

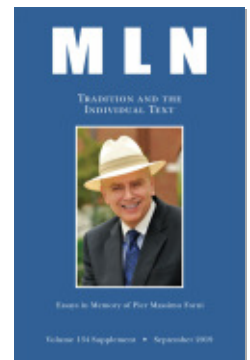


Perfect Beauty: Echoes of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the
Poetry and Music of the Trecento

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Perfect Beauty: Echoes of Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the Poetry and Music of the Trecento



Susan Forscher Weiss¹

Readers of the notational and theoretical treatises of the late fourteenth century experience musical compositions that were both feasts for the eyes and the ears. These examples of *Augenmusik*—what Richard Taruskin calls “a phenomenal feat of calligraphy”—represent a development that Ursula Günther in 1963 labeled the *ars subtilior*.² Characterizing this so-called *ars subtilior* or “subtler art,” as it was practiced by “the Avignon School” for popes and wealthy aristocratic patrons in parts of southern France and northern Italy, were the concern for the expression of the beauty of musical sound and the lure of notating more sophisticated rhythms, such as those overheard in popular music and dance. Experiments with new note shapes are described in the anonymous *Tractatus de diversis figuris*, one of a set of musical treatises transcribed in Pavia in 1391 and held in the library of the Visconti family of Milan (now Newberry Library, MS 54.1).³ The prologue labels the style of writing that employs more variety of rhythm as an *artem*

¹A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Renaissance Society of America in March 2016 and at the Walters Art Museum in October 2016, in conjunction with its exhibition *A Feast for the Senses: Art and Experience in Medieval Europe*. For their feedback I thank my colleagues at Johns Hopkins and the participants of the semi-annual Cenacolo, held at the University of Maryland in April 2016. I would like to acknowledge the expert editorial assistance and advice of Troy Tower. We each took pleasure in the knowledge that the goal was to honor our mentor, colleague and dear friend, Pier Massimo Forni.

²See Taruskin, *Oxford History*, 112–113; and Günther, “Ende,” 105–120.

³Other late-fourteenth-century copies of this treatise include Modena, Biblioteca Estense, MS a.m.5.24 (Mod A); and Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS fonds italien 568

magis subtiliter. In what follows, I will draw connections between some of the ideals of beauty as seen and heard in late-fourteenth-century musical ideas inspired by an ancient rhetorician whose influence warrants investigation.

As Umberto Eco wrote, “[c]on Pitagora nasce una visione estetico-matematica dell’universo: tutte le cose esistono perché riflettono un *ordine*, e sono ordinate perché in esse si realizzano leggi matematiche, che sono insieme condizione di esistenza e di Bellezza.”⁴ Legend has it that, in hearing the music of the spheres, Pythagoras discovered that the so-called consonant intervals of music—unisons, fourths, fifths and octaves—could be expressed in simple ratios. But, as Alan Shaw notes, the

musicality of ancient Greek [...] has long been an article of faith [...]. And there are reasons why Greek seems a special case: the intimate relation—indeed the theoretical identity—between Greek music and poetry, and the fact that the two most basic elements of music—the duration of sounds and their pitch—form two clear and distinct systems in Greek [...]. Poetic meters were based on the relative durations of syllables, which permitted a fairly direct translation into musical terms. Word accent was based solely on pitch, and hence has often been called a “musical” accent.⁵

This perceived coterminality of music and poetry influenced Plato and other philosophers and theorists before its wide dissemination in Latin. At the opening of the second book of *De consolatione philosophiae*, one of the most consumed texts of the Middle Ages, Boethius describes being enchanted by Philosophy’s song, which is accompanied by her most beautiful “musical handmaiden.”⁶ Though writing in Latin, Boethius had summarized Greek theories in his *De institutione musica* and refers here to the music of ancient Greek epic and lyric poetry.

In the fourteenth century, Giovanni Gherardo of Prato (circa 1360/67—before 1446) remembers Messer Dolcibene of Padua, the

(Pit). On Italian rhythmic elements in the *Tractatus figurarum*, see Stoessel, “Symbolic Innovation.”

⁴Eco, “Bellezza,” 61.

⁵Shaw, “Some Questions.”

⁶Such is the translation by Joel Relihan (*Consolation*, 23) of book 2, prose 1 of Boethius, *Consolation*: “cumque hac Musica laris nostri vernacula nunc leviores nunc graviore modos succinat.” See also Samuel James Barrett (*Melodic Traditions*) for reconstructed music for several metra in the *Consolatio* based on a fragment of music known as the Cambridge Songs, found in the Rhineland and written in neumes. In an attempt to understand the practices for notating the Boethian *metra* despite limited access to ancient theory, Barrett (*Melodic Traditions*, 1:133) points out that “a few striking examples survive of an alignment between notated metres and commentaries including descriptions of lyric metres as composed of dactylic feet.” Jan Ziolkowski (*Nota*, 79–81) also finds a fourth-century grammar attributed to Diomedes included as an introductory gloss to a late-tenth-century copy of Horace’s *Odes*.

performer at the court of Bernabò Visconti (1323–1385) and a great friend of the poet Franco Sacchetti (1335–1400), for having “fa[tto] sue canzonette in ritimi con parole molto piacevoli e intonandole con dolcissimi canti.”⁷ Gherardo’s use of the adjective *piacevoli* presages some concepts—namely, *gravità* and *piacevolezza*—addressed by Pietro Bembo in his *Prose della volgar lingua* (published in 1525). In that work, Bembo “proclaims the pre-eminence of a single poetic model, namely Petrarch.”⁸ Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, who debated the ancient theories of imitation with Bembo, had claimed in his *De imitatione* that reading Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek historian and rhetorician working in Augustan Rome, helped him articulate his position on “the artful blending of a variety of styles into a single, harmonious discourse.”⁹ Music historians have thus identified a turning point for the marriage of refined poetry and music in Bembo’s 1525 treatise on the proper imitation of Francesco Petrarca, “in particular his complex analysis, based on the phonetic theories expounded in the first century by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, of Petrarca’s sound structures.”¹⁰

Although only a handful of musical settings of Petrarca’s poems were composed during his lifetime and in the following century, generations of sixteenth-century madrigalists set Petrarca’s sonnets, which Bembo had championed as the height of poetic excellence, and the marriage of music with high Petrarchan texts generated greater respect for music as a performing art. As large parts of Dionysius’s essay depend on musical theory, it seems odd that musicologists have not paid more attention to the possibilities of his influence on later generations.¹¹ While there are well-known followers of Dionysius’s theories and pedagogical methods after Pico and Bembo—from Desiderius Erasmus and Heinrich Glarean to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Friedrich Nietzsche—it is clear that his influence in medieval music has been underrated and the substantial later interest in Dionysius as an entrée into classical music theory warrants an investigation into the extent of the earlier dissemination of his treatise.¹²

⁷Gherardo’s *Paradiso degli Alberti* is quoted in Gallo, *Musica*, 63–64. See also Petrobelli, “Leggiadretto velo.”

⁸DellaNeva, “Introduction,” xxv.

⁹DellaNeva, “Introduction,” xxi.

¹⁰Weimer, “Daniel L. Heiple,” 532.

¹¹Wilhelm Kroll (“Randbemerkungen,” 86–101) has argued that large parts of Dionysius’s treatise are based on Greek musical theory.

¹²On Dionysius in Erasmus’s *De copia rerum* and in Glarean’s annotations and translation of the *Roman Antiquities*, see De Jonge, *Between Grammar*, 41.

Though evidence confirms that Dionysius's treatise circulated in manuscripts between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, one can only conjecture that his concepts resonated with the late-fourteenth-century composer-theorists in the Visconti circles in Italy and France and at the universities of Bologna and Paris.¹³ Their self-referential musical settings of imaginative poetry subtly emphasize beauty and pleasure to both eye and ear, harking back to the Dionysian blending of one harmonious discourse. The syncretic blending of styles revealed their technical skills, sophistication and interest in details and yielded musical novelties such as polymetric and syncopated constructions, newer forms of multicolored notation and more adventurous chromaticism. Composers and theorists engaged in adventurous experimentation intended to achieve beauty, not only in sound but also in arresting images of music encased in hearts, harps and circles.

But who was this Dionysius of Halicarnassus that Pico and Bembo eventually endorsed for the blending of literary styles into harmonious discourse? While they may not be the sources directly consulted by the poets and musicians active in French and Italian courts in the generations before Bembo, Dionysius's suggestions for achieving beauty in music and text nonetheless present possible inspiration for the notational production of this period. Dionysius's essay—Περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων (*Peri syntheseos onomaton*) or *On the Arrangement of Words*, often referenced by its Latin title, *De compositione verborum*—is one of the few extant classical works to focus on syntax and, in particular, the importance of rhythm and variety for beauty. Dionysius was among the first- and second-century writers, along with Aelius Aristides and Longinus, who returned to the idea of magical rhetoric as advanced by the Sicilian rhetorician Gorgias (? - 375 BCE), and rejected by Isocrates and Aristotle. Longinus, like Dionysius, believed that rhythm was a key factor in the "aesthetical effect of composition."¹⁴ He describes the music of the flute as capable of "forc[ing] even an unmusical hearer to move in rhythm and to conform to the tone: likewise, the sounds of the harp exercise a marvelous 'spell.'"¹⁵

George Maximilian Antony Grube critiques the relative lack of authority credited to Dionysius when compared to Demetrius or

¹³Usher, "Introduction." As well as in sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Dionysius's *On Literary Composition* is preserved in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana MS LIX 15 (from the twelfth century); and in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Parisiensis, 1741 (from the tenth or eleventh century), the earliest known source. Aldus Manutius prints the *editio princeps* in 1502.

¹⁴De Jonge, *Between Grammar*, 337.

¹⁵De Jonge, *Between Grammar*, 337; but see also 332–338 in general and 337n41 in particular. See also Lopez, "Sounds."

pseudo-Longinus, despite greater literary output and biographical evidence:

we must treat him with great respect, for he knew classical Greek as no modern scholar can hope to know it. His emphasis on the music of prose, the effect of particular collocations of sound, is almost certainly original and throws valuable light on a much-neglected subject which remains important even in these days of silent reading.¹⁶

Dionysius's theories may have been dismissed in part because of his work on imitation: what survives of his treatise *On Mimesis* has yielded the term "Dionysian imitation" to describe the rhetorical practice of emulating, adapting, reworking and enriching a source text by an earlier author, a significant departure from Aristotle's concept of mimesis, concerned only with the imitation of nature, not of other authors.¹⁷

Dionysius wrote *De compositione* between 20–10 BCE as a birthday offering to his aristocratic Roman pupil, Rufus Metilius. In the introduction, he claimed that the treatise aimed to guide the student's natural impulse toward beauty, including in oratory.¹⁸ Relying not only on Plato, Aristotle, Theocritus and Thucydides but also on music theorists, including Aristoxenus and the Hellenist *kritikoi*, he established a program of rhetoric for future orators linking speech to music, where the words must possess four elements:

[o]f the ingredients from which an attractive and beautiful style may be constituted, there are four which are the most important and effective—melody, rhythm, variety, and appropriateness accompanying the use of these three. Under attractiveness I list freshness, charm, euphony, sweetness, persuasiveness and all such qualities; and under beauty impressiveness, solemnity, seriousness, dignity, mellowness and qualities like them.¹⁹

¹⁶See Grube, "Dionysius," 95 and 109–110. Copies of Dionysius's multivolume history of Rome, several letters and treatises on imitation, on Thucydides and on Dinarchus all survive from the tenth century.

¹⁷See Ruthven, *Critical Assumptions*, 103–104. Two thirds of Dionysius's now lost treatise *On Mimesis* (from which one *Epitome* survives) was devoted to authors suitable for imitation and the best ways of imitating them. Stanley Frederick Bonner (*Literary Treatises*, 36–37) notes that the first two books may have circulated separately and that no evidence confirms the third book was ever completed. See also Malcolm Heath, "Dionysius of Halicarnassus 'On Imitation.'"

¹⁸Here Dionysius fails to mention talent as a factor in creating beauty, referring only to technical knowledge, although in his *De imitatione* he distinguishes three factors, talent, instruction and practice; see Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:75. See also Weaire, "How," 61.

¹⁹See Stephen Usher's edition of Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:71–73, where he signals a reference to part 47 of Dionysius's treatise on Demosthenes. See also Worman, *Cast*, 4 and 9–10. In the *Gorgias*, Plato has Socrates argue that tragic poetry aims

Dionysius recalls an audience booing when a renowned harpist struck a false note, spoiling the melody, and another instance when a reed-pipe player, equally skilled, produced a discordant sound by overblowing, without a tightened embouchure. He describes not only melodic breaches but also performances in which an instrument, struck out of time, destroys the rhythm.²⁰ Dionysius inherited a concern for timing from the *kritikoi*, who foregrounded sound and the euphony of poetry.²¹ He stressed the importance of the rhythm of prose and the collocation of sounds in combinations of letters and words.²²

Following melody and rhythm in importance are variety and appropriateness: “[f]or it is always possible to have too much of even beautiful things, as of things sweet to taste, when they retain their sameness. But when they are varied by changes they continue in their freshness indefinitely.”²³ Too much of the same thing can generate boredom and disharmony, but variations must be used appropriately and, in all, the four elements must strike a delicate balance, a theory Dionysius proves by quoting from Aristoxenus’s *Harmonics* 1.3. He explains the difference between the pitch of speech versus that of song: “[t]he speaking voice does not rise in pitch above three tones and a half: it confines itself to the interval of the Fifth. The singing voice, on the other hand, uses a greater number of intervals, not only the Fifth.”²⁴ He continues: “[b]eginning with the whole octave, it also uses in its [vocal and instrumental] melodies the fourth, the third, the tone, the semitone, and even the quarter-tone, quite distinguishably, according to some.”²⁵ Most importantly, he stressed, “[m]usic requires that the words should be subordinate to the melody, and not the melody to the words.”²⁶

at pleasure and, stripped of its music and meter, essentially becomes public oratory. Although Dionysius cites Aristoxenus as an authority on rhythm, Casper De Jonge (*Between Grammar*, 39n222) questions whether the section on rhythm (Dionysius, *On Literary Composition* 17) is indeed based on his thought. See also Gibson, *Aristoxenus*, 141.

²⁰Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:75.

²¹The *kritikoi* focused on the criteria for good poetry; see De Jonge, *Between Grammar*, 38–39n220. John William Hey Atkins (*Literary Criticism*, 2:133) writes that the “closest analogy to [Dionysius’s] theorizing is presented by those scholars who insisted for the first time on the importance of ‘composition’ in poetry, on the need for beautiful words harmoniously arranged, and for those euphonic and rhythmical effects inherent in syllables and letters [...]”

²²Dionysius thought Romans pronounced their sounds improperly, asserting that Latin was partly derived from Aeolic Greek, the language of Sappho and others that should be studied over Latin for its metrical superiority. See Weaire, “How,” 61.

²³Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:149.

²⁴Roberts, “Introduction,” 3.

²⁵Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:79.

²⁶Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:79–81.

Dionysius also uses examples from classical dramatists, including Aristophanes and Euripides, to argue that syllable length should be regulated by musical time.²⁷ One of these is Electra's address to the Chorus in Euripides's *Orestes*, a fragment that has survived with musical notation.²⁸ Dionysius describes in some detail how words can be sung on one note even though the syllables of each word in the Chorus's first line, "σίγα σίγα, λευκὸν" ("Be Silent, Silent, [...] [L]ight"), have high and low pitches. He also details how rhythm can be altered when words are sung rather than spoken:

[f]or the diction of prose does not violate or even alter the quantities in any noun or verb, but keeps the syllables long or short as it has received them by nature. However, the arts of rhythm and music change them by shortening or lengthening them, so that often they pass into their opposites: the time-length [of production] is not regulated by the quantity of the syllables, but the quantity of the syllables by the time-length.²⁹

It is likely that Dionysius here refers to metrical interventions like syncope, correption and synizesis. It is evident throughout the treatise that Dionysius values the ear and delight in sound quality, especially the variety of intervals. He compares the process of composition (σύνθεσις) to Athena's molding of Odysseus, maintaining that the composition of good style (λέξις) is to the ear what good sculpture and painting are to the eye: "good melody and rhythm are conducive to pleasure, and we are all enchanted by them."³⁰

As a result of political and religious tumult in the fourteenth century, the epicenter of high vernacular culture shifted from Rome to the Italian cities of Milan, Pavia and Naples and to the papal court at Avignon in Provence. In these locations, university-trained composer-theorists were experimenting with ways of enhancing the beauty of sound through varieties of rhythm and pitch content. But could these intellectuals have known Dionysius's writings? Alberto Gallo describes the magnificent holdings of the Visconti library, a

²⁷ *On Literary Composition*, 2:71–81.

²⁸ Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:81.

²⁹ In *On Literary Composition* (2:80–83), Dionysius borrows material from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 3.8.1–2 and part 50 of his own commentary on Demosthenes; see *The Critical Essays*, 1:431.

³⁰ Dionysius, *On Literary Composition*, 2:75–77. See also Worman, *Cast*, 10; and De Jonge, *Between Grammar*, 333–335. In the final chapters of the treatise, Dionysius quotes a verse associated with Orpheus to advocate that orators make good use of rhythm and melody; he describes the resulting prose, exemplified by Demosthenes, as "enchanting" or "bewitching" (in De Jonge, *Between Grammar*, 334).

number of which are duplicated in the libraries of King Charles V of France and his brother Jean, duke of Berry. Established by Galeazzo Visconti between 1360–1365 in the castle at Pavia, the library housed numerous ancient treatises, many with sections on music, including a copy of Plato's *Timaeus* in the original Greek annotated by Petrarca.³¹ Also in the collection are copies of writings by Longinus, Cicero and Quintilian, whose first-century treatise *Institutio oratoria* borrowed from Dionysius, as well as Cassiodorus's *Institutiones divinarum et secularium litterarum*, with miniatures representing the seven liberal arts, a work that Petrarca had commissioned for himself.³²

The Visconti family loved music, dancing and singing to the accompaniment of the organ, harp and lute. Several important musical manuscripts have been tied to the family, among them those now at Lucca, Modena and Chantilly. Alongside the ancient treatises already mentioned, were medieval literary and musical works, such as the *Roman de la Rose*, the *Dit dou Lyon* by Guillaume de Machaut, a book of French motets with music and an enormous collection of ancient, medieval and contemporary works, many including sections on music. The author of one such treatise, a manual presenting the game of chess “come allegoria dell'ordinamento gerarchico e funzionale della società laica,”³³ the *Libellus de ludo scacorum*, present in multiple copies in the Visconti library, made a case for another type of “music” in the court library: “perfectus medicus phisicus novit [...] armoniam pulsuum tamquam quandam armoniam musice” (“a skillful doctor knows [...] the harmony of the pulses like the harmony of music”).³⁴ The collection of Luchino, his brother Giovanni and Luchino's son Brizio, himself a poet and bibliophile, include numerous copies of Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica* that narrates the story of Tubalcain and the invention of and need to preserve music. Among the Visconti medical treatises prescribing music to restoring health was the *Tacuinum sanitatis*, translated into Latin from the Arabic of an early-eleventh-century Christian physician from Baghdad, Ibn Botlan.³⁵ Bernabò Visconti's daughter Verde commissioned an edition of the *Tacuinum* with beautiful illustrations, many depicting musicians and musical instruments, especially the harp, a favorite instrument at their court. (See Fig. 13.1)

³¹Gallo, *Musica*, 59–82.

³²Strohm, *Rise*, 58.

³³Gallo, *Musica*, 73.

³⁴See Gallo, *Musica*, 74. The translation is Kathryn Krug's; see Gallo, *Musica*, 60.

³⁵Gallo, *Musica*, 74–75.



Valentina Visconti, later the wife of Duke Louis of Orleans and mother to the poet Charles of Orleans, owned and played several.³⁶

As it happened, both Petrarca and Jacopo of Bologna (1340–1386), a composer-theorist, virtuoso harpist and poet, enjoyed association with the Visconti family and its sphere of artists, poets, theorists and composers. Along with authoring a treatise on mensural rhythm,³⁷ Jacopo set Petrarca's madrigal *Non al suo amante* to music in the middle of the fourteenth century. This first musical setting of a Petrarchan text reveals principles espoused by Dionysius: there is a beauty of sound in the lengthy melismas and a prevalence of thirds and sixths, intervals previously considered dissonant, as well as variety in rhythm and meter.³⁸ The text of one of his madrigals, *Osellecto selvaggio*, recommends: "Per gridar forte non si canta bene / Ma con soave e dolce melodia."³⁹ The manuscripts containing these works belonged to the circle of the popes during the schism at Avignon, another place familiar to Petrarca, a center for Italian composers, as well as an international hub.⁴⁰ Also active in the Avignonesse Visconti circle of educated patrons, writers and artists in search of beauty were the southern Italian musicians Philipoctus and Antonellus of Caserta.⁴¹ The anonymous *Tractatus de diversis figuris*, a treatise of likely Italian origin, included notational characters for greater rhythmic variety in compositions—for example, the *dragma*, a red note with both ascending and descending stems creating syncopations.⁴² Antonellus honored Guillaume de Machaut by setting his ballade *Beauté parfaite et bonté souveraine*, the only one of his numerous poems to have been set by someone other than Machaut himself.⁴³ Machaut was meticulous in curating his poetic and musical works, making them readily available to younger poets and composers. In the *Prologue* written in 1372, five years before his death, Machaut recounts the stages of his development with clear echoes of Boethius: a personified Mother Nature, in lieu

³⁶On Valentina's harps, see Pirro, *Musique*, 12–13.

³⁷See Wolf, "Arte." The treatise is compiled alongside other theoretical texts in Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS Redi 71, 41v–48v.

³⁸There were imitations of the piece in Jacopo's lifetime and a through-composed setting by Marenzio two centuries later. For concordances, see, in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence, MS I-FI Mediceo Palatino 87 No. 17 and MS I-Fn Panciatichiano 26 No. 1. Considerable scholarship has treated the various settings of Petrarca's *Vergene bella*, such as those by Jacopo and Dufay, and another Petrarchan setting in motet style by an unidentified Italian composer; see, among others, Bent, "Petrarch," 86–96.

³⁹Jacopo's song is printed in Leach, *Sung Birds*, 84.

⁴⁰See Apel, *French Secular Music*; and Moser, "Hymns," 469.

⁴¹Philipoctus is known to have composed a ballade honoring Clement VII.

⁴²See Stoessel, "Interpretation."

⁴³Persico, "Color," 128.

of Boethius's Lady Philosophy, urges him to compose poetry—and possibly music—with the assistance of her children, Sense, Rhetoric and Music. The copy now at the Bibliothèque Nationale (MS fr. 1584) features beautiful illustrations depicting the allegory.

One manuscript containing unusual musical notation stands out as a prime example of this neo-Dionysian obsession with music and its relation to beauty. The famous codex held in the Musée Condé at the Château de Chantilly (MS 564), was compiled in and around Avignon at the very end of the fourteenth century.⁴⁴ The texts therein show direct relationships to Clement VII and Duke Jean, as well as to the Francophile court in Provence. The composers represented in the Chantilly Codex were consumed with the expression of pleasures for the mind and body. Their works realize principles espoused by Dionysius: the development of melody, rhythm, variety and appropriateness.

Some of the most familiar examples of the *ars subtilior* in Chantilly are also visually pleasing—for example, the two picture songs by Baude Cordier and *La harpe de melodie* by the Avignonese composer Jacob Senleches, given in conventional choirbook notation. The same piece is notated within the image of a harp in the Newberry codex, the volume that contains the 1391 copy of the aforementioned *Tractatus*. (See Fig. 13.2)

Its text stresses the importance of seeing and hearing:

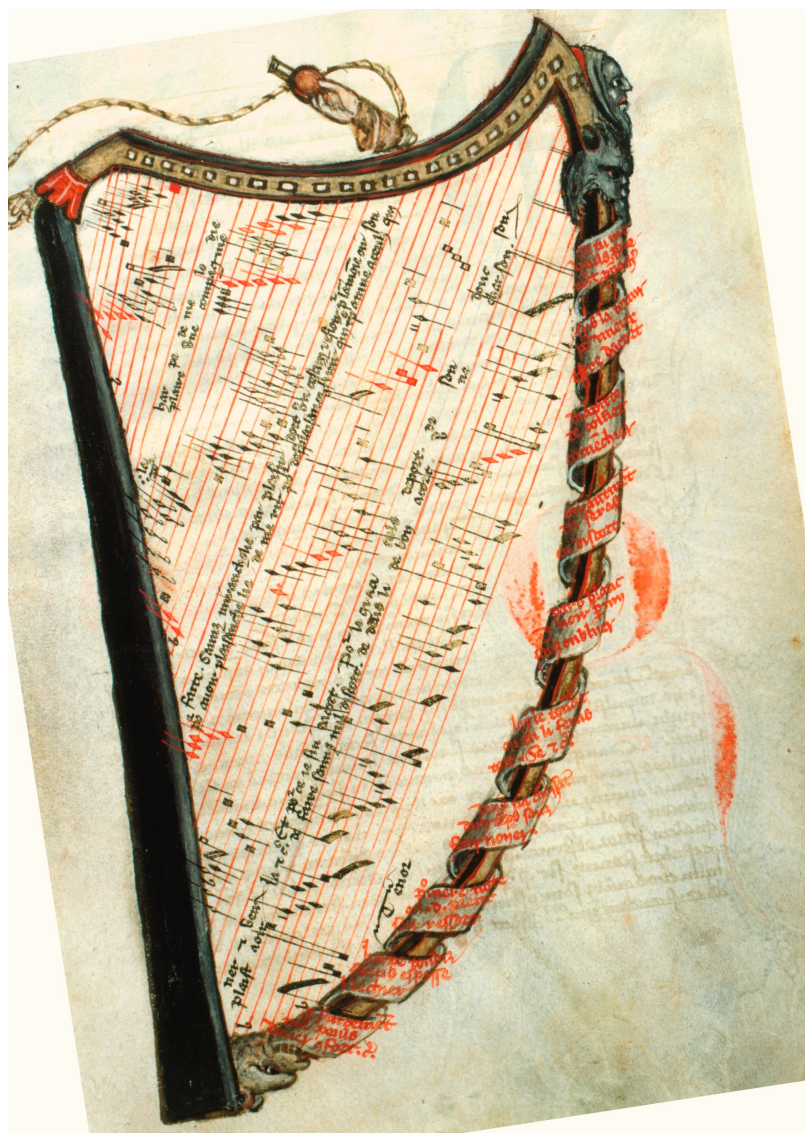
la harpe de melodie
faite sainz mirancolie
par plaisir doit bien cescun
resjouir p[our] l'arm[on]ie
oir sonner et veir

(The harp of melody
Made without melancholy
For pleasure, should greatly
Delight everyone to hear its harmony
sound and to see).⁴⁵

This polysensorial reference suggests that the piece would have been performed in an intimate, private surrounding where guests would gather closely to hear and see the beautiful and complex rhythmic

⁴⁴For the latest research on this codex, see Plumley and Stone, *Late Medieval Songbook*.

⁴⁵The translation, based on Richard Hallowell Hoppin's, is in Hirshberg, "Criticism," 149–150.



notation inscribed on the harp.⁴⁶ The image faces folio 9v, a table of proportions by a Magister Albertus.⁴⁷

Neither Senleches's harp piece nor the two other well-known musical compositions inscribed within shapes in Chantilly—Cordier's *Belle, bonne, sage* and his canonic *Tout par compas*, inscribed within a heart and a circle, respectively—are among the earliest examples of "eye music."⁴⁸ (See Fig. 13.3). An even earlier composition, *En la maison Dedalus*, appears in a spiral in one illuminated collection of music and theoretical texts. (See Fig. 13.4)

This composition is believed to be by Johannes Vaillant, a composer also included in Chantilly and argued to have authored a tuning treatise that depicts a harp possibly related to North African or Middle Eastern models.⁴⁹

Another manuscript containing works of the *ars subtilior*, MS Lat 568 at the Biblioteca Estense in Modena, was compiled in Bologna around 1410 and contains chansons from the courts of Pope Alexander V and antipope John XXIII. Together, Modena and Chantilly name forty late-fourteenth-century composers, an abundance compared to the many anonymous attributions in earlier medieval musical collections. Included in both Modena and the Codex Reina, another late-fourteenth-century manuscript now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, is Antonellus's aforementioned setting of Machaut's *Beauté parfaite*, which also honors Senleches with a melody that resembles the opening of *La harpe de melodie*. References in Antonellus's other compositions suggest he worked for the Visconti family in Milan around the turn

⁴⁶It has been argued that the Chantilly version of the piece "suggests that Senleches sang the upper part and played the canonic part and the tenor part on the harp, a truly virtuoso accomplishment"; see Hirschberg, "Criticism," 149. See also Josephson, "Konkordanzen."

⁴⁷Schreur, *Tractatus*, 9. Although evidence points to Philipoctus of Caserta, Schreur claims there is, to date, no proof of authorship. He does believe the author is "an Italian trained in the French style in the third quarter of the fourteenth century." Magister Albertus could be the twelfth-century French cantor and composer. On folio 9r is another figure, the so-called Triangle of Torkesey, a diagram of rhythmic values popular in England in this period and through to the sixteenth century. See Schreur, *Tractatus*, 33.

⁴⁸I am grateful to Rachel McNellis for sharing the paper she presented at the American Musicological Society in November 2017, "Notating the Sounding Spheres: Baude Cordier's *Tout par compas* as Diagram, Image, and Transformative Space," which locates theological, cosmological and geometric intersections in the image of the circle canon, surrounded by four smaller circles, a piece whose text explicates "Tout par compas suy composés." McNellis finds codicological evidence that Cordier's canon "was intended as an image of God's creation," and, further, that "in their movement, the spheres create a harmonious sound."

⁴⁹See Page, "Fourteenth-Century Instruments."

[illegible][illegible]

of the fifteenth century and archival documents place him in Pavia in 1402. Another of his ballades, *Dame d'onour*, quotes Vaillant's virelai *Par maintes foyes*, a piece that imitates the warbling and cooing of birds.⁵⁰ According to Thomas Persico,

Oltre alla perfetta coerenza strutturale con la forma metrico-ritmica del testo lirico di Machaut, l'intonazione di Antonello è caratterizzata da una duplice ripresa del materiale musicale della ballade di Filippotto, evidente sia nel frammento in color notato da Antonello in concomitanza con il testo «et ma dolour» (v. 6), sia nel melisma d'apertura.⁵¹

Persico analyses the structure of the setting as it relates to the rules of “*constructio verborum* per ‘armonia’ e per ‘musicalità’” as set forth in the poetry of Dante.⁵²

Antonellus certainly admired Machaut, particularly his prosimetrical *Prologue*,⁵³ which is filled with assonance and alliteration, like the /l/ in the first stanza (“languir,” “lontayne,” “longue,” “longuement”) and the repeated /d/ (“douçour,” “desirant,” “dame,” “desiree,” “duree,” “dolour,” “desirs,” “durer”) that culminates in the expression “En desirant ma dame desiree.”⁵⁴ As advocated by the Grand Rhétoriqueurs, a group of younger poets active in the late fourteenth century, Machaut also alternates “feminine” rhymes (lines ending in a mute *e*) with “masculine” ones (lines ending in any other sound).⁵⁵ Antonellus makes the most of this beautiful poetry, displaying many of the complex rhythmic practices of the Avignonesse circle, and is considered one of the first Italians to be so highly influenced by French musical models; his Italian works, especially his *ballate*, tend to be simpler. For additional complexities and ambiguities, each of the three voices follows its own rhythmic and melodic movement. The composer made use of irregular mensuration signs, found in few other manuscripts.⁵⁶ Syncopated rhythms lend an improvisatory quality and, in keeping with the Dionysian need for variety, alternate with passages of rhythmic order and clarity. What results, in Jeremy Yudkin’s eloquent phrasing, is

⁵⁰Vaillant’s *Per maintes foyes* was widely disseminated; see Weiss, “Games.”

⁵¹Persico, “Color,” 125.

⁵²Persico, “Color,” 126.

⁵³Zingesser, “Genesis.”

⁵⁴Yudkin, *Music*, 574.

⁵⁵On Machaut and rhetoric, see Enders, “Music.” The Grands Rhétoriqueurs were active in Franco-Flemish lands from 1460 to 1520 and employed rich rhyme schemes, assonance, puns and clever orthography including the creation of verbal rebuses, as in Cordier’s heart-shaped rondeau.

⁵⁶Taruskin, *Oxford History*, 111–112.

a poetic and musical style of tremendous sophistication and subtlety in which the music floats freely like the diaphanous fabric of a dress in a soft breeze, held by stitches at only the most essential points. Its aim is the perfect beauty expressed in the words of the poem, words [Antonellus] uses as a scaffold for musical variation.⁵⁷

Whether related to Antonellus or not, another member of the Avignonese circle, Philipoctus of Caserta also quoted Machaut's vocal compositions in one of his ballades before being himself quoted in a later motet by Johannes Ciconia (likely Philipoctus's student) that exemplifies the Dionysian principle of imitation.⁵⁸ Another composer-theorist, surnamed Goscalch, is the supposed author of a theoretical text that circulated alongside those of Vaillant and Philipoctus. This mysterious late-fourteenth-century musician explored the *coniunctae*, the so-called forbidden hexachords.⁵⁹ Some identify Goscalch with Solage, a composer in the same orbit who wrote a satirical piece, *Fumeux fume*. The title is another playful double entendre, alluding to the Fumeux, an obscure literary society founded by Eustache Deschamps (1346–1406), a poet who also considered himself Machaut's heir. The members must have challenged one another for unconventional conceits: this obscure epigrammatic text featured multiple variations on the word *fumeux* ("fume," "fume," "fumeuse") and employed chromatic alterations and a prolonged passage navigating the complete circle of fifths.⁶⁰

With or without direct manuscript contact, the concepts central to Dionysius's theory of composition, one which valued polysensorial beauty, influenced composers well before the repopularization initiated by Bembo. The influence of such considerations formed a tradition within Avignonese circles and led to Franco-Italian trajectory that would flourish in Pavia and Milan, where the Visconti nephews Bernabò and Giangaleazzo established courts. The tradition flourished in part due to a pattern of emulation and it is no accident that composers imitated and paid homage to one another, with subtle

⁵⁷Yudkin, *Music*, 575.

⁵⁸On Philipoctus and Ciconia, see Taruskin, *Oxford History*, 110–113.

⁵⁹A "Goscalch francigenus" is the author of treatises known collectively as The Berkeley Array; see Ellsworth, "Introduction," 13–15. In a treatise now in Catania—related to one in Faenza, which attributes the treatise on note shapes to Philipoctus de Caserta, and to another in Washington at the Library of Congress—the Goscalch treatises appear alongside treatises on geometry, Jacobus Barbo's treatise on rhetoric and another on ratios, commentaries on Boethius, and numerous other works, including the treatise on note shapes.

⁶⁰For the text, see Plumley and Stone, *Codex*, 59r. Other composers in Chantilly also have anagrammatic aliases, for example, Trebol/Borlet.

allusions to their models evident in the newer works. In so doing, they reflect Dionysius's advocacy for using good models and illustrate the value of brainstorming in a multicultural environment. In particular, this Dionysian practice reveals that some theorists grappled with the prevailing Pythagorean doctrine of the mathematical division of the monochord by adding consonant intervals, particularly, thirds and sixths. In addition to a focus on the ear and the beauty of sound, there was also a focus on the eye and on retaining aspects of the *ars memorativa*, already in jeopardy as a result of the proliferation of sources and the waning necessity for mnemonics. In all, this Visconti-sponsored Dionysian tradition saw unique expressions both in terms of musical innovation—new definitions of sonority and a new appreciation for timing—and transcription, yielding new note forms and exquisite play of images, innovations that are in fact based on ancient musical theory. As Dionysius now begins to acquire the stature he deserves, this study of an overlooked instance of his influence may continue to inform the critical understanding of his thought and legacy.

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