

Formalism and Virtuosity: Franco-Burgundian Poetry, Music, and Visual Art, 1470–1520

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Critics who have adopted procedures and techniques available a generation or two ago necessarily approach literature with a two-pole interpretive framework, even though they are usually aware that the dichotomy between form and meaning is a fiction—a critical construct tolerated provisionally “for the convenience of discussing” two admittedly inseparable dimensions of a larger whole, the text. By contrast, in the reader-centered pragmatics of today’s critical theory, attempts to assess the possibilities and conditions of meaning itself link form with function. Though no less a dichotomy of convenience than the old one, this polarity affords easier access to fundamental questions formerly submerged in the words and categories of “nonliterary” disciplines. One such question is the subject of this essay: What are the functions of form in works of art produced in an age, or a milieu, of semantic collapse, when meaning is a thing of the past, or of the future?

Attempts to speak of “meaninglessness” on a large scale may easily appear incompatible with the very logic by which they ask to be accepted, though the concept is easily understood on the *personal* level. When the old words no longer work, when language is blocked and action along with it, an individual is said to be “in crisis”—crisis of faith, identity crisis, and so forth. Generalizing, it is not difficult to picture a collection of such individuals, a community. But only in relatively recent times has it become clear that when, on a cultural level, a language ceases to mean, ceases to convey the vital *idées forces* which formerly provided the spiritual scaffolding undergirding the community’s values, then the languages of the arts show signs (now abundantly cataloged) of self-conscious inwardness

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and self-reflexive probing as they recapitulate in their syntax and morphology the crisis they re-create. Searchingly subversive, at best, or simply searching, in the interrogative and self-referential mode, the mechanisms of the language continue to operate, but they turn mostly *à vide*, grinding out continuous clones of themselves as process—like a Xerox machine run amuck.

A fascinating early paradigm of this “crisis” phenomenon is the symptomatic ornamentalism and profligate syntax in the arts of combinatory composition which, as we will see, characterize the half-century of Franco-Burgundian formalism from 1470 to 1520: the age of the *grands rhétoriciens*, of Dufay, Ockeghem, and Josquin, of unequalled craftsmanship in the visual arts. In short, it was an age of unparalleled *Angst* and anality—until the Renaissance (with its “classical” revivalism) found its new language and poured new myths into the machine. The phenomenon is, of course, more familiar in the twentieth century, with the geometric re-visionings of cubism, troped silly by dada and surrealism; with serialism, borrowing, in a dodecaphonic harmonic frame, precisely the same patterning devices of Renaissance generative polyphony described below; and with structuralism and its successors, isolating for analysis and descriptive re-formations the minimal functional units of any system of related parts.¹

But why did the fifteenth-century *rhétoricien* take a year (as Molinet says) to write a *chant royal*? Or Josquin several years (as Glareanus reports) to perfect a Mass? In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century France and Burgundy, what were the functions of technical virtuosity and ostentatious mastery of form? A useful approach to these questions lies in a comparative study of the techniques of Renaissance *canon* (transformations of a statement by strictly patterned alterations and recombinations of its constituent units) in the creative de- and re-construction of narrative, decorative, and melodic material around 1470 to 1520. The half-century of dizzying change that saw the discovery of the New World and the beginnings of the Reformation was a period of intensive exploration and deconstructive reconstitution of traditional forms in the arts as well. As to the *functions* of the traditional forms, I shall distinguish three:

- (1) TECHNICAL FUNCTIONS of compositional devices, structures, figures, and so forth: for example, *x* provides contrast (or continuity, or amplification, and so on), *y* builds tension, *z* resolves *y* and provides a transition to *a'*, and so on.

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(2) SOCIAL (or public) FUNCTIONS

- (a) of individual structures, devices, and so forth: for example, anagram, acrostic, puzzle canon, and so on.
- (b) of individual "formal types" (rondeau, motet, Mass) as opposed to individual works, genres, media.

(3) PERSONAL (or private, or self-reflexively "artistic") FUNCTIONS of formalistic composition in general, as an aesthetic value, a preferred way of organizing and expressing perceptions and experience.

To the last category, Paul Zumthor devotes the most searching and original sections of a recent book on the poetics of the court laureates in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Burgundy and France.² Dismantling traditional literary history's view of Franco-Flemish formalism, Zumthor removes the narrow aesthetic bias underlying it and substitutes a more global view of the functions of form in late medieval French poetry. Essential to his description of the *rhétoriqueurs'* poetics is the principle, newly revived, that poetry—and, a fortiori, poetry criticism—makes better sense if a work is read not merely "in context" but, to the extent possible, in its *own* context. This means that if we compound our ignorance by adding to the historically unknowable a methodologically determined neglect for the sociopsychological and economic pressures of the *rhétoriqueurs'* material milieu, we will never make anything but nonsense of their aesthetic world. With respect specifically to the latter, Zumthor refers frequently to music (though more often in its medieval, crypto-Pythagorean speculative guise than in terms of actual composers and compositions) and to the visual arts, as in the following passage: "Analogie de perception, proximité de dessein, tout ce qui rapproche des peintres, graveurs, enlumineurs, tappissiers même, les rhétoriqueurs mérite d'être signalé" (*ML*, p. 204). This notion of "analogie de perception" provides an excellent springboard for launching two essential questions:

- (1) Can meaningful parallels be drawn between the poetics of the *grands rhétoriqueurs* on the one hand and, on the other, the aesthetics and creative language of the Franco-Burgundian composers, painters, and decorative artists/artisans (engravers, miniaturists, tapestry weavers, tilesmiths) who were their contemporaries and collaborators in the period roughly around 1470 to 1520?
- (2) If salient similarities do reveal more than superficially analogous relations, what do these tell us about the languages of poetry, music, and visual arts at the end of the Middle Ages? Otherwise stated (in the form-function terms of our discussion): To what extent can we compare and equate the functions (technical, private, public) and functionings (rules, conventions, constraints, and conditions of signifying) of the highly formalized aesthetic constructions characteristic of Franco-Burgundian artistic expressiveness?

I must emphasize that my purpose here is *not* to pursue any global, historical approach to these questions. Rather, I wish to isolate a few

examples of *extreme* formal elaboration in Franco-Flemish compositional devices, where ingeniousness and technical virtuosity push against the outermost limits of a medium of expression in exploratory attempts to renew an artistic language perceived as inadequate, or "worn out." Accordingly, in examining specific instances of deconstructive revitalization where the creative energies of the Renaissance strained and cracked—and then recast—the inherited molds of expression in the arts, my remarks will be limited to a *small* but important class of highly rhetorical compositional devices common to (but not equally characteristic of) poetry, music, and visual arts. I have labeled these devices "generative." They include formal mathematical and quasi-mechanical devices, which enabled the late medieval poet, artisan, and composer/musician to generate what can be called "texts" (structures of expression). Through rigorously rule-governed manipulations of multiple (often, in principle, infinite) possibilities of recombination, these texts resulted in realizations ("readings"), capable of fulfilling numerous functions serially or simultaneously. Some of these functions—philosophical, spiritual, aesthetic, narrative, decorative, lyric, ludic (not to mention self-reflexive, self-indulgent, and diversely autotherapeutic)—will be described in detail, while others, merely alluded to.

Before proceeding with analogies and parallels, some preliminary remarks on historical background are necessary. First, it is important to recall the dissociation of what we now call "music" from "poetry" which occurred in the medieval lyric after the *Blütezeit* (eleventh through thirteenth centuries) of the troubadours and trouvères. In contrast to their works, "lyric poetry" of the late medieval court is generally not sung. In the age of specialization after Machaut (fourteenth century), the poet is typically a "wordsmith" (*rhétoriqueur*) in the service of a patron prince and writes works to be recited (or, even better, *read*). Similarly, the composer generally makes no claim to being a poet and writes songs in which the words (written by someone else) play (as the *rhétoriqueur* would have said) second fiddle to the music.³ Though there are exceptions to the rule, the trend moves clearly toward specialization.⁴ Still reflecting this trend is the contrast today between the cross-disciplinary celebrity of the troubadours and trouvères, prey to musicologists and literary specialists alike, and the perfect incognito with which most late medieval poets and composers pass unnoticed outside their respective "fields." Though the two groups were in close contact throughout the period in question, it is unlikely in the present state of medieval studies that a literary specialist will know the names (much less the works) of Binchois, Dufay, Ockeghem, Busnois, Obrecht, Pierre de la Rue, Josquin des Prez. But no more unlikely than for the musicologist to have read Meschinot, Molinet, Lemaire, Saint-Gelays, Cretin.⁵ As soon as one ventures to bridge the gap, however, the primacy of form looms as the most fundamental and arresting characteristic of both groups. The *grands rhétoriqueurs*, to the extent they are known at all, are notorious for their technical mastery, verbal acrobatics, poetic pyrotechnics—no less than the Franco-Flemish composers were and remain noted for astonishing feats of formal mastery and technical virtuosity.

Such virtuosity reached its highest prominence in the generation of 1470 to 1480 (Ockeghem, Obrecht) and, though still a powerful and highly refined resource in Josquin's compositional toolbox, began to recede in his work (and in that of his contemporaries in the first two decades of the sixteenth century) in favor of expressive techniques designed to mirror more closely the shades of meaning and emotion in the texts. This brings us back to the initial question: What specific properties and features in the languages of the various arts reflect the exploratory subversion and revitalization described above?

Let us look first at poetry. It is well known that by the fifteenth century, lyric poetry had undergone a radical transformation; the early lyric fluidity and formal variability (the now famous *mouvance* of the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries) had hardened into the nonlyric and even, some maintain, antilyric *formes fixes* which characterize the poetic formalism of late medieval France. Dispensing with the details of how and why this occurred, the essential point is that by the end of the Middle Ages, the poet in France and Burgundy saw himself as an artisan of words, not as a singer.⁶ He refers to himself as a craftsman (a *facteur*, *faiseur*, *rhétoricien*), and it is plain, sometimes painfully so, to anyone who reads the works that the *rhétoricien* is, indeed, an artisan of forms—or, if you will, an *architecte de la parole*, a specialist in verbal matter. He works words, sounds, metric and strophic forms into intricate patterns and arranges his elaborate designs in *blocks* of exact and harmonious symmetry. He is, in fact, from Machaut on, a virtuoso of the verbal equivalent of the architectural art of *carrelage* (“tile designs”) which adorned the princely châteaux in which he worked and lived. No one familiar with the period will avoid noticing the strikingly similar types of patterns in the poet's works and in his surroundings.

I have gathered elsewhere visual documentation which bears out Zumthor's suggestions quoted above (“analogies of perception” and “proximity of design”) with respect to the meticulously constructivist mentality of the Franco-Burgundian artisan. But the analogies I found are much more than perceptual. It is true that the elaborate designs on the walls, floors, ceilings, windows, woodwork, and so forth of the early Renaissance château are, indeed, composed of intricate blocks of material; but their function is not merely decorative (that is, analogously restricted to this simple plane when compared with contemporaneous poems), it is also *narrative*, with emblematic motifs and allegorical figures arrayed in linear patterns of “visual” discourse—the invariable “discours de la gloire” (see *ML*, pp. 56–77) which silently proclaims the magnificence of the patron prince and proprietor of the château (see figs. 1–4).⁷

The analogies go further still. Not only was the panegyric constructivism of the architect and tilesmith both a decorative and a narrative art; so too, conversely, was the poetics of the *rhétoricien* very much a poetics of *assemblage*. As an artisan of forms, he is concerned less with the phonic qualities and semantic shades of words than with their concrete

materiality on the page—as blocks (*carreaux*). Indeed the central unit of poetic *assemblage* in this period is the perfect geometric block—the *carré*. In the *ballade* and *chant royal*, the preferred strophic form is a square, a poem made up of as many lines as the lines are made up of syllables: octosyllabic *huitains*, decasyllabic *dixains*, dodecasyllabic *douzains* (see *ML*, pp. 154–55, 226–27, 232, and 262–63). Further, inside each strophe, the rhyme schemes display a similarly harmonious symmetry: for example, ten lines of decasyllables bisected by a mirror-image rhyme scheme (ababb/ccdd), half the rhymes being masculine, the other half feminine.⁸

An even more striking example of this block-type verbal *carrelage* appears in the octosyllabic *huitain* by Destrées (fig. 5). Again, the strophe is composed in the shape of a square. Each line contains three words and can be read forward, backward, down, or up, in any of forty-eight combinations (see *ML*, pp. 262–63). Analysis of the strophe into its constituent blocks (fig. 6) reveals a staggering degree of multidirectional homophony. The highly redundant phonic interweave in this verbal *carrelage* becomes apparent *visually* if you assign a different color to each of the nine different rhyming syllables. While such rapid redundancy is not particularly pleasing to the eye, if we look past the fifty-nine rhyming syllables to the twenty-four rhyming *words* (in a slowing or “braking” process analogous to *augmentatio* in the mensuration canon [more on this below]), the pattern, the design, and the visual harmony become evident.

An even more impressive piece in the *rhétoriqueurs*' verbal/visual arsenal is a poem written in 1534 by Gratien Du Pont in the shape of a chessboard. On each of the sixty-four squares is a moveable five-syllable phrase, ending in *-esse* on the black squares, in *-ante* on the white. All sixty-four phrases belong to the misogynist “blâme des femmes” topos. Thus, in the eight squares of the first line at the top, one reads the following octet of five-syllable phrases: “*Femme abuseresse / Infecte meschante / Sans fin menteresse / Charogne puante / Source de finesse [= ruse] / De coeur inconstante / Perverse traitresse / Fausse decevante*” (*ML*, p. 261). The positioning of these phrases relative to one another is analogous to the alignment of the first rank of chess pieces at the outset of the game: rook, knight, bishop, queen // king, bishop, knight, rook. Similarly on the second row, eight five-syllable phrases are arranged as pawns—the same on the opposite side of the board. Now, any of these phrases can take the place of any other on the board, in accordance with the rules governing the movements of the various chess pieces. The number of verbal combinations is, therefore, infinite, and the “meaning” never changes.

Thus, narrative poems of the *rhétoriqueurs*, exactly like the floors of the castles in which they were composed, could be designed in blocks, in squares, with interchangeable recombinant elements dis-constructed and manipulated at various levels of segmentation: phonemic and morphemic for the purposes of rhyme (even graphemic, for visual rhymes [analogous practices—foreshadowings of *Augenmusik*—are found in Ockhegem]); lexemic for alternative semantic de-, re-, and con-structions; and even syntagmatic, where entire phrases are rearranged with no damage

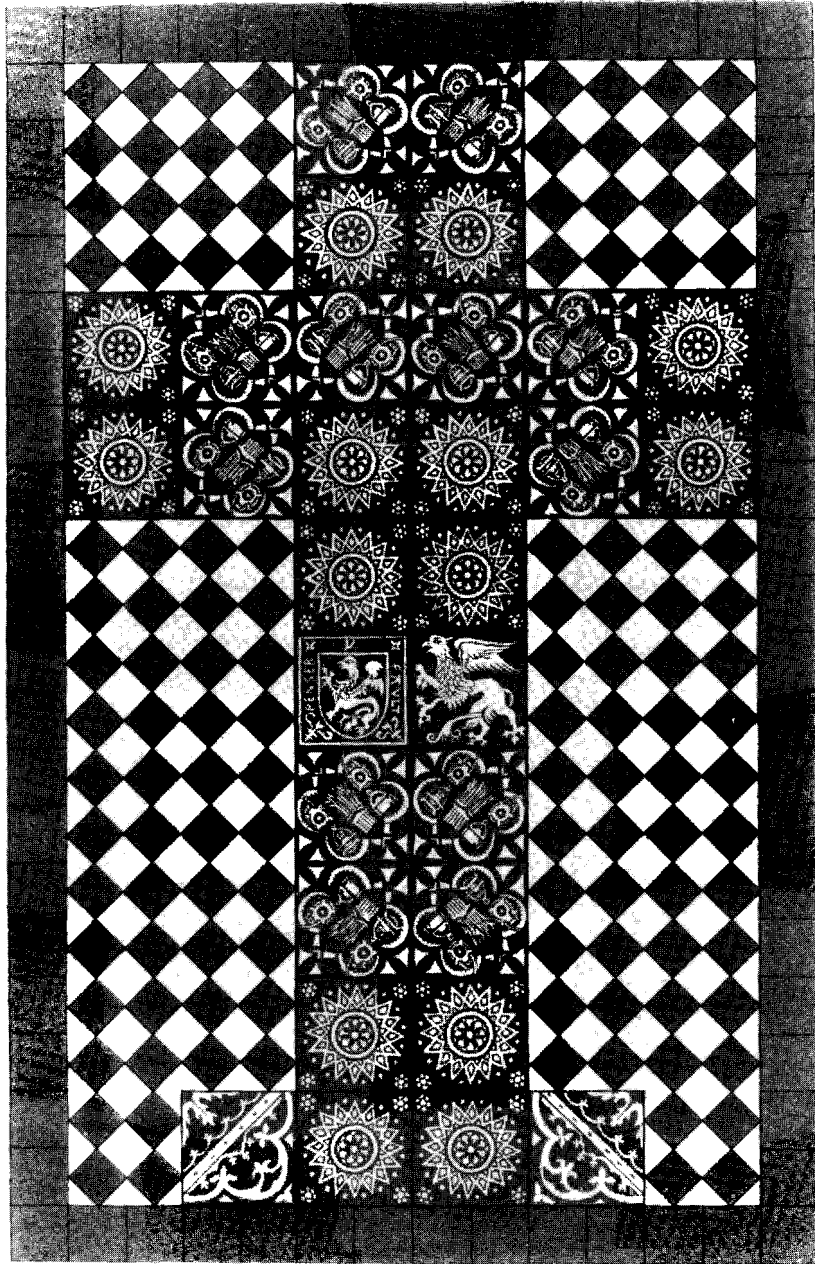


FIG. 1.

650

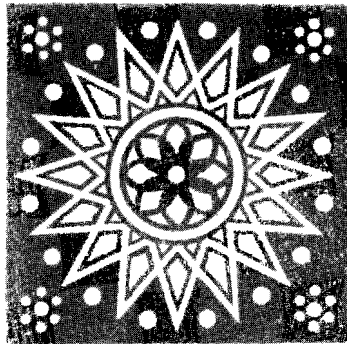
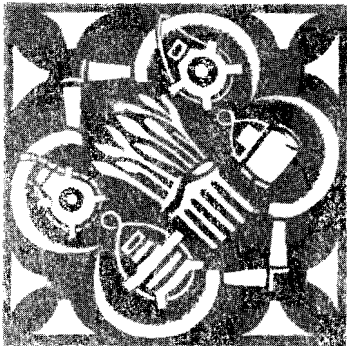


FIG. 2.

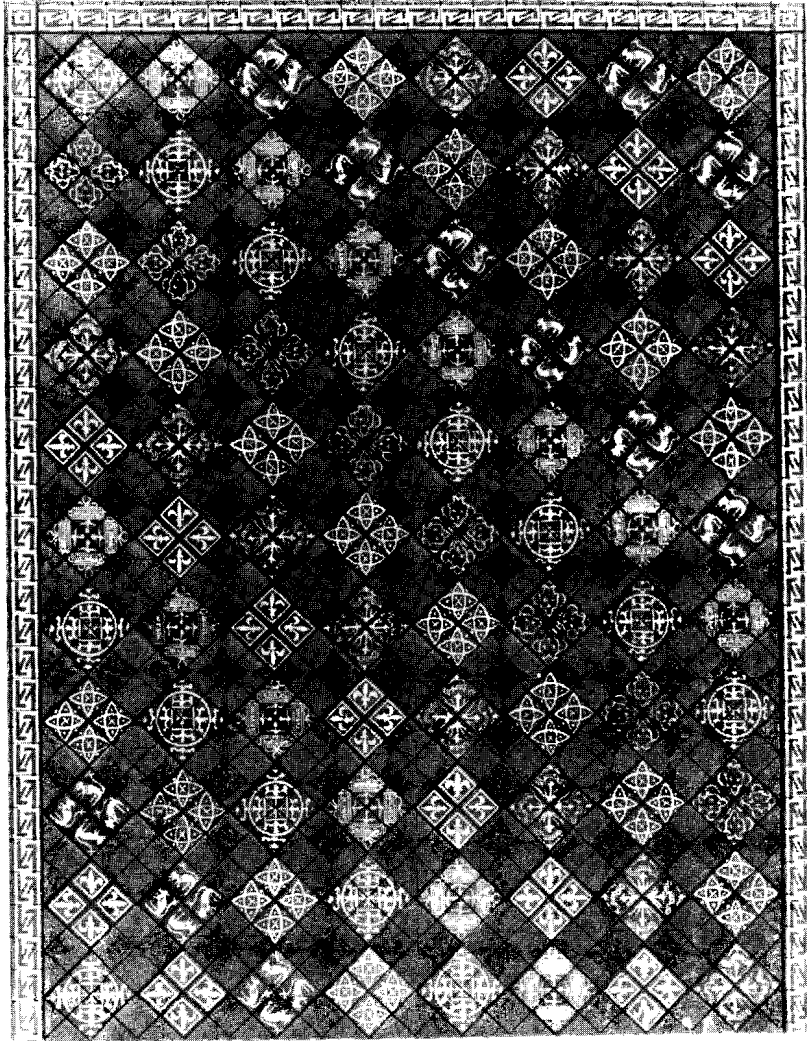


FIG. 3.

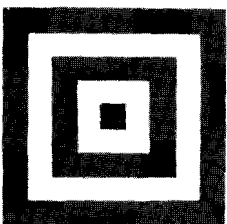
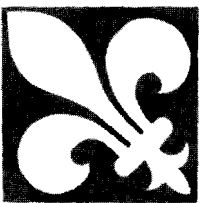
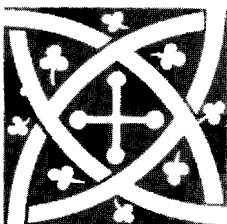
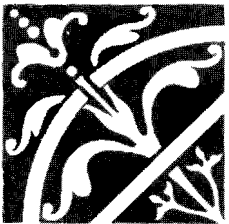
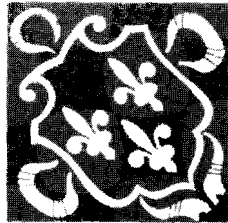
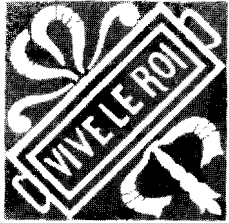


FIG. 4.

Destrées, Vie de Sainte Catherine (1501)
 strophe 108

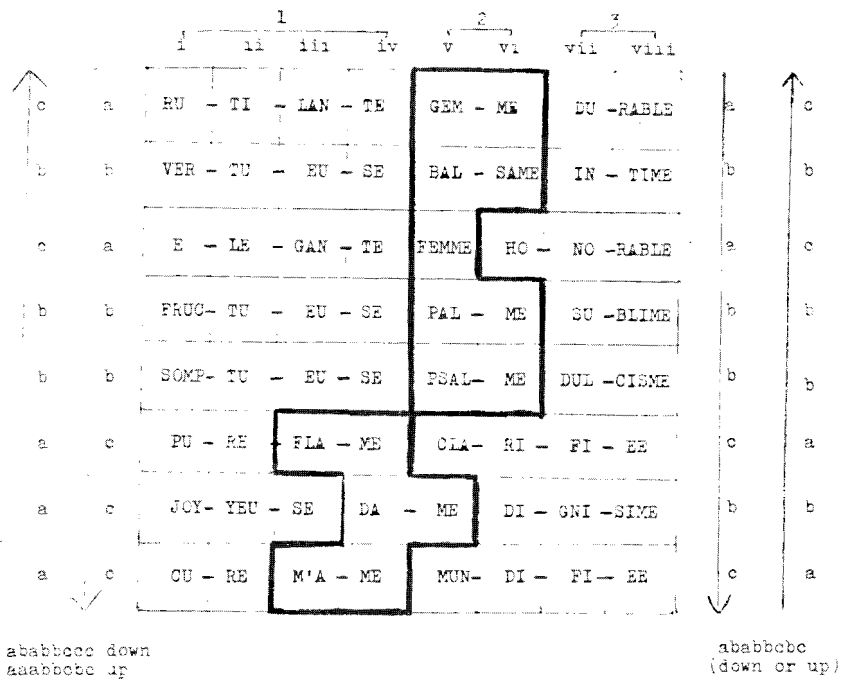


FIG. 5.

RYMING WORDS

number of words		number of rhyming syllables
2	rustling : elegant	1-2
2	petal : ferre	1-2
2	délicat : vénérable	1-2
3	verbeuse : infructueuse : somptueuse : joyeux	1-3
3	balsame : palmé : psalme	1-3
4	intire : subline : dulcisme : dignifié	1-4
2	pure : cure	1-2
3	illame : dame : m'ame	1
2	clarifiée : mondifiée	2

 Total = 24 of the 24 words in the strophe are rhyming words

RYMING SYLLABLES*

number of syllables		assonances
10	re : ce : tu : te : se : te : de(l) : pu : ce :	fruc-
11	ri : (ri) : (ri) : (ri) : ri : si : si : gal : (si) : di : si	
2	lan : gan	
10-8-10	te : se : (blé) : se : (mê) : (mê) : (blé) : se : re : (mê) : se : me : (mê) : re : me : se : me (mê) : re : me	
1	genne : ferme	
4		eu : eu : eu : ver
7	(ra) : (sa) : (ra) : fla : cia : da : m'a	[r'a] : [s'a] : [ra]
3	hal : pal : psal	
4	(clarifié) _{ce} : (mondifié) _{ce} :	e-ig(pante)
2		ny-no(rable)
(5)	(unrhymed): ver-, ins-, soum-, joy-, mun-	

Total =	(84+72)	

of the 84 syllables in the strophe, 59 are rhyming syllables, only 5 are unrhymed. If we add to this number the rhymes obtained by disregarding the 8 mute or elided e's (which may be pronounced, depending on the direction) in which the strophe is read, and by counting duplications of mono- and polysyllabic rhymes, the 72 syllables of the strophe now yield 87 rhyming syllables as against 5 unrhymed ones.

* When the strophe is read in the normal way (left to right vv. 1-8), syllables in parentheses are elements of non-syllabic rhymes ending in mute or elided e (= é), and only the pronounced syllable is counted; e.g., the (ri) in intire is counted, the (mê) is not.

FIG. 6.

to rhyme, meter, or syntax—as in Destrées’ sixty-four-syllable *huitain* (the Renaissance’s verbal version of Rubik’s Cube) and in the sixty-four-square “chessboard” contrafact of Du Pont.

The tile designs *and* the poems reveal functions at once decorative, narrative, and self-expressively artistic. The story they tell is the panegyric “discours de la gloire” of the patron prince; their intellectual and aesthetic values point toward mastery of the most intricate laws of geometric formalism both in conception and execution. It could be argued (though I do not wish to do so here) that *words* thus perceived in their concrete materiality on the page and arranged according to laws of visual harmony can in some sense compensate, in a poetics of *assemblage*, for the loss of the musical component of “lyric” poetry. Whatever functional transfers occurred, or seem to have occurred, this new and, at the time, self-consciously modern(ist) Franco-Flemish formalism should not be viewed only as a sociocultural or psychosocial phenomenon in the history of poetry (see *ML*, pp. 17–22). It should be seen in the broad context of Renaissance constructivism in *all* the arts/crafts in which it occurs: in music, for example, just as much as in painting, manuscript illumination, architecture and architectural decoration (windows, walls, ceilings, tapestries, carpets, woodwork, furniture), even clothing.⁹ In music, the type of formal virtuosity associated with Machaut is only the most visible sign of the break between *ars nova* and *ars antiqua*: the tendencies which culminate in the age of the *formes fixes* had been slowly developing ever since the early thirteenth century. Indeed there is solid musicological evidence for the claim that already at the beginning of the thirteenth century a reductive academic formalism was beginning to refine out of existence the lanky, flowing linearity of the early lyric of the troubadours and trouvères. The lyric was no longer orally transmitted and freely recomposed but constrained from then on by *writing*, straitjacketed into the boxy symmetry that was to culminate in the regularization imposed by the *formes fixes*—as-FIX-iated (as many believe) in the verbal blocks of the *rhétoriciens*.

In music, the architectonic aesthetics and primacy of form I am describing goes well beyond the *ars nova* complexity found, for example, in Machaut’s famous but rather cold, rhetorical exercise, “Ma fin est mon commencement.” There, in an attempt to make the music imitate and illustrate the words, one of the three voices is an exact retrograde of another (the upper voice sings exactly the same notes as the middle voice, but in reverse order), while the lower voice exactly reverses in the B section the order of its own notes in the A section.

In the refined nonimitative counterpoint which became the hallmark of Franco-Burgundian style (1430 to approximately 1490), complex themes delicately interlace and are only held in balance by carefully controlled and clearly audible cadences—points of articulation (pause, transition, closure) comparable in poetry to the skillfully wrought rhetorical “seams” in the textual fabric of versification and strophic design (see *ML*, pp.

161–63 and chap. 13). Here narration, decoration, and *exercices de style* are all subordinated to a higher musical purpose, which, to the speculative, was to capture and illustrate the Pythagorean laws of beauty (as in Busnois' pedantic motet *In hydraulis*). Or, it might be said, in terms better suited to the Renaissance, it was an age increasingly sensorial and (musically) antispeculative; it sought to "audibilize" the harmony of form (form understood in the broad sense, implying all relations of parts to whole and to each other). To this objective, which the late medieval composer shared with the *rhétoricien*, was added in the early sixteenth century a further challenge: to "musicalize" meaning—that is, to reflect or embody a verbal message through correspondences in music and even, as it were, equivalences for the words of a text. (That Josquin's successful efforts in this direction could, rather quickly, themselves be carried to extremes—for example, Janequin's "madrigalist" word-painting—is only another indication of the restless spirit of Renaissance innovation testing the limits of a particular technique or device.) Notwithstanding the dictum that *all* music in the Middle Ages and Renaissance was functional and that all the arts were "applied arts," the Franco-Burgundian masters easily found the means to conduct the most daring experimentation and formal *recherches*. (With enough artistry, and discretion, radically subversive innovations could pass unnoticed, surreptitiously served to the patron prince right in his *Gebrauchsmusik*.) It remained for painters and composers of a later age to liberate their exercises from functionalism and legitimate them with a proper generic tag: *études*, works in which the artist strives to capture, embody, and illustrate the formal laws and test the technical limits of his medium.

Here I must stress two points of method and procedure. First, the examples and comparisons which follow have been chosen (like those above) from disparate genres and media. For example, a generative device or structuring technique used in a large-scale musical composition—Mass or motet—might be compared with an analog from a passage in a brief verse epistle, or from a long narrative poem. Why certain genres in the various media lend themselves more readily to the type of procedures studied here is a question which invites further investigation. My object here, however, is not to compare genres nor to compare media. As a result, I do not seek similarities where one might expect them but restrict myself to comparing instances of a particular phenomenon (as defined above) where one actually finds them. As it turns out, technical experimentation of the *rhétoricien* type is cultivated by composers in the Mass but not, as might be expected, in the secular song. Again, the reasons why this should be so lie outside the scope of this study, but the essential formal and functional similarities of the examples themselves seem to me irrefragable.¹⁰

Now what, precisely, do these examples "exemplify"? This leads to my second point. The generative devices mentioned earlier do not exemplify the general feeling and flavor of "Renaissance style" (whatever that term may entail). Rather, they reveal an attitude and approach to

composition which is one component intermittently apparent in various ways and in varying degrees. As *extreme* manifestations of a general tendency, these devices are harder to detect in the overall picture of compositional procedures during the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance. However, they constitute a remarkably coherent set of elements for a symptomatology of “language crisis” which, properly elaborated, should be valid for any formalism when it pushes toward the outside limits of conception and execution in a particular medium.

It should by now be clear that no single experiment in form nor any general grouping of technical tours de force discussed here is offered as characteristic of Franco-Flemish music as a whole, no more than certain works, or passages of certain works, discussed above are “characteristic” of all late medieval French poetry. If the examples are viewed merely as symptomatic of definable tendencies, it will suffice for our discussion to show that a number of works and passages in Franco-Burgundian music reveal many of the same principles and procedures discussed above with respect to poetry and architectural decoration. Especially in the Mass and the motet, elaborate compositions are constructed—literally *built*, *unbuilt*, and *rebuilt*—around motifs as brief as three or four notes. Typically heard as complete in one voice of a three- or four-voice setting, the phrase is then redistributed among the other voices either complete, or in segments, or in fragments, interwoven and *pieced together* in the various voices of a contrapuntal texture. For example, in Ockeghem’s “Fors seulement” Mass, the *cantus firmus* from a three-part secular rondeau appears in different voices throughout the Kyrie, Christe, Gloria, and Credo—a technique which anticipates the “Parody Mass” or “Imitation Mass” in which *all* the parts of an existing polyphonic piece were used as structural material. Before discussing examples of the elaborate style, we should first look at some of the simpler techniques and practices.

Like the *rhétoriqueur*, the court composer often uses a formal artifice not for structural purposes but in a merely incidental, anecdotal way. As a development of the “musical rhymes” matched to verbal counterparts in chansons of the first half of the fifteenth century, musical parallels to the more ambitious wordplay in the “rhyme designs” of the *rhétoriqueurs* (*rimes couronnées, fratrisées, équivoquées*) can be found in musical puns.¹¹ A good example is the treatment of the final phrase in a passage from the Song of Songs (6:10), “electa *ut sol*” in Josquin’s motet *Virgo prudentissima*. Not only are “*ut*” and “*sol*” (solmization syllables for G and D) given their appropriate pitches in the music but they generate as well a whole sequence of *ut-sols*, distributed *seriatim* among all four voices. The device was apparently amusing enough to be borrowed, reappearing a generation after Josquin’s death in the motet *O gloriosa Dei genitrix* by Nicolas Gombert (d. ca. 1560).¹²

At a related but slightly more complicated level, we find, both among poets and composers, compositional tricks where letters, numbers, syllables, words, phrases, and proper names provide the structural template that generates a text, spun out by systematic permutations of the initial segment.

Among Josquin's numerous exercises in applied aesthetics (in this case, on the notes of the hexachord) is the *Missa super voces musicales*. Here, in each successive movement of the Mass the *cantus firmus* (tenor) begins on the next higher scale step: C in the Kyrie, D in the Gloria, E in the Credo, F in the Sanctus and Hosanna, G and A in the Agnus Dei. The trick is that while the *cantus firmus* appears to be set each time in a different mode, the surrounding texture is always in Mode 1 (Dorian), so that the *jonglerie* ("juggling") passes unnoticed in performance. Destrées, among others, performed the same sort of generative template-exercise in constructing his *abécédaire*:

Admirable **B**eaulté **C**élicque,
 Divine **E**t Ferveur **G**lorieuse,
 Honneste, **J**uste, **K**atholicque,
 Luciférant, **M**iraculeuse,
 Nette, **O**dorable, **P**récieuse,
Qérant **R**efuge **S**uportable,
Tousjours **V**ierge **X**pristicoleuse
Ymne **Z**élable & **Ÿ**fortable.

[GR, p. 209; and see ML, p. 248]

Loyset Compère used the same exercise in the motet *Virgo caelesti*, built around a tenor comprised of the six successive notes of the hexachord (ut re mi fa sol la) climbing unobtrusively through the piece in successively shorter note values (3, 2, 1).

Similar in spirit and execution is Molinet's combination *sofagramme-anagramme*:


Jehan Grignon, sçachiés que j'ay re chut	
Une oraison de celle qui con chut	
Le filz de Dieu, afin d'estre ador é ;	
L'ouvraige donc est fort bien faict, dor é ;	
Fault n'y voys d'ung seul traict ne dem y ,	
Ceux l'ont prisiét qui mieux valent de my .	
Benoict soit il, qui sy bien esto ffa	
Celle qui soubz les angles triom fa ;	
Je vous envoie ung ut, ré, my, fa, sol ,	
La, chantés fort, musés y vostre sol ;	
Se vous fallés, vin buverés, s'on l' a ,	
Tant qu'on dira la, la, mon amy, la ,	
L abeur se pert, riens ne recoeulle	{ Ran
L arrons sont fins, horrible guerre a	
S ollers use on, en quérant paix i	{ -chi
S olas nous fuit, doeul nous tient à mer	
F ausseté bruyt, envye règne en	{ court.
F amine arons, car nostre argent est	
M ille gaurriers chanteront par b	{ Mol
M i, la, s'on pille, il y fait doulx et	

Requérons Dieu que le bon temps jo	}	-li
Reviengne brief et amaine anco		
Utile paix, se chanterons tout	}	net!
Ut, ré, my, fa, sol, la, vive Jen		

[A Jehan Grignon de Ranchicourt, *GR*, p. 95s.; and see *ML*, p. 252]

While Molinet uses the solmization trope to generate a verbal text, Josquin, in his *soggetti cavati* Masses, proceeds inversely, carving out a generative melodic structure from a given word or sentence. Thus in the *Missa Hercules dux Ferrariae*:

H	e	r	e	u	l	e	s		d	u	x		F	e	r	r	a	r	i	e
re	ut	re		ut		re	fa	mi	re											
D	C	D		C		D	F	E	D											



or again, in the instrumental piece *Vive le Roy* in homage to Louis XII, where the melody is a solmized *décalque* of the words: v(=u): *ut*, i/y: *mi*, and so forth. But this sort of construction (in the literal sense) of a generative melodic segment (“theme”—from notes corresponding to the solmization syllables derived from a selected phrase or proper name) does not always have, in Josquin’s hands, a panegyric, sycophantic function. The sixteenth-century theorist Glareanus recounts, for example, that Josquin’s Mass on the syllables *La Sol Fa Re Mi* (A G F D E) discloses (to the initiated) the disgruntled composer’s hermetic boutade directed against an (unnamed) Italian patron accustomed to paying his composers with the phrase “*Lascia fare mi*” (“I’ll take care of it”). Examples of this sort could of course be multiplied (and were, in the sixteenth century, *ultra nauseam*).

By various figures of *amplificatio* we arrive at the highest level of Franco-Burgundian complexity, where compositions exhibit sustained use of generative patterning devices from beginning to end, and at all levels of internal organization. In poetry, the texts by Destrées and Du Pont cited above (where the techniques of *multiple readings* find striking corollaries in works like Ockeghem’s astonishing *Missa cujusvis toni*, a *four-part* Mass “*singable in any mode*”) are exemplary analogs to the type of generative experiments in musical composition which were to culminate in the so-called Parody Mass or Imitation Mass. As previously mentioned, the latter represents an extension and refinement of medieval practices. Whereas throughout the Middle Ages liturgical melodies had provided the structural raw material for new or refurbished compositions, the Burgundian innovation consisted in fragmenting the material more completely and rebuilding it in far more intricate designs. The ultimate Burgundian innovation, which was to change decisively the course of

Western polyphony, consisted in the re-use (in the Parody Mass) of *all* voices of a preexisting piece, not just in one voice (the medieval *tenor*) but broken up and redistributed in many different ways, in *all four* voices (or more: four became standard, but composers often used more; indeed tour de force "exercise" motets by Ockeghem and Josquin have thirty-six (!) and twenty-four, respectively). Any number of examples could be cited.¹³ The essential consideration, however, from our comparative theoretical standpoint, is that the construction of a Mass, motet, or polyphonic chanson proceeds according to rules (*canones*) fundamentally the same as those described above with respect to the poetics of *assemblage*. The piece is literally *built up*, from a melody or motif (or several) arbitrarily chosen from either a secular chanson or a liturgical chant, through the architectonic techniques of canon: patterned *imitation* of all sorts; *inversion* (turning the melodic phrase upside down); *retrogradation* (theme or motif read backward [compare the *rhétoriqueurs*' use of palindrome]); and *mensuration* (on the one hand *augmentation*—increasing the time value of each note in a melody or theme, to give it relief or focus; on the other, *diminution*—splitting the time value, to quote more quickly).

Summing up, we have seen how these procedures generate texts according to a small number of rules: these *canones* provide transformations of a statement (narrative, decorative-ornamental, melodic) by strictly patterned alterations and recombinations of the constituent units of its morphology and syntax. And the recombinations of these interchangeable units occur both as experiments in *melodic* (compare narrative) and *harmonic* (compare elaborative) deconstruction—exploratory subversion and dialectical reconstitutive research—while still fulfilling on another level the various conventionalized social and artistic functions of courtly literary, musical, and decorative expression.¹⁴

* * *

The foregoing analysis provides the means to isolate and compare in schematized fashion some of the distinctive functional features of Franco-Flemish formalism. The schema is not intended to be exhaustive nor universally applicable; it is a construct which allows us to test the degree to which we can generalize accurately among individual artists as well as across media with respect to technical, personal, and social functions of court-produced art around 1470 to 1520. But the function-types discussed here also provide categories to account for *differences*: for example, that musicians and composers were more independent than poets, and far more mobile, traveling widely and working in courts and churches all over Europe; that music itself was more autonomous, less programmatic and functionally serviceable; and that technical artifices in the music of the time were (and remain) more discreet, even hidden, and do not draw attention to themselves (surely one of the most striking differences, for in contrast to the poetry of the *rhétoriqueurs*, even the most mathematically abstract and abstruse artifices of Franco-Flemish polyphony are undetectable in performance).

But in the final analysis—at a point beyond formal analysis—our schema and comparative theoretical discussion should enable us to go further, on past the purely descriptive, and allow us to address a more difficult (and interesting) question: *Why* did they do that sort of thing? One can easily see the craftsmanship, but what fun is there in formalism? What is the function of virtuosity? By way of reply it will not do, of course, to seek refuge in oblique appeals to authority—for example, that formalism in itself is no vice; witness the boos and abuse—patently unmerited—heaped on hapless formalists from Bach to Braque. This sort of dodge only whets our appetite for a *real* explanation.

This inquiry began with the assertion that a functional approach to form created easier access to certain basic questions about art and literature. Now that the details of the demonstration have shed, I hope, some fresh interdisciplinary light on the two rather specific (Franco-Burgundian) questions posed at the outset (see p. 646 above), we may test the larger theoretical claim; namely, that even with a very simple functional model, it is possible to confront, without oversimplification, some of the older and larger questions about literary art—or, for that matter, Art itself. For example, how does one know and explain the difference between *exercices de style* and Art? This question leads us ineluctably to the sacred, totemic presence itself: What is this word “art” made of? If we address the thing in the simplest terms, looking only for its functions, we find that what is generally held to constitute a work of art can safely be defined as an artifact resulting from a complex type of creative behavior which, in a manner consonant with and illustrative of prevailing cultural and aesthetic values, strains against and defines the limits of the formal and technical constraints proper to a selected medium of expression (“poetry,” for example, or “music”). Again, for the purposes of our discussion, I would like to look at two terms from this definition more closely: (1) a “type of creative behavior,” and (2) the notion of “formal and technical constraints.” How shall these be defined in functional terms?

*1. Functions of Creative Behavior in the “Lyric” Sequence IMPULSE→ACT
(Action/Activity)*

On long-standing evidence, both empirical and testimonial (from centuries of articulate and introspective artists anxious to clarify and confide their secrets), we can say pretty well what constitutes the basic lyric, ludic, and psychotherapeutic functions of poetic- and musically-creative behavior. The specifically *lyric* sequence appears as a chain of intensely subjective impulses and expressive actions which, in a simplified *télescope*, could be subtitled as follows:

God, am I happy!/sad! (etc.); in my joy (or hurting) I sing, weep, move, shout; I take forms and pattern them, as best I can, to “say” myself to you, or me, perhaps to play, or hide, or find myself out

of the returning disorder to an Order (harmony, coherence/coherency) we recognize, and call (among other things) "beauty," bringing equilibrium, and repose.¹⁵

Isolating in this sequence the movement "I take forms and pattern them . . .," we come to our second ingredient: form.

2. *Functions of Technique (Craftsmanship, Virtuosity)*

The late medieval—early Renaissance court artist was obliged, above all, to demonstrate superior control of form and mastery of technique. Invoking the categories defined at the outset and illustrated above, we are now prepared to offer a succinct reply to the questions telescoped into the query, What were the functions of virtuosity?

2.1 PERSONAL

a) Psycho-biological. Much has been written on problem solving. The private, purely personal pleasure of overcoming difficulties, a satisfaction enjoyed unobserved, may appear, in this context, meager reward for the effort expended in the activities we have been considering ("Molinet assure qu'il faut un an pour faire un chant royal" [ML, p. 212]). We should not underestimate the other man's "problems." The sense of triumph, and exhilaration, that come from mastery (observable from infancy on) hold a high place on the biological selection/survival scale. In the dialectic of life's pain and pleasure, the satisfaction that comes from the confirmation of one's ability to solve, after persistent efforts, the problems presented by one's particular life/work (however set up) is directly tied to attitudes of (self-)confidence and self-worth.

b) Artistic. This function in the present context can be defined as the combination of *a* above with the expression of a "higher" or more intense subjective feeling (aesthetic, affective, religious, even scientific).

2.2 SOCIAL

In the early Renaissance, as now, demonstrations of technical skill, along with (and not in lieu of) aesthetic sensitivity, provided proof or "indexes" of a person's merit as creator or performer, and the extent to which he was admired determined the conditions in which he would live and work. Thus, when Heinrich Isaak and Josquin were both being considered for the position of court composer (a prestigious and lucrative position) in the service of Ercole I (Hercules I) of Ferrara, the qualifications of the two candidates were duly examined by a ducal search committee, the deliberations of which have come down to us in a letter from the duke's secretary. "Isaak 'is able to get on with his colleagues better and composes new pieces more quickly,'" wrote the secretary. "It is true that Josquin composes better, but he does it when it suits him and not when one wishes him to."¹⁶ Fecundity and collegial congeniality notwithstanding, Josquin got the job. As for the kind of evaluative criteria that went into

the judgment “Josquin composes better” (*compono meglio*), these can easily be deduced from his work, in which technical virtuosity serving without obscuring the appropriate matching of music to text appears to be the most salient and abiding characteristic.

Considerations of this sort bring us full circle to our starting point: the pressures—social, psychological, economic—in the artist’s “real” world that spill over into his aesthetic world and world view, shaping and coloring his *modus operandi* and *modi significandi*. Zumthor’s effort to account for the *rhétoriqueurs*’ “jeux formels (rimes, équivoques, etc.)” as an attempt by the indentured laureates to “fabriquer un mode d’écrire qui permette de désaliéner et de repersonnaliser le rapport de l’écrivain à son écriture,” is a richly suggestive hypothesis (*GR*, pp. 12–13). Why it fails to apply to the musicians and artisans who, as we have seen, shared with the *rhétoriqueurs* the same artistic syntax and aesthetic vision, is a problem that the categories of our functional schema should, if worth their salt, permit us to assess. It would remain, after such an assessment, to untangle Zumthor’s reflections on the *rhétoriqueur*’s problematic relationship to his language as both the instrument of his servitude and his liberation. There is the reality, on the one hand, of the sixteenth-century wordsmith living by his wit and his pen, in an age equipped for the most part to appreciate neither, deconstructing the language of his devalued livelihood; and, on the other hand, there is the reality of a twentieth-century analog writing in Montreal.

“Analogie de perception, proximité de dessein”—Zumthor’s own writing on that of the *rhétoriqueurs*, like a double mirror canon transcribed at an interval of half a millenium, resonates with the ring of transference, that peculiar psychic trope (“metaphoricity” of behavior and desire) which Freud himself is said to have illustrated so strikingly in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where “in his quest for meanings and origins,” his own reading of Sophocles “repeats in uncanny ways the same oedipal quest he seeks to interpret.”¹⁷ *Le masque se fait lumière, et la lumière . . . (et cetera, cancrizans)*. Leaking light from all its seams, the mask discovers all it seems.¹⁸

1. For recent examples, see Philippe Sollers’ self-(de)constructing novel *Nombres* (Paris, 1968), and Jacques Derrida’s essay “*La Dissémination*” (Paris, 1972); Marc Saporta’s infinitely reconstructible *Roman* (Paris, 1962); and Raymond Queneau’s sonnet machine *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (Paris, 1961).

2. See Paul Zumthor, *Le Masque et la lumière: La Poétique des grands rhétoriqueurs* (Paris, 1978); all further references to this work, abbreviated *ML*, will be included parenthetically in the text. A slightly abridged English translation of chaps. 2–3 (with secs. of 4, 8, and 16) appears in *New Literary History* 10 (Winter 1979): 231–63, and a complete translation of chap. 4 in *New Literary History* 12 (Spring 1981): 493–508. See also the companion volume, *Anthologie des grands rhétoriqueurs*, ed. Zumthor (Paris, 1978); all further references to this work, abbreviated *GR*, will be included parenthetically in the text. For more on the musical examples cited below, see, e.g., Gustave Reese, *Music in the Renaissance* (New York,

1954), or the *New Oxford History of Music*, vol. 3, *Ars Nova and the Renaissance, 1300–1540*, ed. Dom Anselm Hughes and Gerald Abraham (London, 1960). Either of these general works will provide sources and background for the musical “raw data” discussed here. On more specific matters of music-historical detail, I am grateful for valuable comments (some of which are quoted below in nn. 4, 10, and 14) provided by Howard M. Brown.

3. Busnois is an exception. A sometime *rhétoriqueur*, he wrote the words to at least some of his songs (four examples are known) and corresponded (in verse) with Molinet, himself a sometime composer, whose surviving musical *opus* consists fortunately of only one song (“Tant ara mon cuer”).

4. A more detailed account of the movement toward increased specialization in the composition and performance of courtly poetry and music would record the exceptions to the rule: some early medieval poets were *not* also musicians, and some late medieval composers *did* set their own poems to music. Noting that, for the fifteenth century, “there seems to be no way of knowing how many lyric poems were meant to be set to music,” Brown offers the tellingly ambiguous example of Charles d’Orléans: “The space left in Charles d’Orléans’ own copy of his *chansonnier*, presumably for music, would suggest that he thought of many of his poems as intended to be sung.” On the other hand, the space in the author’s own copy of his *chansonnier* did remain blank.

5. For a notable exception, see Brown, “Emulation, Competition, and Homage: Imitation and Theories of Imitation in the Renaissance,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 35 (Spring 1982): 1–48. In carefully delineating a wide range of compositional procedures grounded in the principle of *imitatio*, Brown underlines the pervasive importance of classical Rhetoric as a commonly shared wellspring which nourished the theory and practice of composition no less in music than in literature (reference is made, also, to painting) in the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

6. A summary of internal and external factors in the transformation of lyric to Rhetoric is provided in my review of *Die musikalische Erscheinungsform der Trouwèrepoesie* by Hans-Herbert S. Râkel (Bern, 1977), in *Romance Philology* 34 (Nov. 1980): 250–58.

7. This following collage of fragments from *ML* was constructed (like a Renaissance *quodlibet*) to serve as commentary on photographs of tile designs compared with verbal texts, in an earlier version of this paper (“Formal Constructivism in Late Medieval French Poetry: Lyric to Rhetoric, *mouvance* to *formes fixes*, *canço* to *carreau*”), from which the examples in figs. 1–4 are taken.

Culte de l’objet subtilement travaillé, au-delà de toute fonctionnalité primaire (28) *** primat du labeur ardu, patient, du difficile, de l’inattendu (212) *** les mots mêmes semblent travaillés d’un besoin de scientificité fictive, d’anoblissement par le savoir (76) *** les . . . mots ne sont plus que les particules d’une parole dont la seule signification est globale (50) *** matériau émancipé (autant que faire se peut) des contraintes de la phrase, transposé sur un plan où le signe devient le nom vide de ce signe (195) *** goût du bricolage plutôt que de l’industrie; . . . du bariolage plus que du fondu et de la nuance; de l’équilibre numéral des parties plus que de la synthèse; du multiple plus que de l’un. Outil forgé martelé d’“aornures” sans fonction utilitaire; enchâssements cubiques, coniques, pyramidaux, cruciformes du bâtiment . . . meubles marquetés, fourrés de tiroirs minuscules et secrets (134) [and so forth].

For the iconography of these examples (and numerous others), see Emile Amé, *Les Carrelages émaillés du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance* (Paris, 1859), pp. 61–108.

8. This is from the ballade “Homme mortel” by Jean Meschinot. See Zumthor, “Lecture d’une ballade de Jean Meschinot (environ 1470),” *Le Moyen Français* 1 (1977): 5–32.

9. No doubt some of these examples of late medieval courtly aesthetics will have prepared the reader to view with equanimity the use of *song* as interior decoration. If so, picture patroness Isabella d’Este in her Mantua *grotta* (forerunner of the *salon*), where in delicate marquetry she had inlaid in the walls the words and music of Ockeghem’s chanson “Prenez sur moy.” Or Federico da Montefeltro decorating his study with “J’ay pris amors.” But what is to be said of Charles d’Orléans, who wore his songs upon his sleeves? Refinement

of the bizarre, and a delicate taste for sophisticated incongruity, blend smartly in the elegant folds of raffish chic in Charles' designer gown of 1410, embroidered with 960 pearls, of which 568 (as we are told, with the insistent precision of trivial detail typical of the age) reproduced on the sleeves, from beginning to end, the text and music of the song "Madame je suis plus joyeux." Thus attired, the duke could have attended with confidence (had it not been for his extended sojourn in England following his capture at Azincourt) any of the outrageous *fêtes*, *banquets*, and assorted Golden Fleece gatherings which made the court of his cousins, the dukes of Burgundy, the preferred fun spot for gaudy grandees who flocked from far and near to show off their latest disguises (see *ML*, pp. 34–35). At any rate, musical sleeves remained in style long after the disappearance (1465) of Charles d'Orléans; for in the 1480s the arbiters of elegance at the court of Ferrara were still wearing sleeves emblazoned with songs and mottos. See, e.g., Geneviève Thibault, "La Chanson française au quinzième siècle: De Dufay à Josquin des Prés (1420 à 1480)," in *Histoire de la musique*, ed. Roland Manuel, 2 vols. (Paris, 1960), 1:891–92.

10. For anyone wishing to pursue the matter, Brown's reflections on this issue suggest one possible starting point: "What is curious, is that those lyric poems which *are* set to music [in the fifteenth century] are generally *not* those that exhibit the most abstruse verbal acrobatics and poetic pyrotechnics. . . . Sacred music introduces a whole different tradition. [In Masses,] composers were setting the same words over and over again, and therefore an exaggerated amount of their attention might legitimately be given over to 'merely technical' matters, since they were playing with a static and clearly understood collection of texts."

11. In *rimes couronnées* (or *à double queue*), the rhyme syllable is repeated at the end of the line and, at times, also at the caesura: "Le trop durer en feste *et veille esveille* / Chagrin, qui rend tous mes *espritz espriz*" (Molinet). *Rimes fratrisées* (or *annexées*) are an extension of the classical figure of *gradatio*. The beginning of each verse echoes the rhyme syllables of the preceding verse: "Par ceste mort je sens guerre *mortelle*, / *Mort telle* fut desonques très *rebelle*; / *Belle* n'est pas, gente ne *avenante*; / *Venante* à coup et volentiers se *cèle*" (and so forth). *Rimes équivoquées* are lexical and morphological *calembours* extending over two, three, or four syllables: "Homme misérable et *labile*, / Qui vas contrefaisant *l'habile*, / Menant estat *désordonné*, / Croys qu'enfer est *dès or donné* / A qui ne vivra *saintement*, / Ou l'Esriture *Sainte ment*." They occasionally reach total homophony from one verse to the next: "Tournay, entour sa folle outrecuydance / tournaye: entour s'affole outre, qui danse" (*ML*, pp. 236, 237, 272, 273).

12. For other "solmization puns" in Josquin's work, see Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, p. 256 n.370.

13. A convenient example is Josquin's *Missa "l'Homme armé" super voces musicales* referred to above. Here a well-known tune from a popular song (*l'Homme armé*) defines the melodic shape of the Kyrie, where it is reduplicated in mensuration canon (sung simultaneously at different speeds in the four different voices). In the longer movements requiring a more elaborate melodic line, the tune reappears, frontward and backward in the Gloria, in diminution in the Hosanna, and in the Credo, in retrograde and diminution successively.

14. In music, the analogy I am suggesting to the *rhétoriciens'* project as seen by Zumthor ("nothing less than the deconstruction of the hereditary poetic language" by then emptied of its meaning [*GR*, p. 13; *ML*, p. 56; my translation]) might be pursued (further than is possible here) through an analysis of the progressive subversion in the sixteenth century of the liturgical *cantus firmus*. Piously preserved for centuries, gingerly retouched on occasion, the liturgical *tenor* (literally the "holder" of the chant) was both a formal organizational center as well as a venerated *vox auctoritatis* (the Council of Trent's pronouncements on sacred music are illuminating with respect to this ideological function of the *cantus firmus*). Deconstructed in the sixteenth century, it is radically revamped or displaced altogether by melodies nonliturgical in origin, popular, even obscene.

With respect to this line of reasoning, Brown observes that since "some of the *earliest* cyclic settings of the Mass text use popular, even obscene songs for the *cantus firmi* [it could

be argued that] the *cantus firmus* was being deconstructed even as it began. . . . Very briefly, I would characterize the attitude of composers towards the *cantus firmus* as something to be taken seriously as a technique inherited from the middle ages, and then little by little in the course of the 15th c. played with and experimented with, and then ultimately, in the 16th c., either abandoned in favor of the altogether freer parody technique, or used as a rather consciously old-fashioned, even academic technique, especially in traditional texts like the Ordinary of the Mass." Brown would have us bear in mind, however, that in the sixteenth century any attempt to explain a composer's decision either to retain a *cantus firmus* (of whatever sort) or to abandon the technique in favor of more tailor-made, ad hoc settings of a text, must also take into account the tendency, consistently present in Josquin and his contemporaries, to make music more immediately responsive to the meanings and emotions of the words. Indeed, concludes Brown, "it was precisely Josquin's skill in exciting emotion or reflecting emotional states, and not in the first place his virtuosity, that were cited by more or less contemporary critics as his outstanding qualities."

15. I distinguish the *fact* of coherence from the *principle* of coherency, the former being a verifiable system of consistent relations, the latter a desire or temptation to infer from instances of the former a notion of general or universal order. The former defines the world of technology and everyday experience, while the latter is defined by philosophy, religion, poetry, and science. With respect to these activities, coherency stands in a symbiotic relation of reciprocal valuation and "sematicity," simultaneously imparting to and deriving from them "sense" or "meaning"(fullness).

16. Quoted in Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, p. 229; see also *Arts Nova and the Renaissance*, p. 283.

17. Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London, 1981), pp. 15, 225, referring to an article by Cynthia Chase, "Oedipal Textuality: Reading Freud's Reading of *Oedipus*," *Diacritics* 9 (Spring 1979): 54–68. Readers wishing to pursue the question of the degree to which Zumthor's reading of the *rhétoriciens* is "personal and idiosyncratic" (whose isn't?) should consult, in the first instance, Zumthor himself:

Si mon discours doit consister à prononcer, sur son objet, une proposition "vraie", qu'est-ce donc (une fois dépassée la phase érudite, et toujours contestable, de la recherche), qu'est-ce donc que cette "vérité", sinon un accord profond, apaisant, joyeux, entre le désir qui *me* porte vers *mon* objet, et la compréhension que, *moi*, j'en acquière? *Ma* "vérité" m'implique en même temps que *mon* objet . . . sans d'ailleurs à aucun moment nous confondre, car elle n'est qu'un lieu de transition: de moi à un autre, que mon discours rend vraisemblable quoique absent; qu'il dépose en moi et en vous à qui je parle, quoiqu'il reste définitivement évanoui. ["Le Moyen Age et nous: Questions de méthode," *Romanic Review* 70 (May 1979): 209; rpt. in Zumthor, *Parler du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1980), p. 29]

18. The hopelessly translucent mask emblemizes the pro- and antagonist forces in a desperate-heroic *glottomachia*, "une autocontestation du langage, colère de celui-ci qui se retourne contre lui-même, se dénude . . . contraint à reconnaître ce qu'il est: dépositaire d'un inconnu qui nous fait, et dissimulateur de ce même inconnu; mais dépositaire qui ne cesse de trahir, dissimulateur malhabile, de sorte qu'il constitue le lieu de nos ambiguïtés, de nos dénégations, de nos pulsions de mort, en même temps que la matière de nos fantasmes, l'utopie de nos rêves" (Zumthor, "Le Moyen Age et nous," p. 207; rpt. in Zumthor, *Parler du Moyen Age*, p. 23).