
H-France Review Vol. 3 (October 2003), No. 116

Anne Walters Robertson, *Guillaume de Machaut and Reims: Context and Meaning in his Musical Works*. Cambridge U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. xx + 456 pp. Illustrations, music, notes, bibliography, and index. £65.00 (cl); \$85.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-521-41876-3.

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This important study of selected compositions and of the broad context for the *oeuvre* of one of the fourteenth-century's greatest cultural figures demonstrates familiarity with many of the current methodological approaches to the past. It offers a practical application of urban studies, using the geographical spaces of Reims and of its cathedral as a tool for understanding the literary-musical works created there. It uses the biographical profile of this important cleric with his many and extensive courtly ties as a key to unlocking the mysteries of his compositional decisions. It explores a wide range of literary works--theological, poetic, mystical, and eschatological--and explains ways in which those works, available to the poet-composer Machaut and to his audience, might help us interpret the meaning and choices in artistic production. To be sure, there is little critical theorizing in this book; rather, the volume provides a practical demonstration of how and why such tools can be important in our reconstructions of the past.

At one level, Robertson's book takes as its focus a coherent subset of Guillaume de Machaut's musical compositions, those that were written over a pre-existent tenor melody. These include the twenty-three motets, the David Hocket, and the six movements of the *Messe de Notre Dame*. In this musicological reading of Robertson's endeavors, her work represents a kind of cultural history in which music serves as a window upon the past and the past offers an explanation for the compositional and textual choices within a "great work." Thus, we find the expected comparisons of regional chant melodies with their polyphonic adaptations; we find tables of liturgical positioning for various works; and we find discussions of archaic and modernist musical styles, along with their appropriate musico-theoretical contexts (though the speculations on possible connections between Philippe de Vitry and Machaut (pp. 36-7) perhaps overstep the evidence).^[1] We also, generously, find texts and translations for all 23 motets in one of the three appendices to the volume. Had Robertson merely left us with this solid accounting of some of the compositional decisions of this major music-historical figure, she would have done us a service, for she has an apt eye for significant musical detail.

Robertson's study is far more significant than a mere accretion of analytical details, however, for she performs here the kind of intellectual inquiry that can only be done by an expert. What the book ultimately offers is an exploration of *scens*, "facets of meaning in the musical works of one composer/poet" (p. 2). This "meaning" is more than a reconstruction of the specific sense of the words; rather, Robertson evokes numerous "extra-musical referents" (p. 4). Some of these are intertexts. Thus, in the case of motets 1-17, Robertson reads Machaut's poetry in conjunction with sermon literature, including that of the Cistercian author, Baldwin of Ford; with fourteenth-century mystical "wisdom" literature, including treatises by Richard Rolle and John Ruusbroec, as well as Heinrich Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae*, with explorations of the deadly sins; and with *mal mariée* texts, among others. She

draws parallels between the depiction of the spiritual journey of the soul and the ordering of motets, particularly of motet tenors (esp. in Table 3-3 on pp. 98-9), for instance, and then uses details from the mystical literature to add layers of depth and meaning to our understanding of these poetical/musical works. Robertson evinces familiarity with a broad array of literature, but even more importantly she demonstrates ways in which the fourteenth-century reader might have understood the works in question. Teasing out the composer/poet's implicit dialog with literary "models," then, is one of the most important contributions of this work. (She also puts key words which provide circumstantial evidence for literal borrowings in italics or in bold type; the typographical contrast wears thin but nonetheless is useful for a quick scan of related phrases.)

In addition to those verbal "intertexts," the city of Reims itself plays an important role in Robertson's discussions. In chapter one, she invites us into the book through a description of a procession, an effective way to sketch the city's geographical markers. Significantly, her descriptions of the procession focus on place and on material elements—the windows, statues, architecture—and not on its aural element. Her discussions of individual pieces sometimes evoke the material surroundings in which they were created or heard. For instance, Robertson explores motet 19, the sole Machauvian motet dedicated to a saint, in the context of the sculptural program at the collegiate church of Saint-Quentin, a church where Machaut held a prebend and served as canon, and also the church where the twelve chapters of the archdiocese met "to check the temerity of the perverse [bishops]." [2] She quite plausibly sees this motet as a possible aural contribution to the program: "Through this work, not only could the canons now gaze at the sculptures of Saint Quintinus's life that they themselves had commissioned, but they could do so while hearing a motet written by fellow-canon of Saint-Quentin, Guillaume de Machaut" (p. 72). Similarly, motet 23 can be connected with the Reims cathedral oratory that had an altar of Saint Paul and the "Beautiful Image." Robertson details the establishment of a kind of *proto-Salve* service at this altar during Machaut's tenure (pp. 215-21), a service which might well have occasioned performances of this work.

To close the volume, Robertson moves once again to the material surroundings of Reims cathedral and to this altar in particular. Through work already familiar to many scholars from her 1992 study, Robertson connects Machaut's *Messe de Notre Dame* to the altar of the *belle image*. [3] She demonstrates in meticulous detail the reasons that the mass should be connected to Reims cathedral. She further demonstrates that Machaut and his brother, Jean de Machaut, almost certainly endowed a performance of this polyphonic mass at the altar near the *Rouelle*. This means that the Mass served both a Marian and a commemorative function, and in the latter guise, Robertson sees here an anticipation of the numerous requiem masses of the fifteenth century. For Robertson's purposes, the spatial geography of Reims cathedral is important; her chapter evokes the specific location of performance. But with a deft hand, Robertson also sketches out other Marian innovations of the period by identifying the new statues and the new Marian services introduced during Machaut's tenure as canon of Reims. Thus, material culture and innovative liturgical practice provide a backdrop for understanding one of the major works of the western art music canon.

Another important category of "extra-musical referents" can be found in the historical record, which Robertson mines to great effect. She does a particularly fine job of evoking the problematic relationship between archbishop and cathedral chapter in her extensive discussion of motet 18, dedicated to Guillaume de Trie (chapter two). As she points out, "[o]f all the late medieval archbishops of Reims, none was more controversial, nor more universally despised, than the dedicatee of Machaut's Motet 18"; as she then proceeds to demonstrate, Machaut probably intended the motet to function as a hortatory work rather than a commendatory one. Similarly, the historical figure of Archbishop Jean de Craon and his suspect political allegiances during the preparations for the siege of Reims inform Robertson's discussion of motet 22 (chapter seven, esp. pp. 210-15). Here, however, the situation is more complex, for this motet also functions as a *miroir des princes*. Do we perhaps see here a hint of Machaut's own political savvy? After all, in Robertson's words, "to Jean de Craon's ears, the triplum accused the Duke

of Normandy and warned about his upcoming reign; whereas to Charles, the triplum rebukes an ineffective archbishop” (p. 214). In short, Robertson’s familiarity with the *rémois* archives enhances and enriches her interpretive explanations of the texts and music she sets out to elucidate. Ceremonial and political nuances stand cheek-by-jowl with literary connections, and the end result is an evocation of the intellectual life of a particular place and time, not merely a survey of the works of a great composer. In this, I believe Robertson does emphatically meet her stated goal: “We will try to develop a deeper understanding of the cultural and intellectual milieu of this church and city” (p. 7).

Indeed, the book offers information for scholars in a variety of fields. The liturgical historian will find a calendar listing high feasts at Reims Cathedral on pp. 39-42. The researcher on royal ceremonial will find discussions of coronation rites (pp. 45 ff), of the *Laudes regiae* (pp. 47, 63-8, 253-4), and of the symbolic significance of David iconography for the Valois dynasty. Followers of ecclesiastical politics will have numerous anecdotes to add to their collection: The Hundred Years’ War and the siege of Reims in 1359-60, the coronation of Charles V and the dynastic squabbles in France, and the politics and posturing of historical figures necessarily had an impact on a poet-composer accustomed to dealing with the major political individuals of his day. To this historical medley, Robertson adds the special touch of intimate familiarity with the local history and local politics of Reims. In this, she fills a lacuna. Robertson initially claims “we know relatively little of the place where Machaut spent much of his life, the city of Reims” (p. 4); having read the book one will know quite a bit more.

Of course, the city of Reims does not cross over into discussions of each and every work. The chapters on “turned-about love songs” (chapters three to six) focus more on literary than *rémois* connections, and indeed, here Robertson might have done more to ensure that the reader knew whether or not the particular texts serving as parallels to Machaut’s motets were found in the Reims library. Baldwin of Ford (pp. 91-93), Thomas the Cistercian (p. 167 and elsewhere), and Bernard of Clairvaux (p. 176) are all cited as witnesses to contemporary ideas and to specific turns of phrase that were adapted by Machaut in his motet texts, yet the reader is left wondering if the ideas were accessible in written form to the poet-composer, or if he merely knew of them through hearsay. This is probably a failure of editing rather than of authorial perspective; the information on Suso’s presence in the chapter library (p. 52) should have been cited again in the discussion of the *Horologium* (p. 96 ff), and for most other medieval authors the generous end notes give the necessary information.

It is striking that in a work as complex and erudite as this one is, the biggest critique is merely the result of a mental shorthand. Robertson establishes a clear connection between the order of the first seventeen motets within the Machaut manuscripts and the steps of a spiritual journey, and on this front her case is compelling. The problem lies in the slippage between treating the journey as a *compositional* plan for the production of the motets and what she is really documenting, which is an *interpretive* plan for the understanding of the final product. The spiritual journey is relevant for our understanding of these motets even if Machaut did not conceive each of the works in light of it, for he later reshapes the works by giving them this context. Robertson is conscious of the difference; she talks about the need to date pieces individually (p. 183), and admits that Machaut may have placed some preexistent pieces into order and then composed others to fit the steps of the journey (p. 184).

Nevertheless, her analyses sometimes verge on over-interpretations of the individual pieces in order to make them conform to the schema she has proposed, as if the plan for compilation was also the plan for composition. For instance, she demonstrates structural differences between the cluster of bipartite motets (1-7) and unipartite motets (11-17), but then must explain the order of motets 8, 9 and 10, which are unipartite, unipartite, and bipartite, respectively. Robertson sees this ordering as relating to the labyrinth, and suggests that Machaut deliberately “confus[es] the technical devices at this point in the cycle” (p. 172). In other words, she suggests that there was a compositional decision that results in an anomaly of organization. The problem is that a different ordering could potentially be explained away with a similar slight-of-hand. Here, stepping back and considering Machaut’s role as compiler might

have been more convincing. If Machaut-the-compiler was trying to fit a preexistent motet into a sacred-journey scheme, there might in fact be such irregularities of organizational plan. Rather than adopting a symbolic interpretation, I see the lack of a pure division into bipartite and unipartite motet structures as *confirmation* of Machaut's decision as a compiler to adopt the "soul's journey" plan, for a structural-based organization would have placed motet 10 out of phase with the steps of spiritual journey.

If Machaut is the interpreter of his own motets (and, most likely, he is), then musical evidence—perhaps in a separate chapter—might usefully be adduced to show ways in which the idea of the spiritual journey might have affected Machaut's compositional decisions in those pieces explicitly crafted to depict that journey. Elizabeth Upton's retexting of some of the Chantilly manuscript's ballades has demonstrated fourteenth-century composers' consciousness of the meaning—the *scens*--of passages fraught with political implications for the audience.[4] That the composer Machaut did—or did not—do likewise would be the next logical piece of the argument and is a possible direction for future studies.

One of the most important findings in Robertson's study is the presence of a *rémois* model for the creation of compilations of complete works. Machaut has long been understood as a central figure in the establishment of the self-conscious artist, for he claims editorial control over his corpus ("here is the order that Guillaume de Machaut wishes his works to have") and presents his works as a unified collection divided by genre in ways that parallel our modern organization of works by category. What Robertson discovers is that Machaut's undertaking may have had a direct historical model in the works of the Reims cathedral *scholasticus*, Dreux de Hautvillers (pp. 142-3). Not only did Dreux gather his works into author-*corpora* manuscripts, he segregated them according to genre and added "self-promotional" inscriptions. What is perhaps most significant is that "at least two of Dreux's manuscripts were kept on a pulpit in the vestibule of the cathedral." Thus, Robertson finds in the geographical location and in the intellectual-cultural orbit of our composer-hero volumes of writings that may have influenced the way in which he chose to represent himself to posterity.

In short, Machaut, Reims and, yes, France itself, were intimately connected. By exploring those connections, Robertson does more than merely explain the music or amplify the composer's biography. Instead, she describes, evokes, and in part recreates a cultural milieu. The moment in time and space in which Machaut sat in stall number forty on the left side of the choir in the cathedral of a city of central importance to the realm of France still has important literary, historical, cultural, and musical resonances for us today.

NOTES

[1] Particularly problematic are Robertson's assertions about Philippe de Vitry's role in the creation of the *Roman de Fauvel* (p. 37). The connections between Vitry and the *Fauvel* circle have been much debated in recent years, and currently we have no documentary evidence placing Philippe de Vitry in Paris prior to 1321, some four years after the luxury manuscript of the *Roman de Fauvel*, Paris, BNF fr. 146, was copied. Thus, Robertson's speculations about Machaut's educational connections to Philippe de Vitry, and her further speculations about the possible connection between Machaut and the *Fauvel* compilation are probably overstated given our current knowledge. For the current state of research on *Fauvel* and on Vitry's putative role in its compilation, the reader should start with Margaret Bent and Andrew Wathey, "Vitry, Philippe de [Vitriaco, Vittriaco]", *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 16 August 2003), <http://www.grovemusic.com>. One of the most restrictive readings of the Vitry corpus is found in Edward Roesner's sections in the introduction to the facsimile edition of *Fauvel*, and his arguments should lend a cautionary note to any assertions about conscious modeling between Vitry and the younger Machaut; see Edward H. Roesner, François Avril, and Nancy Freeman

Regalado, *Introduction to Le Roman de Fauvel in the Edition of Mesire Chaillou de Pesstain* (New York: Broude Brothers, 1990).

[2] “[E]t ut perversorum compescatur temeritas, et malignari volentium nephariis ausibus aditus precludatur, remedium antiquum”; Pierre Varin, ed., *Archives administratives de la ville de Reims: Collection de pièces inédites pouvant servir à l’histoire des institutions dans l’intérieur de la cité*, 5 vols., Collection de documents inédits sur l’histoire de France, 1er sér., Histoire politique (Paris: 1839-48), vol. 2/1:607, as quoted in Robertson, p. 72 and p. 356 note 89.

[3] Anne Walters Robertson, “The Mass of Guillaume de Machaut in the Cathedral of Reims,” in *Plainsong in the Age of Polyphony*, ed. Thomas Kelly, CSPP 2 (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 100-39.

[4] Elizabeth Randel Upton, “The Chantilly Codex (F-CH 564): The Manuscript, its Music, its Scholarly Reception,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001, chapter four, particularly pp. 219-231. A more extended discussion of ideas and observations about text-music interplay in the Chantilly codex can be found in *eadem*, “Editing Chantilly Chansons: Scribal Procedures for Text Placement and Larger Questions of Musical Style,” in *Essays Presented at the Colloquium ‘La Musique de la Renaissance: Nouveaux regards sur le manuscrit 564 de Chantilly,’* ed. Anne Stone and Yolanda Plumley (Paris: Minerve, 2003, forthcoming). I am grateful to Professor Upton for sharing a copy of this latter work in advance of publication.

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