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The Interplay of Language and Music in Machaut's Virelai 'Foy Porter'

Phyllis Brown
Santa Clara University, pbrown@scu.edu

William Peter Mahrt

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Scarcely anywhere else in the repertory of lyric poetry is the identity of the poet and the composer quite as apparent as in the works of Guillaume de Machaut, the foremost French poet and musician of the fourteenth century (d1377). His works with music should be approached confidently as integral lyrics, as composite works of poetry and music, because he wrote about the process of providing music for poetry and writing texts to be set to music. Furthermore, he specified the sequence of his own compositions – narrative and lyrical, poetical and musical – all in a single book.

Of the lyric genres in which he wrote, the virelai provides an ideal starting point for the study of the integration of poetry and music. Since most of his virelais are monophonic – set only to a single unaccompanied melody – the direct relationship between language and music affords the opportunity for close reading. The virelai ‘Foy porter’ in particular illustrates Machaut’s ability to write poetry and music that intensify one another. Furthermore, ‘Foy porter’ illustrates Machaut’s exploitation of both poetic and musical conventions, such that they reveal his virtuoso control and playfulness.

Machaut’s lyric works have rarely been studied from precisely this point of view, though Enders has advocated such study. Indeed, until recently his lyric poetry has fared poorly, in comparison to that of Petrarch, an almost exact contemporary. Because courtly poetry in short


3 See the discussion of playfulness in the formes fixes of Machaut and his 15th-century successors in Leonard Johnson, Poets as Players: Theme and Variation in Late Medieval French Poetry (Stanford University Press, Stanford 1990).

4 If critics have long divided the medieval lyric corpus into discrete musical and poetic components, recent studies have shown the importance of reuniting those two elements of the ancient Greek mousikē. Jody Enders, ‘Music, Delivery, and the Rhetoric of Memory in Guillaume de Machaut’s Remède de Fortune’, PMLA 20 (1992) p 450.
refrain-forms like the virelai has not had the popularity over the years accorded to sonnets, and because love poetry in our time has abandoned many medieval conventions, Machaut's lyrics are certainly less well known and perhaps less immediately accessible. Johnson describes the modern difficulty:

Just as the variations and evolution of the *formes fixes*, out of context, may be difficult for modern readers to perceive, so the variation—and, to some extent, the evolution—found in the subject matter of these forms may seem imperceptible or unimportant, hackneyed and impersonal, accustomed as we are to the altogether more obvious effects of the emotional shock prescribed by the Romantics.⁵

Machaut was revered by Chaucer and French poets such as Deschamps, Froissart, Christine de Pizan, and Villon, but until relatively recently his literary output has been valued more for its effect on later poets than for its own merit, and his lyrics have even been disparaged by scholars, critics, and literary historians.⁶ More recently, however, Machaut's narrative verse has received considerable attention and praise,⁷ and even the lyrics are beginning to be re-evaluated as well. Poirion has elevated their status in his monumental study *Le poète et le prince*:

Machaut représente à la fois un aboutissement et un début, parce que son oeuvre conduit la tradition lyrique à une perfection formelle et une netteté doctrinale encore inégalées.⁸

Patterson had hypothesized that modern readers were prevented by their own shortcomings from appreciating Machaut's verse as his contemporaries did:

⁵ Johnson p 38.
⁶ Warner Forrest Patterson, for instance, concedes that some of Machaut's 'compositions do not lack merit', but he finds the 'besetting faults of prosiness and prolixity ... vexatious'. *Three Centuries of French Poetic Theory: A Critical History of the Chief Arts of Poetry in France (1328–1630)* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1935) p 76.
⁷ For example, see William Calin, *A Poet at the Fountain: Essays on the Narrative Verse of Guillaume de Machaut* (University of Kentucky Press, Lexington 1974).
⁸ Machaut represents at the same time a conclusion and a beginning, since his work brings the lyric tradition to a formal perfection and a doctrinal nicety as yet unequaled. Daniel Poirion, *Le poète et le prince* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1965; repr., Slatkine Reprints, Geneva 1978) p 192.
Without a knowledge of the exact pronunciation of the words of the French language in that period, a moment when its harmony was widely praised, and without a knowledge of the musical settings in a time when French vocal music was so influential, a just aesthetic judgment of this poetry is scarcely possible.  

Johnson now advocates learning, or at least approximating, the exact pronunciation of the period and provides a description of six major differences between Middle French pronunciation and Modern French pronunciation. Furthermore, the music is now available in modern editions, and musicians are becoming accustomed to period pronunciation.

Machaut’s music has fared somewhat differently from the poetry, especially the polyphonic music, which could be studied as abstract music – an approach consistent with the received nineteenth-century aesthetic. A prejudice remained, however, against the monophonic works, and in particular against a close relation of music and text. An extreme case was the Oxford History of Music (1901–5), whose first volume, covering the years 330–1330, made no mention of the enormous repertory of the troubadours or trouvères, though it gave a largely accurate history of the development of polyphony. The first secular compositions mentioned are the polyphonic rondeaux of Adam de la Halle (late thirteenth century); the author is quite disappointed that they are not rondels at all, but simple three-part songs, containing no interchange of melodies whatever, and no imitation except such as occurs within the limits of each separate part.

For Wooldridge, Machaut had abandoned a close relation of text to music:

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9 Patterson pp 89-90.
10 Johnson pp 23-4.
11 The Works of Guillaume de Machaut, ed Leo Schrade, Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century 2–3 (Éditions de L’Oiseau-Lyre, Monaco 1956) and Guillaume de Machaut, Musikalische Werke, ed Friedrich Ludwig (Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig 1926–54) provide words and music for Machaut’s lyric poetry.
the poetic rhythm and its syllabic application to the words, which govern the whole of De la Hale’s composition, have been abandoned by Machault, who indeed recognizes no formal connexion at all between words and music, beyond that which is created by the coming together of the voices in a distinct close at each *caesura* and at the end of each line.\(^\text{14}\)

Reaney, in the new edition of the same history (1960) pronounced Machaut’s work ‘highly conventional poetry, which has little interest for the modern reader apart from the beauty of sound which makes it ideal for musical settings’.\(^\text{15}\)

A close relation of music to text is often denied outright. In an extensive analysis of a polyphonic rondeau, Leech-Wilkinson draws the inference that ‘musical form operated, to a large extent, independently of textual association’.\(^\text{16}\) Indeed, although literary critics know it must be there to be found, one searches the musicological literature in vain for concrete instances of intimate relations between music and text.\(^\text{17}\)


\(^{15}\) Gilbert Reaney, *‘Ars nova in France’, Ars Nova and the Renaissance*, ed Dom Anselm Hughes and Gerald Abraham, *New Oxford History of Music* 4 (Oxford University Press, London 1960) p 15. Under the rubric ‘Machaut’s Secular Polyphony’ Reaney compares a monophonic virelai of Machaut with a polyphonic rondeau: ‘If we contrast this simple melody [the virelai] with the florid one [the polyphonic rondeau] with its melodic-rhythmic motives which unify the piece in a successful, if somewhat artificial manner, we may be forgiven for preferring the [rondeau]’ (p 27). More recently, Nigel Wilkins in discussing the virelais, opined that their ‘simplicity of style is no doubt a reflection of the usual level of the subject matter of Virelai texts, which are normally amorous ditties with no claims to the type of erudition encountered in the Ballade.’ Nigel Wilkins, *Music in the Age of Chaucer, Chaucer Studies* 1 (D.S. Brewer, Cambridge 1979) p 20.


Language and Music in Machaut's 'Foy Porter'

In 'Foy porter', Machaut's music is wedded intimately to his text; it specifies, clarifies, and emphasizes grammatical, syntactical, semantic, and affective aspects of the poetry, in particular 1) the precise durations of the syllables and lines, 2) the differences between the lines, both in their rhymes and in the grammar and rhetoric by which the lines are related to each other, 3) the stanzaic structure of the complete poem, and 4) its overall character and motion.
Foy porter,  
Honneur garder  
Et pais querir,  
Oubeir,  
Doubter, servir  
Et honnourer  
Vous vueil jusques au morir,  
Dame sans per.

Car tant vous aim, sans mentir,  
Qu’on porroit avant tarir  
La haute mer  
Et ses ondes retenir  
Que me puisse alentir  
De vous amer,  
Sans fausser;  
Car mi penser,  
Mi souvenir,  
Mi plaisir  
Et mi desir  
Sont sans finer  
En vous que ne puis guerpir  
N’entroublier.  
Foy porter etc.

Il n’est joie ne joir  
N’autre bien qu’on puist sentir  
N’imaginer  
Qui ne me samble languir,  
Quant vo douceur adoucir  
Vuet mon amer.  
Dont loer  
Et aurer  
Et vous cremir,  
Tout souffrir,  
Tout conjoir,  
Tout endurer  
Vueil plus que je ne desir  
Guerredonner.  
Foy porter etc.

I want to bear faith,  
guard honor  
and seek peace,  
obey,  
fear, serve,  
and honor you  
all the way to death,  
Lady without peer.

For I love you so, without  
lying,  
that one could empty  
the high sea  
and hold back its waves  
before I would slow down  
my love for you,  
without falsifying;  
for my thoughts,  
my memories,  
my pleasure,  
and my desire  
are endlessly in you,  
whom I am not able to leave  
or forget.
I want to bear faith . . .

There is no joy, no pleasure  
nor any other good that one  
might feel or imagine  
which does not seem to me to  
dissipate when your sweetness  
wants to soften my bitterness.  
Thus I want to praise  
and worship  
and fear you,  
suffer anything,  
welcome all,  
endure all,  
more than I desire  
any reward.  
I want to bear faith . . .
Language and music in Machaut’s ‘Foy Porter’

Vous estes le vray saphir
Qui puet tous mes maus garir
Et terminer,
Esmeraude a resjoîr,
Rubis pour cuers esclarcir
Et conforter.
   Vo parler,
   Vo regarder,
   Vo maintenir
   Font fuir
   Et enhair
   Et despiter
Tout vice et tout bien cherir
Et desirer.
   Foy porter etc.

You are the true sapphire
which is able to heal and bring
to an end all my ills,
an emerald to rejoice in,
a ruby to brighten and comfort
the heart.
Your words,
your glances,
your stability
make every vice flee
and become hateful
and despicable
and every good become cherished
and desired.
I want to bear faith . . .

Example 1: Guillaume de Machaut, ‘Foy porter’

Even in the context of a demanding poetic form notable for its flexibility, ‘Foy porter’ is remarkable for its virtuoso grammatical structures and its short lines. The most common line length in Machaut’s thirty-three virelais is seven syllables, the favorite line length in the thirteenth century. In the refrain and the cauda of ‘Foy porter’, Machaut alternates between three-syllable lines, four-syllable lines, and one seven-syllable line (thus the short line dominates), and in the ouvert and clos two lines of seven syllables are followed by one of four (a sort of reversal of the pattern in the refrain and cauda). Machaut’s use of alternating four- and three-syllable lines can perhaps be seen as a variant of his fondness for the seven-syllable line. Nevertheless, manuscript layout always indicates the short lines.

19 Virelais begin and end with a refrain which is repeated between each of the three stanzas. The stanzas of the virelais have three parts: two short clusters of lines (pedes in this poem, three lines each) set to a repeating melody with two separate endings, one open (that is, not reaching melodic closure, thus called the ouvert), the other closed (thus called the clos) and another cluster of lines called a cauda, here lines 7 to 14 in each stanza, set to the same music as the refrain. Most of Machaut’s virelais use only two rhymes, though a few have three or four. Robert L. Gieber names the virelai as Machaut’s most interesting form with respect to metrics, ‘Poetic Elements of Rhythm in the Ballades, Rondeaux and Virelais of Guillaume de Machaut’, Romanic Review 73 (1982) p 8.
21 In the manuscripts, BN MSS fonds français 843, 1584, 1585, 1586, 9221, and 22546, two formats are used: When the text is placed under musical notation, the format of the text is as if
The music of 'Foy porter' specifies the duration of the syllables of the poetry, and equalizes the length of the lines. The choice of duple meter on all three levels of medieval musical meter (imperfect prolation, tempus, and modus) provides a regular hierarchy of duple relationships upon which the three- and four-syllable lines of the poem may be delivered.

Duple metric organization:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prolation</th>
<th>Application to poem:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓↓</td>
<td>Foy porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓↓</td>
<td>Hon-neur garder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓↓</td>
<td>Et pais querrir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓↓</td>
<td>Ou-beir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓↓↓↓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2: Metrical hierarchy in 'Foy porter'

in a paragraph, from left to right margin; the identity of the line of poetry is indicated by a punctus at the end of each line. In the stanzas, where no additional musical notation is needed, the text may be similarly placed in paragraph format to fill the entire space of the page, thus requiring the same kind of punctuation (MSS 1584, 1585, 9221, and 22546); this punctuation is described by M.B. Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (University of California Press, Berkeley 1993) p 103: 'when scribes copied the verses of a stanza one after the other across the page, they treated each stanza as a paragraph, and separated the verses by a punctus'. Two other manuscripts show a layout which displays the structure of the poem by separating each of its lines: MS 843, a manuscript of text only, lays out the entire poem in short lines; MS 1586, perhaps the most lavish of the manuscripts, displays the melody with the text of the refrain and first pedes beneath it, in page-wide layout, with punctuation dividing the short lines. The text of the cauda and the subsequent stanzas is, however, displayed in two-column format, with the lines of poetry laid out in separate lines. Sylvia Huot in her splendid study of the writing down of poetry, *From Song to Book: The Poetics of Writing in Old French Lyric and Lyric Narrative Poetry* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1987) p 47, has inferred from the use of such a paragraph format that the line of the poetry was not the 'meaningful unit', rather the stanza was; this is certainly not the case for the present work, where the identity of the line is made quite clear either by layout or punctuation.
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This is clearest in the refrain. When the line consists of three syllables, it is set short-short-long; when it consists of four syllables, the long of the previous line is shortened, and the first of the four syllables is made half the length of the other short syllables, preserving the articulation between lines, but keeping the duple rhythm unbroken. This pervading pattern projects a rhythm totally consistent with the dance origins of the virelai:22 the short-short-long pattern suggests an archetypical step pattern—two moving steps followed by a step of repose.

The grammar of the poem uses the infinitives to build to the main point, first in the refrain, then in the first stanza and the caudae of stanzas two and three. In the refrain, Machaut builds through a relatively lengthy list of conventional characteristics of courtly love expressed as infinitives, arriving in line seven at the important object of the infinitives, vous, which is immediately followed by the finite verb, veuil (I want). From there he moves to the convention of undying love and names his lady with a conventional phrase, dame sans per. Though conventional language of love poetry predominates, the finite verb of the sentence emphasizes a less conventional aspect of this poem, that the speaker 'wants', or 'wills', that he do all these conventional parts of love-service. In this poem the will chooses to perform the love-service.

The music of the refrain, in its regular rhythmic pattern, forms the basis for the articulation of its grammatical and rhetorical structure. It is precisely at the object of the sequence of infinitives, vous that the music breaks the sing-song rhythm. At Vous veuil jusques au morir, the duration of the word vous is quadrupled in relation to the previous long syllables, and veuil is doubled; a complementary shortening sets the following syllables jusques au mo--; the final syllable of morir is also shortened in order to articulate the line with a rest without shortening the beginning of the next line, dame. This rhythmic structure establishes a strong, regular forward motion moving to and emphasizing each rhyming syllable; moreover, in the exceptional lengthening just described, the rhythmic structure emphasizes the principal grammatical point of the entire refrain, the object of the sequence of infinitives and the finite verb which controls them. It prescribes a very rhetorical declamation of the text, purposefully distorting the meter and placing a stronger emphasis upon those two words than a reader of the poetry might dare to do without the music.

22 See Lawrence Earp, 'Lyrics for Reading and Lyrics for Singing in Late Medieval France: The Development of the Dance Lyric from Adam de la Halle to Guillaume de Machaut', The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry, ed Rebecca A. Baltzer, Thomas Cable, and James I. Wimsatt (University of Texas Press, Austin 1991) pp 101-31.
The first stanza explains through two parallel car clauses ‘why’ the speaker wants to serve the lady so incessantly. The first car clause uses two finite verbs with the unstated subject je (aim controlled by car and peissse controlled by avant que), and a third finite verb, porroit, with the subject on. Even so, the infinitives still dominate by consistently taking the rhyme position, except in the third line. Line 7, sans fausser, which repeats both the grammatical structure and the idea of sans mentir in the first line of the stanza, seems simultaneously to close the first part of this one-sentence stanza, and prepare for the parallelism in the upcoming car clause, beginning in the second line of the cauda, which reduplicates the grammar of the refrain by listing a series of infinitive-nouns, each modified by mi, all leading to the finite verb, this time sont. Then the subordinate clause beginning que ne puis guerpir provides a further grammatical complication – a conversion of tenses and more parallelism. The conditional (porroit) of pooir ‘to be able’ with the stated subject on in line 2, and then the imperfect subjunctive (peissse) with the unstated subject je, in line 5 (each verb controlling two infinitives), prepare for the final use of the same verb in the first stanza, this time in a negative first person indicative (ne puis), again controlling two infinitives. Machaut has created a careful balance or tension between the parts of the first stanza, with the sans fausser providing a crucial link. Like the image of the waves of the high sea, the grammar is simultaneously balanced with parallelism and pushing forward through the hypotactic structures.

Melody adds to poetry a beauty and variety of contour over and above the declamation of the rhythm and pitch inherent in the text. In some cases its contribution is mainly to articulate the line structure of a text in an orderly fashion by setting each line to a melody with a clear cadence and a distinct shape. This Machaut does in ‘Foy porter’; each line of the refrain has a slightly different shape, and cadences fall upon a

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Example 3: Rhetorical emphasis in line seven

\[\text{Vous vueil jus-que au mo-rir}\]

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variety of pitches. For example, the first line centers on the final (or tonic) of the piece, while the second begins higher and descends to the tone above the final — two very distinct contours, whose cadences yet relate by being a step apart.

There is, however, a higher purpose in the construction of the contours of the melodies and the placement of their cadences: the pitch structure of the melody gives to the grammatical shape of the refrain a rhetorical delivery. The succession of infinitives at the beginning of the refrain might be called a figure of enumeration purely on textual grounds; it is the music, however, which most strongly suggests that Machaut thought of it as enumeration, since the final tones of the successive lines are scale degrees 1, 2, 3, 4, 4, and 5. (This enumeration may proceed yet another step, for the final tone of the long line, on *morir*, is 6.) This is, however, not simply enumeration, but rather climax — the arrangement of parallel elements in an ascending or descending order, here ascending. The final element of the climax, on the fifth degree, is emphasized by the delay created by the repetition of the fourth degree and by a motive identical to that of the first element of the climax. This climax is immediately surpassed in the line containing the object of the infinitives and their controlling finite verb: its total range exceeds the range of any previous line, just as it exceeds the expectations of the meter of the poem.

Finally, the music articulates the stanzaic structure of the poem, by focusing on different parts of the octave range of the piece in its two contrasting parts. The octave had been given a prominent place in the theory of melody by Marchetto of Padua around 1320: in addition to the traditional division of the octave into a fifth and a fourth, the range, or ambitus, was perfect when all of its eight tones were touched upon with an extra note for good measure and imperfect when it was not filled out completely. (It was, incidentally, pluperfect if these notes were exceeded.)

![Perfect Octave Diagram](https://example.com/fig.png)

**Example 4: Ambitus in 'Foy porter'**

The refrain (the A melody) fills out the fifth by ascent in its cadence tones, and in its single most important line it ascends to just below the top note of the octave, the octave remaining at that point imperfect. The stanza (at the B melody, on car tant) begins with that very octave, finally fulfilling the expectation of hearing this note precisely at the word which proposes to explain what has been stated before in an imperfect range. The melody proceeds by filling in the notes of the fourth by descent, finally descending to within one note of the final, remaining imperfect in descent, until its clos ending where it completes the octave downward. It is thus at the very points of articulation between the A and B sections of the music that the perfection of the octave occurs; moreover, touching upon all but one note of the octave at important formal points creates a tension of expectation that is only resolved at these points of structural importance in the text. The first line of the refrain, and therefore also of the cauda (on the words Foy porter and sans fausser), circles around the final with a cadential formula resembling the musical rhyme between dame sans per and de vous amer; this further reinforces the grammatical link between the clos and the beginning of the cauda.

This treatment of the octave suggests a numerological significance to this virelai's notable dependence on infinitives, particularly in the refrain and the three caudae. The refrain opens with three infinitives, each with its own object, then four more infinitives sharing the object vous, which is followed by vueil, the finite verb governing the clause, and finally one last infinitive, morir, in the prepositional phrase jusque au morir. The number of infinitives in the first group matches the number of syllables in the shortest line (3), those in the next group, in the next longer line (4), and the sum of these infinitives before the finite verb matches the number of syllables in the long lines of both refrain and stanzas (7). The number of infinitives before the finite verb in relation to the total number of infinitives in the refrain (7:8) is a numerical analogy to the basic melodic process of the whole piece (the imperfect octave reaching only up to its seventh degree, then perfecting the octave upon the eighth degree, and inversely descending seven degrees, then arriving upon the eighth note in descent). Perhaps this play of numbers also symbolizes the interplay of the trivium (three) and the quadrivium (four), and their combination (seven), referring to the synthesis of rhetoric (trivium) and music (quadrivium) in the piece itself.

The grammar of the second stanza is considerably more difficult than that of the first (where only the separation of the avant and que and the relatively high level of subordination create complications). Stanza two begins simply enough with the il n'est construction followed by the
list of three negatives, but Machaut moves rapidly into wordplay – joie, joir, and douceur, adoucir, and, more difficult, into literary allusion, wordplay, and an ambiguous grammatical construction. In the line vuet mon amer, amer literally means both ‘bitterness’ and ‘to love’ (as in line 14 of the first stanza), and it contains within it the noun mer (as in line 11 of the first stanza). Chrétien de Troyes’ Cligés and Gottfried von Strassburg’s Tristan both include famous instances of wordplay on amer and these three meanings. In Machaut’s poem the meaning ‘bitterness’ is dominant (as in the translation), but the grammar does not specify whether vo douceur or mon amer is the subject of vuet adoucir. The grammatical ambiguity works with the wordplay to suggest the simultaneity of sweetness and bitterness for lovers and that both are affecting and being affected by the love for the lady. Significantly, Machaut re-introduces the finite verb vuet here, stressing again the idea of volition. Here, though, ambiguity and allusion dominate, since either douceur or amer could be the grammatical subject, but not the lover himself as in the line 7 of the refrain.

The cauda of the second stanza resolves the ambiguity, using the verb ‘to want, wish’ as the finite verb and replicating the pattern of the refrain with a series of infinitives denoting conventional ideas of love poetry, this time with the object tout leading to the finite verb veuil, and the subject je understood. In line 13 of stanza two, veuil takes the place held by vous in the refrain and is followed by plus, which introduces the final clause of the stanza, plus que je ne desir / guerredonner, again a clause with finite verb controlling an infinitive. The veuil perhaps receives even more emphasis here, supplanting the object of his desire, and now leading to a clause specifying that his volition is ‘more than’ other kinds of desire.

The final stanza has the most straightforward, simplest grammar of all the stanzas. Here the emphasis is not only on the infinitive construction, which continues to dominate, but also on the vous. The sentence of the ouvert and clos begins with vous as subject, and vo is repeated three times modifying the infinitive-nouns opening the cauda. The second-last line of the cauda picks up the word tout, which was emphasized in the second stanza, and uses it as the first syllable in line 7 (that important position taken in the refrain by vous and in the second stanza by veuil) and again in the second half of the line to modify bien cherir / et desirer. The position of tout combined with the assonance of tout and vous, in a poem dominated by repeated sounds, suggests an

25 Peter Dronke demonstrates that the motif of the bitter-sweet nature of love is important not only in medieval European lyric but also in Persian love lyric, Medieval Latin and the Rise of European Love-Lyric, 2 vols (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1965–66) 1 pp 25–6.

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importance – indeed an allness – of the lady and the love-service that goes beyond what the grammar and word choice could indicate alone.

The second and third stanzas simply repeat the music of the first one. The composer did not neglect the musical setting of these stanzas, however, since he contrived his text to suit the same emphasis upon the seventh line that occurs in the refrain. The melody for vous vueil in the refrain now has en vous in the first stanza, vueil plus in the second stanza and tout vice in the third; all three are linked by alliteration and rhyme, as well as being important words requiring emphasis.

The imagery works with the grammatical, poetical, and musical structure of the poem to develop a theme that the willing desire of the poet/lover results from a force comparable to the waves of the sea but brought under a control antithetical to the nature of the sea. In the first stanza the image is that ‘to slow down’ (alentir) the speaker’s love would be harder than to empty the sea or hold back its waves. The enjambment (especially tarir / la haute mer / et ses ondes retenir and alentir / de vous amer) and grammatical linking of ouvert, clos, and cauda contribute powerfully to the sense of the relentlessness of the waves of the sea and thus the power of the love. At the same time, the control of the grammatical parallelism in the dominant infinitive constructions underscores the aspect of the love’s being willed and by implication under the control of reason. Kelly has suggested that Machaut’s Remede de Fortune, as well as some of his ballades and lais, ‘gives ideal love a preeminence that is meant to capture its purity and realize its essential nobility’. Kelly goes on to argue that Machaut’s sublimation of desire – replacement of desire by hope and an awareness that a pure love for the lady leads to greater virtue in the lover – puts Machaut ‘closer than any other courtly poet to the expression of fin’amors as idea’. ‘Foy porter’ similarly suggests in all three stanzas a sublimation of desire to will. This parallel between Machaut’s use of the verb of volition and Augustine’s and Dante’s emphasis on the importance of the will adds to the thematic richness of the poem.

The second stanza’s playfulness lightens the tone of the imagery and theme, with words denoting joy, pleasure, good, sweetness, and softness predominating. However, the literary allusion of the wordplay on amer encourages the reader/listener to consider the ideas and images of the poem in the context of romance and particularly Chrétien’s, perhaps Thomas of Britain’s, explorations of the power and complexity of love. At the same time, the playfulness of the second stanza and the cauda’s repetition of the main point of the refrain, the idea that the

27 ibid p 122.
Language and music in Machaut's 'Foy Porter'

speaker wants to do the conventional actions of love-service, suggest that the poem is not making thematic progress but rather making the same point with a different tonality.

The third stanza introduces new, albeit not unusual, imagery – the loved one as precious stone. This image contrasts sharply with the fluidity of the sea as image, and the grammar of the third stanza adds to the sense of the stone as a static, permanent image. For a reader in the fourteenth century, precious stones would be associated with supernatural power, especially healing power as the lapidary tradition attests. Gems like sapphires, emeralds, and rubies would commonly be seen both in court, as decorations and signs of power and wealth, and in churches, especially with and on relics and reliquaries. As in the second stanza, the ouvert and clos of the third stanza form one sentence and the cauda a second, but here the last word of the ouvert is terminer, giving a sense of a new closure, at least imagistically. The clos varies the ouvert in the third stanza rather than building on the ouvert and carrying it further as the clos does in both stanzas one and two, though more notably in the wave/sea image of the first stanza. The grammatical parallelism of the ouvert and clos of the third stanza (that is, the ouvert consists of an elaborate predicate noun modified by a relative clause completing the opening Vous estes, and the clos consists of two more parallel predicate nouns with their modifiers) also adds to the static quality of the image. Thus the third stanza completes the theme of the poem by shifting from the image of love as sea brought under control or emptied to the image of precious gem with its associations with supernatural power and permanence. This in a sense closes the idea the first stanza introduces – the explanation for why the speaker wants what he describes in the refrain. He wants to do the love-service because it, like a precious gem, empowers him and makes 'every vice flee'. And the final cauda's stress on the word 'you, your' completes the sense that has been an undercurrent from the beginning of the poem, that the condition of love is independent of external conditions, even of any potential conflicting internal circumstances. The will, volition, of the speaker in a sense transfers all importance from the me (repeated four times in the first stanza but only once in the second and once in the third stanza), or I (only actually spoken once, in the second stanza), to a notable emphasis on you (repeated four times in the third stanza, as grammatical subject and modifier of the three infinitive-nouns). But the you of the third stanza is not a love object that is fickle or changeable, rather one represented by a particularly static and powerful image of the loved one. Furthermore, the language of the final cauda depicts the love as a transforming power, a love like that of Dante for Beatrice – vice flee and becomes hateful while good becomes cherished and desired.

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This is a divine sort of love, typically in medieval literature the only
love that is reliable and unchanging. Thus the third stanza takes the
reader's understanding of the love farther than do stanzas one and two.
Yet this treatment of love avoids a heavy seriousness. Johnson, in
explicating Machaut's Prologue, explains how:

Love, which provides the subject of the poem, also, if it
is of the right and joyous kind, illumines artistic creation
through Esperance, Plaisance, and Dous Penser. . . .
Douce Esperance is contrasted with Desir: it is the former
that brings joy to the true lover. Desir, on the other
hand . . . is coupled with 'poure espoir', the opposite of
Douce Esperance, and brings pain. . . . The result of all
of this is creative joy (ll. 56–65), an ebullient, quasi-
religious fervor, not unlike the 'joy' of Troubadours,
which finds its natural expression in love poetry.28

‘Foy porter’ treats its subject in just such a joyful manner. The tone
is light, and the music and grammar create a rapid pace through the
three stanzas, leaving little time for reflection. The music specifies this
overall character and motion of the poem. The rolling duple meter and
the quick succession of rhymes contrive to create a sense of lightness,
motion, even ebullience that is suitable to the circular form of the
virelai. There is a playful, teasing quality in approaching and then
postponing the expected perfection of the octave that aids this sense of
forward motion as well. The sensitive, personal, volitional quality of
the lyric as a whole is embodied in the rhetorical transcending of the
regular rhythm in line seven, and in the sense of control which this
central line plays in the ordering of the whole lyric. ‘Foy porter’ affords
an opportunity to see how Machaut, supreme poet and musician of his
age, can take the conventions of love and of his arts and transform them
into a jewel of a lyric, rich in meaning yet light in tone: a masterly
offering to Machaut's noble audience, imaging forth courtly love at its
finest.

Stanford University
Santa Clara University

28 Johnson 32–3.