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Melodic and textual types in French monophonic
song. ca. 1500

Columbia University

1978

Vol. 1

MELODIC AND TEXTUAL TYPES IN FRENCH MONOPHONIC SONG

CA. 1500

Douglas Jay Philip Rahn

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Faculty of Philosophy

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

1978

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ABSTRACT

Melodic and textual types in French monophonic song, ca. 1500

Douglas Jay Philip Rahn

Several monophonic songs in French survive from the period 1480-1520. These songs appear in about twenty manuscript and printed sources of the time. Most of these sources can be assigned fairly precise dates. The songs found in these sources are inter-related by a network of concordances but are seldom found in collections of courtly poetry and vice versa. This suggests that the monophonic sources represent a distinctive tradition of poetry. The songs are also associated with different social groups than are courtly products: preachers (e.g., Jean Tisserand and Olivier Maillard), nuns (e.g., the Madelonnettes), law clerks (e.g., members of the Basoche), itinerant entertainers, and members of the general public -- both literate (but not necessarily wealthy) and illiterate -- composed, performed, or listened to the pieces.

Monophonic songs differ considerably in prosody and diction from elite poetry and in melodic style from contemporary polyphonic works based on courtly poems. Nevertheless, the systematic bases of both the courtly and monophonic repertoires are substantially similar allowing comparisons to be made between them. Furthermore, recurrent features of the monophonic corpus generally accord well with systems of versification and music theory expounded at the time by writers such as Pierre Fabri, Henri de Croy, L'Infortuné, Johannes Tinctoris, Franchinus Gaffurius, Pietro Aaron, and Heinrich Glarean.

Musical features selected for analysis include meter, text underlay, phrase lengths, range (or ambitus), maneria (or mode), phrase finals (or differentiae), initial tones, cadence formulas, melismas linking phrases, leaps (i.e., disjunct motion), form, and variation. The melo-textual forms of the songs are related to the formes fixes: ballade, virelai, and rondeau, as well as contemporary developments of these (including the bergerette and chanson jolie). One can discern stereotyped rhyme schemes and patterns of phrase finals and melodic repetition. These appear to be described best in terms of a hierarchical arrangement of prosodic, rhythmic and tonal units, and all three types of organization are found to be closely connected with one another. The polyphonic songs with which the monophonic corpus is compared consist of settings of courtly rondeaux by Compère, Agricola, and Josquin, as well as other rondeau settings which appear in Petrucci's Odhecaton and Canti B. Throughout the study, the songs of Paris, Bib. nat., f. fr. 9346, the "Bayeux manuscript", are found to resemble the polyphonic pieces more than the monophonic songs of MS 12744 of the same collection. The latter in turn are found to resemble printed collections of monophonic song texts more closely in prosody than "Bayeux."

Some special features of the study include the use of statistical tests (e.g., chi-square, Student's t , x - and z -scores, and r_{rank}), an annotated index of the monophonic songs, transcriptions of all the previously unpublished texts, and re-transcriptions of MSS 12744 and Bayeux. Finally, a minimal list of undefined concepts required to describe the

prosodic and musical regularities of the songs is developed and the findings corroborated by comparing the corpus with monophonic songs preserved in MS Dijon, Bib. mun. 517 (ca. 1475).

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CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	i
CHAPTER ONE -- INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND METHODS OF ANALYSIS	1
Problems in French monophonic songs ca. 1500. . . .	2
Methodology	3
Analysis of sources.	4
Examination of the historical context of the songs	8
Analysis of the songs.	10
Evaluation of literary and musical theory. . . .	21
Comparison of the songs with courtly poetry and polyphony	23
Basic assumptions.	26
Summary.	27
Overview.	29
CHAPTER TWO -- THE TRANSMISSION OF THE SONGS	30
Oral transmission	31
<u>Farces, sotties, moralités</u>	31
<u>Batelleurs</u>	34
Written transmission.	41
Printed collections of secular texts	41
<u>Noëls</u> and <u>cantiques</u>	44
Manuscript collection of <u>noëls</u>	46
Printed collections of <u>noëls</u> and <u>cantiques</u> (dated precisely)	53
Printed collections of <u>noëls</u> (dated imprecisely).	56
Monophonic <u>chansonniers</u>	61
Conclusions	69

CHAPTER THREE -- LITERARY FEATURES OF THE SONGS	72
"Rusticity".	72
"Diminutiveness"	84
Obscenity.	90
Regionalism.	94
Repetition	100
Conclusions.	105
CHAPTER FOUR -- MELODIC STYLE OF THE SONGS.	108
PART I: RHYTHMIC FEATURES.	111
Meter.	111
Text Underlay.	128
Testimony of the theorists.	130
Songs in duple meter.	133
Songs in triple meter	139
Exceptional cases	140
Phrase lengths	143
Comparisons with polyphonic <u>rondeaux</u>	147
PART II: MODALITY.	151
Range.	153
<u>Maneria</u>	159
Phrase finals.	165
Initial tones.	181
Comparisons with polyphonic <u>rondeaux</u>	186
PART III: MELODIC PROGRESSION.	191
Cadences	191
Melismas on the final syllable	193
Meter and melodic progression: "chords"	197

CHAPTER FOUR, PART III (continued)

Disjunct motion	208
Form.	211
Variation	213
Summary	222
Comparisons with polyphonic <u>rondeaux</u>	225
 CHAPTER FIVE -- STYLISTIC TYPES IN THE TEXTS	 230
Prosodic treatises.	230
Quantity.	235
Syllable, foot, hemistich, and line.	236
Distichs, strophes, and stanzas.	245
Prosodic features characteristic of monophonic song	248
Progressiveness of rhymes	248
Supernumerary interjections	250
Isolated rhymes	251
 CHAPTER SIX -- FORMAL TYPES IN THE TEXTS AND TUNES	 253
PART I: Long or "heavy" forms	260
<u>Ballades</u>	260
"Pure" <u>virolais</u>	266
<u>Rondeaux</u>	273
"Impure" <u>virolais</u>	274
<u>Bergerette</u> and <u>chanson jolie</u>	274
<u>Virolai chanson</u>	277
Strophic songs.	278
PART II: Shorter, "lighter" forms	281
Virolais.	281
<u>Ballades</u>	285

CHAPTER SIX, PART II (continued)	
<u>Rondeaux</u>	285
Exceptional cases	286
CONCLUSIONS	290
CHAPTER SEVEN -- THE SYSTEMATIC BASIS OF THE SONGS . .	294
Forms and rhyme schemes	295
Tonality	301
Polyphonic functions	305
Tonal systems and the music of the repertoire. .	311
Meter	317
Summary	320
CHAPTER EIGHT -- SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	322
Social background of the songs.	322
Style of the songs.	324
Generic features of the songs	325
Monophonic songs in the Dijon <u>chansonnier</u>	329
Rhythmic features.	330
Formal and prosodic features	336
Conclusions	341
Suggestions for further study	341
BIBLIOGRAPHY	343
GLOSSARY	354
APPENDIX	363
Statistical measures.	363
Annotated index of songs in monophonic sources. . .	368

APPENDIX (continued)

Musical sources	413
<u>A</u>	414
<u>B</u>	567
Textual sources	697
BA 3653.	698
BN 2368 and 2506	759
S'ensuivent les noëls.	866
Dévote contemplation	871
S'ensuit le dicté.	875
BA 10650 ¹	880
BA 10650 ²	933
BA 10649 ²	985
Maillard (Chanson piteuse)	1042
Briand	1043