans.

For though the body is rotting in the earth, the renown grows across the world, and flourishes as a public spectacle, illustrious and far-reaching, to remain an everlasting example of virtuous men for obvious reasons, vv.31-5).

Again here we see a direct instance of a reputation growing, and blooming in the world. D’Auton sets up his image with negative imagery of death and decay, then
immediately and skilfully contradicts it, making his stanza all the more impactful for it. The body, though now dead and lifeless, becomes a fertiliser for the vegetation of reputation; it was the actions which the body achieved in life which are now producing and sustaining the blossoming renown. And this renown is clearly available for all to see, as it is ‘ouvert, cler, et tresample’, and so acts as an ‘exemple’ for all others. Through his actions and his achievements, Hector had amassed a vast amount of capital amongst his peers, and as a result, his reputation has grown to leave a lasting impression on the world. There is a comparison to be made here with the theory of indirect reciprocity linked to augmented reputation considered in chapter one. Hector, through his glorious deeds and admirable acts in life, has made himself a figure whom people are keen to be associated with, even in death.

Throughout the first two poems, language such as this is particularly prominent. In Lemaire’s epistle to Hector, Louis declares: ‘j’ay plaisir d’ouyr ton nom florir, l Donl le cler bruyt jamais ne peult perir’ (I have pleasure in hearing your name blossom, the clear reputation of which will never be able to perish, vv.13-4). Once again the imagery of renown is here being mixed with that of growth: as Hector’s name flourishes, his cultural status is augmented, and more and more people become aware of his reputation, here his ‘bruyt’. The use of nom here also raises an important point, as throughout each of these poems, as illustrated above, the nouns nom and renom are deployed frequently. Renom, clearly conjures images of reputation and renown, yet its internal ‘–nom’, when coupled with the use of nom in its own right, suggests a deeper level of meaning. Not only is it crucial for one’s reputation to flower in order to receive the respect of others, and therefore amass cultural capital, but also an awareness of one’s name itself must be fostered. The term fama was commonplace in medieval Europe, signifying both talk about a particular person, and that person’s ensuing reputation. Accordingly, the poets themselves (with the possible exception of Bouchet) all include their real names in either their epistles’ titles or conclusions, despite writing under the guise of an avatar. Here we see the power and significance of one’s name as tied up with reputation.

and perceived skill in an informal socio-cultural network where one is not always in
direct, and certainly not face to face, contact with its other members.

Concluding this discussion of flowering renown, D’Auton utilises the seed
sowing imagery which Cretin will later go on to subvert completely. Talking of Louis,
Hector writes: ‘Car ton hault bruyt et tes merveilleux faictz | Sont en tous lieux mys et
semez à faix’ (for your great renown and your marvellous deeds are sowed and
placed abundantly in all places, vv.41-2). News of Louis’s blossoming reputation and
deeds are thus spread far and wide, while the use of the verb ‘semer’ conjures
images of seeds and growth, indicating that Louis’s renown will grow ever more
impressive with time. Mailly uses flowering imagery to emphasise Louis’s renown,
suggesting that ‘Fleurir en toy’ (flowering in [him]) are noble qualities, represented by
‘Des fleurs de lis’ of his ‘roialume invincible’ (invincible kingdom, vv.21-5). This
description of renown flowering within Louis, coupled with the subsequent reference
to the tradition-invoking fleur-de-lis, indicates that the king’s renown is entwined with
that of his country, a powerful responsibility for medieval royalty.

Through their imagery and language, the poets involved in this cycle highlight
that renown, reputation, and respect are concepts which can grow, flourish to
impressive standards, and raise an individual to greater heights within their socio-
cultural network. Just as Louis was pleased to hear Hector’s name blossoming on
the Elysian fields, just as Louis’s own actions won him increased renown, resulting in
enhanced respect for his reputation and wider legacy, and just as the French
kingdom’s flourishing renown had the power to influence affairs in which it was
involved, so too was everything to play for when it came to these poets’ reputations.
If they were as successful at composing poetry which caught the attention of their
peers and potential patrons as their characters were at leading their people and
engaging in battle, then growth and expansion awaited them also, as their career
bloomed. As they successfully amassed increasing amounts of cultural capital
through writing poems well received by their informal network, they became ever
more recognised within that network, and the more likely they were of achieving a
real world pay-off such as enhanced patronage. This is the clearest instance yet of
participation in a network resulting in social advancement through such accruing of
capital. A relevant example of this is Lemaire, who having composed (among others)
his epistle and the larger work on Trojan and French history cited above, was
officially appointed to Anne’s patronage in 1512. This concept of thriving renown has the potential to cross networks through time as well as space. Just as the poets and orators referenced at the end of D’Auton’s piece were working to enshrine Louis’ legacy in history, so too, if their strategic literary moves paid off, could poets such as those under consideration here secure themselves an enduring legacy. Poets who held the most cultural capital and achieved the most prestigious positions would have their publications referred to by successive generations seeking to emulate, or better, their successes, and even have them studied and appreciated centuries later still, in contexts which they likely could not possibly have imagined. The notions of flowering social reputation and renown won through cultural capital included in these poems are ones to which their authors were, in their own networks, aspiring also.

This analysis of a five-epistle case study has revealed some elements of the workings of an informal late-medieval literary network. The use of the epistle format, and prevalence of imagery pertaining to writing and correspondence, indicates an informally networked community which was built around communicating in such a way, and utilised this one medium (written poetry) above all else as a space for competitive play within which they could amass cultural capital. The frequency of language related to growth and natural prosperity, when intertwined with that of renown and reputation, reveals what was on offer for those poets who performed well in the poetic arena. Thematically anticipating work such as Bellay’s La Deffense, with its wider advocating of composition in the vernacular through metaphors of nature and growth, these epistles suggest an astute awareness of the importance of literary renown from their authors. Not only would an enhanced reputation through amassed capital improve their odds of winning a real world pay off in the form of patronage, but it also granted participants a chance to have their name quite literally imprinted in the history books, leaving a lasting legacy for future networks and their members.

Poetry as a Leveller?

Across the preceding analysis, the potential for poetry to serve as something of a leveller has emerged more than once. The notion that poetry as a medium facilitated a wider sense of accessibility to this informal network is an important one,

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and once again demonstrates how thematic decisions made within the more ludic literary game help to illustrate particular aspects of the informal network which facilitated it. Just as the fictional, and seemingly impossible boundaries of space, time, language, and culture are bridged by poetry, so the real-world barriers of experience and even status are, admittedly to a lesser extent, bridged. The idea that the poetry of this network promoted a sense of equality has already been explored: poets and chroniclers were portrayed inhabiting the Elysian Fields, a space usually reserved for heroes and royalty, and a commonality was shared by the similarly flourishing environments of Louis and Hector. Furthermore, the very premise of D’Auton’s opening epistle establishes the concept of levelling interaction as a key one for this cycle. Primarily, as considered above, in choosing the epistle as a format (and in the successive poets’ choice to uphold the format), D’Auton establishes a space of play with an established structure and conventions. Each poem is formed of non-repeating rhyming couplets, and adheres to the traditional format of an epistle, with opening and closing salutations. Thus, the pieces are structurally indistinguishable from one another as epistles of varying length.

In choosing to link the real, courtly world of Louis XII with the mythological, heroic world of Hector and the Elysian Fields, D’Auton began a thematic epistolary cycle which confirmed the exceptional status of Louis through association, while also reflecting the poets’ own aspirations to be considered alongside the literary greats of the classical world. Similarly, in linking two worlds which could never normally come into contact, the epistle format acts as a leveller within the constructed world. This link serves as both a ludic component of the game, and also a thematic representation of how the game operated within the poets’ informal network. A brief exploration of the former therefore allows a description of the latter. Having established such a premise in D’Auton’s opening epistle, Hector emphasises the seemingly strange nature of his epistle, before explaining that everything is in fact genuine and appropriate, as the gods have allowed him to correspond with Louis:

…ne tenir à fable
Cestre lectre, combien que difficile
Te semblera, estrange et non facile,
Disant que moy, qui suys mort et transi
Ja long temps a, puisse tresmettre ainsi
 Là mes escriptz
 [...] j'ay fruition
 Des dieux qui m'ont octroyé et permis
 Escrire à toy.

 (do not take this letter as fable, however difficult it may seem to you, however strange and awkward, telling you that I, who am dead and have been gone for such a long time, can send my writings there in this way – I find my fulfilment through the gods who have granted and permitted me to write to you, vv.80-92).

 In simultaneously accepting that the pretext seems alien, while also explaining that there is nothing untoward occurring through his communication, D’Auton acknowledges the barriers which should exist between the pair, and then uses his authorial authority to render them irrelevant.

 In his response piece, Lemaire brings an awareness of this unusual premise to the forefront through his ludic moves in the literary game, dealing with it in a knowingly playful way. He initially comments on the shared use of French language to communicate, commenting, ‘Mais quel merveille! et qui eust eu pensée | Que nostre langue ainsi propre, ajencée, | Fust ja commune en ta tresnoble court’ (but what wonder, and who would have thought that our language, elegant and polished in this way, was already widely spoken at your most noble court, vv.31-3). This seemingly irreverent observation from Lemaire actually fits with contemporary arguments that French was the closest European language to ancient Greek, as later promulgated by classical scholar Henri Estienne.87 Lemaire is subtly demonstrating the importance of classical Greek precedents at the French court, as could be expected from the author of the Illustrations de Gaule. Additionally, this shared awareness of language enables Lemaire to assert Hector’s integration into the otherwise alien Christian world.

 Developing this notion of integration, Lemaire makes explicit the apparent differences between his two correspondents: ‘Or jaçoit ce que des religions, | Sectes et loix, coutumes, regions, | Ayt entre nous difference et distance’ (so, although in respect of religions, sects, laws, customs, and regions there is difference and distance between us, vv.43-5). It is the theme of religion which he chooses to

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87 For instance in his 1565 work, Traité de la conformité du langage français avec le grec.
expand upon, explaining that even though Hector has lived in his pagan law ‘sans
reprise’ (without deviating), since equally ‘en nulle place et lieu | N’as fait offence au
sainct peuple de Dieu’ (in no place or site have you made offence to the holy people
of God, vv.52-7), he is in no way reproached by the French people, or their God.
Such a playful approach to this premise illustrates well the homosocial elements at
work in this network. In spiritedly picking up on the contextual difficulties which
D’Auton had explained away, Lemaire is clearly enjoying his interaction with his
contemporary and his work. Writing presents as much a chance to engage with his
fellow poet as it does to win Louis’s favour. Ultimately Lemaire accepts D’Auton’s
approach, however, indicating that both parties, despite their obvious temporal,
spatial, and religious differences, are considered on an equal footing in his epistle.
He supports this by calling upon France’s perceived contemporary affiliation to Troy
through descent and language as further indication that they are ‘d’ung sang et
substance’ (of one blood and substance v.46). His approach to religion is particularly
noteworthy, as we see how through the dynamics of this particular poetry, an
individual who would normally be a complete outsider to a particular environment
(the pagan Hector to Christian France) is initiated into the fold by an existing
resident, and by extension the authority of the poet.

The third epistle expands the in-game consideration of the epistle format as a
leveller by introducing the new character of Roman god of war, Mars. It is feasible
that Mailly got inspiration for his choice of author from a couplet he read in D’Auton’s
piece, which presents Mars as supportive of Louis’ actions: ‘Mars le cruel qui tout en
sang se baigne | Aura, ce dit, au combat ton enseigne’ (Mars the cruel, who bathes
completely in blood will, he says, fight under you in battle, vv.175-6). In Mailly’s
epistle, Mars signs off his epistle as follows: ‘Escrip aux cieulx le premier jour de
mars | Par ton amis tresleal le dieu mars’ (written in the heavens, the first day of
March, by your loyal friend the god Mars, vv.101-2). Evidently, this cross-mythology
character selection seemed more credible then it perhaps does to the modern
reader. By introducing a further in-game arena, that of the heavenly home of the
Roman gods, alongside the established spaces of the Greek Elysian Fields and the
contemporary French court, Mailly further compounds the notion that such written
poetry is a medium which can help bridge all manner of obstacles to interaction.
Similarly, in Bouchet’s work a further dimension is added as he has two English
kings corresponding. He keeps his piece thematically linked with the first two epistles by referencing France’s descent from Troy whilst praising the French attitude: ‘la gente nation Francigène | Descendue de la tige troyenne’ (the sweet French nation, descended from the Trojan line, vv.919-20). By having Henry VII write to Henry VIII from the Elysian Fields, Bouchet opens up the in-game space to contemporary nationalities other than the French. In doing so, he also cunningly occults England’s own claims to descent from a Trojan (Brutus), a move which would no doubt have pleased his French audience.

This is something which Cretin builds upon in the final piece of the cycle, by having Charles the Bold address his epistle to his various former subjects back on earth: ‘A vous Flamengz, Brabançons, Holandois, | Fiers Hennuyers, Bourguignons, Zelandois’ (to you Flemings, those from Brabant and Holland, proud men of Hainault, Burgundians and Zealanders, vv.1-2). Whereas Bouchet introduced just the English nationality in his piece, here Cretin adds diverse regional groups from Charles’s former territories into the arena of play. They are related to the figures of the earlier epistles via Cretin’s inclusion of Hector as a character interacting with Charles. Not only this, but in having Charles implore his subjects to change their allegiance, and therefore change his own fate at the hands of Hector, Cretin breaches the barrier of status in this poem. Here it is the subjects whose decision and actions will decide the fortunes of their once leader, a clear inversion of the real, existing, medieval order. This shift also inverts the tone of the piece in light of that of the preceding poems. The recognisable ‘heroic’ figure is no longer powerful as Louis, Hector, and Mars all were, instead Charles invests his erstwhile subjects with the power. This serves as an authorial indictment on their current leadership in the real world: Margaret of Austria, regent at the time, is not deemed worthy of being the epistle’s addressee, and is accordingly bypassed in favour of her subjects.

One final point to make on this subject of levelling is the use of particular language related to skill within the poems. For instance, the word ‘dextre’ is used by the poets in their epistles to praise both poetic writing and physical fighting. Cretin uses it to describe Louis’ actions on the battlefield: ‘Son dextre brachz a fustz et fers de lance | A exercé telz exploitz de vaillance’ (his right arm, with the shafts and heads of lances, accomplished such valiant exploits, vv.85-6). Lemaire, on the other hand, deploys it in compliment of Hector’s epistle writing: ‘Certes, tu as ung
touchement bien dextre’ (certainly, you have a pleasantly dextrous touch, v.35). Mailly goes one better in his piece, using it to describe both a physical gesture of correspondence, and to compliment Louis’ actions in the same couplet: ‘Qui tu depuis devant moi de sa dextre | Transmys lectre pour ton faict tout a dextre’ (who [Hector] to you afterwards, in my presence, passed with his right hand a letter of your doings, which are all dextrous, v.45-6). Notably, this also supports the argument that Mailly was aware of the previous two compositions, since Mars has also come into contact with them. Here is evidence of the poets utilising a shared vocabulary to describe and praise both written works and physical exploits. Through this careful choice of language, the achievements of kings, heroes, and poets are all coloured with the same level of accomplishment, largely to the advantage of the poets who otherwise would be unlikely to receive similar praise to those of military prowess.

The form of the epistolary poem is thus used by these authors to lower manifold barriers and act as something of a leveller within their compositions. In the five poems considered, the boundaries of time, geographical space, culture, language, religion, fiction and reality, and status have all been crossed, leaving a more accessible playing field which allowed a constructed virtual network of dead Counts, mythological heroes, Roman gods, living kings, and Charles’ erstwhile subjects to interact together. It is this premise which relates directly to the informal network of poets considered in this chapter. As they created a poetic world which allowed such diverse characters an arena for exchange, so did that poetry act as a leveller within their network. The formal structures of wider poetry, and the conventions of this particular exchange, provided a common ground for production and communication. To take a relevant example, in the St Petersburg manuscript, the epistle by the unknown ‘A. de Mailly’ sits directly after those of D’ Auton and Lemaire, and in exactly the same format. Whereas Lemaire was, to quote Britnell, the ‘leading literary figure writing in French in the first fifteen years of the sixteenth century’, Mailly was a nobleman, with this epistle his only known literary output. Yet if one was to leaf through the presentation manuscript, there is certainly no visual indication that one author was a literary superstar, and the other a relative unknown.

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It is the reputation and capital assigned to the poets’ names which indicate prowess to a knowledgeable audience.

It is well worth reflecting briefly here on the interplay between contemporary networks that the presence of Mailly in this case study points toward. While he was an outsider when it came to the informal literary network of experienced poets, he was very much an insider of the courtly networks of power and patronage (which are at once partly formal and partly informal) that it was here overlapping with. If we were approaching this case study from the opposite angle, from the perspective of the courtly network of patrons these vocational poets were seeking to impress, Mailly would then be the node with the highest cultural capital and social reputation by far. This is a useful illustration of how a node in one network may have considerably more or less capital, and therefore influence, in another.

For the current analysis, however, poetry, certainly within this informal network, acted as a leveller of the constructed networks within the epistles themselves, and to a lesser extent served to break down barriers of the poets’ informal network, serving as a facilitator of accessibility and therefore participation. How well the individual poems were received, and the ensuing benefits won by their authors, was clearly crucial, but from the outset the selected poetic format provided anyone with the appropriate skills, social positioning, and an inclination to contribute to the game exactly the same fundamental potential, opportunity, and basis from which to impress as anyone else.

The Author and the Avatar

This consideration of one medieval informal network can be drawn together through a final consideration of the more personal, performative play which these authors engaged in when creating their respective epistles. In each of the poems dealt with above, its author assumes a very definite in-game avatar. The term ‘avatar’ here is closely linked to current notions of subjectivity within medieval literature, notably that of ‘persona’ outlined by Kay. The persona, once defined as the constructed speaker of a poem as distinct from its historical author, now represents something of a ‘skilful confusion’ of the two. Kay argues that the performer of a text was often its author, a context which presented this confusion between ‘speaker’ and ‘author’. Persona therefore, with its sense of dramatic artifice,
is often an appropriate designation of carefully elaborated stage roles.⁸⁹ The notions of avatar and persona are by no means mutually exclusive; they in fact work in synchronicity. The avatar represents the point at which the actual reception of a text as the cultural production of its informal network fuses with its diegetic context of utterance. That is, the heroic figure serves as a kind of implied voice which speaks to the reader or audience, but this is constantly underlain by the implied presence of its real author, and his actual motives and concerns.

In its most fundamental state, the choice to adopt an in-game avatar entwines elements of both performative and ludic play for these poets. In writing as a definite historical or heroic figure in their poems, the authors distance the authorial voice of the poem from their own, leaving them free to enact a kind of performance, as that particular voice, on the page. In the more traditional, ludic sense first explored by Huizinga, this conforms to the idea of leaving one’s true self at the door when engaging in play – the poets here were free to adopt an avatar of their choice, through which they felt they could create the most original and entertaining poetry.⁹⁰ Such a scenario also granted a poet more freedom: under the guise of an avatar, it was more acceptable to address the king on an equal footing than if speaking directly to him. Additionally, the established space of play, here the French court, meant that the authors could be freer in voicing opinions toward the Pope, through their avatars. Knowing that their works would remain in the manuscript culture of the court (as shown above, none of these poems, bar Lemaire’s, appeared in wider print until after the deaths of both Julius and Louis), they could present often strongly negative impressions of the Pope without fearing consequences in their wider lives, something which, since many of them were connected to religious orders and institutions, would have been particularly important. Once more, we see the more game theoretical moves of this network enabling the ludic play for its individual members.

As noted above, although each poet assumed a recognisable avatar and wrote as such in their poems, this does not mean the question of subjectivity is answered before it has been posed. The voices of these five poems – Hector, Louis

XII, Mars, Henry VII, and Charles the Bold – are still just as much constructed identities as the ambiguous ‘je’ of early troubadour poetry and later *chansons de geste*. Would Henry VII and Charles the Bold be as derogatory toward their own peoples in favour of the French as portrayed here; and would Mars or Hector (if not fictional) really pay any attention to the territorial quarrels of a Christian king centuries after their existences? The answer is clearly not, illustrating that although the voices used here are ones recognisable from history and ancient literature, they are just as subjective as an anonymous *je* narrator would have been. By considering both the wider contemporary influences on all of these authors, as well as the more personal circumstances of each, it can be better appreciated how these authors constructed the voices in their epistles.

More generally, we see the greatest common influence as being intertextual, in the form of the other contemporary epistles popular at the French court. As shown above, the *rhétoriqueurs*’ burgeoning interest in the epistle format following St. Gelais’s translation, alongside foreign influences such as Andrelini’s Latin compositions for Queen Anne, made the epistle a fashionable choice for these poets, who in turn adopted its structure and conventions. There are also echoes of the praise poems encouraged by Louis before his war with Julius began, alongside the wider popularity of heroic imagery, and French links to Troy, in contemporary French writing regarding the king and his exploits. A more immediate intertextual influence on the tone of the individual poems here are the other poems of the cycle themselves. As a fundamental aspect of how this network operated, this is worth emphasising: for instance, Lemaire took up the themes of D’Auton’s piece and deployed them in new ways in his epistle; Mailly likely took the inspiration for his piece from a couplet part way through D’Auton’s (vv. 175-6); Bouchet attempted to rework the established format by making it more historical; and Cretin subverted the existing themes and imagery of the cycle surrounding growth and renown in his final piece. Each successive author fed off the poetic work of his predecessors, aiming to enrich his own composition.

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On the more personal level, these epistles were in some way shaped by their authors’ own networks and experiences. As explored above, the imagery of correspondence, composition, prosperity, and renown, while shaping these poems on a thematic level, were also drawn from the network’s own facilitation of exchange, competition, and cultural capital acquisition. Each poet’s choice of avatar is of particular interest here, as it reveals something of their status in the network, and also their own ambitions. As the most established of the five poets at the court, acting as Louis’s personal historiographer, D’ Auton would likely have felt most confident in addressing the King, through his work, as an equal. In choosing ‘preux Hector’ (arguably an even more capable and effective warrior and leader than Louis) as his avatar, D’ Auton not only further praises Louis by association, but also displays his confidence and status by addressing the king on equal terms. In deciding to take D’ Auton’s call for reply literally, and writing a response piece as Louis himself, Lemaire makes perhaps the boldest move of the game. Writing as the very king he is hoping to impress, the poet must ensure that he strikes a perfect composition, capturing the tone, style, and skill which the king would undoubtedly expect to see of his own efforts. As noted above, Lemaire was perhaps the most poetically skilled of all the poets considered here, and was also around this time making a final push for royal patronage; as such, his choice of avatar reveals not only a confidence in his ability to create an epistle of the required nuance, but also a willingness to take a risk to win the capital he needed to impress the court and ultimately enter royal patronage.

Mailly, the unknown of the five poets, displays the opposite in his choice of avatar. Despite Lemaire calling for reply even more emphatically, Mailly chooses to switch Hector with Mars as Louis’s correspondent in his epistle. As he was not an established poet, there is every chance that Mailly did not feel confident enough (or simply was not inclined) to directly continue the cycle as it had been established by such eminent wordsmiths, and so chose a less ambitious avatar. Mars was of course the God of War, so by portraying him as Louis’s ‘amis tresleal’ (most loyal friend, v.102), Mailly still praises Louis by association, arguably more so than his predecessors, since his correspondent has been upgraded from a hero to a god. That said, Mars had no direct link with Louis in mythology or otherwise, meaning
Mailly was free to create his own, shorter, entry, without the added pressure of presenting himself at the same level as his two predecessors.

Bouchet forgoes all the previous correspondents in selecting Henry VII to write to his son, Henry VIII. There are two elements potentially at play here. The first is a desire for Bouchet to make his epistle more relevant, as at the time Henry had just allied with Julius against the French – a move which his father declares: ‘m’esbahis’ (astounds me, v.26). The second reason is more complex. As a provincial poet Bouchet was more of an outsider to courtly life than the other members of this network, and this is perhaps reflected in his choice of avatar. Bouchet uses Henry to display his wide knowledge of English and French history, in a far longer epistle than any of the others. In subtly shifting the function of the game toward something more historical, Bouchet signals his own status as an outsider. Henry’s apology that his letter ‘n’est tissue en si eloquent mettre’ (is not formed from such eloquent metre, v.1158) as those of D’AUTON and Lemaire is perhaps the closest we come in these poems to hearing the true author emerge, as Bouchet laments his lack of poetic skill, and therefore the capital required for access to full courtly status. Finally to Cretin, who returns to the traditional epistolary themes and structures, while also selecting a new avatar, that of Charles the Bold. Here an attempt to keep the cycle relevant can again be seen, as Charles addresses his former subjects who had begun carrying out border raids on French territories, and are hence labelled ‘meschans par desobeissance’ (miserable in their disobedience, v.12). In choosing a former enemy of the French crown as his avatar, Cretin is able to subvert the very tone of the exchange, resulting in a suitably inventive piece to serve as the close to this cycle. Each author, through their choice of avatar, reveals a little of their aims and their status within this network.

The informal network considered across this chapter appears to have been a successful one. Free from the enforced regulations and obligations which saw the downfall of the London Puy, this more informal manifestation of network provided a structure which promoted competition between its members in a more constructive manner. In particular, it facilitated a collaborative means of correspondence, which in turn allowed for the acquisition of crucial cultural capital, and its associated pay-offs. The themes of growth and reputation found in this case study reflect well these pay-offs, as the informal network fostered the self-promotion needed for its members to
succeed in their career pursuits. In doing so, it also encouraged the formation and nurturing of wider social bonds, feeding the human need to belong in a more organic way than more formal networks could. In the next chapter, this more positive medieval understanding of network will be traced across both France and England, through the dual literary motif of the flower and the leaf, in a consideration of the most complex form of network: the virtual.
Chapter Three

Virtual Networks: Orders, Emblems, and ‘the Flower and the Leaf’

‘Which woll ye honour, | Tell me, I pray, this yeere, the Leafe or the Flour?’

(Tell me, I pray, which will you honour this year, the leaf or the flower?)

Taken from *The Floure and the Leafe*, an anonymous Middle English poem dating from the second half of the fifteenth century, this couplet asks a question of its narrator which underpins the case study to be examined in this final medieval-focused chapter: are you with the flower, or the leaf? The chapter explores the notion of virtual networks, that is, those for which there is no historical record of their having existed tangibly in contemporary society, and so may not ever have done so, but which were still charted in some way by an individual or connected group of individuals. Perhaps even more strongly than those labelled formal or informal, they reveal the inherent love of interaction and play which feeds the broader enthusiasm for networks. In keeping with the literary focus of the thesis, this chapter explores in detail two virtual networks realised through the dual literary motif of the flower and leaf within a series of late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century poems. I propose a new reading of these flower and leaf compositions (which have never been studied as a cohesive whole) that draws on a virtual network framework heavily informed by contemporary chivalric and courtly ideas regarding association. Accordingly, a consideration of medieval chivalry, focusing particularly on the orders, emblems, and tournaments spawned by this medieval culture, illuminates the cultural foundations of the network being aspired to here. While I propose a tentative hypothesis for how the emblems of the flower and leaf may have been used in real courtly environments, the most important evidence here is that of virtual networks as a literary device which reflects the human desire to interact, and by extension reveals networks more widely to be something of an aspirational model for the late medieval mind.

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Chivalry and Literature

The underlying ludic element of the poems which employ the flower and the leaf as a dual motif is a sense of association with either one or the other. The flower or the leaf becomes a player's emblem, and they are joined within a virtual poetic network by all those who have also selected their chosen side. These notions of ordered networks, emblems, and opposing teams all find precedence in the high medieval concept of chivalry. From roughly 1100 to 1500, chivalry strongly influenced ideas of courtliness and courtly love, and, as Maurice Keen has demonstrated, the term is far from easily defined. Depending on context, it has been seen as physical groups of heavily armoured horsemen, an entire order of knighthood comparable to that of religion, a term encompassing the defensive warrior class estate, or the code of values apposite to this estate. The understanding of the present chapter is closest to the last of these, in that chivalry was a code of not only values, but expected behaviour and endeavours aspired to by the noble and landed echelons of French and English society. To be deemed chivalrous, knights had to show (among others) the qualities of loyalty, prowess at arms, hardiness, courtesy, justice, compassion, and generosity in their daily actions, which should be well-considered and always in pursuit of social and Christian justice.

Popular literature of the period thrived on these ideals, which were also enforced by contemporary instructional manuals. In Chrétien de Troyes’s *Perceval, The Story of the Grail*, the young hero receives advice on how to be a good, chivalrous knight from a gentleman named Gornemant. Gornemant explains that if he should overcome an enemy in battle to the point where the latter can no longer

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3 Notions of chivalry were of course also prevalent in other western countries, as shall be seen through the primary material left by Majorcan philosopher Ramon Llull below, but the focus of this chapter is on France and England.
defend himself, Perceval ‘must grant him mercy rather than killing him outright’. Should he come across a ‘disconsolate’ woman, he should ‘do right by consoling her if [he] know[s] how to’. More generally, he should always ‘go gladly to church and pray’, and never ‘be too talkative or prone to gossip’. The virtue of these qualities is confirmed in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, a Catalan piece written by Ramon Llull in the late thirteenth century and subsequently translated into English, French, Scots, and potentially Latin. In it, Llull confirms that knights should possess the virtues of ‘fayth’, ‘hope’, ‘charyte’, ‘iustyce’ (justice), ‘prudence’, ‘strength’ against sin, and ‘attemperaunce’ (temperance), explaining in detail the importance of each. He also agrees with the literary emphasis on regularly hearing mass, loving the commonwealth, and always acting in a courteous and hospitable manner.

The element of chivalry most influential on the virtual flower and leaf networks under examination here can also be seen in Llull’s recommended benevolent qualities: that of community and brotherhood. Those striving to embody the ideals of chivalry would often be brought together through their exploits, and once more both the literary and more instructional works of the period highlight how these connections could provide a sense of belonging. Geoffroi de Charney provides the clearest indication of these strong bonds in *A Knight’s Own Book of Chivalry*, penned in the early 1350s. Charney is often cited as the quintessential knight of the period, and his instructional work has been deemed ‘as close to the genuine voice of knighthood as we are likely to get’. He notes that knights (or ‘men of worth’) should strive to be ‘humble among their friends’, and later reinforces this point, instructing knights to always ‘love and serve your friends’. Most tellingly, he encourages knights everywhere to ‘relax with your friends’; with ‘friends’ here undoubtedly meaning other knights, this suggests that informal, relaxed downtime spent building up bonds with his equals was deemed particularly advantageous for the chivalrous knight.

Charney continues by imploring his knightly readers to ‘speak of the achievements of others but not of [their] own’, and, perhaps more importantly, to ‘avoid quarrels, for a

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quarrel with one’s equal is dangerous’. 11 This emphasis on forming and fostering bonds in chivalrous circles is equally present across popular literature: for instance, in Chrétien’s *The Knight of the Cart*, after enjoying a hearty meal ‘the King did not stir from among his companions’, choosing to enjoy their company rather than retire. 12 Similarly in *The Knight with the Lion*, the Queen takes to task the knight Kay for speaking ill of his fellow knights: ‘You are tiresome and base to reproach your companions like this’. 13 As is similarly evidenced by the elements of mutual aid and compassion found in the statutes of the London Puy, this fraternal component to chivalry is a crucial aspect when exploring the concept of network. While it joined all those aspiring to chivalrous ideals together in something of a large-scale universal virtual network, this kind of fraternity would enjoy its ultimate manifestation in the establishment of knightly orders.

**Knightly Orders**

Knightly orders, alongside their associated emblems, are the first of the two direct cultural influences emerging from chivalry to be found acting on the virtual flower and leaf networks. D’Arco J. D. Boulton has compiled the most influential and comprehensive study of this practice, defining orders as ‘more or less formally constituted bodies whose principal class of members was restricted to laymen of noble birth and knightly profession’, which were formed between 1325 and 1470 across Western Christendom. 14 He proceeds to divide the numerous orders for which some evidence survives into six useful categories: four sets of ‘true orders’ (that is, those that had some sort of rule, constitution, or statutes), and two sets of ‘pseudo-orders’ (those which did not, and so whose members had no formal ties to one another beyond the simple fact of membership of the same order). The true orders were: monarchical, which had a hereditary presidential office attached to a sovereign prince; confraternal, which were endowed with a democratic constitution that saw the chief office elected, rather than inherited; fraternal, whose members were held together on fairly equal terms by oaths of mutual loyalty and aid; and votive, orders built around a vow to carry out specific chivalrous deeds, intended to

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11 Ibid., p. 71.
13 Ibid., p. 296.
enhance the reputation of their members. The pseudo-orders are less important for
the current discussion, acting as glorified retinues, or serving as an honorary reward
to honour knightly achievements.\textsuperscript{15} The categorisation most relevant when
examining the flower and the leaf is that of votive orders, which Boulton has
suggested ‘were in effect chivalrous games in which their members were the players
and the statutes the rules of play’.\textsuperscript{16} I propose that the aims and operations of these
real-world formal networks influenced the creators of the virtual flower and leaf
networks under discussion below.

Very few statutes have survived for this kind of chivalric order thanks to their
somewhat transient nature; however, those that do confirm Boulton’s appraisal,
though they have been little studied by scholars (Boulton himself examines only
monarchical orders).\textsuperscript{17} They would usually be structured around a specific chivalric
focus; for example, the \textit{Emprise de l’Escu Vert a la Dame Blanche} (Enterprise of the
Green Shield with the White Lady) was established in 1399 by Jean le Maingre,
Marshal of France, in order to protect women. The statutes tell of how the Marshal
heard while visiting the court that ‘plusieurs dames et damoiselles, vesves et autres,
estoient oppressees et travaillees d’aucuns poissans homes qui par leur force et
puissance les vouloient desheriter de leurs terres, de leurs avoirs et de leurs
honneurs’ (many noblewomen of different ranks, widows and others, were
oppressed and tormented by various powerful men who, by their power and force,
sought to disinherit them of their lands, possessions, and honour).\textsuperscript{18} Appalled by this,
the Marshal established the order, since any man ‘naturellement et de droit les
dames] doit garder et deffendre de tout grief et tort a son pouoir’ (naturally and by
right should do everything in his power to defend women from all harm and
injustice).\textsuperscript{19} A network was thus formed which promoted the chivalric ideals of
compassion and defence of the (perceived) helpless, and by extension raised the
social prestige of its members.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{15} See: Boulton, \textit{Monarchical Orders}, pp. xvi-iii.
\item \textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, p. xvi.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Wider scholarship on chivalric orders tends to focus on monarchical orders due to the better
preservation of their statutes, and their enduring nature. See, for instance: Stephanie Trigg, \textit{Shame
and Honor: A Vulgar History of the Order of the Garter} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania
\item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{Le Livre des Fais du bon Messire Jehan le Maingre, dit Bouciquaut}, ed. by Denis Lalande (Geneva:
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 162.
\end{itemize}
These votive orders (and, in fact, the other true orders) would have all promoted a strong sense of exclusivity. The statutes for the order known as the *Fer de Prisonnier* (Prisoner’s Iron), established in 1415 by the Duke of Bourbon, demonstrate this clearly. Formed to defend women and seek out opponents to challenge in combat (as all chivalrous knights should), the seventeen members of this order agreed that, should any of them die while a member, then ‘on ne mectra nul en leur lieu que ce ne soit par le consentement et accord de nous tous’ (no one shall take their place except by the common consent and agreement of us all). The order was thus a closed group, with only those who were sworn members holding sole authority over its actions and composition. This sense of exclusivity was perhaps the most influential feature in fostering the sense of companionship in chivalric orders under examination here, and is further visible in the surviving statutes.

Remaining with the *Fer de Prisonnier*, some of the order’s statutes can be seen as lifted almost verbatim from those of confraternities, which, as discussed in chapter one, heavily promoted social interaction and satisfied the human need to belong. The statutes close with the following item:

Nous tous jurons, promectons et serons tenuz de nous entreaymer et entretenir en bonne et loyal amour et fermeté […] et de fère et tenir les ungs vers les autres durant ladice emprise toute loyaulté et fraternité que frères e compagnons se doivent faire et entretenir.21

(We swear, promise, and undertake to love one another, and maintain loyal and virtuous friendship and constancy towards one another, and during the period of our undertaking, to be loyal and fraternal to one another as brothers and companions should be.)

The aspirational language of companionship is unmistakable, and is found more subtly across the other surviving statutes, including those of the *Compagnie du Cigne Noir* (Company of the Black Swan). Established in 1350 in Savoy, the order’s statutes insist that ‘li Compaignons soyent tenuz et jurent de siegre ung autre a lour

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21 Douët-d’Arcq, Pièces Inédites, p. 374.
propre despens’ (the companions are held and sworn to support each other at their
own expense) against any outside individual who may wish ill on them.22 Interestingly, this support is guaranteed even against family ‘jusques a gra de
cousin-germain’ (up to the degree of cousins-german, or first cousins), suggesting
that the bonds formed within this order were at least perceived as transcending all
but the closest of familial ties. The feeling of belonging to an exclusive and mutually
supportive group, and the social bonds formed therein, were clearly key features of
these chivalric orders. It will have been noticed that in many ways they bear striking
resemblances to the formal networks considered in chapter one, and it is to this form
of structured network which the flower and leaf authors reveal an inherent aspiration
in their works. More specifically, it is through the notion of emblems, a concept
inextricably intertwined with that of the chivalric order, that they do this.

Emblems

The use of emblems was commonplace in relation to knighthood and chivalry
across the medieval period, and was strongly tied to family heraldry. Terence Wise
concisely defines heraldry as ‘a system for identifying individuals by means of
distinctive hereditary insignia, this system originating in Western Europe during the
Middle Ages’.23 The heraldic image relating to a particular family (most commonly
taking the form of a coat of arms, found on shields and banners) illustrated their
origins, locating them historically and geographically through its constitutive forms,
bordures, colours, tinctures, and charges.24 It is not these more strictly functional
heraldic emblems which serve as an influence on the virtual flower and leaf networks
under examination in this chapter, however. Rather, it is the more simplistic emblems
formed of a particular, recognisable image which chivalric orders adopted as a kind
of membership badge for their respective groups.

This consideration of emblems engages with the work of Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco, who finds a ‘creative poetic will’ in the act of selecting an emblem for a
group, since, free from any prior association, it can stand for whatever its creator

decides. This is an effect which he describes as ‘a theatre of the memory’, as an emblem associated with a group, rather than a hereditary lineage, ‘directs its contemplative character to the collectivity of those who wear it’. Via the example of the Portuguese Order of the Sash, established around the second quarter of the fourteenth century, Rodríguez-Velasco demonstrates how employing such an emblem produces a distinction of character, creating an external brand for the group which codifies the direct link between the order and its members. Emblems such as this thus become a recognisable marker for an order, simultaneously identifying its members and representing what they stand for, and can traverse both space and time. This understanding of emblems holds currency in the primary evidence, and can be seen not only in the statutes currently under examination, but also in the instructional works considered above.

In Llull’s treatise on chivalry, a knight’s coat of arms is assigned a dual purpose; primarily, it serves to identify knights on the battlefield: ‘by cause that he be knowen in bataylle’ (so that he may be recognised in battle). More tellingly, though, is that the image becomes firmly associated with his deeds as a knight: ‘that he be allowed yf he be hardy & yf he do grete & fayr feates of armes and yf he be coward faulty or recreaunt the enseynal is gyen to hym by cause that he be blamed vyttupered and repreuyd’ (that he may be loved if he is hardy and performs great, impressive feats of arms, and if he acts cowardly, then the insignia will allow him to be blamed, vituperated, and reproved). Recognising it as a means of awarding both praise and blame, Llull concludes by concisely noting that the emblem ultimately serves as an indicator of whether a knight is ‘a frende or enemy of chyualrye’ (friend or enemy to chivalry). Here, as Rodríguez-Velasco suggests, the emblem is able to assume a higher authority than simply identifying allegiance, becoming a reflection of its bearer’s reputation and morality.

The votive chivalric orders clearly appreciated the level of importance assigned to emblems, not least in that they usually incorporated their chosen

26 Ibid., pp. 216-7.
27 Susan Crane also provides an illuminating discussion on what she terms ‘chivalric selfhood’, which she argues uses visible markers such as emblems to ritually locate selfhood beyond the confines of any one individual body. See: Susan Crane, The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 107-39.
28 Llull, Book of Chyualry, p. 88.
emblem into their order’s name. As such, the Compagnie du Cigne Noir prioritises a description of its emblem above all else, placing it first among its statutes:

‘Premierment. Quiz porteront dargent au Cigne Noir le pied et le bec roge. Et soyent tenuz de porter le en armes […] si quil soit appareissant quiz sont de la Compaignie’ (Firstly, that they will bear argent, a swan sable, armed gules. And they are held to bear it on their arms so that it reveals that they are a part of the company).29 The Escu Vert a la Dame Blanche provides a similarly detailed description of its emblem, noting that: ‘si furent .XIII. chevaliers […] pour signe et demonstrance de l’emprise que ilz avoient faicte et juree, devoient porter […] lié autor du bras, une targe d’or esmailee de vert atout une dame blanche dedens’ (there were thirteen knights, and to show that they were a part of the enterprise which they had made and sworn, had to wear a targe sinople, a bordure or, a lady argent on their arms).30 The emblem is here directly and explicitly linked to membership of the order, investing the network with a clearly defined communal identity. Visual identifiers of network membership can still be seen in many social spheres today: support of football clubs, membership of political parties, and participation in the scouts movement are but a handful of the network affiliations still indicated by badges or emblems of some kind.

The statutes of the Fer de Prisonniers take this a step further by allowing their emblems to demonstrate not only communal association, but also levels of internal hierarchy: ‘porterons en la jambe senestre chascun un fer de prisonnier pendant à une chesne, qui seront d’or pour les chevaliers, et d’argent pour les escuiers’ (they will wear a prisoner’s iron on their left leg, hanging from a chain, which will be made of gold for the knights, and silver for the squires).31 Each of these instances illustrates how orders used emblems not only to signal a member’s acceptance and belonging, but also the wider exclusion from the association of anyone not bearing the given symbol. It is exactly this sense of belonging to a particular group, as identified by an emblem, which I find at the heart of the dual flower and leaf motif discussed below. There is only one other well-documented example of a similar virtual network existing in the pages of contemporary literature: the Order of the Rose created by Christine de Pizan.

29 Cox, Green Count of Savoy, p. 359.
30 Livre des Fais, ed. by Lalande, p. 163.
31 Douët-d’Arcq, Pièces Inédites, p. 370.
Christine de Pizan was an Italian-born author working for the Paris royal court who produced over forty works in both poetry and prose across her thirty-year career from 1399–1429, and as such is likely the most famous and well-studied female author of the Middle Ages.\(^{32}\) While embroiled in a poetic and epistolary exchange now known as the ‘Débat de la Roman de la Rose’ at the dawn of the fifteenth century, in 1402 Christine produced a poem titled Le Dit de la Rose (The Tale of the Rose).\(^{33}\) Taking the form of a dream vision, the piece sees its female narrator attend a courtly entertainment thrown at the Duke of Orléans’s hotel one night. The event is a sumptuous affair, and interestingly many of the guests appear to be partaking in some form of poetry contest akin to the puys: ‘Qui mieulx mieulx chascun devisoit, | […] Ainsi se firent longuement’ (each vied to write the best he could, they passed a good long time that way, vv.74-82).\(^{34}\) Loyalty, a messenger working on behalf of the Goddess of Love, arrives at the hotel, and offers roses to those willing to join a new order. Those accepting the rose must swear as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Qu’a tousjours mais la bonne renommee} \\
\text{Je garderay de dame en toute chose,} \\
\text{Ne par moy ja femme n’yert diffammee;} \\
\text{Et pour ce prens je l’Ordre de la Rose.}
\end{align*}
\]

(To keep each lady’s reputation clear, forevermore, in every way I know, and to be sure no woman’s name is smeared; and thus I take the order of the Rose, vv.205-8).

Later in the poem, Loyalty visits the narrator personally, and reiterates the importance of this order. It is established to condemn slander, since it ‘mainte femme est laidie | A tort et a grant desraison’ (dishonours scores of women wrongly, senselessly, vv.417-8). While slander against men is also deplored, the focus of the order is firmly aimed at women, and the narrator gladly promises to enact a

\[^{32}\text{On Christine de Pizan’s life and works, see: Nadia Margolis, An Introduction to Christine de Pizan (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012); and Tracy Adams, Christine de Pizan and the Fight for France (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2014).}\]

\[^{33}\text{For more on the Débat, see: Christine de Pizan and others, Debate of the Romance of the Rose, ed. and trans. by David F. Hult (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); and Debating the Roman de la Rose: A Critical Anthology, ed. by Christine McWebb (New York: Routledge, 2007).}\]

\[^{34}\text{The piece is reproduced in: Debating the Rose, ed. by McWebb, pp. 219-53. All further quotations are taken from this edition, and referenced in the main text.}\]
recruitment drive: ‘Si soient tous jeunes et vieux | Desireux d’estre retenus’ (may everyone, the young and old alike, desire to be enrolled, vv.617-8).

Here, Christine is evidently using the concept of the chivalric order to further her attack on the misogynistic tendencies ingrained in the courtly society of the day, a cause for which she argued strongly in her writings. Though it draws on contemporary orders such as the Emprise de l’Escu Vert a la Dame Blanche discussed above, there is no evidence that such an order ever took shape away from the pages of Christine’s poetry, nor that it was adopted by other authors. Though a virtual network in the sense that it was given form, purpose, and an emblem by Christine, then, it does not function in quite the same manner as the virtual flower and leaf networks. As explored below, the ambiguous raison d’être of these more spontaneous virtual associations presents a different conceptual framework to that of the Rose. While the creation of Christine’s order serves a definite purpose in the realm of gender politics, those of the flower and the leaf are invested with a more playful, communal quality. Not only this, but there is one aspect which is most definitely lacking in Christine’s creation: that of a competitive binary opposition. This sense of almost arbitrary antagonism can be found most clearly in the second aspect of chivalry which influences the kind of virtual network under scrutiny here: tournaments.

Tournaments

Described by David Crouch as ‘a remarkable medieval obsession’, the tournament was a phenomenally popular event for not only rich, aristocratic knights, but also society more widely. With origins most likely in later eleventh-century Northern France, by the middle of the twelfth century the tournament had developed into a form which would be more or less recognisable until the end of the Middle Ages. From its beginnings as little more than battles scheduled in peacetime, the tournament came to be a far more tightly-organised and pageantry-heavy affair. On the day of a tournament, hundreds or even thousands of knights and squires would gather, divide up into two teams, and then engage in armed conflict under two colours, in skirmishes not far removed from that experienced in actual wars. As time went on, rulers such as Richard I and Edward I in England drew up regulations to make tournaments less dangerous. Less lethal weapons and stronger armour were
encouraged, and more tightly defined areas of conflict were imposed, allowing judges to witness the day’s events and proclaim who had handled themselves best. Those who were deemed the victors then stood a better chance of being offered places in noble and royal retinues. Tournaments therefore offered the chivalrous elite strong military training, the potential to amass the cultural capital needed to further their careers, and the opportunity to signal themselves as part of the elite.35

It is both the increase to social reputation on offer at such events, and also the division into two equal teams, which are of particular use for the current reading of the flower and leaf poems through the lens of virtual network. Regarding the former, De Charney notes in his mid-fourteenth-century Book of Chivalry that men ‘earn praise and esteem’ at tournaments for they ‘require a great deal of wealth, equipment and expenditure, physical hardship, crushing and wounding, and sometimes danger of death’. For those willing to overcome these obstacles, and to do so in an impressive manner, ‘their fame and renown increases in their own territory and that of their neighbours’.36 One of the key benefits offered by social networks (the provision of cultural capital and increased reputation) could thus explicitly be found at tournaments, and, providing a knight had the means to participate, it is easy to see their appeal. Accordingly, much contemporary evidence survives of noblemen keen to engage in this socially significant sport. References to tourneying abound in Gilbert of Mons’s Chronicle of Hainaut, which covers the period from around 1050-1195. Mons writes that after Easter 1172, Count Baldwin ‘continued to attend tournaments in Burgundy between Montbard and Rougement with about 100 knights at his own expense’.37 This practice of a collective continually roaming the lands in search of tournaments to attend was popular across the period, with the groups becoming known as tourneying societies.38 Gilbert also reveals the potential size of such meetings, as in August 1170 Baldwin took ‘3000 foot soldiers’ to face ‘about 30,000’ men at a tournament at Trazegnies.39 The complete accuracy of this account cannot be confirmed, as not only would Gilbert likely be embellishing

36 Charney, Knight’s Own Book, p. 48.
to further glorify the victorious Baldwin, but, as is considered below, uneven tournaments were frowned upon. Finally, this narrative evidence also reveals the sorts of practices involved in tournaments. As suggested by the secondary studies, these early events bore all the hallmarks of real warfare; in 1177 the lord count of Hainaut won a tournament between Vendeuil and La Fère, and in the process took hostage ‘the lord of the castle’ along with other ‘virtuous knights’ including the count of Clermont and his brother.\footnote{40}

While this model of fiercely competitive play between two sides is important for the present discussion, even more so are the often seemingly arbitrary divisions which formed those two sides. Recent scholarship has noted that an equal division of the forces was the most preferable starting point for a tournament. Returning a final time to the *Chronicle of Hainaut*, it is recorded that while there were customs as to which side certain knights would be on, these were viewed as secondary to having well-divided teams: ‘Although it was the custom in named tournaments for knights of Hainaut to be on the side of the Flemings and men of Vermandois, nevertheless Baldwin […] crossed over to the side of the French where there were few men’.\footnote{41} This desire for equal division is equally found in the prose literature dealing with tournaments; for instance, in *The Service of Ladies* (1255) by Ulrich von Liechtenstein, the author notes that ‘word was sent | to choose sides for the tournament. | This soon was done as it should be, | and all divided equally’.\footnote{42} Similarly, arriving at a tournament in *Lancelot*, ‘Boors demande a son esquire de quell part il tornoiera, ou par devers cels del chastel ou encontr’els’ (Boors asked his squire which team he would be tourneying on, those within the castle or those outside of it, in other words, on the home or away team).\footnote{43} This literary evidence, which often shaped practice in the real world, and vice versa, indicates that upon arrival at a tournament knights would not necessarily know under which banner they would be fighting, but that as equal a division as possible was ‘as it should be’.

The notion of splitting into two teams, often in a fairly arbitrary manner, under a particular banner and colours, ready to face off against an equal and opposing

\footnote{40}{Ibid., p. 71.}
\footnote{41}{Ibid., p. 57.}
team, was thus one which was ingrained in the social, courtly milieu within which the
flower and leaf poems were produced. This was a milieu which also championed and
respected associational chivalric orders, which again saw their members come
together under a particular emblem. These are the two key influences, found in both
courtly literature and reality, which inform the present reading of the dual flower and
leaf motif as forming aspirational virtual networks within the texts which contained
them, created by a group of informally networked poets.

The Flower and the Leaf

It is through this lens of aspirational, virtual networks built around notions of
association, emblems, and competitive play that the remainder of this chapter
considers a collection of poems linked by a particular thematic motif. Across the later
medieval period, four authors figured the dual motif of the opposition of the flower
and the leaf: Eustache Deschamps in three ballades and one rondeau, Geoffrey
Chaucer in two variant prologues to The Legend of Good Women, Charles d’Orléans
in two ballades in both French and English, and an anonymous author of Middle
English verse in The Floure and the Leafe (hereafter FL). See figure 3.1 for a visual
representation of their production.

The scholarly consideration of this dual motif has been somewhat limited.
There is no study which focuses on the flower and leaf across all of these
compositions as a feature worth exploring for its own merit. Instead, scholarly
attention only comes when examining the pieces more or less in isolation, and rarely
engages with their sociological undercurrents. The most detailed studies involving
the flower and leaf are those which focus on the anonymous dream-vision poem
which takes the opposing images for its title. Derek Pearsall has done the most work
in this field, publishing an edition of FL along with The Assembly of Ladies in 1980.
The introduction is hugely useful in terms of context, in that it considers the
allegorical precedence of the poem, and explores its linguistic and thematic
features.44 More recently, in 1990, Pearsall compiled an online edition of these two
works, along with The Isle of Ladies, including a succinct yet updated introduction to
each piece. In FL’s, Pearsall alludes to ‘real or supposed’ courtly cults of the flower

44 The Floure and the Leafe: And, The Assembly of Ladies, ed by Derek A. Pearsall (Manchester:
Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962), pp. 1-78.
and leaf. The only other scholar to consider the work in such detail is George Marsh, in his two articles on the piece’s sources and analogues from 1906. Marsh first identifies the works by Deschamps, Chaucer, and Charles which also employ the oppositional motif, and then proceeds to explore the moral significance of the wider allegory in FL, and much of the literary imagery, including the colours of white and green, the birds mentioned in the piece, and the storm. His work is completed with an appraisal of the thematic analogues offered by contemporary compositions. While this is a useful early literary analysis of the poem, the central concept of association with either the flower or the leaf remains largely unconsidered.

In the wake of the late nineteenth-century expulsion of FL from the Chaucerian canon, there was a flurry of short scholarly articles on the piece around the dawn of the twentieth century. Charles McClumpha confirms FL to be the work of another author, and considers the influence that Deschamps’s Lay de Franchise may have had on its composition. G. L. Kittredge charts some of the links between the English and French courts in an attempt to better date some of Chaucer’s work, and in doing so comes across FL, which he declares to have been a real courtly enterprise. Finally, Walter Skeat argues (somewhat unconvincingly) that FL was composed by the same anonymous female author of The Assembly of Ladies, as well as a third titled Verses by a Lady. More recently, but in a similar vein, C. Annette Grisé has examined FL alongside Assembly as pieces written by women. Discussing their tone and content, Grisé draws out features such as feminine experience in courtly love, and female sovereignty over their own conduct. Again in these pieces, FL is considered in thematic isolation from the other compositions which explicitly employ the dual motif. Most recently, Helen Cooney has examined the poem, aiming to ‘build upon the work of Pearsall’ in suggesting a new reading of

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Cooney thus goes a step further than Pearsall, accepting the flower and the leaf to be a ‘conventional’ courtly game with neither external evidence, nor a single reference to either Deschamps’s or Charles’s compositions. Her argument for a philosophical foundation to the poem makes substantial assumptions of the author’s scholarly precedent, while her assertion that the genesis for the piece was but three lines in Chaucer’s prologue which represent a self-aware ‘conundrum’ on the states of essence and existence is largely unconvincing.

Setting aside FL, there are other accounts of varying detail from studies concerning the other three authors under scrutiny here. In her work on Deschamps, Laura Kendrick makes reference to the four compositions left by the poet, indicating that they represent evidence of the vogue for ‘débats récréatifs entre séculiers sur des sujets légers’ (recreational debates between secular figures on light matters) at the court of the young Charles VI. Joyce Coleman makes perhaps the most interesting use of the same compositions in her essay in a 2006 collection on the context and reception of Chaucer’s Legend of Good Women. In a particularly stimulating piece, Coleman charts the political links which may have led Deschamps to compose his ballade on the flower for Philippa of Lancaster, proceeding to hypothesise as to how Chaucer himself may have come to see it. The result can be read as a tentative representation of an informal courtly network which would sit well alongside the example presented in the previous chapter. Lastly, Mary Jo-Arn has commented briefly on the presence of the flower and the leaf imagery in Charles d’Orléans’s English work, considering how Charles’s choice can be read in the light of his wider professions of grief. The works cited above are all of varying levels of use when considering the four sets of poetry under consideration here. That said, the fundamental device of opposing flower and leaf is never explored in any real level of detail, be it from a literary or more sociological viewpoint. Moreover, the four instances are never analysed fully together, meaning more intertextual and

potentially revealing conclusions are never reached. The following analysis seeks to address this by considering all four poetic moments together through the lens of network.

Poetic Precedents for the Flower and the Leaf

The use of flowers and leaves as separate motifs has a rich and well explored history across medieval poetry. Often stemming from classical, mythological precedents, the imagery of flowers in particular permeates both sacred and secular compositions. Perhaps the most notable of these comes in the form of the rose. It arguably achieved greatest prominence following the thirteenth-century French allegorical poem La Roman de la Rose, which would become the ‘most widely read, imitated, admired, and debated work’ of the period.55 The central metaphor of the rose remains the subject of heated scholarly speculation: could it refer to a certain lady, her love, or perhaps her virginity? Whatever the specific intended representation (if indeed there ever was one), the rose is presented as ‘a mysterious and eroticised object’, a legacy which all later intertextual mentions of the rose would carry.56 Another popular trope was that of the violet, which had come to represent something very different – although it is worth noting that different authors deployed individual floral imagery in different ways. The French abbot Bernard of Clairvaux wrote in the early twelfth century that the Virgin Mary was the ‘violet of humility’, picking up on an association which can be traced back to the early Church, and which can be seen influencing many poets of the period.57 Bernard also noted that Mary was the ‘lily of chastity, [and] the rose of charity’, and both associations are also found across contemporary literature.

The daisy was another popular motif, praised by authors including Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and two of the poets considered here, Chaucer and Deschamps.58 It was considered a virtuous flower thanks to its colours and form, its ability to bloom throughout winter, and its following of the sun by day and closing of

56 Kay, Romance of the Rose, p. 18.
its petals by night.\textsuperscript{59} Froissart in particular created a strong mythological context for the daisy across his œuvre which evolved as time went on. In his earlier compositions the daisy serves as a love token, to an extent replacing the unattainable lady who presents it. It then later becomes a source of poetic inspiration, and is at times even taken as the sign of the poet himself.\textsuperscript{60} The use of flowers more generally can also be seen illustrating a certain theme in a body of work. For example, as explored in the preceding chapter, the poets making up the informal network around Louis XII played with the theme of blooming flora to emphasise his growing renown and reputation in the world. This is a brief glance at the use of plant life in medieval vernacular literature, a topic which could easily fill several studies of this length in its own right. It is included here both to signal this wider literary understanding, but also to demonstrate the different manner in which the flower and leaf are evoked in the poems of the current study. Although a well-versed audience would be aware of the intertextual symbolism attached to flowers in contemporary poetics, the present authors present these flowers and leaves as relatively blank emblems, instead invested with importance in terms of their association. There is no textual implication that the ‘flower’ or the ‘leaf’ represent any virtue in the first three authors’ works: Chaucer and Charles in particular speak only in terms of association with the respective images, not their values.

There is, potentially, evidence for this precedent of a more descriptive, less metaphorical deployment of flowers and leaves in earlier vernacular literature; however, it is again to a different end than in the poems considered in detail below. The \textit{début printanier} or ‘Spring opening’ is a widespread feature of earlier lyrics which often invoke the natural world of springtime in their initial stanza(s). One notable proponent of such a topos was the prominent twelfth-century troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn. Several of his compositions open with references to flowers and leaves; for instance: ‘Lancan folhon bosc e jarric, e·lh flors pareis e·lh verdura | pels vergers’ (When woods and thickets put on leaves, when flowers and greenery appear in gardens).\textsuperscript{61} Often a third term is included, that of the green grass, such as

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 246-7.
here: ‘Can vei la flor, l'erba vert e la folha | et au lo chan dels auzels pel boschatge’ (when I see flowers, the green grass and the foliage, and hear the song of the birds in the woodland).  

This device is ultimately, however, a structural one, used to establish a contextual frame unrelated to the remaining content of the composition: ‘Lancan vei la folha | jos dels albres chaser […] no crezatz qu'e volha | flor ni folha vezer, | car vas me s'orgolha (When I see the foliage falling down from the trees, do not think I am wanting just to see flowers and leaves, let me see my lady).  

This convention can also be seen being deployed in a more disjunctive manner. For instance, the author of an unstudied French chanson collated around 1300 into a collection now held at the BNF, begins: ‘Cil qui chantent de fleur ne de verdure ne | content pas la doulour que ie cent’ (Those who sing of the flower and the leaf do not feel the sorrow that I do).  

In reversing the conventional use of the début printanier, which tended to introduce more optimistic themes, the author here uses the topos to establish a more oppressive tone to his piece.

This use of flowers and leaves as a purely narrative device was often deployed alongside the more symbolic examples considered above. An example of this comes in the form of a French motet series brought to light by Sylvie Huot and David Rothenberg. Motets were polytextual musical compositions in which four different voices simultaneously sung four different texts which were interlinked and commented on one another. In the present example, Quant revient et fuelle et flor / L’autrier joer m’en alai / Virgo viget melius / Flos filius eius, flowers and leaves are used to indicate the onset of summer in the triplum voice: ‘Quant revient et fuelle et flor | contre la seison d’esté’ (when leaf and flower return with the approach of summer). The motetus, however, uses the flower to suggest the virginity of a distressed maiden whom a knight discovers in an orchard: ‘m’en entrai | por quellir flor. | Dame plesant I trovai’ (I went in to pick a flower. I found a pleasing lady there).  

Again, however, while there is precedent here for the non-specified flower

62 Bernart de Ventadour, p. 86 (vv. 1-2).
63 Bernart de Ventadour, p. 206 (vv. 1-7).
64 Paris,BnF, Département des manuscrits, Français 1591, fol.82r.
66 Rothenberg, Flower of Paradise, p. 3.
67 Ibid., pp. 44-5.
68 Ibid., p. 45.
and leaf as imagery (often deployed together) in medieval literature, it is still not in
the opposing sense of bivalency which characterises their use in the current case
study. Such a precedent, absent in any direct sense from the imagery of this motif,
can perhaps be better charted through its debt to a particular genre, that of debate
poetry.

Debate formed a key feature of much medieval poetry as it provided a
platform for the continuation of exchange craved by its composers, as seen in the
previous chapter through poetic calls for reply. Debate poetry facilitated this notion of
perpetual exchange in a relatively straightforward manner. Two ideas would be
presented, and their respective merits debated. These ideas could be returned to
time and again. For instance, one popular theme for poetic debates of the late twelfth
and thirteenth centuries were the ‘débats du clerc et chevalier’, or debates of the
cleric and knight, which witnessed ladies disputing the relative merits of taking either
a cleric or a knight for a lover. 69 Another key feature of this kind of composition,
again referenced in the previous chapter, was the notion of deferred judgement. Very
rarely would a judgment be passed by the appointed literary magistrate; instead
debates were left open, ready to be returned to or reworked in future pieces. Thomas
Reed has noted that this ‘marked formal and ideological irresolution’ illustrates how
these poems were ‘less interested on settling on a winner than in the apprehension
or appreciation […] of the differences that give rise to the debate’. 70 The universal
contemporary popularity of this kind of poetics highlights well the desire for sustained
interaction and exchange which its producers craved: a further manifestation of the
human need to belong which continues to draw people to membership of networks.

A particularly useful account of the evolution of debate literature is provided
by Emma Cayley, who (in a synthesis of the field) charts instances of the genre
including ancient Mesopotamian disputes, the debate cultures present in Syrian and
Arabic writings, the skilled agôn contests of ancient Greek literature, early Latin
disputation models of conflictus and altercatio, and the more subjective examples

69 Barbara K Altmann and R. Barton Palmer (eds and trans), An Anthology of Medieval Love Debate
70 Reed, Thomas L., Middle English Debate Poetry and the Aesthetics of Irresolution (Columbia:
provided by the troubadours of the earlier period. From this prolific tradition, two particular branches seem to exert the greatest potential influence on the manner in which the dual motif of flower and leaf are adopted in the present case study: the *jeu-parti*, and longer, unresolved contemporary debate pieces. The *jeu-parti*, which came to prominence in northern France, and particularly Arras, in the latter half of the thirteenth century, most often dealt with questions of love. One poet would suggest the topic for debate, another would select his preferred response. A debate would then take place in the form of alternating stanzas, before appeals were made to two appointed judges, whose rulings are rarely supplied by the text. The fundamentally dichotomous nature of this exchange is a crucial feature in the poems below, where one must align oneself with *either* the flower or the leaf.

There are also echoes of the longer, more narrative pieces which feature an unresolved debate. These compositions include the considerations of knight and cleric already noted, alongside examples such as winter and summer, and the hugely popular body and soul, versions of which survive in around twenty contemporary languages. A useful example to briefly consider in the light of the present study is a piece from around 1392 by Froissart titled *Plaidoirie de la rose et da la violette*. As suggested by its title, the poem sees representatives of the rose and the violet debate the merits and virtues of each: in the primary exchange, the rose is said to be able to ‘traire amans tout hors d’esmay’ (draw lovers completely out of their sadness, v.28), while maidens are revealed to ‘dessus leurs lis | les mettent en segneflance | d’esbatement et plaisance’ (put [violets] on their beds as token of delight and pleasure, vv.62-4). In the second (longer) exchange requested by the appointed judge, ‘Imagination’, the advocate of the rose, compares ‘la Rose vermeille | … par figure, | au soleil (the red rose, by figure, to the sun, vv.110-2), while the violet’s defender challenges this, pointing out that ‘Rose est muiste, et le

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71 For the full appraisal, see: Cayley, *Debate and Dialogue*, pp.29-37. Also useful is: Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry*, pp. 41-152.
74 Reed, *Debate Poetry*, p. 1.
soleil chaus’ (the Rose is moist, the sun hot, v.185). He further mocks the rose by playfully declaring ‘ce je li di | que pis ne voeil les violettas | aux estoilles ne aux planettes | Figurer par aucune voie’ (I assure him that I will not, by a still worse figure, compare violets to the stars or the planets, vv.196-9). Imagination makes no ruling in favour of either, instead directing them to a higher court, and in doing so inviting continuations. This exaltation of one party over another is seen most explicitly in Deschamps’s early compositions, and to an extent in the allegorical FL, as considered below.

However, with the genre of debate poetry, as with the symbolic imagery explored above, a specific literary precedent for the dual flower and leaf motif itself is not visible. Granted, flowers and leaves were popular tropes in contemporary poetry, sometimes even in their nonspecific ‘flower’ and ‘leaf’ forms, but they never act in direct opposition. Similarly, while there are distinct echoes of debate poetry’s ‘for-and-against’ foundations in their deployment within the poems of the present study, often these peculiar instances do not offer any suggestion as to why one should be selected over the other, nor any explicit indication that they should be defended. It is this ambiguous nature of the importance ascribed to association, rather than metaphor, which invites closer inspection. This is achievable through the paradigm of virtual network influenced by the principles of chivalric orders and competitive play.
The first recorded poetic deployment of the motif lies in four poems written by Eustache Deschamps, the Vertus-born poet who enjoyed close patronage links to the French royal family, in particular Charles V and Charles VI, throughout his career. Four of his surviving pieces employ the motif of the flower and the leaf: ballades 764, 765 and 767, and rondeau 766. Joyce Coleman has convincingly dated ballade 765 to somewhere between September 1384 and April 1385. Since

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77 These designations are taken from: Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres Complètes d’Eustache Deschamps : IV* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1884), pp. 257-64. All further quotations are taken from this edition, and are cited within the main text.

78 Ballade765 is a poem which explicitly praises Philippa of Lancaster (daughter of John of Gaunt) as ‘la flour pour en roy’, and it was during these months that Philippa was briefly a candidate to marry the sixteen year old Charles VI of France. Coleman speculates that Deschamps may have even been commissioned to write such a poem during this time. Joyce Coleman, ‘The Flower, the Leaf, and
all four pieces are so closely linked as a sequence by their shared motif, it seems likely that the remaining three share a similar period of origin. The individual compositions are each notably different in their approach to their subject matter. The first two ballades are of similar shape: in 764 Deschamps outlines the various virtues of the flower, ‘elle a beauté, bonté, fresche coulour’ (she has beauty, kindness, and sweet colours, v.14), before declaring himself her lifelong servant, ‘J’aim plus la fleur que la fueille ne face’ (I love the flower more than the leaf, v.10). 765 also extols the flower’s qualities, ‘En tous estas vient la fleur a plaisance’ (in every state, the flower leads to pleasure, v.16), before again siding with her: ‘je me tien a la flour’ (I hold with the flower, v.10). At one moment the leaf is personified as Philippa of Lancaster. Rondeau 766 represents a shift in tone, best described by Coleman as closer to ‘the humour of Deschamps’s male-bonding drinking-society poems’.79 It also reflects the more playful character of the rondeau as a format. In it, Deschamps appears to tease the French chamberlain Hélion de Naillac, calling him ‘Tresdouce flour’ (such a sweet flower, v.1), and playfully declaring, ‘Me tien a vous et non pas a la fueille’ (I hold myself to you, and not to the leaf, v.2), as he did to the potential bride-to-be Philippa in his previous poem. Ballade 767 is the only one which sees Deschamps argue for the leaf over the flower, highlighting the former’s role as protector and provider for the latter, and declaring: ‘Sur toutes fleurs est la fueille royaux | Pour ce a fueille plus qu’a fleur nous tenons’ (the noble leaf is superior to all flowers, and so we hold ourselves more to the leaf than to the flower, vv.19-20). The piece is written as if from members of the leaf’s network, and again Deschamps ends on a playful note by signing the piece as if from a selection of high-level French and Burgundian officials.

The flower and the leaf next appear in this manner in the two variant prologues to Chaucer’s The Legend of Good Women, which dates from somewhere around 1386-90.80 In them, Chaucer appears to be distancing himself somewhat from those orders which Deschamps described the people of France dividing themselves between. In the earlier version (F), there is an almost throwaway

comment suggesting members of his audience would be affiliated with one or the other:

ye lovers […]
In this cas oghte ye be diligent
To forthren me somwhat in my labour,
Whethir ye ben with the leef or with the flour.⁸¹

(In this cause you lovers ought to be diligent and help further me somewhat in my work, whether you are with the leaf or flower, ll.69-73).

Chaucer is here imploring his audience, whom he generously deems more experienced in love, to help him praise the daisy, regardless of what their preference may be in this secondary debate. Later in the prologue, again while exalting the daisy, he deems it necessary to clarify that he is not wading in on this new debate between flower and leaf, assuring his audience that his tale relates to a time before such a division was popular:

But natheles, ne wene nat that I make
In preysing of the flour agayn the leef,
No more than of the corn agayn the sheef;
For, as to me, nys lever noon ne lother.
I nam withholden yit with never nother;
Ne I not who serveth leef ne who the flour.
[…]
For this thing is al of another tonne,
Of olde stoye, er swich stryf was begonne.

(Nonetheless, do not think that in praising this flower over the leaf, I make any more than I would for the corn over the sheaf, for one is no worse or better than the other. I have no opinion now of either, nor do I know who serves the leaf or flower, for this is all drink from another cask, from an old story, before such was begun, ll.188-96).

The tone of this disclaimer is notably dismissive: in suggesting that he is no more for the flower over the leaf than he is the corn over its sheath, Chaucer trivialises the

⁸¹ Geoffrey Chaucer, ‘The Legend of Good Women’, in The Riverside Chaucer, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2008), ls. 69-73. All further quotations are taken from this edition, and are cited within the main text.
debate to something outside of his consideration. There is a definite sense here of enforced distance and separation, as Chaucer appears keen to keep his work separate from this trend of associating with either the flower or the leaf. Why make reference to this motif at all, then, when it is not returned to in any section of the main poem? Most plausible is that this is simply an integration technique, with Chaucer referencing Deschamps’s compositions in a bid to increase the cultural weight of his own piece. More in-depth explanations for this are considered below.

In the later, revised version of the prologue (G), Chaucer’s tone is far less sarcastic, and more explanatory. The comparison to the corn and the sheath is still present; however, his more measured accompanying assurances that he is not siding with the flower or the leaf, that he knows not who favours one or the other in his audience, and, most importantly, that no one need be offended by his praise of the daisy, imply an approach indicative of a more respectful distance from such debates, as opposed to dismissal of them.

I hope that they wole nat ben evele apayed,
Sith it is seyd in fortheryng and honour
Of hem that eythrr serven lef or flour.
For trusteth wel, I ne have nat undertake
As of the lef agayn the flour to make,
Ne of the flour to make ageyn the lef,
No more than of the corn agen the shef;
[…]
That nys nothyng the entent of my labour.

(I hope that they will not be displeased, because it is said in the furthering and honour of those either serving the leaf or the flower. Trust well that I have not undertaken for the leaf against the flower, nor of the flower against the leaf, no more than I would for the corn against the sheaf. That is not the intention of my work, ll.68-78).

Pearsall has suggested that Chaucer’s shift in tone represents the growing influence of a ‘cult of the flower and the leaf’ at the English court while he was composing his *Legend of Good Women*.82 This is a theory which is returned to presently, however,

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it is clear that the fleeting reference to the flower and the leaf motif appears much more sympathetic in this later working of the prologue.

The third allusion to these two orders, or cults, appears in two of the poems written by Charles d’Orléans while he was held prisoner in England for almost twenty-five years following his capture at the battle of Agincourt. A renowned poet, Charles penned versions of these two ballades in both his learned English and native French tongues. They are ballades 61 and 62 in the edited collection of his French works, and 65 and 66 in the English. While the two versions are almost identical in terms of content and narrative flow, scholars such as Arn have compellingly shown that the English versions are indeed the work of Charles himself, and not a translator. The first ballade is realistic in tone and subject, telling of how on the first of May Charles found himself among a charming company who, ‘pour oster merencolie’ (to avoid melancholy, v.5), decided that each person must choose, according to ‘Fortune’, either the ‘fueille’ (leaf) or the ‘fleur’ (flower, vv.8-9) as their emblem for the coming year. Charles is dealt the leaf, and later decides that this is appropriate, since ‘par Mort perdu ay | La fleur […] | Qui estoit ma Dame’ (Death has taken the flower who was my Lady, v.14-6). He continues to lament his lost lover, claiming that no flower could ever match her beauty, and finishes by bleakly declaring that ultimately, ‘Il n’est fueille ne fleur qui dure | Que pour un temps’ (there is not a flower nor a leaf which lasts more than a season, vv.34-5).

In the following ballad, Charles recounts a dream he has the next day, in which a flower appears and reprimands him for choosing to support the leaf over her for the year. He explains to the flower (here the personification of his lost lover): ‘Riens n’ay meffait, se pense je, vers toy’ (I have not, I think, done anything to wrong you, v.10), since he was simply adopting the leaf as per the rules of the game. He does, however, grant that he will always do the flower honour, ‘quelque part que je soye’ (wherever I may be, v.22), no matter what chance affiliation he may have for a particular year. The two sets of ballades both survive in the respective manuscript

84 For the French versions, see, Pierre Champion, Charles d’Orléans Poésies Tome I : La retenue d’amour (Paris: Honoré Champion Editeur, 2010), pp. 85-88. And for the English, Robert Steele, The English Poems of Charles of Orléans (London: OUP, 1941), pp. 75-77. All further quotations are taken from these editions, and are cited within the main text.
collections of his French and English poetry which Charles commissioned toward the end of his royal imprisonment in England.

The final example is perhaps the best known of those surviving works dealing with the motif. Now believed to have been written around 1460-80, _The Floure and the Leafe_ is a Middle English poem consisting of 595 lines of rhyme royal verse, which was, up until the late nineteenth century, also considered to be the work of Chaucer. There is no surviving original manuscript of the piece; however, the inclusion of an item titled ‘De folio et flore’ in a list of contents at the back of Longleat 258 suggests that the poem was originally included. 258 is a manuscript collection of Middle English poems now held at the library of Longleat House, and written in a single hand dating to the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Unfortunately, the relevant sixteen-leaf quire has been lost, but there seems little doubt that it comprised the poem under consideration here. The earliest and only authoritative text for _FL_, therefore, is that which Thomas Speght published in his first edition of Chaucer’s Collected Works in 1598. It was not until 1868 that this attribution was categorically debunked by Henry Bradshaw, and it has since been impossible to determine the true author.

The piece is narrated by a female voice, and takes the form of an allegorical dream vision, despite occurring while the narrator is awake. Unable to sleep, ‘As [she] lay in [her] bed, sleepe ful unmete’ (lying in her bed, completely unable to sleep, l.17), the young woman takes a walk, ultimately coming to rest in a ‘herber’ (an arbour, l.49). From this vantage point, she first witnesses a troop of knights and ladies appear, all wearing chaplets ‘of leves fresh and grene’ (of fresh, green leaves, l.155), and then a second, similar, company, who all bear chaplets ‘made of goodly floures, white and red’ (made of attractive red and white flowers, l.333). These two groups independently proceed to dance, joust, and sing (ll.526-65): one in service to

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89 For a dated but useful appraisal of the themes and imagery used in _The Floure and the Leafe_, see George L. Marsh, ‘Sources and Analogues of “The Flower and the Leaf.”’ Part I, _Modern Philology_ 4, no. 1 (1906), 281-327; and ‘Sources and Analogues of “The Flower and the Leaf.”’ Part II, _Modern Philology_ 4, no. 2 (1906), 281-327.
the leaf (here standing for fidelity and perseverance in love for the ladies, and valour in battle for the knights), the other in service to the flower (representing fickleness and flirtation for the women, and idleness for the men). This joviality is disrupted by the sudden onset of a great ‘storme of haile | and raine’ (ll.368-9). The company favouring the leaf remain dry in their shelter under a laurel tree, but those in support of the flower are drenched by the onslaught. After the followers of the leaf kindly help their counterparts of the flower ‘to dry their clothes that were wringing wet’ (soaking wet, l.406), and both parties begin to move on, the narrator asks a passing lady to explain what it is she has witnessed. After the meanings of the flower and the leaf are explained to her as above, she pledges her allegiance to the ‘Leafe’ (l.576), before heading home herself.

Something of a literary evolution of this motif presents itself when these four moments of deployment are considered in such a chronological manner. Deschamps’s four compositions adhere most closely to traditional debate poetry, firmly establishing two opposing sides and weighing up their respective merits; Chaucer’s prologues to The Legend of Good Women deploys the motif in a more extraneous manner; Charles d’Orléans seemingly draws on his own personal experience of a more ludic enterprise in his ballads; and the anonymous FL author takes the motif and inflates it to a much longer allegorical moral piece. Before considering the virtual networks which lie at the heart of this motif, it would be remiss not to make an attempt at further exploring this contextual development. In doing so, it is possible to plot elements of the loose informal network (akin to that considered in the previous chapter) which linked these poets, despite their spatial and temporal differences.

A Solely Literary Enterprise?

One of the main questions which underpins the work of those scholars who have considered any of these references to the flower and the leaf is how far it represents some form of real courtly enterprise. The main argument against any real-world courtly cults, orders, or games relating to the symbols of the flower and the leaf is that there is no concrete historical evidence. Early twentieth-century philological scholars seemed content that such groupings must have occurred, purely because they were alluded to in the literary sources: in particular the
companies described in FL and Charles’s ballades suggest playful, organised occurrences. G. L. Kittredge for instance asserts: ‘The lines just quoted are good historical material. They show that English court society [...] entertained itself by dividing into two amorous orders’.90 The potentially apocryphal Cour Amoureuse of Charles VI considered in the first chapter is here brought to mind once again. This blurring of the lines between seemingly formal and virtual networks is considered in more depth below. More recent scholarship has become less trusting of such references to cults of the flower or leaf, with Coleman noting: ‘not even among the better-documented French is there any evidence of such a cult in practice’.91 Both of these standpoints seem unsatisfying; just as the former puts its whole faith in the literary sources, so does the latter in the (lack of) historical ones.

Given the participatory nature of medieval poetics it is possible, maybe even plausible, to demonstrate the motif moving along an informal poetic and courtly network, a conventional baton, almost, adopted from one poet to the next. It is well documented, for instance, that Chaucer was one of the few Englishmen whom the usually Anglophobic Deschamps respected, calling him the ‘Grant translateur, noble Geoffrey Chaucier’ (great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer), in a personal ballade praising the English poet.92 It has also been shown that Deschamps actively encouraged the exchange of poems with Chaucer, and argued that the manuscript sent alongside the complimentary ballade composed in his honour may have contained some or all of his flower and leaf compositions.93 If nothing so direct, Coleman’s approach has shown that Chaucer is likely to have seen at least the second ballade through Philippa of Lancaster, her father being Chaucer’s main patron.94 Whatever the means, Chaucer almost certainly came into contact with Deschamps’s work in some capacity, and given the proximity of their respective compositions including the motif he may have included his brief allusions to the flower and the leaf in his Legend of Good Women prologues as a literary nod to his French counterpart.

90 G. L. Kittredge, ‘Chaucer and Some of His Friends’ Modern Philology 1, no. 1 (1903), pp. 1-2. For a more recent voicing of this standpoint, see: A.C. Spearing, Medieval Dream-Poetry (Cambridge, CUP, 1976), p. 103.
91 Coleman, ‘The Flower, the Leaf and Philippa of Lancaster’, p. 51.
92 Ardis Butterfield considers this ‘very complex compliment’ in detail, see: Ardis Butterfield, The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Year War (Oxford: OUP, 2009), pp. 143-51. See also: Michael Masi, Chaucer and Gender (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 50.
93 Kittredge, ‘Chaucer and His Friends’, p. 6.
94 Coleman, ‘The Flower, the Leaf and Philippa of Lancaster’, p. 54.
Similarly, Charles d’Orléans is known to have read Chaucer’s poetry while held prisoner in England: A. C. Spearing notes that he acquired a ‘fuller acquaintance with Chaucerian poetry’ toward the end of his incarceration, while Julia Boffey has written in detail on Charles’s reading of Chaucer’s dream visions, and the influence it had on his own pieces. Charles may well have engaged with The Legend of Good Women’s prologue(s), via the preceding French sources of Deschamps and earlier lyric traditions, and drawn upon the flower and leaf motif to frame his four ballades in English and French. Completing this hypothesis, it is by a similar means that the anonymous author of FL would have encountered the motif. Scholars including Pearsall have noted the strong echoes of poets such as Chaucer, Lydgate, Froissart, and Deschamps in the piece, so it can be assumed that the author was well versed in courtly poetry, and could have come across the flower and leaf trope in any number of his predecessors, and adapted it for his own work. This progression of theme neatly highlights one informal network in which these four poets were involved. Just as the five authors considered in the previous chapter formed the nodes of a network through their association with Louis XII, here is evidence of Deschamps, Chaucer, Charles, and the author of FL being linked through their respective presence in the strongly connected French and English courtly circles, and the poetic exchange which this facilitated. They formed the nodes of a network built around a literary motif, as opposed to a person or event. Even at a time when the two countries were engaged in the Hundred Years’ War, the collaborative flow of themes along the relations of this informal network of authors can still be seen.

To consider this from the opposite perspective and shift the focus onto the possibility of some real-world courtly engagement with cults or orders of the flower and leaf, the internal evidence of the poems is all one has to go on. Two of Deschamps’s poems are of particular interest when considering any wider dissemination of the flower and the leaf motifs, and they are the two most neglected by scholars. Ballade 765 receives the most attention thanks to its inclusion of

97 A wider consideration of Anglo-French literary relations across this period is provided in: Butterfield, Familiar Enemy.
Philippa of Lancaster, and then 764 for the reason that it is the first in which Deschamps employs the flower and the leaf, making it of interest to those studying both ballade 765, and Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*. The remaining two compositions are thus, to an extent, overlooked, appearing somewhat flippant in comparison. If the flower and the leaf was purely a literary device, one would expect four poems of similar form and tone to the first, ballade 764. In it, Deschamps begins by providing a context for his discussion, ‘Qui est a choiz de deux choses avoir, | Eslire doit et choisir la meillour’ (for those who have to choose between two things, must select and choose the best, vv.1-2), before engaging in the actual debate as a means of showcasing his poetic prowess: ‘Car la fueille n’a pas tant de pouoir, | De bien, de senz, de force et de valour | Comme la flour’ (for the leaf doesn’t have nearly as much power, goodness, sense, strength, or value as the flower, vv.11-3).

The final two compositions are framed very differently, however. There is no introductory context as in the first two poems; instead, in 766 Deschamps immediately declares his allegiance to the personified flower: ‘Tresdouce flour, Elyon de Nillac, | Me tien a vous et non pas a la fueille’ (Such a sweet flower, Hélion de Naillac, I hold with you and not the leaf, vv.1-2). The poet here assumes a pre-existing level of awareness of his thematic framework on the part of his audience. With Deschamps an influential figure in French politics (he held the positions of diplomatic messenger, *huissier d’armes*, squire to the Dauphin, and governor of Fismes during his career), it is likely that both Hélion and the officials he mentions in the envoy to ballade 767 would have come into contact with the compositions – either directly from Deschamps or through their shared socio-political networks. The notion of flower and leaf being juxtaposed in such a playful way must thus, in some capacity, have been common knowledge in such circles, or these mischievous compositions would have fallen flat. Whether this was solely from Deschamps’s own compositions, or in some other extra-textual form it is, at present, impossible to determine.

Suggestions of a life away from the literary page can also be discerned in Chaucer’s prologues. In addition to the revision of the prologue implying a shifting attitude to the nature of the flower and leaf in wider courtly life, the very deployment of the motif suggests some external awareness of the concept. As has been noted across the thesis, later medieval poets often integrated the themes and imagery of
their precursors and contemporaries into their own work, in a bid to showcase their dexterity and proficiency. However, this is not what Chaucer was doing with the flower and the leaf. For a start, the imagery is clearly not the foundation of his work; it is evoked for just over ten lines in the near six hundred-line prologue to his 2,723 line piece. When it is deployed, there is no real poetic flair around it, and no further context is given. The respective significances of the flower and leaf are not elaborated on, nor the nature of the selection and ensuing implications of ‘[w]hethir ye ben with the leef or with the flour’ (whether you hold with the leaf or the flower, F, l.72). If anything, the narrative tone gives the overall impression of reticence regarding the whole affair: ‘I not who serveth lef ne who the flour. | That nys nothyng the entent of my labour’ (I do not know who serves the leaf and who the flower, for that has nothing to do with the intention of my work, G, ll.77-8). In the current reading, the sense here is that Chaucer is referring to a concept which he was certain his courtly audience would understand and appreciate. Whether this came from some external courtly game or an awareness of texts such as those considered in this chapter must again remain unknown.

This links to another point already alluded to: that the manner in which the flower and the leaf are deployed in each of these given examples is fundamentally different. To push this ‘real-world’ hypothesis to its tentative conclusion, the chronology of this motif as it spread across the channel is worth considering. Deschamps’s original references in the 1380s to the existing ‘deux ordres en l’amoureuse loy’ (765, v.2) indicate that the flower and leaf vogue originated in French literary circles. The fact that Deschamps’s ballade 765 (likely intended for a degree of English consumption thanks to its praise of Philippa) explains this notion of dividing between two emblems in the most detail suggests that the concept may not have been as common in equivalent English networks. The difference in tone between Chaucer’s two prologues suggests that at the time he was composing The Legend of Good Women it was growing in popularity, whether in some way stemming from literary pieces like Deschamps’s, or the wider French ties to the

English court. By the time Charles d’Orléans wrote of it as a political prisoner in the early fifteenth century, the flower and the leaf juxtaposition was clearly at a peak in popularity. This is also supported by the rich decoration of a mid-fifteenth-century copy of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, which includes an illumination of a courtly audience hearing the work, bordered with an elaborate flower and leaf design. Charles’s ballade suggests that it may also have become closely associated with Mayday. Finally, if the quire containing *FL* was removed (perhaps for personal consultation) from the Longleat manuscript collection around the time of its compilation, this would be further evidence that the motif was still a popular one towards the end of the century.

The picture which emerges from this consideration of the potential for the flower and leaf motif to have existed away from the literary page is one akin to the chicken and the egg. If the two did exist as some sort of ludic courtly orders (still an indeterminate assertion, but a likely one given the varying content of these poems), it is impossible to discern which came first: the courtly orders, or their literary allusions.

One of the main reasons the twentieth-century arguments for courtly divisions into separate orders of flowers and leaves are not so credible is that the game they present is too strictly and rigidly defined. Too much is assumed from too little evidence: Kittredge, for instance, declares that the two groups would discuss ‘no doubt with an abundance of allegorical imagery, the comparative excellence of these two emblems’. Spearing also writes with conviction of ‘a kind of game at the court of Richard II, in which the courtiers divided into two parties […], in order to provide a framework for the discussion of questions of love’. Even more recently, Florence Percival has made such an assumption, speculating that each order ‘vied in praising its own symbol more highly than the other’. While these hypotheses cannot be discredited outright, and an explicit attempt to exalt one emblem’s virtue over the other is indeed present in three of Deschamps’s works, they are simply too presumptuous. Aside from Deschamps’s personal, considered comparisons of the

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101 Kittredge, *Chaucer and His Friends*, p. 2.
102 Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry*, p. 103.
two, never in the literary sources is there reference to any sort of debate or rule-enforced game occurring. The only thing which is certain is the selection of one or the other: Deschamps notes that ‘dames ont chascune en defferance, | L’une feuille et l’autre fleur’ (ladies each have their preference, one choosing the leaf, another the flower, (765 vv.3-4); Chaucer declares that it makes no difference to him whether ‘ye ben with the leef or with the flour’ (F, l.72), while Charles records no further interaction that day with the ‘compaigne […] de gracieuseté garnie’ (gentle company, 61, vv.2-4) he was among once he has been assigned the leaf. These quotations all suggest a less immediate, more sustained association with whichever symbol each courtier may be assigned.

Developing this theory, there is further evidence in the language used that the flower and the leaf might not refer to some immediate debate, but a more prolonged, less tangible, sense of interaction. Charles’s compositions are the most revealing here, as he alludes to the nature of his year-long association with the leaf (the length of one year is also found in the anonymous FL, as the narrator is asked (with the inference of looking ahead): ‘which woll ye honour, | […] this yeere?’ [ll.573-4]). For instance, he notes in ballade 61 that ‘cest an, sans que point je l’oublie’ (this year, I will at no point forget it, v.24), and that he is happy to remain ‘entiérment de sa partie’ (entirely in her camp, v.26) for the coming twelve months. When he is reprimanded by the flower in the following ballade, she reminds him that ‘pieça mon party | Tu tenoies’ (you formerly held my party, vv.6-7), and declares that she is hurt at his ‘soustenant la fueille contre moy’ (supporting the leaf over [her], v.8). There is no suggestion of any particular obligations Charles as narrator has inherited alongside his affiliation with the leaf, instead he must simply keep it in his mind, support it, and remain in its camp for the coming year. This understanding is present in the earlier works, also. When Chaucer directly addresses his audience as either ‘with the leef or or with the flour’ (F, l.72), it seems unlikely that there would be a structured courtly game or debate occurring while his poetry was being recited. Rather, members of his courtly audience may already have had experience of being affiliated with either emblem (indicated by Chaucer’s use of the verb ‘servyth’), in some ongoing capacity akin to that which Charles would later describe. Similarly, it has been seen that Deschamps notes how various women of France ‘ont chascune en defferance’ (have respect for each one), further suggesting that this was a
continuing preference or association with either the flower or the leaf. Finally, the poets each use some nuanced variation of the verb to take, or hold, in their pieces, for example: ‘je me tien a la flour’ (Deschamps); ‘I am witholde yit with never nother’ (Chaucer); ‘tu tenais | Mon parti’ (Charles d’Orléans).

Whether or not the juxtaposed literary motifs prompted such playful divisions of groups into mock orders which supported either the flower or the leaf is one question which for now must remain unanswered. If they did, it would most likely have been along the lines suggested above: the division of a group into two sub-networks which identified with a particular emblem, and therefore came together under a common membership badge in a manner akin to that discussed earlier in the chapter. Ultimately, any such historical reality must remain a hypothesis. What matters for the present argument is the concept of virtual network to which these pieces bear witness: a virtual network which offered an aspirational formula for repeated, if diffuse, interaction, play, and exchange. Once again, this is a network iteration which is somewhat peripheral, away from its members’ primary associational forums. Given the more aspirational nature of these flower and leaf structures compared to the formal London Puy studied in chapter one, this is further suggestion not only that networks in general are keenly sought out by individuals, but also that these more slight networks have their own innate worth.

The Virtual Networks

It is of paramount importance that these four sets of compositions are studied together as a collection of poetic moments linked by the dual motif of the opposed flower and leaf. Existing scholarship does not provide any such collective appraisal, for the most part either focusing on FL, or the allusions to the supposed cults in Chaucer’s work, thanks to his wider literary prominence. Ultimately, the brief few lines in the prologues to The Legend of Good Women are in fact the least illuminating when discussing the virtual flower and leaf networks, and have been considered at the almost total expense of Charles’s compositions. When examined together, both the outward linguistic intertextual links and the more subtle thematic similarities of these pieces demonstrate the aspirations at play in the formation of their virtual networks.

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104 Deschamps, Ballade 765, v. 3.
The shape and composition of these virtual networks are perhaps, of this thesis, the most troublesome to define, given that they may or may not have taken shape in the real world. Using the evidence available, however, a relatively stable picture can be painted. In each case, there are two connected networks that form simultaneously: one under the banner of leaf, the other flower. The nodes of each are selected solely according to the event of splitting a group into these two camps, as everyone participating in this virtual game takes up a position in one of the two associated networks. The relations between these nodes are defined by the subsequent playful interaction facilitated by this game, in whatever form that may have taken: for example, in FL this is dancing, singing, and jousting. Each author’s composition, taken separately, can be seen to represent a whole iteration of these co-dependent virtual networks. However, when read together as they are here, two more complex and temporally nuanced virtual networks appear. Although none of the pieces explicitly reference their predecessors, they are still strongly intertextual, and so refer to the same fundamental network structures. When read together, each author’s depiction of the flower and leaf networks represents recurrent instances of the same two networks, with each subsequent iteration inheriting the virtual heritage and tradition of its predecessors. In this way, the flower and leaf networks emerge as something akin to a heraldic bloodline, or a cross-generational order. Though it is not spelled out, by the time Flora is presented as the leader of the flower network in FL, she is thus part of a social structure whose virtual predecessors include all those implicated in Chaucer’s courtly audience as holding with the flower, and French chamberlain Hélion de Naillac.

Aside from the distinct either/or duality of the flower and the leaf framing each of these instances, there are further clear moments of intertextual reference suggesting a shared awareness from their authors, and by extension the informal courtly network which linked their writings. Tellingly, the earliest and the latest pieces are the most strongly linked by internal reference. In FL, the company of the Leaf make ‘of hearbs that there grew, | […] Very good and wholesome ointments new’ (wholesome ointments from herbs, ll.407-9) for their sunburnt acquaintances, while Deschamps notes in his ballade supporting the leaf that: ‘En grans chaleurs voit on prendre souvent | Fueilles de saulz pour malades garir’ (See how, when in great heat, willow leaves are often taken to cure any illnesses, vv.31-2). It is not just the
leaf’s benefits which are highlighted by the two poets, but also its properties. In FL, the only flowers to survive a sudden burst of intense sunlight are those ‘suche as succoured were among the leves (which were protected among the leaves, ll.365), while the rest ‘had lost the beauty of her fresh coloures’ (their colours, l.357). Both the ability of leaves to ‘garder celle fleur nuit et jour’ (protect that flower night and day, v.25) and the fact that faced with adverse weather the flower’s ‘colour li faut perdre’ (colour it must lose, v.24) are also present in Deschamps’s ballades 764 and 767 respectively. This sense of fragility is extended from the flower to the leaf by both Deschamps in his second ballade on the flower (765, v.27), and Charles, who laments the passing of both in the envoi to his first ballade on the subject. The month of May is also included by all four authors (Deschamps in 767, v. 35; Chaucer, in Prologue F, l.108; Orléans in the opening line of all four compositions; and in FL, l.437), and both Chaucer (G, ll.55-6) and the anonymous author of FL (ll.347-8) include the popular trope of praising the daisy.

While these notions are individually not unique to these four authors’ works, considered together they indicate a shared creative thought process and awareness of the preceding compositions. This is displayed most strikingly in their creation of the virtual, competitive play-focused networks akin to chivalric orders centred around the flower and the leaf. Accordingly, the notion of order frames the entirety of FL. The stylistic designation on the page of those members ‘of the Leafe’ or ‘of the Floure’ (e.g., ll.414-5), with its possessive nature and capitalised nouns reminds the reader of both real world orders (such as the afore-studied Company of the Black Swan – my emphasis), and Deschamps’s claim to know of ‘deux ordres en l’amoureuse loy’ (two orders of amorous law, 765, v.2). There are even references to some of the most famous contemporary orders of all toward the end of the piece, as the narrator is told how ‘the Nine Worthy’, the ‘Noble knights of the Round Table’, the ‘Dousperis honourable’, and ‘knights old of the Garter’ (ll.504-21) are all members of the leaf’s wider network.105

Furthermore, affiliation with either of these networks is presented as being unstarkably beneficial for an individual across all of the poems. When singing the

105 The ‘Dousperis honourable’ here refers to the Twelve Peers, or Paladins of France, who were Charlemagne’s most illustrious knights, and as such often appear in later romances. For a useful introduction, see: Thomas Bulfinch, Legends of Charlemagne: Or Romance of the Middle Ages, 2012 reprint (Auckland: The Floating Press, 1863), pp. 15-24.
praise of the flower, Deschamps declares that ‘ordre n’est qui plus mon cuer solace’ (there is no order which soothes my heart more, 765, v.39). Early in FL, the narrator sits in an arbour surrounded by ‘buds and floures sweet’ (l.91) and a ‘fresh greene laurey tree’ (laurel tree, l.109), and in a foreshadowing of the sense of belonging to be offered by their namesake orders, she considers it ‘more pleasaunt […] | Than meat or drinke, or any other thing’ (ll.120-1). Reinforcing this reading, in the following stanza she becomes aware of the sound of voices, ‘the most sweetest and most delicious | That ever any […] Heard in their life’ (ll.129-30). Her excitement at hearing human voices, and the potential for interaction and exchange to which they allude, couple with the predicted emblems of the piece’s two orders to symbolise the social and personal gain available through membership therein. This concept is returned to at the end of the piece, when one who has already taken membership in the virtual network of the Leaf is keen not to get left behind by her group: ‘For here may I no lenger now abide; | I must follow the great company | That ye may see yonder’ (I cannot stay here any longer, for I must catch up with the great company which you can see ahead, ll.589-91). The broad appeal of networks is thus established in this verse collection, but their authors do not let it rest there. They further enrich the virtual networks of their compositions with each of the three key benefits perceived in the formal and informal networks explored in the preceding chapters of this thesis: a satisfying of the need to belong, the facilitation of competitive play, and the opportunity to accumulate cultural capital.

The contrast between isolation and network membership is the most prominent thematic undercurrent in Charles’s four pieces. He is in a downcast mood as narrator across them, grieving as he is following the death of his beloved.106 In the first of his French ballades, he likens his dead lover to a flower, linguistically playing with the flower and leaf duality following his own selection of the leaf. He notes that ‘par Mort perdu ay | La fleur, de tous biens enrichie, | Qui estoit ma Dame, m’aime’ (through Death, I lost the flower, rich in all virtues, who was my Lady, my love, vv.14-6). Whenever he references his lost lover, he does so in relation to himself; for instance, noting that she ‘son amour m’avoit donnee’ (gave her love to [him], v.32). This dramatically ironic sense of togetherness only serves to heighten the sense of

isolation he now feels, thanks to their enforced separation. This, in turn, makes the contrast between himself and the pre-formed network he encounters even stronger. They, he writes, are ‘de gracieuseté garnie’ (equipped with gentleness, v.4), and seeking ‘pour oster merencolie’ (to avoid melancholy, v.5) – quite the opposite to Charles’s current state of mind. A prisoner on foreign soil (albeit a royal one), it is difficult not to draw parallels between Charles the narrator’s feelings and those of Charles the author, constantly rootless as he moved around the noble households of England. The tone of isolation prevailing in these compositions highlights most strongly the dangers of not enjoying a sense of belonging, a human need already seen to be provided for by the formal and informal networks considered in this thesis, and aspired to through virtual examples such as these.

The fact that this charming company, already seemingly so content, wish to divide themselves up further into two sub-networks points toward the second advantage of forming such groupings: their facilitation of competitive play. The technical influence of debate poetry on these pieces has already been examined, and it is in Deschamps’s first two pieces that it is most evident. In 765, the poet takes this literary genre and makes it the focus of the piece’s content, describing how ladies (and later men) across France are pledging their allegiance to either the flower or the leaf (vv.1-4). Not only this, he projects the practice further still, onto England: ‘Voist en l’ille d’Albyon’ (look in the isle of Albion, v.44). Charles fleshes out this practice by depicting it in progress: as he joins the company he meets in selecting either the flower or the leaf, and pledging allegiance to it. Crucially, he describes this process in ballade 62 as an ‘esbat’ (v.15). From the verb ‘s’ébattre’, this indicates that the whole enterprise was grounded in play, a pleasant means of amusing and diverting themselves by splitting into two opposing yet linked networks. It is this team mentality, emerging from these virtual networks, which fostered competitive play.

The aspects of chivalry, especially the concept of tournament, considered above are key to this discussion of competitive play, and they punctuate the text of FL in particular. The knights of the leaf put on a display at the poem’s midpoint which bears more than a passing resemblance to other literary depictions of tournaments. By the later fifteenth century, the time of FL’s composition, tournaments had evolved from the all-out military skirmishes of earlier periods to more regulated affairs with a greater emphasis on jousts. As such, the narrator notes that ‘every knight […] lightly
laid a speare | in the rest, and so justes began | on every part about, here and there’ (ll.280-83). As explored above, unequal tournaments were frowned upon, and so the knights here were divided up ‘as evenly as they could’ (l.278), prompting the narrator to marvel at their ‘rule and governaunce’ (discipline and conduct, l.286). The inclusion of this sequence at the physical heart of the poem paints it unmistakeably in the colours of chivalric ideals of competitive play, facilitated by membership in one of these virtual networks.

The notion of chivalric ideals is tightly intertwined with the third attraction of such networks: the opportunity to acquire social capital. Again, drawing on the potential, already seen in both formal and informal examples, to win reputation through association with a network perceived as prestigious, *FL* exploits the prominent courtly model of chivalry to demonstrate this capital. The clothing worn by those who are members of either virtual network is described in rich and sumptuous terms, serving as an outward indication of their less tangible capital. The seams of the ladies’ garments are ‘set with emerauds, one and one, | by and by’ (emeralds, one after another, ll.144-5), while on their collars, sleeves, and trains are inlaid ‘great pearls, round and orient, | diamonds fine and rubies red, | and many another a stone’ (ll.148-50). Similarly, the knights’ equipment is so elaborately decorated that even ‘the worst was worth the raunsoun | of a king’ (a king’s ransom, ll.155-6). Even their horses are ‘trapped and raied right, | without difference, as their lords were’ (presented entirely correctly, ll.262-3). The company of the flower enjoy an almost identical introductory description, indicating that although they are the target of the piece’s moral judgement, their association with an ordered network still invests them with a level of social capital.

In Deschamps’s sequence of compositions this capital is presented in a different manner, as a valuable asset worth defending by the network. His final ballade is the only piece by any of these authors not to be written as though from a single perspective. Rather, it is spoken in the collective ‘nous’ voice, and signed as though by five supposed members of the order.107 Their reason for writing is to

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107 Jean-Claude Mühlethaler suggests that the inclusion of the ‘one-eyed Porquerons’ among these members serves to undermine the overall argument of the piece, thus indicating that the flower is still the superior choice: Jean-Claude Mühlethaler, ‘Inversions, Omissions and the Co-textual Reorientation of Reading: The Ballades of Charles d’Orléans in Vérard’s *La Chasse et le Départ*”
rebuke the claims of Deschamps’s first three pieces which favour the flower, thus their piece opens: ‘Vous qui priez et loez la fleur tant, | Voulons par droit la fueille soustenir (To all you who praise and support the flower so much, by right you want to support the leaf, vv.1-2). This virtual order of the leaf takes the suggestion that they are part of a meaningless network as an affront to its reputation, and therefore its social capital, and in doing so highlights a secondary intersection between competitive play and the capital on offer for the victors. Finally, as seen above, the isolated Charles has nothing but praise for the group he encounters promulgating the virtual networks of flower and leaf, and since no additional information is provided on them, the reader therefore infers that they are a respectable group primarily for this enthusiasm for networks.

Emerging through these writers’ imaginings of virtual networks is the manner in which they are inevitably mapped onto reality, be it explicitly through the writing, or implicitly in the mind of the reader. Deschamps’s use of real contemporary figures in his fourth ballade, as well as of French chamberlain ‘Elyon de Nillac’ as the addressee to his rondeau, undoubtedly plays on the impressionable mind of the reader and blurs the boundaries between the virtual networks of his work, and the real world referred to alongside them. When viewed alongside the potential historical existence of some form of courtly enterprise involving divisions between the flower and the leaf considered above, this blurring becomes all the more impactful. In a comparable vein, the use of laurel in FL sets both a literary and literal precedent, each doubtless influencing the other. Laurel was the traditional ancient symbol of victory, and so became associated with the heroes of Roman antiquity in medieval literature. As an emblem, it was also invoked in the real world by Louis of Naples, in the statutes for his Order of the Knot.108 The association of the virtual leaf network with laurel thus further distorts the margins between reality and fiction in the case of these virtual networks, as readers begin to associate them with an iconography which permeates reality.

As a result of this interaction with reality, glimpses of how networks function in that reality also emerge from these poems. For example, individuals are seen to

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108 Keen, Chivalry, p. 182.
belong to more than one network, and the question of identification through networks is tackled (two of the founding principles of social network analysis). These are most closely recognisable in formal networks, which is understandable given this is the model which these virtual equivalents aspire to emulate most closely. The collection provides both abstract and more direct instances which show individuals remaining affiliated to more than one network: the former appearing in Charles’s second ballad. Despite being assigned the leaf as his network of allegiance for the coming year, when faced with the disapproval of his lover (personified as a flower) in a dream the next night, he assures her that he will continue to honour her: ‘Car non pour tant, honneur te porteray | de bon vouloir, quelque part que je soye’ (Nevertheless, I will willingly do you honour, wherever I may be, vv.21-2). His new affiliation with the network of the leaf evidently does not preclude him from continuing his association with the flower, and he goes so far as to reprimand the flower for thinking that it might: ‘Ne te plains plus, car cause n’as pourquoï’ (Do not complain any more, for you have no reason to, v.27). Similarly, all of the knights who form a part of the leaf’s network in FL are said to be accompanied by a trumpeter, and ‘on every trumpet hanging a broad banere | [...] every trumpet his lords armes bere’ (on every trumpet hung a broad banner – every trumpeter bore his lord’s arms, ll.211-3). In displaying the symbols of their own kinship networks alongside their allegiance to the leaf network, the knights proudly show that they are part of multiple networks, some invested with the reputation of lineage and heritage, others more competitively playful.

The question of identification through networks is one central to the dual motif of flower and leaf. Networks are defined not only in themselves, but also in relation to other examples. This occurs both externally, as they are seen as different and oppositional to other networks, and also through the eyes of those other networks. It has already been shown how Deschamps plays with this concept in his poetry, writing his final piece in defence of the leaf as if from disgruntled members of that very order. In doing so, the order of the flower is unreservedly portrayed as a definite ‘other’ to that of the leaf. This also demonstrates an awareness that outsiders would undoubtedly be comparing the two networks on their relative merits. This external appraisal dictates a need for each network to be deigned superior in order to win more social capital. This sense of associated opposition is tackled metaphorically in
As the author provides the members of each virtual network with a counterpart in the opposing order: ‘And every lady then, anon right, | That were in white, one of them took in grene | by the hond; which when the knights had sene, | In like wise ech of them took a knight’ (every lady in white straight away took one in green by the hand; seeing this, the knights did likewise, ll.397-400). Networks are thus seen by, and are therefore defined by, other networks. Moreover, they are also defined by outsiders in relation to these other networks, and their interactions therewith.

These notions of identity and definition are the final, and most important, elements to be raised by this consideration of virtual networks in the flower and leaf compositions, and they reach their peak in their depictions of emblems. As has been noted across this chapter, emblems serve not only as a means of identifying a network (be it virtual or real), but also come to encode its actions and activities, embodying everything for which that network stands, and its members’ places within it. Charles uses revealing terms to describe his yearlong association with the leaf in both his French and English compositions. In the French, he takes the leaf ‘pour livree’ (as livery, 61, v.10), indicating that the symbol explicitly serves as an insignia representing his relationship to the network of the leaf. In the corresponding line of the English piece, Charles phrases his association slightly differently, declaring he took the leaf ‘alle yere to dwelle’ (to reside in all year, 65, l.10). The line structure is unclear as to whether this indicates Charles will live within the leaf all year (or rather, its camp), or whether the leaf will be present within him all year. Whichever is intended, there is a definite sense here that the membership of the leaf network is viewed as something deeper than just a passing verbal claim to association. Taken together, these two lines show how an emblem plays the dual role of identification and embodiment for the virtual networks. This is also visible in Charles’s use of the verb ‘porter’, as in ‘la fueille porteray’ (I will take/wear/bear the leaf, 61, v.23). The multi-layered meanings of ‘porter’ suggest the leaf is not only a physical marker which he can wear to indicate his membership, but also a more subtle concept which he can take on and support for the year.

The importance of these emblems is underlined by the author of FL, who frames the entire piece with them. In a take on the début printanier, both flowers and the greenery of their associated leaves are introduced across the first two stanzas: ‘every plain was clothed faire | with new greene, and maketh small flours | to
springen here and there’ (everywhere was covered with new greenery, and small flowers sprung up all over, ll.7-9). This introduction, with its playful pun on ‘spring’, anticipates the coming virtual networks by placing their emblems at the forefront of the reader’s mind from the very outset. When the two orders are introduced into the text, they are symbolically surrounded by examples of their emblems; each lady of the leaf takes ‘by the hond a knight, and forth they yede | unto a faire laurer that stood fast by, | with leves lade’ (a knight by the hand, and goes forth to a nearby laurel tree, which was laden with leaves, ll.303-5), while the company of the flower congregate on a ‘tuft’ of land which is ‘all overspad with floures in compas’ (surrounded with flowers all around, l.343). Those favouring the leaf are particularly subsumed by representations of their emblem: their leafy chaplets are formed from ‘laurer grene, | some of oke, and some of other trees’ (laurel and oak leaves, ll.267-9), and they hold ‘boughes […] | some of laurer, and some of okes kene, | some of hauthorne, and of woodbind, | and many mo’ (branches of laurel, oak, hawthorn, woodbine, and many other trees, ll.270-3). Again, as in Charles’s pieces, the implication is that their respective emblems are more than just identifiers. By wholly encompassing the two networks with their respective symbols, the author uses these emblems to define not only their members, but also the physical space which they inhabit.

The specific choice of flower and leaf as the emblems for these virtual networks is central to the present reading of these poems, and I propose that in two ways the perpetual existence of such flora underlies the broader aspirational nature of networks. First, the flower and leaf are to a degree co-dependent. The leaf collects the sunlight which allows the plant to create fuel, and therefore is essential for the flower to grow. Conversely, the flower produces seeds, which when dispersed in the ground will grow new plants, which then proceed to sprout leaves. The flower is thus equally essential for the leaf to grow. This dual sustenance and dependence on another is represented in the virtual networks, as, in many ways, extant networks provide the necessity to establish new ones. Counter-networks provide the opportunity for social exchange and competitive play, and, through this, networks satisfy the need to belong. Just as the ‘shoures sweet of raine’ (sweet rain showers, FL, l.4) sustain both the flower and the leaf, so this drive for social interaction and a
need to belong ensures the survival of networks such as those aspired to in these pieces.

Second, although plants die with the onset of winter, they inevitably reappear when conditions improve, meaning that the natural landscape will never be without them. The reassuring timelessness of these emblems reflects an innate human desire for social exchange and play, here facilitated by networks. At first glance, the envoi to Charles’s first ballade seems to discredit this theory. He laments that it matters not which emblem he chooses, since both will be dead before the season is out. Does this aside suggest that the entire game is folly? That it cannot continue forever since its representatives are dead? Quite the opposite, since the flower and leaf will both return before long – a sentiment reflected in Charles’s decision to write the ballade which immediately follows this one on exactly the topic which he has seemingly just killed off. Despite the mortality of the flower and the leaf, they rise again in the following composition, proving their constancy and resilience, and celebrating the continuation of these virtual associational networks and the social play which they foster.

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At the close of *FL*, the narrator makes a delightful pun. Having discussed the orders of the flower and leaf with the lady of the leaf she encounters, she decides that she too will join the virtual leaf network. When the conversation is over, she declares, ‘I tooke my leve of her’ (I took my leave, l.586). Aside from a description of her exit, this line also serves to illustrate something far wider: the narrator has witnessed the joy to be found in these virtual networks, and realised the social benefits of being a member of a respected example. In ‘taking her leaf’, she ties together all the aspects hitherto discussed; adoption of the emblem indicates her association with the leaf network, and she also takes the emblem in a subtler sense, one which has connotations of allowing a part of one’s own identity to be subsumed into that of a network, and vice versa. This sustained intertwining of personal and collective identity is the ultimate destination of the need to belong, as she is included in a network structure which has no defined end point, and which promises social exchange and competitive play. In the final stanza, she plays on the causality dilemma of which came first: the literary trope of flower and leaf, or some wider
cultural phenomenon. She puts all that she has witnessed and learned ‘in writing’, making it the contents of a ‘little book’ (ll.589-91). Within the very literature itself, then, both author and narrator ensure that the virtual networks of flower and leaf will continue into perpetuity, as each deems them worthy of committing to paper, and preserving for future generations. It will likely never be known whether these playful networks of the flower and the leaf ever took on a life away from the literary texts which preserve them, but through considering them as a sustained instance of authorial creation of virtual networks, a strong argument for the very notion of network as an aspirational model for the late medieval mind has emerged. These virtual networks incorporate each of the benefits perceived in real-world formal and informal networks, and in doing so point to a wider individual agency toward forming medieval social networks which remains firmly in evidence today.
Chapter Four

Modern Networks: Computer Mediated Communication and the Art of Trolling

Our printing press is the Internet. Our coffee houses are social networks.¹

Heather Brooke’s statement on communication and technology captures the key theme of continuity that this final chapter considers. A journalist and freedom of information campaigner, Brooke suggests a fundamental link between the technologies and structures involved in social networking and information exchange of today and past centuries. The following chapter considers the social networks of the modern day in the light of the research conducted on their medieval counterparts in the previous chapters. It goes beyond a theoretical comparison of the two, instead questioning how far social networks as social structures can realistically be seen as part of a coherent continuum stretching from the medieval period to today, and examines in detail some of the crucial differences between their operations. In doing so, it also explores the argument that today’s social networks are capable of offering a more transient, and ultimately detrimental platform than before.

The chapter opens with a study of the early eighteenth-century Kit-Cat Club, a Whig drinking association which forms the content basis for the proof-of-concept prototype accompanying this thesis. It is included here as interim evidence of social networks in operation between the core medieval and modern focuses of the thesis. A threefold discussion around the continuities and disruptions visible between medieval and modern social networks follows this. The suitability of the theoretical terminology for network categorisation established in the introduction is first considered, with particular attention paid to the implications of dubbing a network ‘virtual’ in the present day. Following this, analysis turns to the three perceived benefits seen across my medieval examples: the need to belong, competitive play, and social reputation. I argue that despite some nuanced differences (which are considered in detail later in the chapter), these benefits remain some of the key

attractions to social networks. The section draws to a close with a discussion around the themes of network formation and operation which emerged across my medieval analysis. This includes the issues of whether networks are formed internally or externally, the related question of individual agency, and also the nature of hierarchies in networks.

The latter half of the chapter presents an in-depth case study of Internet trolling, which serves as both a framework within which to draw together many of the themes and arguments of the thesis as a whole, while also serving as a chance to consider some of the potentially less positive aspects of today’s social networks. While presenting several undeniable disruptions in the continuum between medieval and modern social networks, the examples analysed also reveal a further, perhaps unexpected, coherence. This examination of trolling explores a phenomenon completely unique to modern social networks, but which is in part encouraged by some of the very principles which were seen to drive engagement in the medieval case studies. Through discussions centred on the importance of anonymity, the capital-infused concept of ‘lulz’, and the highly fluid network of trolls known as Anonymous, it becomes apparent that trolling behaviours in fact represent many of the principles considered across the thesis pushed to their social extremes.

*The Kit-Cat Club*

The aspects of social network membership examined across this thesis, in particular the continuum of perceived benefits to membership, are not evidenced solely in the medieval and modern-day examples on which it is built. While working on my proof-of-concept prototype with Antenna International (a detailed account of which can be found in Appendix A), I conducted research into a social network which bridges the temporal gap between my two primary areas of study: the late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century Kit-Cat Club. Situated some two hundred years after the latest medieval sources this thesis examines, and around three hundred before the present day, the Kit-Cat Club provides a further point of reference in support not only of the universal human drive to form networks, but also of the particular benefits which have emerged across the previous chapters.

Today, a whole room in the National Portrait Gallery London is given over to a series of paintings by Sir Godfrey Kneller depicting the members of the exclusive
drinking association which came to be known as the Kit-Cat Club. They were painted over a period of twenty years, and are of a special size which has also come to be called the ‘kit-cat’: slightly larger than a traditional head and shoulders format, allowing enough space to include one or both of the sitter’s hands. Although many of the poses appear similar, each of the Kit-Cat members present is individually identifiable through his own gestures, props, and outfit. Figure 4.1, for example, shows Kneller’s portrait of club-founder Jacob Tonson, his profession as publisher indicated by the copy of *Paradise Lost* held in his hand. Not only was this one of his most profitable publications, but it also alludes to the network’s cultural aspirations, as explored below. It is upon this physical gallery space that the digital prototype accompanying this thesis is based. The logistics of the club itself, however, are useful here as an example of an interim social network emphasising the continuities visible between social networks across the two periods under primary examination in the thesis.

![Figure 4.1: Sir Geoffrey Kneller, ‘Jacob Tonson’, © National Portrait Gallery, London.](image)

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While the concrete facts of the club’s foundation were never explicitly recorded, the influential book seller and publisher Jacob Tonson is usually cited as its founding member. By the close of the seventeenth century Tonson was a renowned figure in English literary circles, and he used this position to bring regularly together both wealthy patron-readers keen to support new literary talent (including John Somers, once the Lord High Chancellor; Charles Montagu, 1st Earl of Halifax; and Charles Sackville, 6th Earl of Dorset) and upcoming young authors seeking patronage (such as John Vanbrugh, Matthew Prior, and William Congreve). As contemporary poet Sir Richard Blackmore (not a member of the club) wrote in his 1708 poem *The Kit-Cats*: ‘BOJAC [Jacob] the mighty Founder of the State […] Chose proper PilIars to support its Weight. | All the first Members for their Place were fit, | Tho’ not of Title, Men of Sense and Wit’. 3 He continues: ‘Now crowds to Founder BOJAC did resort, […] he as Sovereign, by Prerogative | Old Members did exclude, and new receive. | He judg’d who most were for the Order fit’. 4 The Kit-Cat Club thus began as something of an extended publishing rights deal for Tonson, as he secured the loyalty of authors alongside the continued support of well-placed literary patrons.

In this sense, then, the origins of the network in literary production align well with the medieval examples considered earlier. These men began meeting at the Cat and Fiddle, a tavern located on Gray’s Inn Lane and owned by Christopher (or Kit) Cat, who gave his name to his pies, famous across London, and subsequently the club under examination here. Across the early years of the eighteenth century, the Kit-Cat Club developed into far more than a means for Tonson to maintain his professional links and income. 5 Membership was limited to Whigs who, as opposed to the Tories, were pro-constitutional government and anti-royal absolutism; they were pro-parliament, progressive thinkers who were desperate for cultural change, particularly when it came to the arts. As considered below, the Kit-Cat Club came to represent the Whiggish ideal of ‘Englishness’, an aspiration for a new English

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classicism which would ultimately transform English politics and cultural identity, and in doing so pave the way for George I and the Hanoverian succession.6

The Kit-Cat Club has been studied relatively infrequently by scholars. In his 1872 work *Clubs and Club Life in London*, John Timbs included a brief summary of the network, describing it as ‘threefold celebrity – political, literary, and artistic’, before proceeding to document its noteworthy members, what was known of its origins and rituals, and some humorous anecdotes associated with the club.7 More recently, in the early twentieth century, short articles were published which examine aspects of the network including the club’s influence on London’s theatre scene and Kneller’s series of portraits.8 The only full-length study of the Kit-Cat Club was published in 2008 by Ophelia Field, and it is by far the most comprehensive and useful material available on the subject. Knowingly subtitling her work *The Kit-Cat Club: Friends Who Imagined a Nation*, Field makes clear from the outset that while the club’s story ‘can be read as a study of how the political stability in Britain experienced after 1720 was constructed and defended from the 1690s onwards’, her project ‘is, above all, a book about friendship’.9 Accordingly, Field makes the relationships between some of this network’s key members (many of whom had been friends since childhood) her primary focus in charting the club’s origins, ambitions, and history. While this emphasis on, and exposure of, the personal bonds which held together the club is of note when considering it as a social network, it does leave the more sociological influences on its formation and operation largely unexplored.

The network falls into my formal category, as it was subject to various stringently-enforced regulations. The nodes of the network could only be men – as with the London Puy, no women were allowed, but they were the subject of the club’s famous admiring toasts. The number of nodes was similarly restrictive, as no more than thirty-nine individuals could be members at any one time. Meetings were held regularly, in a pre-arranged location at a pre-arranged time, and followed an

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6 Field, *Kit-Cat Club*, pp. 6-8.
ordered structure. As Sir Richard Steele later noted in the *Spectator* magazine (itself founded by Kit-Cat members Steel and Joseph Addison):

> Upon all meetings at taverns, it is necessary some one of the company should take it upon him to get all things in such order and readiness as may contribute as much as possible to the felicity of the convention; such as hastening the fire, getting a sufficient number of candles, tasting the wine with a judicious smack, fixing the supper, and being brisk for the dispatch of it.\(^{10}\)

Certain levels of decorum were evidently expected at meetings such as the Kit-Cat Club’s, indicating a high level of formalised continuity. The network had a secretary – Tonson – but any other sense of hierarchy at the network’s meetings was actively discouraged, as per the Whiggish belief that the notion of class should be detached from one’s birth and realigned with taste and education. As a clearly-defined principle, this non-restrictive value was just as formalised and accepted an aspect among the network as an opposing restrictive one would have been.

The Kit-Cat Club thus presents itself as a network formalised in both its structure and activities: membership was reserved for a select few, but those granted access were intended to feel on an equal cultural footing with each other, while meetings were held in a consistent manner and composed of the same rituals and activities. Upon further examination, the three perceived benefits to social network membership already seen in the late-medieval networks of this thesis are also visible in this eighteenth-century example, thus adding further weight to the argument that these benefits are part of the universal appeal of social networks across the centuries. The most prominent benefit on offer to the nodes of the Kit-Cat network was the potential to acquire cultural capital and social reputation, in large part due to its groundings in London’s, and more specifically Tonson’s, literary circles.

There is a striking similarity to the informal network made up of the poets writing for Louis XII studied in chapter two here, as one of the defining aspects of the Kit-Cat Club, especially in its early years, was the way in which it treated social capital and reputation as a currency for literary progression. The patronage of wealthy, high-profile Whigs given to aspirational young authors is described by Field

\(^{10}\) *The Spectator*, ed. by Donald F. Bond (Oxford: OUP, 1965) no. 508.
as ‘the mechanism that made it [the club] tick’ across its two decades in existence.\(^\text{11}\) This arrangement was of most value to the young authors eager to begin publishing their works, but lacking the means and social backing to do so. For them, being admitted into a noble patron’s ‘conversation’, as it was known, signalled a shift in their standing, as this new familiarity with an influential figure meant they had the backing to further their preferred vocation. Just as the French medieval courtly poets won healthy wages and even entire abbeys in return for their literary output, the structure of the Kit-Cat Club won the author Joseph Addison his first literary success.\(^\text{12}\) Addison caught the attention of Lord Somers, who arranged a two hundred pound bursary for him to travel around Europe, during which time Addison published *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, a work explicitly dedicated to his patron Somers.\(^\text{13}\) Addison was far from the only author to be supported by Somers, either, as John Locke, Pierre Bayle, Richard Steele, and John Hughes were also among those who progressed thanks to his patronage.\(^\text{14}\)

Additionally, just as aristocratic figures such as Louis XII and Anne de Bretagne enjoyed the glamour of cultural association with successful authors at the close of the Middle Ages, so did these Whig heads of state at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Writing later in the century, for example, Samuel Johnson describes Kit-Cat member and Earl of Dorset Sackville as being widely ‘celebrated for patronage of genius’.\(^\text{15}\) Similarly, author Oliver Goldsmith reminisced in 1759 that ‘when the great Somers [Kit-Cat member] was at the helm, patronage was fashionable among our nobility’.\(^\text{16}\) Furthermore, by fostering their social reputation as a keen supporter of the arts, as well as their cultural links with individual authors, these patrons also secured the assurances of support they needed to maintain and further their own Whig political agendas. Addison again provides useful evidence of this. One of his first poems was addressed ‘to his majesty’, and contained a lengthy compliment to Somers, while a later piece praising the government’s Treaty of

\(^{11}\) Field, *Kit-Cat Club*, p. 36.

\(^{12}\) As was the case for Jean d’Auton, see: Paul L. Jacob, *Chroniques d’Auton, Jean, Volume 1* (Paris : Silvestre, 1834), p. iii.


Ryswick was dedicated to Halifax. Addison went on to champion the Whigs and their causes to the extent that he ultimately entered political circles himself, rising to the position of Secretary of State by 1717. While the utility assigned to the capital and reputation available through participation in the Kit-Cat network was thus not always literary, it was still arguably the most enduring driving force behind this social network’s internal interactions and exchanges.

Beyond these specific instances of social capital and reputation passing between the network’s nodes there was also a wider climate of cultural capital as related to the arts surrounding the Kit-Cat Club. Just as was considered when discussing the virtual flower and leaf networks, and as is further seen below when the notion of self-promotion in modern networks is noted, the Kit-Cat Club augmented its own social reputation by incorporating features considered rich in cultural capital. Through its crusade to foster its own brand of classic English culture, the network associated itself with pastimes including literature, theatre, opera, art, and architecture. These were – and in many circles remain to this day – activities and interests which are rich with habitus (Bourdieu’s concept of inhabited capital) and objectified cultural capital. The third Earl of Shaftesbury, a Whig with many connections to the Kit-Cat network despite not being a node of it himself, succinctly articulated this perceived importance of the arts in 1710:

‘Tis expected that they who are high and eminent in the State, shou’d not only provide for its necessary Safety and Subsistence, but omit nothing which may contribute to its Dignity and Honour. The Arts and Sciences must not be left Patron-less. By associating their network with elements of the arts so rich with perceived capital, the Kit-Cat’s nodes sought to legitimise and establish themselves on a similar basis. This strategy takes on increased meaning when considered within the political climate of the day: the club was established at the beginning of William III’s rule, the period instigated by the Protestant ‘Glorious Revolution’ and overthrowing of James II. William deliberately portrayed himself as a warrior king, and as such gave little time or energy over to fostering the arts – especially in a language that was not his

own. It was against this backdrop that the Kit-Cat Club network could be seen encouraging the survival of features of educated society invested with considerable cultural capital, and in so doing hoping to invest themselves with the same.

One final note on the topic of capital is of interest here due to its parallels with Van Doosselaere’s work on the trade networks of medieval Genoa, referred to in the introduction. Just as his monograph revealed that those traders with strong reputations as credit-loaners secured the most influential deals, members of the Kit-Cat Club recognised that the continually emerging model of financial capitalism meant they needed strong reputations to remain successful. Field only briefly touches upon this, noting: ‘as Whigs who generally appreciated and exploited the benefits of credit-based commerce and urban life, its members recognised that they needed to invest in social capital as much as financial capital’. That being so, the club offered an opportunity for its members to build the social reputation necessary to make further connections with individuals well-informed on the topics of economics, politics, and wider social issues. The political success of Kit-Cat members including Somers, Montagu, and Baron Wharton, whose connections and support helped them rise through the ranks of government to form three quarters of the prestigious Whig Junto group, speaks volumes to the success of this shrewd strategy of social advancement. The Kit-Cat Club, then, served as a network which not only allowed its members the opportunity to amass the kind of social reputation necessary to pursue a variety of personal interests, but also sought to invest itself with, and therefore outwardly legitimise itself through, the kind of cultural capital traditionally associated with the arts. To consider the Kit-Cat network in this way, purely as a provider of capital and reputation, however, gives an unrounded and overly clinical representation of its activities. The satisfaction of the omnipresent human need to belong was provided by this network perhaps more visibly than any of those considered elsewhere in this thesis.

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19 For more on this period of the country’s cultural history, see: Williams, Creation of a Whig Literary Culture.
20 Field, Kit-Cat Club, p. 41.
21 The Whig Junto was a group of four leading Whigs who effectively directed the management of the Whig Party and often the government, during the reigns of William III and Anne. For more, see: E. L. Ellis, The Whig Junto, in Relation to the Development of Party - Politics and Party - Organisation, from Its Inception to 1714 (Oxford: OUP, 1962).
As already noted, Field frames her defining study of the Kit-Cat Club’s activities and politics around the bonds of friendship and familiarity that formed between its members. In the light of the present thesis’s arguments, this understanding of kinship can be further nuanced through the need to belong. Field notes, for example, that ‘a longing for relaxation, amusement and the sympathy of friends’ would have been just as crucial to the club’s success as any ‘social or economic cost-benefit analysis at the back of its founders’ minds’.\(^{22}\) Granted, in a similar manner to some of the nodes in the informal network around Louis XII, many members of the Kit-Cat Club enjoyed relationships outside this particular structure. For instance, Congreve was Tonson’s lodger for seven years: in an imagined dialogue between the two by mutual friend Nicholas Rowe, Congreve describes Tonson as ‘the cheeffullest, best, honestest, fellow living’.\(^ {23}\) Some bonds stretched even further back, such as that between Addison and Steele, who had been close friends since their schooldays at Charterhouse.\(^ {24}\) This craving of ‘the sympathy of friends’ goes further still than Field suggests, however. The club’s explicit exclusion of any woman and the resulting all-male regular meetings makes it identical in this respect to the homosociality of the London Puy. Just as, some three hundred years earlier, the male members of the Puy network gathered to create \textit{chants royaux} intended to praise the worthiness of women, here, members came together and toasted ‘beauties’ worthy of their admiration.\(^ {25}\) This process of furthering their own, homosocial, bonds through the absent women also provided a key element of competitive play, as examined below.\(^ {26}\) This reading points towards a network of individuals aiming to sustain and nurture congenial interactions and exchanges with one another into perpetuity, just as the theory behind the need to belong suggests should be the case.

\(^{22}\) Field, \textit{Kit-Cat Club}, p. 42.  
\(^{23}\) Nicholas Rowe, \textit{The Poetical Works Of Nicholas Rowe: With The Life Of The Author} (London: C. Cooke, 1800), p. 96. This kind of dialogue poem is also reminiscent of the male-only debate poems prevalent in the late medieval period as a reinforcement of male friendship’s ethical duty, as discussed below: see footnote 31.  
It is not only through this personal desire for convivial exchange that the need to belong reveals itself. The closing decades of the seventeenth century were defined by social uncertainty and fractured rule for England. The Civil War, though over by 1651, had left as its legacy a climate of civic turmoil, particularly for those supposedly in positions of power. Following the victory of the Parliamentary forces, England became one of the few countries in Europe without a monarch, and this left the upper echelons of power dangerously unstable. Various parliaments plagued with in-fighting rose and fell, Oliver Cromwell famously ruled as Lord Protector for a period, the army dissolved parliaments in which it did not have faith, Charles II returned from exile to take the crown in the Restoration, and his successor James was later overthrown in the Protestant ‘Glorious Revolution’, orchestrated by a union of English Parliamentarians.27 Among this extended civic upheaval personal relationships, alliances, and other ties formed in politically-grounded environments could themselves prove mercurial, meaning that at the time of the Kit-Cat’s formation it represented a much-needed provider of stable pleasant interaction with like-minded individuals hard to come by elsewhere. In a more intense sense than the ‘founders’ of the Cour Amoureuse of 1400’s desire to escape the uncertainty of an outbreak of the plague through poetic competition, the Kit-Cat network offered a sense of belonging for (particularly its aristocratic) members at a time when other options were beset with uncertainty.

As well as allowing members to accrue social reputation and invest themselves with cultural capital, then, the Kit-Cat Club’s network also offered a much needed satisfaction for the need to belong. Often building on existing bonds formed through other more personal networks, such as those formed through education or prior business exchanges, the club provided a stable constant for its members at a time when shifting political influence meant little else could be guaranteed for long. Its Whiggish pre-requisite for membership also gave members a sense of exclusive identity as a network formed in direct opposition to an ‘other’, here the Tory party. Just as the virtual networks of the flower and leaf presented their members with an antagonistic but associated ‘other’ through which to part-define themselves, the Kit-

Cat Club openly presented itself as ‘Whig not Tory’, further promoting a feeling of shared identity and belonging among its members.

Although to a slightly lesser degree than those of belonging and social reputation, the Kit-Cat Club also met the third perceived benefit explored across this thesis: the provision of competitive play. Each time the network’s members came together at The Cat and Fiddle inn (and their subsequent preferred venues), part of their ritual was to offer toasts to great contemporary beauties. After the main meal was over, the table would be cleared and everyone’s glasses replenished. At this point Tonson called out to the rest of the company ‘for a toast’, which prompted the nomination and eventual toasting of Whig ‘beauties’ with light verses.\(^{28}\) These verses would later be inscribed on a glass alongside the name of their subject, though none of these glasses appear to have survived.\(^{29}\) Field notes that these toasts provided ‘the one-upmanship of literary competition’ for the club’s members, and stresses that they were ‘ludic but not lewd’.\(^{30}\) That said, Field has little else to say on the subject of these toasts, despite their illuminative potential on the workings of this formal social network. Most importantly, one is again reminded of the playfully competitive compositions of the London Puy, and the intended literary output of the *Cour Amoureuse*. These toasts represent another continuation of the homosocial behaviour articulated by Kosofsky, which sees men engaging in a literary enterprise which is paradoxically focused on, but totally excludes, women. Cayley argues in her article on two male-centric debate poems of the fifteenth century that ‘words are the currency of male exchange, and it is through male words and voices that women are to be won. However, […] what is won and played for by the ‘impotent’ knights is essentially male companionship and conversation as a substitute for action, love, and a woman’.\(^{31}\) Not only is the influence of desire for competitive play therefore a continuity between the medieval networks studied and the present eighteenth-century example, but here it is even manifest in an identical homosocial manner.

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\(^{29}\) Field, *Kit-Cat Club*, p. 57 (n. 29).

\(^{30}\) Ibid., p. 58.

A record of some of the verses produced by Lord Halifax to this end is preserved in Timbs's nineteenth-century account of the club, including ones in honour of the Duchess of St Albans, the Duchess of Beaufort, Lady Mary Churchill, and Lady Sunderland. The verses are all short, formed of four or six lines of rhyming couplets. As an example, the following is Halifax's composed toast to lady Sunderland:

All Nature's charms in Sunderland appear,
Bright as her eyes, and as her reason clear;
Yet still their force to man not safely known,
Seems uniscover'd to herself alone.32

Once again a parallel can be drawn to the *Cour Amoureuese* of 1400, since its statutes declared that nodes in the network should compose poetry that would foster 'l'honneur, loenge, recommandacion et service de toutes dames et damoiselles' (the honour, praise, eulogy, and service of all ladies and damsels).33 In their artistic output, then, these two networks both facilitated a similar kind of competitive play.

Halifax's pieces repeatedly focus on the eyes of his selected ladies: for example, St Albans's 'conquering eyes [that] have made their race complete'; Beaufort has double charms, in her wit and 'with her eyes'; while it is Lady Churchill whose 'eyes alone that liberty restrain'. This practice of emphasising the perfection of particular female attributes, in particular the eyes, adds to a tradition which reaches back to the medieval and early Renaissance periods.34 Some of Charles d'Orléans's early ballades illustrate this practice of portraying eyes as inspiring love: for instance, he asks of a lady, 'Vueilliez voz yeulx emprisonner | Et sur moy plus ne les giettés' (please take your eyes prisoner and do not let them look upon me), for fear that he will fall in love with her. Similarly, in a later piece, he declares that: 'Lesquelz yeulx viennent raporter | Ung si tresgracieux raport | Au cueur' (these eyes come and deliver so very gracious a message to the heart).35 An extension of this

33 La Cour amoureuse, dite de Charles VI, ed. by Carla Bozzolo and Hélène Loyau, 3 vols (Paris: Léopard d'or, 1982-92), I, p. 36.
medieval courtly lyric staple, the poetic form known as the *blason*, popular in the early Renaissance period, saw writers catalogue the admirable features of a woman.\(^{36}\) This convention was particularly prevalent in the Petrarchan tradition of the sixteenth century: following Petrarch’s lead in praising female features, writers such as Pierre Ronsard wrote *blasons du corps féminin* which praised a lady’s attributes from the hair down.\(^{37}\) These little Kit-Cat verses thus tap into a rich late-medieval and Renaissance literary trope of men cataloguing women’s bodies, and framing it as flattery.

The surviving verses are appropriately superlative, with each woman being portrayed as more charming than the last. Albans’s eyes might make her race complete, but Churchill is then described as the ‘fairest and latest of the beauteous race’; similarly, while Sunderland embodies ‘all Nature’s charms’, she is outdone by Mademoiselle Spanheim, who is renowned not only by the Kit-Cat Club but across Europe: ‘Admir’d in Germany, ador’d in France’.\(^ {38}\) Studying these verses from one member of the network, it is clear to see how when coming together for their regular meals members would strive to outdo one another’s compositions. In another recorded verse, for instance, Congreve adopts Halifax’s recurrent trope of the purity of eyes, challenging the gathered network, ‘Look on her Eyes if you their light can bear’, in reference to a Mrs Brudenell.\(^ {39}\) This sustained one-upmanship around particular themes and tropes strikingly echoes the ‘self-assertive challenges’ Armstrong identifies between late medieval French poets, as witnessed in the linguistically competitive output of the poets writing for Louis XII considered in the second chapter.

From this examination of the Kit-Cat Club through the methodological lens of this thesis, not only have the three selected benefits of network membership once more been found, but also a distinct impression of the Kit-Cat Club as a social network reflecting the cultural space it formed in has emerged. In some ways this

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\(^{38}\) Timbs, *London Clubs*, p. 50.

reflection was an explicit and considered move in reaction to the contemporary social climate. As noted above, founding members including Tonson and Somers felt that England under William was failing to foster the arts, and so established a network which would both attract artists and further support the full spectrum of English cultural art for over two decades. Other reflections of the cultural space came about more naturally, however. Small influences, such as the contemporary belief that eating the main meal of the day in the mid-afternoon among friends was not only fashionable but also a civilising duty, implicitly shaped the structures and practices of the network. Other, far larger influences also played their part, including the lapse of England’s Licensing Act in 1694. This afforded writers a far greater freedom of speech, and prompted a surge in books, papers, and pamphlets published in London – far more, in fact, than any other country in Europe. This governmental allowance came at exactly the right moment for the Kit-Cat Club’s formation, as it would have cemented publisher Tonson’s position as one of the leading figures of London society, and provided a platform for the network to promote its principles and work.

Several aspects of the Kit-Cat Club reinforce the continuum between the other networks considered across this thesis, both medieval and – as demonstrated below – modern. Most importantly the club shows that, among others, it provided the same three key benefits for its members that have been seen throughout the preceding chapters. As a formal network, it did not fracture as the London Puy had done, instead surviving into the early decades of the eighteenth century, and is credited by most of those who have studied it with meaningfully changing the shape of English culture and politics in the manner its Whig members had always intended. Lastly, it can also be seen as a reflection of the cultural space in which it formed: through the socio-cultural ties which already joined several of its members, to its reaction to the fundamental social climate of the day. This mirroring of the social and cultural space inhabited by a network is a concept which emerges as increasingly important when studying today’s equivalent structures.

Medieval and Modern Social Networks: Worlds Apart?

Just as the social networks analysed in the preceding medieval-focused chapters were selected for their appropriateness to the needs of the thesis and

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41 Ibid., p. 41.
availability of source material, so are the modern networks of the present chapter. The following discussions thus focus exclusively on social networks facilitated by computer-mediated communication (CMC). My reasoning for this is two-fold. First, as was acknowledged in the introduction, to think of a modern social network is to think of examples grounded in CMC, since they are by far the most culturally prevalent in today’s technology-powered Western world. In August 2015 the largest online social network, Facebook, boasted over 1,490,000,000 registered accounts.\(^{42}\) That equates to around a fifth of the estimated global population. Even taking into account the estimated 170,000,000 fake accounts cited by Facebook itself,\(^{43}\) and other inevitable anomalies such as duplicate accounts, these data still suggest that, at some point, around a sixth of the world’s population have been part of the network of social networks facilitated by Facebook. Adding weight to this, it was announced on the 24\(^{th}\) August 2015 that a billion people had used the site in a single day.\(^{44}\) Second, CMC-facilitated networks have been chosen because they represent the most sizeable difference in technology and access between the two periods. This is noteworthy for the weight it adds to an argument for any form of continuum between the two eras. If there are indeed continuities between the two (as I argue there are), then finding them across the most technologically-alien networks is stronger evidence than if they were found in modern case studies which more closely resembled their medieval counterparts: a formalised, face-to-face book club built around literary exchange, for instance.

In light of this, it must first be examined how far the definitions and categorisations applied to the previous medieval networks are transferable to modern CMC-facilitated ones. Social networks, it has been argued, are formed of a collection of interconnected nodes, held together by relations specific to their own network, and can be considered formal, informal, or virtual. That networks are still comprised of inter-related nodes is true. As Simmel and others have argued over the decades, this interconnectedness is the foundational basis of any kind of network,

\(^ {44}\) Dave Lee, ‘Facebook has a billion users in a single day, says Mark Zuckerberg’, BBC News <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-34082393> [accessed 31 August 2015].
Particularly in modern CMC social networks the individual nodes are highly visible and identifiable, as the vast majority require each member to create a profile for themselves. Within the online environment each node is recognisable by an image, usually a photograph of themselves, a name, and any other personal information deemed appropriate, all often combining to form a supposedly representational avatar. Modern CMC networks thus arguably make their members more constantly visible to other nodes than medieval networks did, as at any time a member can log on and view their fellow nodes’ profiles. This constancy of access and high visibility of membership can be read as the natural progression of those desires seen in the London Puy statutes, wherein the figure of the clerk represented a tangible, yet ultimately intermittent, link to the wider network. This development suggests a more nuanced aspect of the need to belong than has been considered until now. It may not be enough for humans simply to enjoy these relationships during their active participation in network activities: if at all possible, it seems preferable to have access to persistent and tangible evidence of their bonds at all times. In this way, when not actively interacting with other nodes in their Facebook network, a user can still browse their accrued list of ‘friends’ as a means of reinforcing the existence of their social ties.

The three categories of network – formal, informal, and virtual – appear today in different forms than were seen in the medieval period. While the kinds of network they most often contain have sometimes altered, however, the fundamental principles behind them remain sound. Seemingly the most troublesome of the three is ‘virtual’. In today’s vocabulary the concept of a virtual network as real people connected and interacting in a virtual CMC sense over the internet is very different from that presented by the authors of the medieval flower and leaf pieces, for instance. However, according to the definitions proposed in the introduction, these apparently ‘virtual’ networks of nodes who connect over the internet without ever

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45 See: Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings, ed. by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: SAGE Publications, 1997).
47 Horn, Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis, p. 221.
physically meeting – for instance, members of a single Facebook group, users frequently interacting in a particular online forum space, or players who form a regular team in an online game – are in fact a new kind of informal networks. Whereas the virtual categorisation incorporates networks which are constructed and recorded in some way, but never actually form in reality, these new CMC-facilitated networks are in fact informal examples, as they are composed of real individuals who regularly come together in a non-regulated manner.

To expand upon an example presented in the introduction, a genuinely virtual network in a modern CMC-based context would be that of fantasy football teams. An individual CMC-user has the ability to put together their ideal football team, which comprises players from several different clubs and often different countries. Despite not necessarily having any actual network ties in the real world, these eleven players are brought together as teammates and nodes in a virtual network. Just as Deschamps designated various French officials as serving the Flower or Leaf potentially according to nothing more than his own imagination, here these real-world players are brought together to form a team-based network by the CMC-user that never manifests in actuality. In this respect the virtual categorisation, understood here as a network constructed by some means but never realised in reality, actually presents the fewest changes between the two periods.

Formal networks also exist in a largely unchanged sense. However, when it comes to formal iterations of CMC-facilitated formal networks, they are today on a scale likely unimaginable to the members of medieval formal networks such as the puys. Today’s formal networks still require some kind of formalised and regulated registration process, and an agreement to behave in a certain manner once accepted. These agreements can be seen across a broad selection of online formal networks, from recreational examples like the ubiquitous Facebook, to more professional sites such as LinkedIn. This is the point at which the main difference from formal networks today compared with those of the medieval period emerges. Once registered, the user is technically a member of the entire formal network, so, in the case of Facebook, they are part of a structure comprised of over a billion nodes. Social networks, however, are in part defined by the flow of exchange between nodes, and so, paradoxically, each user of Facebook is not truly networked to every other member in this sense. What these new, sprawling formal networks in fact do, I
propose, is facilitate the creation of far smaller informal networks. For example, on Facebook these manifest as the ego-nets of each member-node’s particular friends list, or the members of particular ‘Groups’, while on Twitter they can be formed using the ‘List’ feature or around particular hashtags. Formal networks, then, are today often more global structures which then facilitate smaller informal sub-networks. The question this raises around whether social networks are formed internally or externally is addressed below.

Informal networks, as already indicated, still inhabit the middle ground between real-world formal networks and more theoretical virtual networks, but thanks to the near-constant advancement of technology, today the category accommodates even more kinds of network than it did in the medieval period. Informal networks remain the most prevalent kind of network thanks to the sheer variety of structures the category accommodates. As seen above, modern formal networks are often so large that they promote the formation of informal sub-networks. One aspect of modern informal networks that is rarely seen in medieval examples, however, is their facilitation of networks composed of nodes who have absolutely no other personal relational link to one another beyond that network. The importance of remembering that the nodes of medieval networks usually did not know one another solely through that one network, as the evidence may sometimes be skewed to suggest, does not apply to these new instances. CMC-facilitated informal networks have ensured that today nodes with no prior associational history can come together and form bonds within a particular framework. As an example, players using the online network features of popular video game series Call of Duty are able to form their own ‘clans’. Clans can be comprised of any combination of players, so long as they are registered for online gaming and have internet access. A user’s membership of a particular clan is indicated by a unique ‘clan tag’ in square brackets at the start of their on-screen username. Clans are usually formed around players’ perceived skill levels and not on any form of previous affiliation. These informal networks can then regularly participate together in team-based missions and competitions. This new means of forming informal networks composed of nodes with no prior awareness of one another would have been, if not outright impossible, much harder given the technical capabilities of the medieval period. Although the same could be argued of some modern formal networks, genuine formal networks, regulated and built on

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exchange, are usually still grounded in some real-world space or series of relationships.

Formal, informal, and virtual networks, then, still operate well as categories for modern social networks, since all examples can satisfyingly match one of their respective criteria. While iterations of virtual network, as defined in the current thesis, remain largely unchanged in the modern period, both the formal and informal categories now incorporate examples subtly different to their medieval predecessors. Formal networks often serve as global frameworks of sorts, giving rise to more informal sub-networks within their larger structures. These CMC-facilitated informal networks regularly represent the expanded remit and scope of the informal category, which now not only sees networks quickly and easily formed across geographical borders, but also between nodes with absolutely no prior awareness of one another. Despite these new possibilities, the categories themselves, as defined in the introduction, still hold between the medieval and modern periods. Analysis now turns to the other key investigative aspect of this thesis: the perceived benefits of social network membership.

A Continuum of Benefits

As has become increasingly apparent across the case studies of this thesis, the need to belong is one of the most fundamental motivations for people joining social networks, be they informal, formal, or virtual, or in the fourteenth or eighteenth centuries. This drive remains prevalent in the CMC-facilitated networks of the twenty-first century also. Taking Facebook as an example, several secondary works have already considered the notion of belonging as one of the key factors behind Facebook use. In their 2012 literature review ‘Why do people use Facebook?’, Ashwini Nadkarni and Stefan Hofmann survey the existing literature on the topic, and propose that there are two primary motivations to membership of this particular social network: the need to belong, and the need for self-presentation. Nadkarni and Hofmann suggest that Facebook is particularly attractive when it comes to satisfying the need to belong, since as it ‘enables visualisation of social connections it also validates and enhances users’ self-esteem’.48 This visible representation of both network membership and the social connections which it entails is something offered

by many of today’s CMC-facilitated networks, where users not only have a visible presence in the form of a profile page of some kind, but also a readily available list of the nodes to whom they are connected: for instance, the ‘Friends’ list on Facebook, and ‘Followers’ and ‘Following’ lists on Twitter. This seems to be a modern means of constant network membership-awareness, orientated around the presence of other nodes and each user’s sense of belonging among them. This in part realises the aspirations found in the London Puy’s statutes for a constant, tangible link to the network, and also the desire for strong, associational bonds invested in the virtual flower and leaf networks.

In another study, Gwendolyn Seidman examines how users with different dominant personality traits used Facebook to satisfy belonging needs. Seidman proposed that there were various ways users could achieve a feeling of ‘belongingness’ from Facebook: ‘information seeking (using Facebook to learn about others) and communication, [...] acceptance seeking and connection/caring’.49 A sample group of 184 undergraduate students filled out an online questionnaire which sought to ascertain both what type of character each participant had, and what motivated their Facebook use. Neurotic individuals, for example, who often experience social difficulties, were found to use Facebook as a way ‘to meet belongingness needs not sufficiently met offline’.50 Conversely, agreeable individuals turned to Facebook mainly to seek acceptance and maintain connections, while extraverted participants used it principally for communication purposes.51 Crucially, then, Seidman’s findings suggest that the majority of people studied do use Facebook to achieve a sense of belonging, but that their subconscious logic behind this varies according to personality type.

A final piece of research worth considering here is Kennon Sheldon and colleagues’ 2011 article examining feelings of connection and disconnection in Facebook users.52 Their work was prompted by a study they undertook which paradoxically appeared to suggest that more frequent Facebook use correlated with

50 Ibid., p. 406.
51 Ibid., p. 405.
both more relatedness satisfaction (i.e. feelings of connection) and more relatedness dissatisfaction (i.e. feelings of disconnection). Across three subsequent studies the authors propose and prove the hypothesis that increased feelings of disconnection prompted higher levels of Facebook use, and that these higher levels of use go on to provide the sense of connectedness craved. As their title succinctly puts it: ‘disconnection drives use, and connection rewards it’. Their fourth study provided the most telling results: seventy-eight regular Facebook users were challenged to set themselves a reduction in use target. Not only did those who reported feeling more disconnected at the outset of the study set themselves less ambitious goals, but they went on to perform less well in those easier goals. This is an enlightening study for the present thesis, as it demonstrates most clearly how individuals are drawn to Facebook as a means of banishing feelings of disconnectedness. Additionally, it also offers evidence that a user’s presence in such a CMC-facilitated network actively enhances their feeling of belonging, even if, as Sheldon et al. point out, it is ‘perhaps not as positive as face-to-face sociality’.

This last point raises the question of whether CMC-facilitated networks are enough to satisfy people’s networking needs alone, or if they are simply too transient in nature to offer greater benefits than their offline equivalents. Remaining with Facebook, while smaller informal networks do sometimes develop which are not built on existing relationships (for example around a particular ‘Interest’ page), research has shown that users search the network for people they already know offline far more than they browse for complete strangers to meet. In this way, CMC-facilitated social networks such as Facebook can be perceived by users as a means of further cementing existing bonds. This is a phenomenon which was seen to an extent in the London Puy, as members undoubtedly often knew one another from their other city dealings, and also in the statutes of the supposed Cour Amoureuse, since the given intention was to keep entertained and connected at a time when an outbreak of pestilence threatened to unbalance the usual social status quo. Whether it be through cementing existing bonds or forming new ones, through an extroverted

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53 Ibid., p. 766.
54 Ibid., p. 772.
55 Ibid., p. 773.
desire to interact in a new forum or an introverted attempt to experience a sense of belonging lacking in the offline world, modern-day CMC-facilitated social networks still count satisfaction of the human need to belong as one of their key perceived benefits.

The second benefit of social network membership considered across this thesis is their facilitation of competitive play. Once again, this aspect is still at work in modern CMC-facilitated networks, and often in ways which are markedly close in principle to what was seen in the preceding medieval case studies. One of the most enduring behaviours in support of this assertion is the creation of internet memes. The internet meme is a phenomenon which has grown in popularity since the 1980s, but which has only recently begun to attract attention from the scholarly community. Limor Shifman, author of the only full monograph on the subject of internet memes, notes that the scholarly response to memes has often been at best ‘sceptic’ and at worst dismissive, suggesting that the meme concept ‘explains and changes absolutely nothing’. The exact definition of an internet meme is still a hotly debated and highly subjective area, however, I agree with Shifman who proposes that an internet meme can be defined as: ‘(a) a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance; (b) that were created with awareness of each other; and (c) were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users’. The internet meme is thus the collaborative product of numerous individuals connected in some way by the Internet, most usually with the sole purpose of personal entertainment and outdoing one another.

Arguably the most common form of internet meme takes the form of a still image, sometimes with text superimposed onto it. A core feature of the original image is taken by members of CMC-facilitated social networks, reimagined in some way, and then disseminated back around the network. Each subsequent iteration of the meme image is intended to be more creative and amusing than the last, while still retaining the original, core element. The best way to demonstrate this concept is through an example. In 2009 a photograph was taken on the set of science-fiction movie Inception of lead actor Leonardo DiCaprio walking jovially toward the camera

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59 Shifman, Memes in Digital Culture, pp. 7-8.
(figure 4.2). In August of that year, entertainment blog Celebrity-Gossip posted the photograph online in a gallery of behind the scenes shots from Inception’s filming. Around a week later, a forum thread was created on Flash animation website Newgrounds titled ‘Photoshop Leonardo DiCaprio’, which included an exploitable template of the photograph with a transparent background, and encouraged members of the forum network to transpose DiCaprio’s image digitally into different environments.60 The images soon went viral, with members of more and more internet networks (including Reddit, 4chan, and Facebook page ‘You Laugh You Lose’) participating in the creation of new interpretations of what became known as the ‘Strutting Leo’ meme. Notable examples include DiCaprio among world leaders at a G8 summit; DiCaprio in the poster for 2012 movie Avengers Assemble; DiCaprio in the background of the Mona Lisa; and DiCaprio in a still from The Sound of Music (figure 4.3).

![Figure 4.2: The original ‘Strutting Leo’ photograph.](image-url)

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Figure 4.3: Notable examples of the ‘Strutting Leo’ Internet meme.
The creative process here almost duplicates that seen among the informal network of poets writing for Louis XII in the early-sixteenth century. Just as those writers often took a core motif, trope, or theme (for instance, the imagery of flowers and growth, and the catalogue convention), each reinterpreting it in innovative and entertaining ways in a bid to win acclaim within the network, so did the members of those CMC-facilitated networks who created increasingly inventive ‘Strutting Leo’ images. The facilitation of competitive play in principle across these two instances is practically identical. Furthermore, just as literary motifs were intertextual in the late medieval period, so are the core components of memes today. It was noted in the second chapter how classical Greek imagery was a popular element of later medieval French literature, and as such appeared across multiple authors’ works with similar connotations. For instance, in the heroic epistles studied Louis XII was glorified by association with Hector, while in Jean Lemaire de Belges’s *Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye* the wider French monarchy and nation was affiliated with Trojan heritage.\(^61\)

In the same way, aspects of particular memes, such as the central image of DiCaprio used in ‘Strutting Leo’, are often found used in other memes, and thus form a new kind of intertextual cultural language among members of the social network involved. An example of this is provided in figure 4.4, which sees DiCaprio’s image used in a memetic image alongside that of actor Keanu Reeves, looking downbeat. This image of Reeves was itself the object of an internet meme, similar in nature to that of ‘Strutting Leo’, which came to be known as ‘Sad Keanu’.\(^62\) These examples remain to this day two of the most enduring internet memes. Their flow not only among the network communities in which they were born, but also to otherwise independent networks (through nodes who are present in both networks), indicates the continuing enthusiasm for competitive play to be found in modern CMC-facilitated networks – a manifestation of play, crucially, for its own sake, and with only the most transient of social capital associated with it.

\(^61\) For more on this topic, see: Judy Kem, *Jean Lemaire de Belge’s Les Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye: The Trojan Legend in the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

Finally comes the potential to acquire cultural or social capital and build reputation offered by social networks. While still one of the most influential attractions of modern social networks, I argue that this benefit has, in places, seen a considerable shift in perception from the late medieval period to today’s CMC-facilitated networks. Before turning to this notable shift in the way social capital and reputation are perceived in modern networks, it is important to note that there are still examples of direct similarity. The study undertaken by Ellison et al. concludes that the authors can ‘definitively state that there is a positive relationship between certain kinds of Facebook use and the maintenance and creation of social capital’. Their work on a sample of 286 undergraduate students at Michigan State University revealed that regular Facebook use resulted in three particular kinds of social capital: bridging capital, bonding capital, and maintained capital. Bridging social capital refers to loose ties between network members who may provide new information and perspectives for one another, but rarely emotional support (similar to the weak ties of the London Puy, for instance), while bonding social capital relates to the opposite: the close, emotionally supportive ties which form between those in families or tight friendship networks. Maintained social capital in turn refers to maintaining valuable connections as one progresses through different stages of life: for instance, those which remain in effect via CMC-facilitated social networks once a node has left the

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63 Ellison et al., ‘Benefits of Facebook “Friends”’, p. 1161.
original physical space in which the network relations were formed. This more tangible understanding of social capital, as tied up in the relationships between nodes themselves, is similar in nature to that seen as provided by the early guild structures discussed in chapter one.

A new understanding of what social (or cultural) capital and reputation represents within today’s CMC-facilitated networks, especially those which are free to join, becomes apparent on closer inspection. Social capital and reputation are now, more than ever, sought for their own sakes. In each of the earlier networks studied, while there were no instances of nodes being personally against the prospect of an increased reputation, social and cultural capital was in some sense sought because it also represented an opportunity for progression of some kind outside the network. The poets writing for Louis XII needed patronage; the members of the London Puy sought to increase the prestige of London, and by extension their own economic opportunities; and the Kit-Cat Club nodes all pursued a more refined kind of culture for their country which would allow the furtherance of their wider Whig agenda. These external benefits have largely been seen to provide a more persuasive motivation for network engagement than the opportunity for exchange and internal network capital accrual alone. Increasingly today, however, capital and reputation are seemingly craved for their own sakes. This unspoken truth is implicitly present in the vocabulary which has built up around many modern networks: the success of an individual on Twitter or Instagram is measured by their number of ‘followers’, a term previously reserved for adherents of some wider social, religious, or cultural movement. A desire for externally-vindicated self-representation, alongside what I term ‘self-promotion’, sees network nodes posting status updates and images of themselves which show their possession of, or interaction with, items or concepts invested with capital of some kind by the wider network. At time of writing, the Instagram hashtag (a means of cataloguing and making posts searchable) ‘#humblebrag’, indicating such a post intended to prompt admiration or jealousy from other nodes, was present on almost 50,000 images. The ‘likes’ received for these displays (another telling linguistic turn) are the only visible record

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64 Ibid., p. 1146.
66 Instagram ref
of the purely network-bound capital and reputation amassed, and they hold no currency in the wider world, beyond self-gratification. This use of modern social networks as a platform for narcissistic tendencies is far from an entirely new concept, but its ubiquity among them is certainly at an unprecedented level. This is another indication of the potential transience and insubstantiality of certain examples of today's CMC-facilitated social networks.

The Operation of Social Networks

Having considered the definition of modern networks and their perceived benefits, there remains a further aspect of modern social networks which requires attention: that of their internal workings. A complete survey of the way in which today's social networks operate, even when restricted to CMC-facilitated examples as the current chapter is, would be an undertaking beyond the scope of this thesis. This being the case, here two fundamental features of networks which have already emerged as key points of discussion in the preceding medieval chapters are considered. This allows for further comparative analysis, built on that already conducted in the medieval examples. First, the question of agency is considered. Networks can be established externally (by some outside entity) or internally (by the individuals who come to make up the nodes of the network itself). When compared alongside one another, I argue that today's CMC-facilitated networks, particularly their formal iterations, are constructed far more externally than their medieval predecessors, and this in turn prompts the discussion around individual agency. Second, the notion of hierarchy is examined. Hierarchies of some kind were seen in – particularly the formal – medieval examples offered, and these more rigid structures are compared with the apparently level playing field offered by most CMC-facilitated networks, in a discussion that reveals a complex kind of hierarchy in fact visible in both periods.

All three of the core medieval social networks studied were seen to be self-forming in some way. The London Puy was established by high-placed individuals of the city’s social circles to help ensure that ‘the city of London may be renowned for good things in all places’, and also to offer those members a more personal arena in which to entertain themselves and forge new connections.67 The informal network of

67 Horn, Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis, p. 216.
poets writing for Louis XII was most definitely established from within, as each writer chose to engage with the preceding works, and thus integrated himself as a node of that network. Similarly, members of the virtual flower and leaf networks depicted by courtly poets across the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries made an informed choice not only to join these networks, but to instigate them in the first place ‘to avoid melancholy’. The eighteenth-century Kit-Cat Club was equally internally established, largely at the hands of Tonson, and thus able to follow its Whiggish intentions without any inward tension. This evidence does not, of course, preclude the notion of externally-formed networks in these earlier periods. Many religious examples, for instance, were constructed in this manner, as high-level Church officials established networks (such as monastic orders, and individual monasteries) which then recruited previously unconnected lay members to their cause. However, of the kind of networks considered in this thesis, that is, social networks built around interaction and exchange with the expectation of primarily personal benefit, internal formation does seem to be the most prevalent means of origin.

Today’s CMC-facilitated networks present a somewhat different picture, however, as many iterations are founded by external agents for some other gain not directly related to the network’s primary function. This is particularly notable in the larger formal networks considered above, as the external founders of companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have crafted global social networks not so that they can benefit directly from forming nodes in those networks, but rather from their monetisation. The modern-day potential for exploiting the concept of the social network for social gain has been conclusively realised: as of June 2015, Facebook’s estimated market value was $245,000,000,000, while its CEO Mark Zuckerberg has a net worth of almost $40,000,000,000 alone. These vast figures are stronger evidence than anything of the continued attraction and perceived benefits of social networks: in today’s capitalist economy, social networks have become a multi-billion dollar industry.

This trend for CMC-facilitated social networks being established primarily as a means to generate income for founders who do not actively participate in them for the traditional benefits discussed up until now does not mean that those who choose to join are left as faceless drones with no agency. Above it was noted how informal networks (including ego-nets of Facebook friends, and mutual followers on Twitter) form as sub-networks of these vast, online formal networks, and this is where individual agency is most at work. It is still the choice of individual nodes to join the social network; they are just inputting themselves into a pre-existing network structure. As a means of network access, this is as old as networks themselves: it is very rare for every node which will eventually feature in a network to have been present from its inception. Just as the female narrator of The Floure and the Leafe chose to join the leaf’s existing network at the poem’s close, and younger members of the Kit-Cat Club such as Lionel Cranfield Sackville, 1st Duke of Dorset, joined the group after the moment of its inception, so do people joining online examples today. The crucial difference is that the modern CMC-facilitated networks people elect to join are invariably far larger and more complex than their predecessors.

Furthermore, a node’s personal experience of these CMC-facilitated networks is still guided by their own, personal motivations. For example, research has shown that one of the primary motivations for a user joining professional employment-focused network LinkedIn is the desire to find a new job. Similarly, as noted above, individuals have been seen to join Facebook expressly to maintain and improve their social connectedness, and its associated social bond capital. More nuanced evidence of this personal agency within externally-established social networks is provided by the existence of viral Internet memes already explored. Memes can be considered one of the more eccentric outputs emerging from modern CMC-facilitated networks, and as such present a new kind of evidence for individual agency. The process of creating memetic images or videos, and then sharing them among the other nodes of a particular network, offers the individual no other benefit besides personal amusement and the recognition of likeminded fellow nodes. This networked

activity purely for one’s own entertainment, and the desire to entertain the wider network, offers no other tangible benefit beyond the process of creation for the node in question, and so must be seen as a solely independently-motivated action, and thus clear evidence of agency within a social network of external origin. Just as the wider scholarship on the medieval period now reveals communities rich in agency, as supported by the preceding chapters, the above evidence demonstrates that although modern CMC-facilitated networks are often externally-established, nodes still follow the same personal enthusiasms within them.

The significance of hierarchies in modern networks is, again, a complex issue, but one which presents further similarities alongside its distinct differences to medieval equivalents. As was seen in chapter one, medieval networks such as the London Puy were structured according to a strict hierarchy, in this case comprising a Prince, his twelve advisors, a clerk, and the remaining nodes below them.\(^7\) The efficient functioning of this hierarchy was of paramount importance, as evidenced by the shift in power reported by the second set of statutes, which saw the Prince’s influence reduced in favour of his advisors’. This ordered and explicitly advertised kind of hierarchy is something seen less often in today’s CMC-facilitated networks. A notable exception to this assertion comes when nodes are given increased levels of influence over the technical running of the network: for example, users designated ‘admin’ in the informal networks of Facebook ‘group’ pages, or ‘moderators’ on one of Reddit’s ‘subreddits’, the themed message boards which make up this hugely popular site driven and shaped by the contributions and interactions of its registered network of members.\(^5\) Most frequently, however, nodes joining these modern online exchange networks join on an identical footing to the rest of the community — in principle, at least.

The strongest example of this lack of imposed, structured hierarchy is provided by Twitter. When an individual joins this social network, estimated to be the second most-used globally, they do so at the exact same level as all other members. Despite it being a formal network (users must formally register and agree to terms and conditions), there are no formalised levels of hierarchy available. Every node is

\(^7\) Horn, *Munimenta Gildhalle Londoniensis*, pp. 216-7.

\(^5\) Reddit is divided into smaller notice board-style sections, each dedicated to a specific concept. The subreddit r/funny, for example, has over 9,000,000 members, see: <https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/>.
faced with an identical platform for output and influence as every other node. In theory, then, this lack of graded positions means that upon joining Twitter I have exactly the same opportunity to participate and gather influence as the President of the United States. In practice, of course, this is not the case. The reason for this is that an individual’s social and cultural capital, along with their associated reputation and influence, are carried over from the offline world and their existing networks into the structures of Twitter. As has been a fundamental principle across this work, no one network ever operates in isolation, be that through its interaction with other networks, or its nodes’ presence within other networks. To continue with the above example, in May 2015 Barack Obama joined Twitter using the personal account @POTUS. The reaction from the wider network broke world records for follower acquisition: within thirty minutes the President had amassed 100,000 followers, and after five hours he had already broken the 1,000,000 follower threshold.76

Nodes in the Twitter network who amass followers in such volume clearly exact more influence than those who do not. At the time of writing, the most followed individual on Twitter is American singer Katy Perry, who has almost 75,000,000 followers. Tellingly, however, she herself only follows 156 other members of the network.77 This imbalance reveals the way in which informal hierarchies emerge in social networks that have no such formalised structures in place: through directed flow. Social Network Analysis assesses the relationships between nodes in a network according to whether information, social exchange, and ideas flow in only one direction, or both ways.78 In the case of Katy Perry (who serves as a useful example of many such figures of influence on Twitter), this flow is completely directed, as millions of nodes follow her, but she does not follow them back. Put simply, this means that while 75 million followers read every update she tweets, she sees none of theirs. This directed flow, transposed into the formal Twitter network from her fame and influence in the wider, offline world, places her conclusively above those nodes following her in the informal hierarchy that emerges.

76 Amit Chowdhry, ‘President Obama Joins Twitter, Hits 1 Million Followers In 5 Hours’, Forbes / Tech <http://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2015/05/19/obama-twitter-potus/> [accessed 31 August 2015].


This implicit structuring is not just a modern phenomenon. Returning to the St Petersburg manuscript of courtly poetry prepared for Queen Anne which contained the works of Jean d’Auton, Jean Lemaire de Belges, and Antoine de Mailly considered in chapter two, a similar process can be seen at work.\textsuperscript{79} As discussed, on the pages of the manuscript each author’s work is presented identically, just as Twitter members are presented with an identical platform and profile structure. The associated literary capital and reputation associated with each author raises or lowers the value of their work in the collection. In this way, D’Auton’s and Lemaire’s work remains to this day the more acclaimed and studied of the three ‘identically’ valued pieces on parchment, while Mailly’s effort has been neglected by his contemporaries and modern scholars alike. Their tendency to encourage this kind of informal hierarchy is thus a distinct similarity between modern and medieval social networks. There is, however, a further kind of informal internal hierarchy found in today’s social networks which is largely absent from their medieval equivalents. This unspoken hierarchy emerges in modern CMC-facilitated networks and is unrelated to any external influences, rather developing from the self-promotion of features deemed capital-worthy by the nodes of that particular network.

As was seen with their definitions and perceived benefits, then, there are many, at times unexpected, similarities between the ways in which medieval and modern social networks are structured and operate. The differences which have emerged are often linked to the vast scope and scale of today’s CMC-facilitated networks, as further potential similarities get lost among, and are warped by, their sheer complexities. Everything, from participation in, information flow among, and evolution of today’s social networks is so much more open, accessible, and instantaneous than ever before. It is with this in mind that the final analytical section of this thesis explores a case study of trolling in modern social networks. Many aspects of trolling can be linked thematically to concepts seen in the medieval evidence, albeit in a socially extreme manner.

\textit{Trolling a Network}

This final analytical section considers the concept of trolling in modern CMC-facilitated networks. It reveals that what first appears to be a phenomenon unique to

\textsuperscript{79} Saint-Petersburg, National Library of Russia, fr. F. v. XIV. 8.
these present-day structures in fact embodies many of the fundamental principles seen across all social networks, but manifest in a more extreme manner. The practice of trolling is one which has garnered increasing amounts of both scholarly and media attention over the past decade, although it remains a topic on which much future research can be done.\textsuperscript{80} Due to the difficult nature of gathering primary evidence as detailed below, my discussion of trolling builds upon the work of scholars already active in the field, in particular Whitney Phillips. Using the analytical tools developed across the thesis, the importance of anonymity in trolling, the familiar driving forces of cultural capital and competitive play behind the practice, and also the structures and behaviours of the group known as Anonymous are examined in a final demonstration of the intricacies of social networks, and the ways in which they mirror the cultural spaces around them.

\textbf{Defining Trolling}

‘To troll’ as a verb in relation to disruptive conduct within online social networks is a term used, often erroneously, to describe a wide range of behaviours seen online. It is important to make clear from the outset that trolling is distinct from other antagonistic activities found in CMC-facilitated networks, including hacking (proficient technological exploitation of existing computer networks and systems),\textsuperscript{81} cyber-bullying (repeatedly targeting a particular node, often as an extension of similar real-world actions),\textsuperscript{82} and flaming (willingly entering into highly hostile and insulting dialogues).\textsuperscript{83} In contrast to these practices, and as is evidenced across the remainder of this chapter, trolling is a more darkly playful enterprise, most often devoid of any particular personal agendas. Trolls exist online to target other unsuspecting internet users with a variety of tactics: offensive language, images of pornography and gore, or non sequiturs and distortions of ongoing conversations. This disruption of flow within established networks is all intended to provoke outraged reactions, in which the trolls take great pleasure and find much

\textsuperscript{80} For the only full-length study of trolling, see: Whitney Phillips, \textit{This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture} (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

\textsuperscript{81} For a useful collection of essays on hacking, see: Kenneth Einar Himma, \textit{Internet Security: Hacking, Counterhacking, and Society} (Sudbury, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning, 2007).

\textsuperscript{82} For an introduction to cyber-bullying, see: Robin M. Kowalski, Susan P. Limber, and Patricia W. Agatston, \textit{Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Digital Age}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} edn (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

amusement. It is a constantly escalating problem for CMC-facilitated social networks, with independent bodies such as ‘Knowthenet’ commissioning reports on the issue. Their 2013 report describes trolling, ‘at its worst’, as ‘involv[ing] purposely and anonymously spreading hatred, racism, misogyny, bigotry, conflict and any other kind of unpleasantness. In milder cases it’s about causing interpersonal conflict just for the sake of it.’\(^{84}\) The report, however, proceeds to discuss the term trolling as interchangeable with that of cyber-bullying. This kind of unsatisfying merging of the two concepts, common in wider discussions of trolling, has prompted scholars to attempt to define trolling in more precise terms.

In her 2010 observational work on trolls in relation to sociological understandings of politeness, Claire Hardaker comes to the conclusion that a troll is:

a CMC user who constructs the identity of sincerely wishing to be a part of the group in question, including professing, or conveying pseudo-sincere intentions, but whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement.\(^ {85}\)

In 2014, Erin Buckels et al. conducted two surveys aimed at ascertaining if individuals who trolled displayed certain personality traits. Their results suggest that there is indeed a link between trolling and the so-called Dark Tetrad of personality: participants who admitted to trolling scored more highly in tests for sadism, psychopathy, and Machiavellianism than those engaging in more benevolent online participatory activities such as chatting and debating.\(^ {86}\) The authors conclude that trolling ‘appears to be an Internet manifestation of everyday sadism’, or, as their title puts it: ‘Trolls just want to have fun’.\(^ {87}\)

Also in 2014, Whitney Phillips (considered to be so well-versed in the world of Internet trolling that many secondary outlets refer to her as ‘Dr Troll’)\(^ {88}\) built upon this definition in her full length study of troll culture *This Is Why We Can’t Have Nice*
Things. Phillips bases her argument on both sustained observation of trollish activity online, but also interviews with trolls themselves. She notes three further pillars of trolling in her definition.\textsuperscript{89} Trolls, according to Phillips, self-identify as such. They embrace the implications that accompany being a troll online, and willingly build these facets into their online personae. These self-identifying trolls are motivated by an abstract concept they refer to as ‘lulz’. Phillips describes lulz (which can be singular or plural) as ‘a particular kind of unsympathetic, ambiguous laughter’ similar to Schadenfreude, which loosely translates from the German as revelling in the misfortune of another. If a troll fails to generate lulz they have failed to troll successfully; the achievement of lulz is considered far more important than from whom they are derived. As troll Paulie Socash (a pseudonym) puts it, he does it ‘for the lulz’.\textsuperscript{90} Finally for Phillips, the ability to keep their offline identity concealed is crucial for trolls. The anonymity afforded by being able to create profiles and avatars which bear no relation at all to their real identities allows trolls to behave in ways they could not in their offline networks. In the same interview, Socash describes himself as ‘30ish’, ‘college educated’, and ‘employed’.\textsuperscript{91} Were he to engage in the ‘in-your-face and disrespectful’ interactions that define his online trolling in these offline circles, social norms would likely see him ostracised from friends and unattractive to employers.\textsuperscript{92} When it comes to enacting disruptive and offensive behaviour intended to enrage unsuspecting nodes in the pursuit of lulz, Socash again summarises it well in another interview: ‘Anonymity is critical, in my opinion. It allows one to freely state unpopular positions (whether one’s own or not)’.\textsuperscript{93} The implicit differentiation here between one’s true beliefs and those they posit while trolling is another important factor, as Phillips’s research suggests that the latter is rarely a direct mirror of the former.\textsuperscript{94} There is a noteworthy comparison to be drawn here with Cayley’s identification of the debating positions often adopted and espoused by medieval poets, who would argue points they did not necessarily hold in order to ‘polemicize and thus perpetuate debate’.\textsuperscript{95} Whereas these writers promulgated invented

\textsuperscript{89} Phillips, \textit{Can’t Have Nice Things}, pp. 24-6.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} For a discussion of debating positions in the Querelle de la Rose, see: Cayley, \textit{Debate and Dialogue}, pp. 52-86.
viewpoints with the intention of prolonging literary exchange, however, trolls deploy shocking statements purely as a means to antagonise their chosen targets into outraged response.

The precise definition of trolling is thus a nuanced one, and it will undoubtedly be one which continues to evolve alongside both trolling behaviours themselves, and wider reactions to them. For now, it would be beneficial to augment the above definitions with an explanation of trolling in accordance with the analytical vocabulary deployed across the rest of this thesis. There are two troll-related network structures to be considered here: the established networks into which trolls insert themselves with the intent of disruption, and the highly fluid informal network which trolls themselves make up. Regarding the first of these, it is important to note that trolls do not make up nodes in the original social network structure. Once the network is established and operational trolls then insert themselves as members pertaining to have the intention of engaging in the manner of the existing nodes, but in fact proceeding to behave in a manner which only seeks to disrupt the flow of information between those original nodes. As an example, Hardaker bases her study on the digital records of an equine health and wellbeing forum, into which trolls inserted themselves as nodes alleging to own horses in the offline world, but going on to disrupt genuine discussions by posting absurd and upsetting messages related to the subject matter.

This behaviour is something absent from the medieval examples examined in the preceding chapters. While there is evidence that nodes did not always behave in a manner deemed appropriate to the wider benefit of the social network (for example, the Puy Prince overspending and subsequently being stripped of his autonomous power), nowhere can be seen such an explicit and self-defined attempt to infiltrate a pre-established network with the sole intent of disrupting it for one’s own amusement. Furthermore, trolling presents an almost paradoxical counterpoint to the notions of initiation present in the earlier examples. Several of the networks studied were seen to be accessible only to those who were initiated insiders: the Puy refused to allow any non-members to be present at its feast, the heroic epistles were the output of a closed group of poets centred on the court of Louis XII, and membership to the Kit-Cat Club was available by invitation only to known Whigs. The

practice of trolling turns this idea of privilege via initiation upside down, by marking the initiated insiders as targets. Although initiated to their own network, these nodes are uninitiated to the principles of trolling to which they unexpectedly find themselves subject, and as a result can feel disoriented and often hurt in an online network structure in which they previously felt secure. This discrepancy between networks of today and earlier centuries is in part explained by the behavioural extremes to which modern technology allows trolls to go to, and is considered in more detail below.

The second network structure at work where trolling is concerned is the loose, informal network of the trolls themselves. This is perhaps the most informal instance of a network to be considered in this thesis. Due to the self-awareness of trolls, whenever they engage in such activities they automatically and implicitly signal their membership to the wider group of troll-nodes actively operating in various CMC-facilitated networks. This practice also attracts the awareness and appreciation of other trolls active in the same, target, network due to the performative nature of extracting lulz from unsuspecting targets. If not participating in trolling at that moment however, these fellow trolls may never directly signal that they are present, instead recognising and appreciating the efforts of others silently. For instance, troll Socash recollects that when first engaging in trolling: ‘I followed the lead of other trolls I saw working these [message] boards, […] there was not really a hub to meet and discuss trolling’. In this way, whenever trolling takes place in an established online social structure a kind of ego-network develops with the active troller at its centre, and any other self-confessed trolls present forming other nodes, who may or may not contribute to the trollish flow themselves at that moment. Socash is again enlightening on this topic. Asked whether he feels he belongs to a ‘group or community’, Socash responds: ‘[t]o an extent, yes. But the community is very fluid – people come and go and return […] The community I see as my own is made up of trolls who have been at this for a while and take their anonymity seriously’. He continues to explain the dangers of forming any more formalised trolling networks than the transient ones in which he sometimes finds himself: ‘Despite the upsides for trolls of a network […], communities based on trolling are kind of a liability to trolls. If the point is to troll and remain anonymous, the more one socialises and lets out who one is outside of trolling, the more one undermines this purpose’.97 While a more

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formalised network of trolls would allow for a more reliable, perhaps jointly-orchestrated, means of trolling, the associated loss of anonymity which would likely accompany more sustained interaction with the same nodes renders it an impractical option for trolling communities.

In charting these two network structures related to trolling, two primary dissimilarities between the late-medieval networks studied and the activities of trolls have emerged. The concept of nodes inserting themselves into a network under the veil of anonymity afforded by a generic avatar, with the sole intention of disrupting the flow of that network for nothing but their own entertainment (here embodied in the concept of lulz) is one completely alien to the networks studied up till now. As noted, there is evidence of those who were reprimanded for not following the rules closely enough, and there were undoubtedly those who entered networks in pursuit of their own interests at the expense of the networks': for instance, as seen in the tactics of Jean de Montreuil within the Querelle de la Rose. An extended literary debate prompted by the popular thirteenth-century poem Roman de la Rose, this sequence of written exchanges provided late medieval poets with a ludic opportunity to hone their written debating skills. One of these authors was Christine de Pizan, with whom several of the male intellectuals involved (such as Gontier Col and his brother Pierre) dutifully exchanged works. Jean de Montreuil, another contributor, however, refused to engage directly with Christine, or to concede her any ground whatsoever in the debate, essentially rendering it a sterile exercise. As a node in this informal literary network built around the Querelle, then, Montreuil sought only to showcase his own skill and the strength of his opinion. In not engaging in the traditional debating manner with Christine, he failed to contribute to a key aspect of the literary dialogue which was the network’s primary raison d’être. Beyond examples like this, however, the presence of a node purely intending to unsettle a network structure for no tangible reason is unique to modern networks studied.

The potential for anonymity provided by these CMC-facilitated networks, and exploited by trolls, is the second fundamental difference visible between the structures of the two periods under study. There are recorded instances of individuals concealing their true identity upon entering particular networks in the medieval period, one example being the occupation of spy. As a brief example, 98

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98 For more on this aspect of the Querelle, see: Cayley, Debate and Dialogue, pp. 73-80.
Bertrand de la Broquière was an early fifteenth-century Burgundian spy who posed as a pilgrim to the Middle East from 1432-3, but was in fact on a fact-finding mission at the request of Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, in the hope of facilitating a new crusade. In these cases the node in question is still identifiable as an existing person: once someone has seen Broquière, they at least know him well enough to recognise subsequently. In CMC-facilitated networks, however, not only can nodes keep their offline identity completely concealed, but thanks to the ease with which new avatars can be created, they have the ability to fashion a new profile and appear as a new, unrecognisable node in other – or even the same – networks. Similarly, while authors such as those writing for Louis XII were no strangers to using avatars in their work, at the point of production it was always known who the actual author was, often through the inclusion of their name somewhere in the poem, as witnessed in chapter two. Trolls, however, at no point signal their true identities; at their point of production the target of their actions has no knowledge of who they truly are. The act of trolling, then, as a practice possible only thanks to the anonymity afforded by modern online social networks, is seemingly at odds with the medieval evidence already considered. When examined using the analytical framework developed over the preceding chapters, however, trolling behaviours actually present themselves as extreme manifestations of some of the key principles and themes at work in many social networks, including their medieval iterations.

‘I did it for the lulz’: Cultural Capital and Competitive Play

Trolls are, at heart, productive nodes in whatever established network they elect to hijack. The majority of network nodes considered prior to this point have also been productive in some (usually literary) way; however, the trolls’ production evidently does not benefit the wider network, but is instead intended to serve only their own disruptive interests. As an example, the informal network of poets writing in defence of Louis XII produced a series of poetic outputs that sought not only to advance their own career paths, but also to further refine and demonstrate the intricacies of vernacular rhetorical verse to the wider artistic community. Contrastingely, when trolls produce an output within a social network structure it

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serves neither to win them any tangible gain, nor to enhance the wider network in any way.

A prominent trolling ground for this kind of behaviour is the comments section of video-sharing website *YouTube*. Once registered with the site, users form loose, informal networks which facilitate discussion around the videos posted. Trolls take advantage of the openness of this system, and repeatedly attempt to disrupt the informational flow with their own inflammatory comments and video posts. An ongoing online project to expose the ‘Biggest YouTube Trolls’ provides useful examples of this behaviour. Some trollish users border on the absurd: for example, ‘Durham Francis’ trolls by seeking out videos of tornadoes and commenting on them that tornadoes do not really exist, and are in fact a ‘government conspiracy’.

He also posts his own videos on the same theme, including one which suggests tornadoes are an invention of the US government as an ‘excuse to invade Syria’ (see figure 4.5).Francis’s trolling is only successful if other nodes of the YouTube network accept that they are his real opinions, and respond in an accordingly outraged manner. In this instance, user Louie Silva responded to Francis’s video with the comment: ‘accept the fact that tornadoes exist, people die from these storms, come on, accept it’ (see figure 4.6). This is the marker of success for Francis; it is not simply enough to post this disruptive material in a network, rather other uninitiated nodes must react to it. Francis acknowledges his success by replying to Silva’s comment in a way which provides no new information, instead returning the dialogue to his original point in a cyclical manner common to trolling: ‘Did you even watch the video? It clearly states that tornadoes do NOT exist. Now who’s the fool???’ (see figure 4.7).

To an outside observer this kind of behaviour appears nonsensical, even pointless. Although contributing to the visible production of the YouTube-facilitated network (Francis and Silva’s exchange took place in 2013, and the record of it remains online), it is of a completely different kind to the useful production of the medieval networks studied. It is, in fact, some of the motives behind Francis’s

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actions, and those of other trolls, which are surprisingly similar to those examples of medieval individuals joining networks. The first of these two motives is the now-familiar concept of participating in a network with the hope of accruing cultural capital. The capital here takes the form of the lulz which trolls seek as the outcome of their online antagonism. As already noted, the mere act of interjecting into an online social network with a disruptive and likely offensive comment or post does not constitute a successful troll. The irked reaction of the unprepared target node provides the all-important lulz for both the active troll and any other trolls who may recognise the exchange as an effective instance of trolling. The original troll thus wins acclaim from these other observant members of his highly fluid informal network, since lulz is the sole concept invested with capital in cultural circles of trolling. Here is another layer of complexity to this new kind of CMC-facilitated competitive play, as two networks are fundamentally required as opposed to one, as the unsuspecting reaction in one generates cultural capital in another.

Figure 4.5: One of YouTube troll Durham Francis’s online videos.

Figure 4.6: YouTube user Louie Silva’s response to Durham Francis’s video.

Figure 4.7: Durham Francis’s response to Louie Silva’s comment, acknowledging a successful
Lulz is a form of cultural capital pushed to its very extremes. It is a sociological commodity which can be extracted from unsuspecting nodes in CMC-facilitated networks at any expense. As a troll identifying as Peter Partyvan reveals, trolling often seeks to prompt reactions by exploiting personal facets of the target nodes’ offline life: ‘You have to interact with the people you are trolling […] you can make them absolutely rage when you start getting in their heads […] by trying to guess aspects of their lives based on their profiles. The things that hurt the most are the comments grounded in truth’. Trolls argue that they do not necessarily hold the often racist, sexist, and homophobic views they use in their attempts to provoke a reaction, rather that such language is used because they know it will guarantee that craved reaction. It is here important to reiterate the theoretical difference between trolling and more general online abuse. Since trolls operate from behind the veil of online anonymity, the genuine worldviews of the actual person behind the avatar cannot be ascertained, and so the point is moot. What is definite, however, is that trolls are not opposed to using language which is deemed highly offensive and upsetting by the majority of nodes in the networks they target (and indeed society more generally) in order to score the biggest reaction: the bigger the reaction, the bigger the lulz, and the more capital the troll wins.

Not only is this kind of cultural capital socially extreme, it is also more transient than any considered up until this point. Whereas the cultural capital won by the poets studied in chapter two through their compositions accumulated over time, augmenting their social reputation and securing them further work, the capital won by trolls is far less sustainable. The main reasons for this, as with the practicalities behind trolling itself, lie largely in the modern-day technological advances which facilitate the new kinds of network on which trolls prey. Most importantly, the self-imposed anonymity of trolls means that any cultural capital derived from their actions cannot be assigned to their real-world selves, as would normally be the case. Furthermore, the inflammatory nature of their behaviour means that they often do not even operate under the same avatar for any great length of time. Most trolls operate multiple accounts at any given time, and are constantly forced to replace accounts

104 Ibid., p. 35.
105 Ibid., p. 97.
banned by site moderators. Philips did note that several of the trolls with whom she collaborated, particularly on Facebook, would maintain name roots as they made new accounts to replace ones rendered unusable; a ‘Frank’, for example, appeared as Francis, Fran, François, and Frankie across her period of study. Ultimately, however, the uncertainty of identity spawned from anonymity fundamentally undermines any prospect of an enduring identity to which a troll could attach their collected cultural capital, and build a social reputation around. Even if a troll could somehow ensure the capital they accrued remained associated with one particular online identity across the networks in which they were active, the temporal fluidity of the loose networks formed by trolls themselves renders it non-transferable. As Gabriella Coleman asserts, trolls operating in the same network space at a particular moment may never interact with the same group of people again. A successful extraction of lulz counts for nothing in a subsequent trollish exchange if none of the newly present trolls witnessed it themselves. Lulz, then, represents an extreme manifestation of cultural capital. It is a capital enjoyed almost uniquely at the moment of its extraction (that is, when a targeted node responds angrily to a troll’s attempts to provoke such a reaction) and only by those initiated trolls who also happen to be present in the network at that moment. Beyond this, the capital remains only as a memory for its successful proponent, as they move on to their next target, often with a new, unrecognisable avatar identity.

Alongside this potential to acquire an extreme and fleeting cultural capital, trolling also presents its practitioners with the opportunity for competitive play. Where the nodes of the Kit-Cat club sought to outdo one another with increasingly inventive complimentary toasts, and the members of the London Puy pursued the accolade of best chanson, trolls enact a distortion of this more benevolent play through an escalating game of extreme one-upmanship. A now-infamous example of this kind of antagonistic play came to a head in 2007, and featured a cult video game called

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106 There is an ongoing debate as to how effective the practice of banning known-troll profiles is, given their transience. For example, see: Meritxell Garcia, ‘Is Banning the Best Approach When Dealing with Online Community Trolls?’, Standing on Giants (2015) <http://www.standingongiants.com/is-banning-the-best-approach-when-dealing-with-online-community-trolls/> [accessed 27 September 2015].


‘Battletoads’, and the oft-decried website 4chan. 4chan is a simple image board website, divided into various ‘boards’ to which users anonymously post content and prompt discussion: for example, the /a/ board is dedicated to anime, the /v/ board to video games, and the notorious /b/ board is designated as ‘Random’. The /b/ board in particular is a hotbed for trolling, with Phillips noting that it has the dubious honour of serving as ‘an incubator for early trolling culture’. Almost the entirety of trolls posting to /b/ do so under the screenname ‘Anonymous’, and this, combined with the transgressive one-upmanship involved in trolling under inspection here, means that the Random board is swamped by highly offensive, distasteful, and often outright illegal content. Matthias Schwartz best summarises the culture of /b/: ‘Measured in terms of depravity, insularity and traffic-driven turnover, the culture of /b/ has little precedent [...] it reads like the inside of a high-school bathroom stall, or an obscene telephone line party line, or a blog with no posts and all comments filled with slang that you are too old to understand’.

Battletoads is an arcade-style fighting and platform game first released by developers Rare in 1991. Over subsequent years, Battletoads gathered a cult following in gaming circles and came to the attention of 4chan’s trolls during a video game screenshot contest. Following this, “Is this Battletoads?” became the standard trollish response to any post on the /v/ board, and later to any post involving a video game screenshot on /b/, with the intention of disrupting any chance of meaningful informational flow among the informal network assembled there. In 2007 and 2012, this now-common trolling trope became the subject of an intense version of competitive play for an informal network of users active on /b/. Peaking from 12-14th September, trolls repeatedly called forty branches of American video game store GameStop en masse to pre-order the sequel to Battletoads – which did not exist. Due to the sheer volume of these prank calls, GameStop employees became increasingly irate, and would often begin shouting angrily as soon as the troll...

112 Battletoads, created by Tim and Chris Stamper (Twycross, Leicestershire: Rare, 1991).
mentioned the game.\textsuperscript{113} A form of competitive play thus developed which involved trolls attempting to keep the unsuspecting GameStop employee on the line for as long as possible before revealing they were seeking the fictional \textit{Battletoads} sequel, prompting the maximum reaction and therefore the maximum lulz.

Transcripts of the most lulz-worthy calls were posted onto the \textit{/b/} board; however, this primary evidence has been lost thanks to the temporary nature of 4chan’s boards (the site receives so much uploaded content that the oldest and least-engaged with posts are constantly being deleted). In 2012 an identical trolling raid was carried out on a pawn shop made famous by a television program on the History Channel (figure 4.8 shows the initiating post). A number of the resulting posts to \textit{/b/} remain accessible through saved screenshots, and they clearly reveal the subversive kind of competitive play relished by trolls. Trolling began with simple enquiries as to whether or not the store had \textit{Battletoads} available, as seen in figure 4.9. Others reversed this tactic, by providing just enough information for the employee to realise that they were again referring to the game, as demonstrated by the troll in figure 4.10 who claimed to be ‘an antique game collector […] looking for a very old, extremely rare title’. A further popular tactic was to engage the employee in conversation about another item, such as a ring, before eventually revealing their true trollish intention by mentioning \textit{Battletoads}, as shown in figure 4.11. One user blended both these approaches by indicating they were about to enquire after \textit{Battletoads}, then, after a pre-emptive interruption from the employee, protesting that they were in fact searching for ‘bats … signed bats, like from the MLB’. After this brief reprieve the troll does indeed ask for Battletoads, and the employee once again hangs up (figure 4.12). The callers became ever more inventive in their quest to impress their fellow trolls on \textit{/b/}, with one even posing as a police officer called about the store’s harassment, only to proclaim himself ‘Officer Battletoad (figure 4.13). This kind of competitive play, centred as it is around the exploitation of unsuspecting bystanders, is of an antagonistic level not witnessed in the medieval evidence studied in previous chapters.

Figure 4.8: The initiating call to prank ‘Gold and Silver’ pawn shop, posted to 4Chan.

Figure 4.9: Transcript of a troll’s call to ‘Gold and Silver’ pawn shop, posted to 4chan.

Figure 4.10: Transcript of a troll’s call to ‘Gold and Silver’ pawn shop, posted to 4chan.

Figure 4.11: Transcript of a troll’s call to ‘Gold and Silver’ pawn shop, posted to 4chan.
Figure 4.12: Transcript of a troll’s call to ‘Gold and Silver’ pawn shop, posted to 4chan.

Figure 4.13: Transcript of a troll’s call to ‘Gold and Silver’ pawn shop, posted to 4chan.

Figure 4.14: Visual meme created in the wake of the Battletoads prank and posted to 4chan.
Beyond these increasingly creative and outrageous prank calls, the Battletoads trope has been deployed in ever more imaginative ways, each instance intended to be better, more lulz-worthy than the last. Memetic images were created for trolling the /b/ board with (for example, figure 4.14), an (unsuccessful) attempt was made to name a crowdsourced NASA probe ‘Battletoad’,¹¹⁴ and separate themes of trolling were intertwined with Battletoads: for instance, a website with a phone number proclaiming to be for assistance in pre-ordering the new game was posted to /b/ – the number was in fact for a Scientology Church branch, another popular target of trolls.¹¹⁵

This example of competitive play ties directly to the previous consideration of cultural capital, for the further a troll is willing to push a particular trope in the pursuit of lulz, the greater the worth of the resulting capital they enjoy. The troll who calls a GameStop store and elicits an outraged diatribe from the frustrated employee there has, in their eyes, far outdone another who simply comments “Is this Battletoads?” on another user’s /v/ board post. Again, the concept of competitive play is here forced to its extremes (the trolls’ sustained assault on GameStop stores likely comprises a very real form of harassment) in the pursuit of an equally extreme form of cultural capital. This notion of trolling representing an informal social network operating under extreme manifestations of the principles studied across this thesis is further revealed through a final discussion around the group known as Anonymous.

‘Anonymous’ and the Extremes of Network Principles

The activist (or ‘hacktivist’) group known as Anonymous has become increasingly prominent in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Belonging to a highly fluid informal network of internet activists and vigilantes, many with high levels of technological competency, the nodes of Anonymous are governed by no consistent philosophical or political manifesto beyond a fierce championing of anonymity and the free flow of information.¹¹⁶ Since 2008, the network has involved itself in several high profile political movements. In ‘Operation Tunisia’, Anonymous supported Arab Spring pro-democracy protestors by providing scripts which

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

Anonymous has not always been this kind of irreverent activist network for perceived good, however. Prior to their first operations which could be deemed political in 2008 (against the Church of Scientology), Anonymous was synonymous solely with the type of deviant trolling examined across this chapter. The network in fact emerged from 4chan’s already mentioned ‘Random’ /b/ board, one of the most controversial sectors of the internet, and thus Anonymous was originally the collective noun given to the ‘hivemind’ of trolls who would often collaborate in large-scale trolling, or ‘raids’.\footnote{Phillips, \textit{Can’t Have Nice Things}, p. 57-8.} It is this embryonic informal network, comprised of whichever /b/ trolls happened to be online when a particular raid was initiated, which further demonstrates the extremes to which the founding principles of social networks revealed across this thesis can be taken: initiation to a network, identification versus an ‘other’, and reflection of the cultural space.

The process of initiation into social networks has been seen to be a key feature of their earlier iterations in particular. Many, including the London Puy and the Kit-Cat club, enforced a strict male-only policy, restricting membership to one half of the population. The reasoning in both cases was supposedly a collective desire to honour women through their activities, as in the \textit{Cour Amoureuse}, but membership was restricted nonetheless. Often, initiation into a network involved the swearing of a solemn oath by all new nodes: for example, the promises sworn by medieval orders of knights seen in chapter one. Initiation was sometimes more subtle, such as for the poets writing for Louis XII, who were integrated into the informal network which
formed through intertextual references to both the poets already active, and the linguistic content of their existing poems. Anonymous’s early trolling pushed the notion of initiation to an extreme in two basic ways – one within the informal network of trolls itself, the other in those CMC-facilitated networks which they infiltrated. Unsurprisingly, given Anonymous’s enthusiasm for online freedom, membership of this highly informal network was totally at odds with the structured initiations seen in medieval networks such as the Puy. Nodes needed access to an internet connection (a pre-requisite of all the CMC-facilitated networks considered in this chapter), but beyond that, nothing else. When posting to /b/, no means of identification was needed, not even the valid email address required by almost all other such online networks. This unrestricted approach to initiation to the /b/ board, and therefore Anonymous, remains in place to this day, as shown by figure 4.15. The username is pre-set to ‘Anonymous’, and besides a one-click security check to prevent bots spamming the site, one is then immediately free to post to the board, and thus potentially become a node in the Anonymous network.

Figure 4.15: The online registration requirements of 4chan.

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Trolling, as an act, is fundamentally asymmetrical, and it is in this discrepancy of awareness on behalf of Anonymous’s early targets that a reversed form of extreme initiation is to be found. As Phillips notes of trolling more generally: ‘the troll, regardless of his or her motives, is roping a chosen target into a game of which the target may not even be aware, and subsequently to which he or she cannot consent’.\(^{122}\) Phillips’s understanding of consent is compatible with the current discussion around initiation. When a troll targets a node in another pre-established network, that target node becomes an exploitable node in the troll’s informal ego-network: they have no choice here, the troll removes the opportunity to consent to initiation completely. Simultaneously, the troll has initiated themselves into the established social network with no regard for its own initiation regulations; the troll has no desire to be an insider of the network in the sense its original founders intended. This duality of forced initiation on the part of troll node and target node (active and passive respectively) is best illustrated with an example.

In 2006 the Anonymous network turned its attention to the virtual space Habbo Hotel. Habbo is a social network environment largely aimed at teenagers, and describes itself to parents as: ‘a virtual hotel environment where players can socialise with each other using customized avatars called Habbos. The virtual environment features Public Rooms, which are accessible to all players, and Guest Rooms, which are private user-created rooms’.\(^{123}\) When unconfirmed rumours circulated on 4chan’s boards that Habbo moderators were displaying racist tendencies in their practices, Anonymous decided to take action. On July 6, nodes in the Anonymous network logged in to the Habbo platform en masse, all using avatars styled as black men wearing grey Armani suits and sporting exaggerated afros. These infiltrators to the Habbo network proceeded to disrupt its flow by forming picket lines, often in the shape of swastikas, preventing legitimate users (mostly children and young adolescents) from accessing the virtual hotel’s pool (see figure 4.16). When these non-consenting nodes found themselves in the midst of Anonymous’s subversive network, many used the platform’s chat feature to ask what was going on. The pre-arranged answer Anonymous nodes gave was that the ‘pool

\(^{122}\) Phillips, *Can’t Have Nice Things*, p. 164.

is closed due to fail and AIDs’.\textsuperscript{124} This early quest for lulz from Anonymous highlights well the extremities to which trolling can push the principles of network initiation. Troll nodes initiated themselves into the existing Habbo network by adhering to only the most superficial of registration regulations, before revealing their true, disruptive intent. At the same time, target nodes from the Habbo network underwent a forced and unconsented initiation into Anonymous’s informal network for the brief period of the raid.

Anonymous’s early actions, such as the Habbo raid, soon caught the attention of the mainstream media, and it is in the relationship between the two that this network displays another drastic manifestation of a network principle: identification versus an ‘other’. In \textit{This Is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things}, Phillips’s convincing and provocative central argument is that trolling behaviours actually mirror that of American sensationalist media outlets. As she asserts in her introduction:

\begin{quote}
within the postmillennial digital media landscape of the United States, trolls reveal the thin and at times non-existent line between trolling and sensationalist corporate media. The primary difference is that, for trolls, exploitation is a leisure activity. For corporate media, it’s a business strategy.\textsuperscript{125}
\end{quote}

Anonymous in particular has a long history with such media outlets, an uncomfortable association which proves illuminating on the topic of antagonistic

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{124} Coleman, \textit{The Many Faces of Anonymous}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{125} Phillips, \textit{Can’t Have Nice Things}, p. 8.
\end{footnotes}
network identification. In the earlier case studies, social networks were at times seen to form in response to a perceived deficiency in existing structures: for instance, the Kit-Cat Club was an unashamedly Whig network, intended to right the cultural and political wrongs being enacted by the Tory party. The virtual flower and leaf networks represent a more benevolent variation on this theme, as opposing but associated networks were established with the intent of providing gentle competitive play for their respective nodes.

Anonymous and the mainstream media took this practice to another level, shifting it from a case of identification versus an ‘other’, to one of definition. Following raids such as that on Habbo Hotel, when Anonymous was still a network really only known by those involved, Fox 11 News aired a segment entitled ‘Report on Anonymous’. The report describes Anonymous as ‘hackers on steroids’, ‘a hacker gang’ and an ‘Internet Hate Machine’, acting with the sole intent of ‘disrupting innocent people’s lives’. Anonymous, until this point a network unrecognised by the wider internet community, let alone the American public at large, had been handed a national platform and blueprint for future depictions of themselves. Two days later, on July 29th 2007, Anonymous uploaded their own response video to YouTube, gleefully parodying the sensationalist language and depictions directed at them by Fox news. It contained several darkly ironic and seemingly paradoxical statements: for instance: ‘you have completely missed the point of who and what we are [...] We mock those in pain. We ruin the lives of others simply because we can [...] We are the embodiment of humanity with no remorse, no caring, no love, and no sense of morality’. Anonymous, which until Fox News introduced their network to the wider world had had no need to define itself as any form of identifiable entity, took Fox’s portrayal of them, magnified and exaggerated it, and presented it back to the now interested world. It was the beginning of a cyclical loop in which Anonymous would troll (for instance, leaving offensive messages on Facebook memorial pages for teens who had committed suicide), actions which American media outlets would then decry, often by utilising the very same tactics as the trolls (for instance, making friends of the deceased teens read out messages left by trolls on camera for

127 Ibid.
broadcast).\textsuperscript{129} The content of these news segments would then be integrated into the memetic trolling language of Anonymous, and so the circle would begin again.

The retaliatory nature of this game of one-upmanship between early Anonymous and the media links directly to reflections of the cultural space, the final aspect of social networks which trolling exaggerates. It has previously been hypothesised across the thesis that social networks operate (in part, at least) as reflections of the cultural spaces in which they form. In this way, the London Puy established itself in an emergent social climate of guilds and confraternities, and the Kit-Cat Club sought to reverse a perceived lack of attention given to the arts in eighteenth-century England. Trolling practices, of both the early informal Anonymous network and trolls more widely, are an especially pronounced manifestation of this principle. Primarily, the CMC technology which provides the foundations of the networks that trolls disrupt allows for this behaviour on a fundamental level. As was discussed in the first section of this chapter, online networks are today far more transient than their medieval counterparts were. Users can join or leave these networks easily, and profiles can be deleted, or banned, and remade with almost no effect on the node behind them. This all combines to ensure a near-total lack of repercussion and accountability for those nodes who choose to remain anonymous in online networks, allowing trolls to behave in ways they could not in offline networks. As Facebook troll Wilson Mouzone indicates, many trolls are completely aware of the implications of these actions: ‘[Great trolls] fully understand the implications of everything they say and do […] They have empathy and can work out the best way to wind people up, but that also means they are fully aware of the harm they cause’.\textsuperscript{130}

The security of anonymity is not the sole way in which the influence of ever-evolving technology on culture more generally shapes trolling behaviours. Christie Davies, in his study ‘Jokes that Follow Mass-Mediated Disasters in a Global Electronic Age’, argues that the rise of technologically-mediated news dissemination, or as he puts it the ‘total triumph of television’, has greatly contributed to an increase

\textsuperscript{130} Quoted in: Phillips, \textit{Can't Have Nice Things}, p. 35.
in emotionally detached humour.\textsuperscript{131} Citing the assassination of President Kennedy as the first event which spawned sustained cycles of disaster jokes, Davies gives three explanations as to how the medium of television encouraged such humour. First, reports on tragedies such as Kennedy’s assassination are invariably preceded and followed by totally unrelated programming, or what Davies terms the ‘rubbish’ of modern television. This jarring of totally serious news and harmless entertainment serves to complicate the normal human emotions of empathy and sympathy. Second, television portrays fictionalised accounts of disasters alongside real-life occurrences, making it more difficult for viewers to extract fact from fiction on a subconscious level. Finally, the viewer does not actually personally experience the tragedy in question, affecting their ability to take it seriously, and allowing for cynical or comedic reactions instead.\textsuperscript{132}

Davies’s theory is even more pertinent to the technological climate of today. Increasingly, people are constantly connected to the Internet, receiving a constant stream of content ranging from the heartbreakingly tragic to the hilariously absurd, all in the time it takes to click on another hyperlink. For trolls, the resulting emotional detachment from real-world events couples with the lack of repercussions afforded by anonymity within CMC-facilitated networks to make any topic, no matter how controversial, exploitable in the pursuit of lulz. This analysis thus comes full circle, with an explanation of how trolls feel able to use such offensive language, and shocking images of pornography and gore in their exploits among CMC-facilitated social networks: emotional detachment emanating from the technologically-dominated culture of today. This is by no means a justification of such behaviour; it is, however, a further account of how trolling represents the founding principles of social networks examined here pushed to their extremes.

Trolling, on the surface so different from the behaviours, principles, and themes accounted for in the medieval case studies, is in fact a network behaviour built upon many of the foundations seen in them. These foundations, however, are pushed to extreme ends of the sociological and anthropological spectra by trolls: the motivational benefits of cultural capital and competitive play are intensified, attitudes


\textsuperscript{132} Ibid, pp. 24-6.
toward network structure and accessibility are defined without any regard for the uninitiated, and the modern cultural space influences – here negatively – the practice of trolling more directly than anything seen in the medieval examples. While they are exaggerated, distorted, and pushed to their extremes, this study of trolling has provided further evidence that there are indeed governing principles across the social networks of the later medieval and modern periods under examination.
Conclusion

Salués moy toute la compagnie
Ou a present estez a chiere lye
Et leur dites que voulentiés seroye
Avecques eulx, mais estre n’y pourroye
Pour Viellesse qui m’a en sa ballie.¹

(Give my greetings to all the company you’re among at present with good cheer, and tell them I would willingly be with them, but I cannot because of Old Age, who rules me.)

When Charles d’Orléans finally returned to France after twenty-five years as a political prisoner in England he had among his possessions a bundle of loose quires, containing a collection of the French poetic compositions on which he had worked during his absence. Commissioned by Charles back in England when it had become apparent that negotiations around his release were making significant progress, this assortment of his personal rondeaux, ballades, chansons, complaints, and caroles would take on an extraordinary social life of its own once he had reintegrated himself into the courtly and literary circles of Blois. Over the subsequent twenty-five years until Charles’s death in 1465, not only did the poet-Duke add more and more of his own compositions to the manuscript, he also allowed members of his household, his family, his friends, and his literary peers to enter their own works into its vellum pages. Such was the scope of this literary venture that at least twice across the period Charles had to purchase extra parchment to create space for new poetic entries. The resulting 299-leaf manuscript stands testament to the active, enthusiastic, and constantly evolving artistic and social ties the Duke enjoyed once back at Blois; many of the contributors’ compositions are in dialogue with one another, while other groups of text are all built

around a particular theme or shared line. This manuscript collection (now BnF MS. fr. 25458) not only indicates some of the social networks of which Charles was a node upon returning to his homeland, but also embodies many of the continuities which comprise a social network continuum from the late medieval period to the present day.

As a cultural artefact, Charles’s personal manuscript served as a forum that facilitated, fostered, and also displayed the collaborative output of the informal networks to which the Duke belonged. In this way, it differs from the evidence studied across the previous chapters. Here, the tangible output which survives is evidence of other, more primary networks, as opposed to being the creation of a periphery network established solely to collaborate on that tangible output. For instance, whereas the London Puy was founded primarily to produce chansons, the verses contained in Charles’s manuscript are the result of playful interaction between the nodes of pre-existing social networks. Accordingly, there are contributions from noblemen (such as Jean duc de Bourbon and René d’Anjou) with whom Charles had ties through his courtly activities, alongside pieces by vocational authors (including François Villon and Georges Chastelain) with whom Charles enjoyed more social connections. The present manuscript thus not only bears witness to the existence of these networks of relationships, but also, in recording some of their ludic literary activities, offers valuable insights into their operations. Unsurprisingly, many of the principles at work in these network operations are strikingly familiar.

The literary content of the manuscript repeatedly reveals the kind of competitive and collaborative play witnessed most clearly in chapter two among the nodes of the informal network around Louis XII. One oft-studied poetic sequence in the collection is a series of ballades beginning with the line: ‘Je meurs de soif auprès de la fontaine’.
which saw Charles’s personal acquaintances (including his doctor, Jehan Caillau) and established poets (such as the Bourbon court’s Montbeton) alike contribute pieces. Each author sought to outdo his fellows in terms of style and originality in his bid to write the best piece possible in this competitive literary and social diversion. There was also, of course, a considerable amount of cultural capital and social reputation on offer for those who were permitted to enter their pieces into Charles’s manuscript. The physical inscription of their poetry into the collection symbolised their wider presence in the less tangible web of intertwining connections which made up some of the most esteemed courtly and literary networks of fifteenth-century France. Furthermore, participation in these competitive literary enterprises and the continued preservation of that participation in the physical record of the manuscript fulfilled the two primary aspects of the need to belong: pleasant, repeated interaction with others, and a belief that this interaction would continue into perpetuity.

In many ways, Charles’s personal manuscript and the ‘sea of poetic chaos’ (to borrow Taylor’s term) with which more than forty contributors filled it are comparable as a medium to modern-day online discussion forums. Taylor has convincingly demonstrated that the collection was readily available for consultation by curious poets and courtiers at Blois, who could then engage with the ongoing dialogues found within its pages in their own compositions. In a similar way, members of networks frequenting particular online forums and discussion boards are presented with a comprehensive record of the discussions, debates, and dialogues, both historical and ongoing, which have played out there. Microblogging platform Tumblr is a prominent example here, as nodes can explicitly copy previous comments into their own responses, creating a direct conversation, or respond more generally to the topics of discussion considered in the thread. Information, ideas, and elements of competition flow through the posts of these forums in the same way they do through the hands of Charles’s manuscript. Both serve

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7 Ibid., p. 106.
as consultable records of their respective social networks: a visible reminder to the
world that these groupings existed, and that they thrived on interaction and exchange.

A defined continuum between the medieval and the modern?

It is exactly this kind of critical discussion around social networks and their
natures that this thesis intended to deliver. Its specific aims were twofold: first, to
explore how far it could be asserted that there is a continuum between medieval and
modern social networks, in both their fundamental appeals and operational structures,
and second, to establish a new methodological approach which examines historical
moments through the theoretical lens of ‘social network’. Through such an analysis of
the evidence gathered across the preceding chapters, while an argument for continuity
between networks of the two periods has been made, so a variety of secondary
observations on the fundamental notion of ‘social network’ itself have been noted.

The strongest aspect of continuum between networks of the two periods relates
to the motivations behind individuals joining them. Predictably, considering they are
social structures built around relationships that facilitate exchange and interaction,
forming networks is a fundamental means of satisfying the human need to belong. The
medieval networks studied in particular suggest an inherent human desire not only to
enjoy amicable social bonds which have the potential to continue into the foreseeable
future, but also to have some sense of omnipresent connection to such networks. In this
way, members of the London Puy could always be reached by the clerk, and vice
versa;\(^9\) the idealised networks of the flower and leaf involved the security of a year-long
membership period, extending the belonging aspect far beyond the initial moment of the
networks’ conceptions;\(^10\) and Charles d’Orléans’s collaborative manuscript collection
was constantly available for consultation and inspiration.

Slightly more unexpectedly, two further socio-anthropological benefits that
networks offer – the facilitation of competitive play and provision of cultural capital or
social reputation – have proven to be just as enduring as the satisfaction of the socio-

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\(^9\) Horn, *Munimenta Gildhallae Londoniensis*, p. 221.
\(^10\) *The Floure and the Leafe and The Assembly of Ladies*, ed. by D. A. Pearsall (London: Thomas Nelson
psychological need to belong. That ludic competition attracted members into joining the networks studied here is undeniable. In an explicit sense, many of these networks were built around games of skill, or what Caillois would term *agôn*.\(^{11}\) The annual festival of the Puy pitted members against one another in a bid to compose the best *chanson* of the year, while the *Cour Amoureuse* was to hold even more regular contests on this theme, and produced a comprehensive set of regulations to ensure they progressed correctly.\(^{12}\) Where the networks studied have not had their foundations in structured games, a more nuanced form of competitive play has permeated them: for example, the authors writing in support of Louis XII each sought to create an epistle which played on the themes and imagery deployed by those before them, but in a technically superior manner, while the loose networks of trolls studied in modern CMC-facilitated networks were shown to thrive on an enthusiasm for antagonistic one-upmanship.\(^{13}\)

In a similar manner, social networks across the two periods present their members with various means of acquiring cultural capital and building an associated sense of social reputation. In the earlier instances, this accruable capital and reputation tended to have some form of influence outside of the specific network in which it was acquired. The sixteenth-century writers examined in chapter two, for example, were symptomatic of many informal literary networks of the period, in which vocational poets won capital through the positive recognition of their peers and highly-placed potential patrons, and used their resulting social reputation and influence to attract further, more prestigious work.\(^{14}\) The Kit-Cat club of the early 1700s likewise offered inexperienced but talented writers the means to amass capital and forge connections with political patrons, while also boosting the reputation of those very patrons in their own social

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\(^{12}\) *La Cour amoureuse, dite de Charles VI*, ed. by Carla Bozzolo and Hélène Loyau, 3 vols (Paris: Léopard d'or, 1982-92), I.

\(^{13}\) See, for instance, my discussion of the *Battletoads* trolling incident in chapter four; ‘*Battletoads Preorder*’ *Know Your Meme* (2009), <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/battletoads-preorder> [accessed 27 September 2015].

\(^{14}\) Jean Lemaire de Belges provides a useful case study of such vocational progression, on whom see: Kathleen Miriam Munn, *A contribution to the study of Jean Lemaire de Belges* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1975).
circles through their association with the next generation of great writers. The CMC-facilitated networks of today promote the importance of a different type of capital and reputation, one which has far less value in the world outside the networks which generate it. As the discussion in chapter four reveals, social networks that form within formalised sites such as Instagram and Twitter encourage the association of capital with particular cultural items or ideas, and recognise users for their possession and assimilation of these trends. The cultural capital these users subsequently possess is only recognised within those networks, however; it is not transferable into the node’s offline social networks. This desire for cultural capital for its own sake, and a similarly restricted kind of social reputation, is one of the most notable disruptions among these motivations which are otherwise equally applicable to both medieval and modern networks.

Developing this point, the greatest discrepancies between the motivations for joining social networks of the two periods under study are grounded in the technology used to facilitate them. In some ways, the openness and ease of access to CMC technologies today enables network behaviours which would have been impossible in the medieval period. The practice of trolling considered in chapter four is one of the strongest and most salient examples of this. With users able to maintain their anonymity within a network behind a faceless avatar, trolls feel able to disrupt the activities of unsuspecting networks using a range of antagonistic and damaging tactics which break all manner of accepted social norms. Both this practice of trolling and the new approach to cultural capital considered above are unrecognisable in custom from the evidence studied from the medieval period. That said, the motivations behind them (enthusiasm for competitive play and desire to be recognised respectively) are in fact extreme manifestations of some of the fundamental motivations for engaging with social networks. While there are undeniably disruptions in some aspects of the motivations considered, then, overall the evidence indicates a relatively stable continuum of

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16 On the importance of anonymity for trolling, see: Whitney Phillips, This Is Why We Can’t Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), pp. 53-5.
perceived benefits to social network membership from the late medieval period to the present day.

This question of advances in technology also feeds into another discussion around the ways in which social networks reflect the cultural spaces in which they develop. Christie Davies’s theory on the jarring manner in which modern technology distributes serious new stories in the same virtual space as more absurd and frivolous entertainments helps explain, to a degree, the practice of trolling a network with content considered highly distasteful, for instance. In other cases, networks are formed more explicitly as responses or reactions to their cultural surroundings. The Kit-Cat club, while at its heart a social drinking club (a notably fashionable practice of the period), sought more broadly to rectify the perceived artistic drought plaguing its country at the time. In other examples, contemporary cultural trends are assimilated into network practice more subtly. As discussed in chapter one, the London Puy was established not only in imitation of the continental puys seen to be so beneficial to their wider communities, but also in a cultural urban climate which was beginning to recognise the benefits of economic and social guild structures. The writers grouped around the French court in the early sixteenth century integrated cultural fashions not into the structuring of their informal network, but instead into their productive output. In this way, the popular epistle form was used as a frame for their literary works, which were themselves populated with equally current narrative themes, including Greek heroic imagery. Whether it be in moulding the structure of the network, in shaping its wider agendas and aims, or in permeating its practices, it is rare that the cultural space within which a social network takes shape does not have some influence on its composition.

While networks are in part reflections of their respective cultural spaces, it has also been noted that the examples considered across this thesis have been, more

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18 Field, Kit-Cat Club, pp. 45-6.
through evidence availability than any form of intentional orchestration, somewhat peripheral in nature. Studying networks which have thus not been their members’ primary or even secondary associational forms has revealed both methodological and theoretical findings. Primarily, it serves to remind the critical observer that any given network can only ever account partially for an individual’s wider activities and experiences in the world. For example, while the five poets studied in chapter two formed an informal network which at that historical moment served as a platform to hone their skills and attract the attention of a particular patron, as a structure it could not have offered the levels of support and resources that their wider professional and kin-based networks did.\textsuperscript{21} Participation in these more ephemeral networks, then, are evidence of a particular kind of human activity. In the most basic sense they further support the argument for an underlying enthusiasm for social networking present across most societies, as hypothesised throughout the present work. More practically, they represent an opportunity to strengthen bonds formed in other settings. As an illustration, if the \textit{Cour Amoureuse} network ever formed as its statutes anticipated, its nodes (as identified by the supposed membership lists which survive) would all have known one another from their regular courtly activities, and would have had the opportunity to solidify these social ties into something deeper through competitive literary play.\textsuperscript{22} Finally, as discussed most prominently in chapter three, the so-called ‘weak ties’ generated by these fringe networks are in fact, sociologically speaking, of more use to a node when they need something outside of their primary spheres of activity.\textsuperscript{23} If an individual cannot acquire the resource they need from their usual, core networks, it is important that they at least have some degree of connectedness which links them to other nodes outside of these circles. It is through these peripheral network structures that such vital ties are formed. The activities of the examples studied here thus help to demonstrate the social significance of these more peripheral kinds of network in societies.

\textsuperscript{21} On the importance of support from primary networks, see: Mary E. Procidano and Kenneth Heller, ‘Measures of perceived social support from friends and from family: Three validation studies’, \textit{American Journal of Community Psychology} 11 (1983), 1-24.


\textsuperscript{23} Mark S. Granovetter, ‘The Strength of Weak Ties’, \textit{American Journal of Sociology} 78 (1973), 1360-80.
While the formation of such ties, both strong and weak, is a fundamental aspect to social networking, the process of initiation into a network has been seen to be even more significant. In both the medieval and modern examples examined, two particular kinds of initiation have been evidenced, and they correlate to the type of network into which a node is integrating. Formal networks, and often the virtual networks which emulate their arrangements, present a highly structured means of initiation. Between the two periods comparable practices of swearing oaths to adhere to strict sets of statutes and regulations, and agreeing to lengthy terms and conditions contracts are required of potential new members to networks. In more informal structures, a subtler kind of initiation is often employed; as opposed to enforced legalistic promises, initiation is quietly achieved when existing members acknowledge a new node’s presence as validated. For instance, in the late medieval poetry circles considered in the second chapter, intertextual references to other poets’ works symbolised successful initiations into various informal networks.

This concept of initiation can be taken a step further, since one of the ultimate goals of network membership appears to be a deeper process of fusing one’s own identity with that of the network in question. Repeatedly it has been seen that networks are prone to sculpting their communal identities in response to an ‘other’ of some kind: the Kit-Cat Club versus the Tory government, Anonymous versus Fox News, the Flower versus the Leaf. The desire to display affiliation with this new network identity explicitly is another preferable practice facilitated by many of these networks: for instance, as the London Puy’s company rode through town in procession after their annual feast, and medieval chivalric orders proudly wore liveries and emblems which identified them as a unified network to the uninitiated. The concept of initiation, whether it be formalised or more organic, thus symbolises both personal admittance into a network, and also a deeper, revered sense of shared identity, relatable again to the omnipresent human need to belong. When these principles of initiation are flaunted, disharmony and

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24 For a definitive study of this kind of poetics, see: Adrian Armstrong, The Virtuoso Circle: Competition, Collaboration, and Complexity in Late Medieval French Poetry (Tempe (Arizona): ACMRS, 2012).
disruption are suddenly able to permeate the various levels of a network, as evidenced most dramatically by trolls, and the online fallout from their disregard for pre-ordained rituals of initiation.

The final overarching conclusion which can be drawn from the preceding analysis relates to my three categories of network, and the balance (or lack thereof) which they respectively strike between the demands placed on their members and the ultimate payoffs subsequently available to them. The formal, informal, and virtual classifications introduced in the introduction were initially intended to provide a coherent and comparable means with which to discuss the wide range of network structures to be considered in this thesis. However, through close analysis of primary evidence, it has become clear that there are notable advantages to some types of network over others when it comes to their potential sustainability. For while it has been demonstrated that individuals are generally predisposed to seek out social networks and their associated benefits, this is not a case of blind commitment to the cause. A social network must ultimately offer enough of a payoff (the specifics of which vary from network to network) which its nodes feel match the demands placed upon them by membership. There is always, thus, a universal tendency for networks to fracture, and it is to a certain extent the class of each individual network that helps determine whether it succumbs or not. Formal networks are the most susceptible to this downfall. As was demonstrated by the London Puy’s failure to offer a satisfying payoff for the heavy economic and social investments it demanded, these externally-established and rigid structures are not best positioned to react to their nodes’ needs and desires. Informal networks, predominantly developing organically at the hands of those who will go on to populate them, have the advantage of fluidity here, allowing them to respond efficiently and appropriately to their nodes’ needs in a less pressurised environment. The differing periods of time between production of the poems studied in chapter two provides a quantitative example of this flexibility. Virtual networks are similarly resilient to fracturing, since they are more

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26 As previously outlined, three months passed between the composition of the first and second epistles, with another four until the third. Half a year then elapsed before the fourth composition was penned, with around another five months until the last. The poets were not subject to strict time-sensitive targets, and could thus compose works that reacted organically and more effectively to the ongoing quarrel between Louis and Julius.
idealised iterations of how a network ‘should’ operate. The flower and leaf networks accordingly strip membership demands back to their simplest form (one initial meeting and the holding of a particular camp for the ensuing year), while offering the maximum payoff (sustained playful interaction and exchange devoid of economic demands).

Social networks present an enduring attraction to individuals: that much is undeniable. That is not to say, however, that they are universally successful in satisfying their members: if the demands placed on nodes are not vindicated by a sufficient payoff of some kind, the network is far more at risk from internal fracture, and eventual failure.

Where next?

This analytical evidence on the nature of social networks as structures of human societies is complemented by the advantages offered by the new methodological approach proposed by the thesis. By making the notion of ‘social network’ the primary investigative lens, and building up a research framework around it that draws on practices from social psychology and anthropology, alongside more traditional historical and literary analysis, a critically sympathetic and nuanced reading of the sources consulted has been possible. This has allowed new interpretations to be proposed of the historical moments, cultures, and phenomena that make up my case studies. The reasons for which the London Puy fractured, the potential reality of a courtly game based around imagery of flower and leaf, and the evaluation of modern-day trolling as an antagonistic exaggeration of behaviours common in wider society: all have emerged through an examination of primary evidence that places the principles of network at its forefront. This methodology is thus highly compatible with approaches deployed in other disciplines. Several aspects of my own research have negotiated with work done by scholars in a variety of disciplines: to take some prominent examples, the socio-literary readings of late medieval French poetry pioneered by Taylor, Armstrong, and Cayley; the argument for medieval agency championed by twentieth-century political historians of medieval England including Carpenter; and the socio-psychological hypothesis for the human need to belong proposed by researchers such as Baumeister and Leary. My interdisciplinary approach, therefore, while presenting its own findings, also contributes to a range of ongoing scholarly discussions in a variety of fields.
That being the case, this kind of analysis opens several avenues for future research which have the potential for fruitful exploration. The most natural extension of this work would be to apply the analytical framework to other examples of network. As was asserted in the introduction, due to the practical limitations inherent to a work of this length, this thesis was never intended to be a comprehensive study of all social networks in my two chosen time periods, instead serving as a selection of case studies from which evidence for more insightful, overarching arguments could be formulated. The scope of this study could be expanded in three key ways: first, similar networks from different geographic locations across the two periods (more Eastern medieval societies would perhaps provide an enlightening counterpoint) could be considered to qualify the conclusions drawn further. Next, an exploration of networks of a different nature (for instance, solely political, economic, or religious) would prove illuminating on just how transferable the continuum is not only across geographic boundaries, but also between groups with very different primary preoccupations. Finally, case studies drawn from the period before my medieval iterations, and also the interim centuries running up to the modern-day examples, could further extend the reach of this research. If such research were to be undertaken, it would provide an opportunity not only to refine the wider discussion around the continuities and disruptions of social network practice across the centuries, but also to re-examine manifold historical sources in a new light.

From the outset, this thesis has sought evidence for three select perceived benefits to social network membership: satisfaction of the need to belong, facilitation of competitive play, and the provision of cultural capital. Evidence permitting, it would be beneficial to broaden this discussion, and consider what other motivations individuals had for joining social networks, both medieval and modern. This may be more feasible for more recent social networks which are often accompanied by fuller records, but where uncharacteristically large bodies of consultable evidence survive for the medieval period this would undoubtedly be a beneficial enterprise. A closer examination of how existing social ties encourage entry into new social networks (a consideration made at points in chapters two and four which would benefit from further evidence-based analysis), an exploration of the influence of family and peer pressures, and the introduction of other variables which scholars in other fields may recognise as important...
to such processes would all enhance our understanding of the complexities of network membership.

Regarding the evidence analysed over the preceding four chapters, there are also ways in which it could itself be developed. I restricted my work in chapter two to a focused study of the five poets who wrote in support of Louis XII's particular quarrel with Julius II. As noted, however, these poets were part of a far larger and richer tapestry of networks, both professional and personal, at the time. An attempt to chart these wider networks in more detail, with all their intricacies and intertwined relationship ties, would provide an even more useful glimpse into the social life of this group of vocational poets. The most promising means of achieving this strikes me as constructing the ego-net of one of the figures (for instance, Jean d'Auton, given his historical and literary prominence), and extending it outward to incorporate the sub-networks of his own connections. In a similar vein, it would be constructive to cultivate the various discussions around social networks as shaping themselves against an 'other' of some kind into a wider consideration of how networks as social structures interact with one another. A principle distilled to its purest form in the associated but oppositional networks of the flower and the leaf, an investigation into how networks engage with and react against one another would add a compelling dimension to the wider understanding of them as social structures populated by individual nodes who have all adopted a form of shared identity.

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Social networks can, in many ways, be paradoxes. Universal yet never identical, individual yet communal, exclusive yet omnipresent. Echoing one last time the ideas of Simmel, wherever there are human beings living together, there will be social networks. This thesis has provided but a snapshot of these social structures from the late medieval and modern periods. Their variety is matched only by the scale of their complexities, and yet a sense of continuum has been found threading them together, linking them as if in their own macro-network. Technologies have altered, and there are undeniably elements of considerable disruption in the story of the social network across the centuries, but, in certain ways explored here, they can be seen forming according to
the same core principles, offering the same benefits to their members, and succeeding or failing by the same standards.

The quoted *rondeau* which opens this chapter is, be it by design or chance, the final one to appear in Charles d’Orléans’s personal manuscript, and is penned by the Duke himself. Writing as if at the end of his days, separated from the cultural artefact and the networks which created it, he laments his absence from those social groupings which have brought him so much joy over the years of his life, thrice repeating the opening line ‘give my greetings to all the company’. In this brief piece, tucked away unassumingly in the final quire of the manuscript, Charles highlights the enduring appeal of social networks. These ubiquitous structures are not painted as necessary, forced, or obligatory; rather, they are treasured memories, a fond source of enjoyment and ‘bon temps’. The narrator of this final rondeau, isolated from his once ‘pleasant life’ and its social exchanges by ‘Old Age’, discloses his anxiety of definitive disconnection from his social networks. The innate attraction of network membership, and the associational bonds that it fosters, thus appears to be down to a strong social desire for compassionate and benevolent participation, as much as the psychological drive toward belonging and exchange.

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Appendix A: Proof-of-Content Prototype

The proof-of-concept prototype which accompanies this thesis represents the first steps toward a fresh way of experiencing cultural spaces. It combines Google’s new spatial perception initiative Project Tango, which is still in a pre-release developmental stage, with the technology behind binaural audio. Based around a room in the National Portrait Gallery that houses Sir Godfrey Kneller’s Kit-Cat Club portraits, the prototype provides a kind of audio play, with each actor’s voice sounding as though it is emanating from the position of their character’s portrait in the physical space. The Tango technology means that the user does not have to remain in one place for this effect to work; as they move around the room, the Tango orientates itself with them, and adjusts the sound’s perceived origin point accordingly.

The Technology

The main technology behind this prototype is Google’s Project Tango, an Android tablet enhanced with three specialised depth perception cameras that allow the device to detect its position in the world around it. This means the device is not dependent on traditional external positioning processes such as GPS, which are far less accurate. Accordingly, the key uses for the tablet include precise indoor navigation, 3D mapping and accurate measurement of physical spaces and objects, and subsequent recognition of those learned environments. As a user moves through a space with the Tango, the device tracks every movement: it records which way it is facing and exactly how far it has moved, and using its cameras the tablet is aware of the physical presences of the environment such as walls, floor, and ceiling. At its heart, then, the Tango is a precision
positioning device which is constantly and acutely aware of its location in the physical world.

Binaural sound is a means of playing back audio content that creates a 3D stereo sound sensation for the listener, making them feel as though the noise is coming from discernible locations within the room they are in, as opposed to just through a pair of headphones. Traditionally, this technique requires the listener to remain in one position to enjoy the most realistic effect of a binaural recording. By creating this prototype with the Google Tango technology, however, the user is able to move around a space and still get the effect of fixed audio points. For instance, if a sound is seemingly coming from the left of a listener, and they turn 180 degrees, the sound will then appear to be originating from their right, as it would if it were actually being made in a fixed point in the room.

These two concepts were combined using the design software Unity. Predominantly used as a platform for video game design, Unity also functions as a 3D environment builder. Through add-ons known as SDKs (software development kits) Unity is compatible with both the Google Tango device and binaural sound.

The Prototype

Although the proof-of-concept prototype is based on a room in the National Gallery, because of the amount of time I needed to spend working in the physical space in which the prototype would ultimately be used, the design is actually that of Antenna’s conference room at their London offices. Using Unity, I first built a to-scale virtual copy of the conference room. Within that virtual room I then placed audio sources in positions
that corresponded to replica portraits placed around the real conference room. After a
creative brainstorm with Antenna colleagues I drafted a rough script which we then
informally recorded: for a proof-of-concept prototype it was more important that the
technology worked than the content be polished. I edited the recording into separate
audio files for each character, and then imported each of these four character’s audio
files into the audio sources positioned in Unity.

Using a spatial trigger, I finally coded the prototype so that the audio content
launches when the user gets to a particular location in the room. Once they are in place,
the audio play begins, which each character sounding as if they are speaking from a
different part of the room, indicated in the real world by the replica portraits attached to
the walls. The Tango technology then allows the user to walk freely around the room
with the device, and the virtual copy of the room constantly orientates itself to match the
user’s actual position, thus ensuring that the respective voices always sound as though
they are coming from the same fixed points in the real room. Although there is a visual
representation of the room on the screen of the Tango tablet, the prototype is ultimately
envisaged as being an audio-only experience. That is to say, when a visitor enters the
room, their attention should wholly be given to the actual paintings, and their progress
guided subtly by the progression of the audio play around the room.

The Future

There are two main avenues for development that I propose for this proof-of-
concept prototype. The first lies down the path already set out upon: using the Tango as
a facilitator for new, innovative ways to experience cultural spaces. Giving voices to
particular artworks as here is only one way in which this technology could be exploited.
In more open plan spaces such as museums or heritage sites, the audio provided could be more akin to a continuous soundscape, with different objects emanating their own sounds, which get louder as the visitor approaches, and maybe trigger more specific content once they are in close proximity. The various animal-dominated rooms of the Natural History Museum strike me as a particularly strong potential testing ground for such immersive experiences, which would likely prove particularly appealing to younger audiences.

The second way to develop this technology lies more in the academic sphere. Virtual spaces created in Unity, such as that of the conference room in the present prototype, do not require Google Tango technology to explore. They can be loaded onto any mobile device, and the complex movement algorithms provided by Tango replaced by a simpler point and move system, facilitated by the device’s gyroscope and an on screen ‘move forward’ button. This suggests the potential for a kind of virtual exhibition space, an accompaniment to traditional scholarly output wherein users can look around a room ‘filled’ with items relevant to a particular study. To take this thesis as an example, I could create a virtual space and populate it with items relevant to chapter two: manuscript extracts of the heroic epistles studied, recordings of them spoken in the original Middle French, woodcuts of the authors, and portraits of Louis and Ann, for instance. This virtual exhibition could then be downloaded to any Android device and would allow users to engage with the primary material in a deeper and more personal way than through reading scholarly analysis in isolation.
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