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# Music, competition and the *Art de seconde rhétorique*: The youthful chansons of Gilles Mureau and Philippe Basiron

Peter Woetmann Christoffersen

Excellency in creating and understanding poetry – or at least some skill – was highly regarded in fifteenth-century France. The cultivation of poetry in aristocratic and royal circles has been interpreted by modern research as a sort of pastime or courtly parlour games, which occasionally involved virtual or staged *cours d'Amour.* Lately these activities and the production of poems in *formes fixes* have come to be regarded more as vital and competitive elements in the participants' social interaction, as vehicles of meanings derived from rich literary traditions and contexts, and as dialogues on esthetical and social convictions; in short, poetic endeavours were tools for securing positions in a closed cultural field, where everyone were guarding their cultural investments. Poems are preserved in prestigious presentation manuscripts containing works by single authors, and they appear in miscellaneous collections, where the most diverse texts interact and invite the informed reader to explore his expertise of literary canons and traditions in order to participate in this poetic universe.

The two well-known poets from the middle of the century, Charles d'Orléans and François Villon, may stand as representatives of opposite poles within this culture. Charles d'Orléans, a duke, father of the future king Louis XII, ranked third in the kingdom, and he was the most accomplished aristocratic poet, a self-assured and demanding *primus inter pares* in his circle of peers and servants. Villon was a professional poet, a clerk of unknown origins, and just as virtuosic in exploring the play with traditions and genres, but far more provoking and subversive in his stimulation of the reader's imagination. In spite of the near total obscurity of his life, art made him a guest and occasional participant in the duke's poetic circle.[1] The dynamic of this cultural field spilled over into the slightly less elevated social circles of rich merchants and well-educated groups of lawyers and clerks who were poised to achieve noble status by purchase or through the offices as royal notaries and secretaries. For these people shouldering much of the responsibilities of running the economy and the administration it was important to be able to participate in this field and gain the resultant prestige.

1 This interpretation of French poetry is based on a recent book by Jane H.M. Taylor, *The Making of Poetry. Late-Medieval French Poetic Anthologies* (Turnhout, 2007), in which the author convincingly (and quite discreetly) adopts the terminology of Pierre Bourdieu to describe the interactions of poets and poetry; and as regards Villon, see the same author's readings of his works in the book *The Poetry of François Villon. Text and Context* (Cambridge, 2001).

In addition to an institutional education and private teachers an upcoming versifier could get help from manuals of writing poetry. Such books circulated throughout the century under titles like *Rhétorique*, or more precisely, *L'Art de seconde rhétorique* – the first art being the art of writing prose.[2] Inspiration could also be found in less ambitious anthologies of poems, where the reader furthermore could gather information on the behaviour and vocabulary expected in courtly circles. Many of these collections included texts that had become widely known through musical settings, which to some degree made them stand out as memorable.[3] Music for poems in *formes fixes* is preserved in a group of small format polyphonic song collections known as the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers, which were produced in Central France in the years around 1470.[4] Owners and purchasers of such luxury items, in which poems, music, careful layout and nice illuminations seem to create an imaginary world of noble living, were indeed, as demonstrated by Jane Alden, to be found among the new nobility, among secretaries and notaries amassing wealth and influence.[5]

That the fascination with formal poetry was not just a short-lived trend can be ascertained by the successful commercial venture of the Parisian publisher, Antoine Vérard, who in 1501 printed and marketed the enormous anthology of the then quite old-fashioned poems in *Le Jardin de plaisance et fleur de Rhetoricque*.[6] The editor of the collection supplied as a preamble a versified treatise titled *L'Instructif de seconde rhétorique*, a manual of the making and discussion of poems. Jane H.M. Taylor points out that this arrangement fulfils an '... important role as a guide to reception, to the decoding which provides an upwardly mobile audience with a set of cognitive rules which

2 The main fifteenth-century manuals of the craft of poetry were published by Ernest Langlois in *Recueil d'arts de seconde rhétorique* (Paris, 1902).

3 Three such manuscripts and a print, Vérard's *Le Jardin de plaisance* of 1501, are carefully analysed in Kathleen Frances Sewright, *Poetic Anthologies of Fifteenth-Century France and Their Relationship to Collections of the French Secular Polyphonic Chanson*, Ph.D.-diss. (University of North Carolina, 2008; available at https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/indexablecontent/uuid:a6618879-5105-4de2-bdc6-d2147522157d).

4 The literature on these manuscripts is voluminous. The most important recent discussions are found in the dissertation by Paula Higgins, *Antoine Busnois and Musical Culture in Late Fifteenth-Century France and Burgundy* (Princeton, 1987), and in Jane Alden's book, *Songs, Scribes, and Society. The History and Reception of the Loire Valley Chansonniers* (New York, 2010). The group of manuscripts consists of the following: Copenhagen, The Royal Library, MS Thott 291 8° (Copenhagen); Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 517 (Dijon); Washington D.C., Library of Congress, MS M2.1 L25 Case (Laborde Chansonnier – Laborde); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. Vmc. ms. 57 (Chansonnier Nivelle de la Chaussée – Nivelle); Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Codex Guelf. 287 Extravag. (Wolfenbüttel). I have published Copenhagen and parts of the other chansonniers online in commented editions in *An Open Access Edition of the Copenhagen Chansonnier and the Related 'Loire Valley' Chansonniers* (at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/).

5 Alden, *Songs, Scribes*, 178–214.

6 Cf. Eugénie Droz and Arthur Piaget (eds.), *Le Jardin de Plaisance et Fleur de Rhétorique. Reproduction en fac-simile de l'édition publiée par Antoine Verard vers 1501* (Paris, 1910–14; the facsimile volume (1910) is now made available online at http://archive.org/details/lejardindeplaisaoovera).

govern the process of reading and which therefore give it the tools to judge the success or failure of any particular poem.'[7] Analogous to this, the musical Dijon chansonnier begins by offering the reader a basic introduction to the understanding of note values and ligatures, 'S'ensuit La declaration des valeurs des notes ligaturees de chansons …' (fos. 5–6).[8] It simply helps the users of the chansonnier to avoid the most obvious traps when discussing music in contemporary mensural notation. These two instances of taking the reader by the hand give us a hint of how important it was to be competent in deliberations on poetry and music in order to secure one's position in the leading circles.

My aim in the following is to raise the question if a similar competitive urgency and wish to participate in the greater cultural field were part of the driving forces behind the composing of polyphonic chansons. Internal competition and spectacular use of material lifted from the production of other musicians are well-known phenomena in the period around 1470 – one can just think of the boom in polyphonic masses. However, emulation and borrowing were also emerging in the secular music.[9] With the intention of keeping this question apart from the expectations that a musician could be met with when working for a secular court, I shall discuss solely chansons preserved from the hands of musicians who as far as we know spent their entire working life in the service of the church during the relevant period. I also disregard the musical dominant figures of the time, personified in Du Fay, Ockeghem and Busnoys, whose music has been intensely researched, whose learning was undisputed, and whose standings in society ended up secure, probably by means of their musical prominence alone. The few secular songs by Gilles Mureau and Philippe Basiron have never enjoyed the same attention. They were rather young composers when the repertory in the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers was collected, and it has been important to chart their careers to throw light on the dating of these chansonniers.[10] Both spent much of their time teaching choirboys in their *maîtrises*, both probably composed chansons during their youth only, and their chansons disclose interesting intertextualities and tendencies concerning musical innovation and the cultivation of poems that exhibit a bit more literary ambition than usual. I have published online all the songs mentioned in the following along with detailed commentaries.[11]

7 Taylor, *The Making*, 259–60.

8 See also Alden, *Songs, Scribes*, 160–61 and 239.

9 See, for example, Howard Mayer Brown, 'Emulation, Competition and Homage: Imitation and Theories of Imitation in the Renaissance', *Journal of the American Musicological Society,* 35 (1982), 1–48, and the volume edited by Honey Meconi, *Early Musical Borrowing* (New York & London, 2004).

10 Cf. Paula Higgins in her introduction 'The Origins of the Manuscript' to the facsimile edition, *Chansonnier Nivelle de la Chaussée (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Rés. Vmc. ms. 57, ca. 1460)* (Geneva, 1984), x; and Alden, *Songs, Scribes*, 120–21 and 126. A detailed discussion can be found online in Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, *The chansons of Basiron's youth and the dating of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers* (at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/NOTES/BasironYouth.html – html- and PDF-versions).

11 See Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, *The Complete Works of Gilles Mureau (c1442–1512) – poet-musician*

*Gilles Mureau*

None of the chansons by Mureau can be found in the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers. The three songs that I will look at are preserved, two of them uniquely, in a small paper chansonnier, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magl.xix.176, which was copied by a Florentine scribe around 1480.[12] This Italian scribe apparently had access to French exemplars that must have been practically contemporary with the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers. He copied the music of his exemplars accurately enough, but he did not understand French at all, and consequently his poetic texts are either missing, fragmentary or consisting in incipits only, and he did not supply any composer names. A later scribe has added the index, foliation, composer attributions and other completions. This user had an intimate knowledge of French music, and especially of music in the royal lands in Central France, and he identified three songs as being by 'muream'. It is worth mentioning that he recognized the music of composers hardly ever mentioned in other musical sources, names such as Mureau, Raoullin, Tinctoris and Fedé – it looks as if his view of contemporary France was shaped by a recent stay in Orléans, Blois or Tours.[13] For Mureau's chansons, it is in all cases possible to recover the missing texts with the help of other French musical or poetical sources. This is a lucky situation, because the poems hold the key to much of the distinguishing traits of Mureau.

Gilles Mureau (*c.*1442–1512) spent his long career in the service of the Notre Dame cathedral of Chartres. The cathedral, a royal institution situated in a region that since the thirteenth century had belonged to the crown and had close connections to the Orléans region, was served by one of the big musical organizations in France. The confraternity of *horarii et matutinarii Ecclesiae Carnotensis* (called the *heuriers*) was a body of 24 professional singers performing plainchant as well as polyphony, which can be compared to the *petit vicaires* at the Cambrai Cathedral.[14]

Mureau probably started as a choirboy, and in 1462 he was mentioned as a *heurier*, in 1467 he was appointed *maître de grammaire* at the cathedral's *maîtrise*, and before

*of Chartres* (at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/Mureau/01Start.html), and *The chansons of Basiron's youth*. For detailed lists of sources etc., see also the entries in David Fallows' indispensable *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs, 1415–1480* (Oxford, 1999).

12 In the following I use the abbreviation Florence 176; further abbreviations include (in addition to those mentioned in note 4): Florence 2794 – Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2794; Florence 229 – Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Banco Rari 229; Mellon – New Haven, Yale University, Beineke Library, MS 91 (Mellon Chansonnier); Seville 5-I-43 – Seville, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, MS 5-1-43; Le Jardin 1501 – Antoine Vérard, *Le Jardin de plaisance et fleur de Rhetoricque* (Paris, [1501]).

13 For a more detailed description, see Christoffersen, *The Complete Works of Gilles Mureau*, at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/Mureau/03Work.html.

14 Cf. Nicole Goldine, 'Les heuriers-matiniers de la cathédrale de Chartres jusqu'au XVI$^{e}$ siècle. Organisation liturgique et musicale', *Revue de Musicologie,* 54 (1968), 161–75.

1472 he was installed as a canon.[15] He kept these posts for the remainder of his life, occasionally sharing the teaching of the boys with other musicians and for short periods functioning as the cathedral's organist, but his role as administrator of the *maîtrise* seems to have been permanent. His position in the clerical world was apparently very secure. At an early date he appears to have become quite affluent with land holdings in the areas near Blois and Bourges. An additional source of income was that he took in sons of noblemen to board and look after in order to teach them grammar and the art of performing polyphonic music, 'et aussi les enseigner et monstrer dechant aux mieulx qu'il pourra', all agreed to in written contracts with the fathers.[16] The prosperity resulting from his many activities made it possible for him to embark on two major journeys. From March to October 1483 he visited Jerusalem, and again the following year he was away for half a year on a pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostella.

This busy life did not offer much incentive to compose new music after the early years of his career – for example, no sacred music is preserved from his hand – and music formed only a part of his professional life. His talents apparently unfolded just as much in the arts of language and words and in connection with his administrative capacities as a canon of the cathedral. The main threads through his life were the roles of singer (*heurier*) and teacher (*maistre de grammaire*). He built his career on an early success in these roles, and his four surviving ascribed secular compositions can with great probability be placed during his formative years, before his position as canon became secure. And we have to ask if the texts and music of his songs were designed as efforts to acquire approval (cultural standing) as well as attracting paying pupils among the nobility and bourgeoisie of the city.

The texts of his chansons show him as a competent follower of the literary *l'art de rhétorique*, of the skills of poetic role-play and of complicated rules of versification cultivated in courtly circles. Let us start with *Grace actendant,* in which the text as well as the ascription in Florence 176 gives evidence to Mureau's authorship. The initial letters of the lines in the poem, a bergerette with a four-line refrain, form the acrostic GILLES MUREAU; the rhyme syllables are in the first section (refrain and *tierce*) '-mes/ -mais' and '-usé' in the pattern ABBA, while the contrasting second section (*couplets*) uses '-oureux' and '-ame', CDCD.[17] These rhymes combined with the acrostic place the

15 All information concerning the biography of Mureau comes from André Pirro, 'Gilles Mureau, chanoine de Chartres', in W. Lott, H. Osthoff and W. Wolffheim (eds.), *Musikwissenschaftliche Beiträge, Festschrift für Johannes Wolf zu seinem sechzigsten Geburtstage* (Berlin, 1929), 163–67.

16 A contract dated 1471 between 'Robert de Garenne, seigneur de Saugis' and 'Gilles Mureau, maistre des enfants du cueur de l'Église de Chartres' is reprinted in Abbé A. Clerval, *Les écoles de Chartres au moyen du V^e au XV^e siècles*. (Mémoires de la Société archéologique d'Eure-et-Loir, Tome XI; Chartres, 1895), 428–29.

17 Exactly the stringent formation of the rhymes permits the reconstruction of the original appearance of the poem. It survived to be printed in Le Jardin 1501, fo. 96, where the last lines of the tierce (lines 11–12) have been exchanged and revised: 'Viengne qui peut, je vivray desormais / En non chaloir,

poem securely in the literary sphere. While most of the poems used for music depend on perfectly satisfactory rhymes (*rimes suffisantes*), a *rhétoriqueur* prefers *rimes riches,* which can be graded from *rimes léonines* to a still higher complexity in diverse forms of *rimes équivoques*.[18] Mureau's rhymes in this poem belong to the *léonines* by showing identity in three elements each. This fashionable love complaint has everything one might expect from a *maître de grammaire* in charge of the children of the nobility – a veritable visiting card of a poet-musician:

| | |
|---|---|
| **G**race actendant ou la mort pour tous mes | Waiting for grace or death as my reward |
| **J**'ay trop esté d'esperance abusé, | I have too often been abused by hope, |
| **L**abuer en vain j'ay mon temps en usé, | on labour in vain have I used my time, |
| L'eure maldis que tant ame jamays. | miserable ever to love so much. |
| **E**n grant peril est ung povre amoureux | An unlucky lover is in great peril |
| **S**'il se submet au danger de tel dame: | if he submits to the danger of such a lady: |
| **M**ourir pourroit chetif et langoureux | He may die frail and longing |
| **V**ingt foiz et plus sans que pitié l'entame. | twenty times or more without her being bothered by pity. |
| **R**iens n'y vault sens ne servir d'entremes, | Nothing, neither wisdom nor being amusing, |
| **E**stre subtil ne faire le rusé | nor cunning nor guile |
| **A** non chaloir, car g'y ay trop musé. | makes any difference, for I have wasted enough time on this. |
| **V**iengne qui peut, je vivray desormais | Whatever happens, I shall live hereafter |
| grace actendant *ou la mort pour tous mes.* | waiting for grace or death as my reward. |

(Florence 176, fos. 46$^{v}$–48, and Le Jardin 1501, fo. 96)

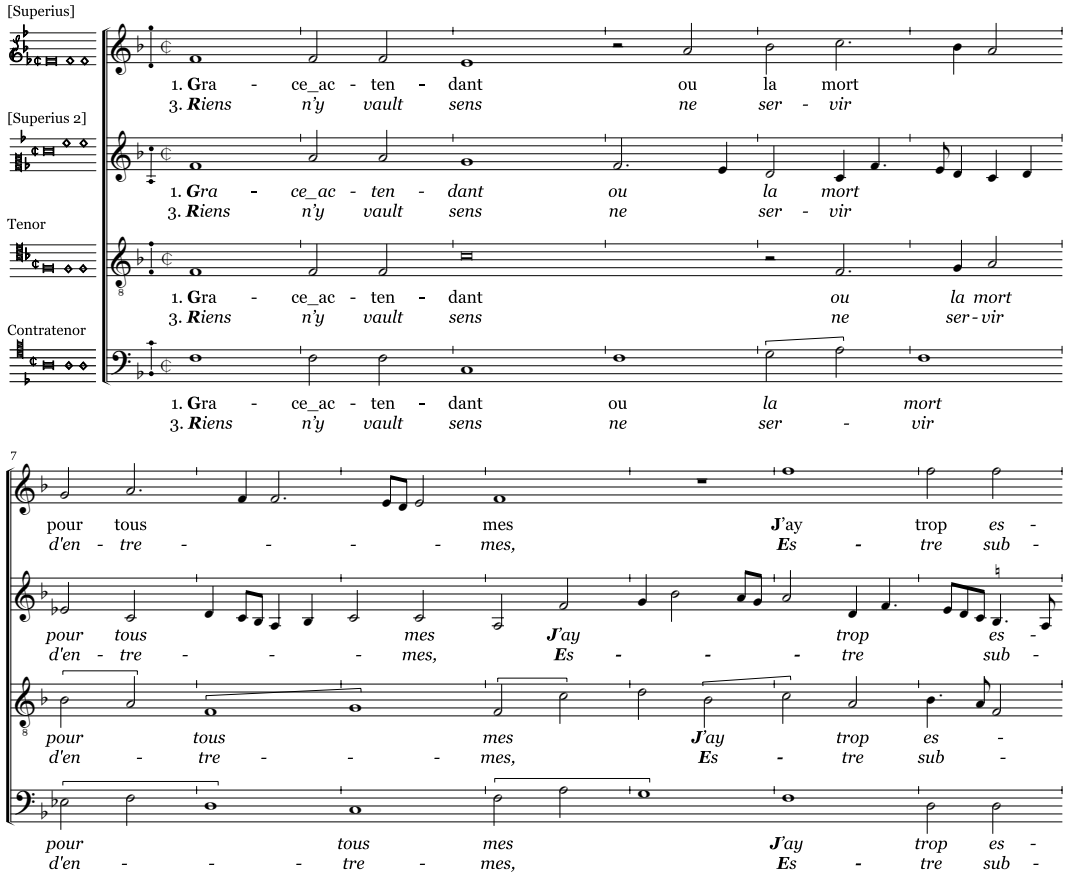
Acrostic GILLES MUREAU

The music of *Grace actendant* is for sure Mureau's most ambitious effort. The song is composed for four voices in the first section, for two high voices, a tenor and a low contratenor, and for three high voices in the second section (see exx. 1a–b). This layout is an original working out of the principle of contrast characteristic of the bergerette.[19] Here the contrast is not brought about by a change of mensuration, rhythmical ductus or modal colouring, but by vocal instrumentation. Two worlds of sound are juxtaposed, both quite new in the secular music of the 1460s: a four-part voice disposition (a group

car g'y ay trop musé', which produces a misleading acrostic: GILLES MUREUE; cf. the faulty edition of the song in E. Droz et G. Thibault, *Poètes et musiciens de xve siècle* (Paris, 1924), 43–48.

18 See for example the lists under the heading 'Et premièrement une règle de moz léonines et plains sonans et esquivoques et presonans' in the anonymous treatise *Les Règles de la Seconde Rhétorique* from the early fifteenth century in Langlois, *Recueil*, 15.

19 It is not a three-part song with a 'fragmentary added 4th voice' as stated by Richard Freedman in 'Mureau, Gilles' in *Grove Music Online* (accessed May 2011).



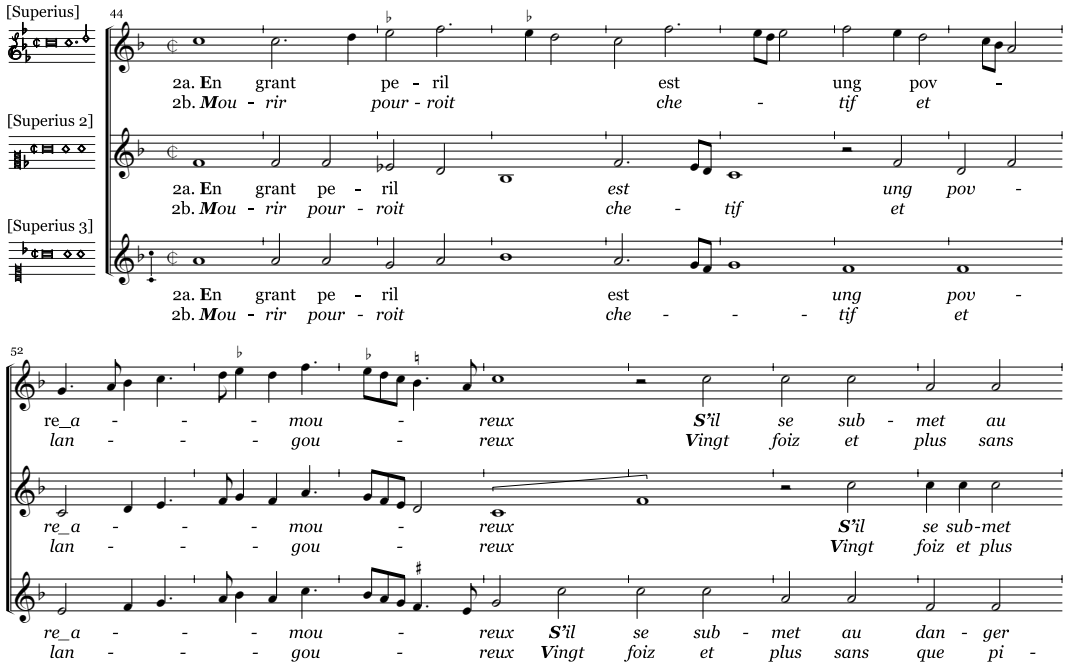

Ex. 1a, Gilles Mureau, *Grace actendant* (**Florence 176**, fos. 46ᵛ–48), bb. 1–13.

of boys on the upper parts and two grown-up singers) contrasting with three equal high parts (three boys solo?).

The boys of the *maîtrise* were in demand as musical performers outside the cathedral, not only in religious institutions but in noble houses as well; *Grace actendant* could very well be composed for some noble entertainment. The gifts that the boys received in recompenses for their performances had, according to the decision of the chapter, to be shared between the master of music and the master of grammar, the latter being responsible for the boys' expenses.[20]

*Grace actendant* is composed with careful regard to the words in all four voices. It is easy to place the text in such a way that the words either are pronounced simultaneously or in turn in the parts without disturbing the clarity too much, and the composing with four parts is handled very skilfully (ex. 1a). In the bergerette's second section, the tenor and contratenor drop out, and a new, third superius part enters. The second superius

20 Clerval, *Les écoles,* 430.




*Ex. 1b,* Gilles Mureau, *Grace actendant* (Florence 176, fos. 46v–48), bb. 44–58.

takes over the tenor functions, while the new voice is placed between the first and the second. This brings along some *fauxbourdon*-like passages, especially in bars 52–55, which form a nice contrast to the sound of the first section, and in bars 55–60 all three participate in a free unison canon on a triadic motive – the second superius speeding up the activity (ex. 1b).

Poems intended for musical setting were traditionally made in such a way that it seemed natural in the rondeau to repeat the first half of the refrain after the short *couplet* and the complete refrain after the *tierce*, and likewise the complete first section at the end of the bergerette. When these forms became popular as poetry for reading or reciting without music during the fifteemth century (Christine de Pisan, Charles d'Orléans and others), repeats were often reduced to a single line or the first words (*rentrement*) only, which had to be integrated into the discourse of the preceding formal section; accordingly, Charles d'Orléans distinguished between *rondeaux* and *chansons* (rondeaux made for music).[21] The literary ambitions of Mureau are clearly in evidence – he did work and experiment with the form. In *Tant fort me tarde* (see below) the sense of the refrain does not permit a repeat of the first three lines as a unit, while the first line alone constitutes a satisfactory 'short refrain' after the *couplet*; nothing hinders a complete repeat of the refrain at the end of the song. Conversely, in *Grace actendant* it is the

21 Cf. Daniel Calvez, 'La Structure du rondeau: mise au point', *The French Review,* 55 (1982), 461–70.

music that resists a repeat of the complete first section at the bergerette's end, because this would result in a quite implausible ending on the mode's fifth degree and with a third in the final chord. The solution is again the 'short refrain' of the first line only, that is to say, that the refrain has to stop in bar 10 on the word 'mes' on the mode's finalis with the fifth sounding in the second superius. This brings a natural completion to the music as well as to the sense of the poem (cf. ex. 1a).

The artful constructed poem, the use of contrasts by vocal instrumentation and the ingenious use of a 'short refrain' at the end of the song are not the only ambitious traits in *Grace actendant.* The song may, just like *Je ne fais plus* (see below), have left the composer's hand notated in *fa*-clefs, that is, notated without letter-clefs, but in formations of *fa*-signs (or flats) alone – three or two flats to each voice are typical. This means that the songs were notated not at a fixed pitch, but could be performed at any convenient pitch. The *fa*-clef notation seems to have been used by composers around Binchois and in Central France in the 1450s and the early 1460s (Ockeghem, Barbingant, Le Rouge). Knowledge of the notation soon faded away, and the songs were then in later sources transmitted in fixed-pitch notation.[22] This suggests that Mureau in these high-range songs made use of a notational praxis, which was relatively well known in his region, in order to make the songs performable for other singers than groups with boys. Of course, another possibility could be that he imitated the notation of songs by older composers, which at that time circulated in fixed notation including 'superfluous' flats, in order to gain some additional status. In short, it looks as if Mureau with *Grace actendant* pulled all stops to show off his credentials.

The two other poems in the same vein, *Tant fort me tarde* and *Je ne fais plus*, take the art of the *rhétoriqueurs* a step further as they both use *rimes équivoques*, artful rhymes where the same words or syllables are repeated as rhyme words, looking or sounding alike, but with different meanings. Characteristic of this are the rhymes of *Je ne fais plus*, in which the first set of rhyme words sounds: 'escris / escris / descris / et cris / acris / escris / precris / qu'Antecrix', while the second rhyme says alone: 'plains / plains …' – a quite virtuosic performance. In addition, this song is cast in the rather uncommon form of a *rondeau tercet layé* with only five lines in its refrain – usually short lines are interpolated into the four or five lines of the refrain, but here we find only three long lines, handled by a very sure poetic hand. The poem can be retrieved from a contemporary, or even slightly older, French source, Florence 2794, where the song appears anonymously, but with a complete text. The utterly desolate content of the poem matches the rather pretentious formal layout. Its focus is on the act of writing poetry itself, from which the author now will abstain, and it might be written in a female voice. But who is the man to whom the author wishes to complain 'il est a naistre, cil a qui je m'en plains' – he is

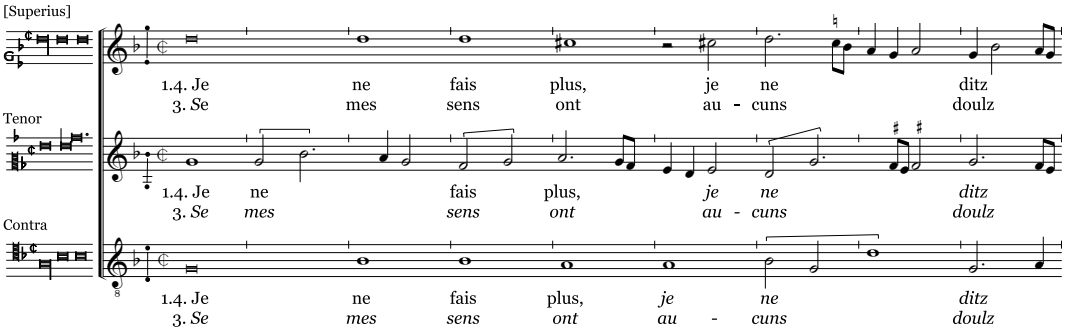
22 Cf. my article '*Prenez sur moi vostre exemple*: The 'clefless' notation or the use of *fa*-clefs in chansons of the fifteenth century by Binchois, Barbingant, Ockeghem and Josquin', *Danish Yearbook of Musicology*, 37 (2009), 13–38, and the detailed commentaries to the edition of Mureau's chansons.

not yet born? Probably just a piece of literary artifice evoking the Second Coming of Christ as an antithesis to those 'more treacherous than Antichrist':

| | |
|---|---|
| Je ne fais plus, je ne dis ne escris,<br>en mes escris<br>l'en trouvera mes regretz et mes plains<br>de larmes plains,<br>Ou, le moins mal que je puis, les descris. | I do nothing more, I do not speak nor write,<br>in my writings<br>you will find my regrets and complaints<br>filled with tears,<br>or I, the least poorly I can, describe them. |
| Toute ma joye est de souppirs et cris<br>en dueil acris;<br>il est a naistre, cil a qui je m'en plains. | All my joy has by sighs and cries<br>grown into pain;<br>he is still to be born, he to whom I will<br>complain. |
| *Je ne fais plus, je ne dis ne escris,*<br>*en mes escris*<br>*l'en trouvera mes regretz et mes plains.* | I do nothing more, I do not speak nor write,<br>in my writings<br>you will find my regrets and complaints. |
| Se mes sens ont aucuns doulz motz escris,<br>il[s] sont prescris;<br>je passe temps par desers et par plains,<br>et la me plains<br>d'aucunes gens plus traittres qu'Antecrix. | If my mind ever did write any sweet words,<br>they are damned;<br>I pass time in abandonment and grievance,<br>and there I grieve<br>that some people are more treacherous than<br>Antichrist. |
| Je ne fais plus, *je ne dis ne escris,*<br>*en mes escris*<br>*l'en trouvera mes regretz et mes plains*<br>*de larmes plains,*<br>*Ou, le moins mal que je puis, les descris.* | I do nothing more, I do not speak nor write,<br>in my writings<br>you will find my regrets and complaints<br>filled with tears,<br>or I, the least poorly I can, describe them. |

(Florence 2794, fos. 50$^{v}$–51)

*Je ne fais plus* was Mureau's only international *hit* song. It appears in ten French and Italian musical sources dated before *c.*1500, and in at least seven sources from the sixteenth century. After around 1490 the scribes began to attribute this highly successful song to composers of greater fame as Antoine Busnoys and Loyset Compere, probably mainly because Mureau at that time was forgotten as a composer. The lyrical musical setting adheres closely to the text. It is varied with a declamatory first section and a more animated second. The tessitura is high with the tenor occasionally crossing above the superius. It is perfect for boys' voices, but it was like *Grace actendant* probably originally notated in *fa*-clefs making it performable at any pitch. A characteristic trait of Mureau's music is his ability to make the upper voice seemingly 'float' upon the web of the lower voices. *Je ne fais plus* is a particularly successful example of this, and it may be one of the reasons for the song's lasting popularity. This furthermore calls attention to a musical trait, to which he apparently resorted quite often, namely to exploit the




Ex. 2, Gilles Mureau, *Je ne fais plus* (Florence 2794, fos. 50ᵛ–51), bb. 1–9.

driving force of the traditional cadence configuration with suspension and resolution in order to set off or animate a melodic development long before the arrival of the phrase's ending. The memorable opening of *Je ne fais plus* can stand as a sort of paradigm of this technique, and already in bars 6–7 on it is used to energize the flow after the calm beginning (see ex. 2).

Mureau's rondeau cinquain *Tant fort me tarde ta venue* appears uniquely in Florence 176 under his name and has text incipits only for the song's two sections (fos. 71ᵛ–73). However, as these incipits are in complete agreement with the setting by Philippe Basiron in the Laborde chansonnier (fos. 34ᵛ–35), which has the complete poem, it is easy to restore Mureau's song. Notwithstanding that Mureau's setting is preserved exclusively in an Italian source, which must be dated later than the 'Loire Valley' group of chansonniers, it is most likely the original setting. The music is quite ordinary in the style of the 1460s. It may be an early work, while *Grace actendant* and *Je ne fais rien* probably date from around 1470, just a bit too late to be included in the repertory of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers. It is in a 'normal' tessitura (*B–c″*) with tenor and contratenor in the same range, and the contratenor often crosses above the tenor and takes the fifth at several cadences. The sound of the setting is quite old-fashioned, even if the upper voices abound in parallel thirds and sixths. All three voices relate to the text, and the setting is varied with alternating declamatory and melismatic passages involving sequences in canonic imitation; it ends in a *fauxbourdon* cadence.

Tant fort me tarde ta venue
pour compter ma desconvenue,
mon plus qu'ame, que sur mon ame
je ne prens plaisir en nul ame
qui soit aujourduy soubz la nue.

De joye mon plaisir se desnue,
si douleur t'est puis souvenue;
mille foiz le jour te reclame:

Tant fort me tarde *ta venue.*

Your appearance so strongly holds me back
from explaining my disappointment,
my more than beloved, that by my soul
I do not get pleasure from any love
that today might be found under the sky.

My pleasure strips off any joy,
if you still bring back the pain;
thousand times a day I cry to you:

Your appearance so strongly holds me back.

| | |
|---|---|
| Or est ma sante certes nue, | Certainly my sanity is gone, |
| je ne scay quel est devenue, | I do not know what has happened to it, |
| desconfort m'assault que point n'ame | worry assaults me that (he) does not at all love (me) |
| et me veult mectre soubz la lame; | and will put me below the tombstone; |
| je suis mort, s'il me continue. | I shall die, if this continues for me. |
| Tant fort *me tarde ta venue* | Your appearance so strongly holds me back |
| *pour compter ma desconvenue,* | from explaining my disappointment, |
| *mon plus qu'ame, que sur mon ame* | my more than beloved, that by my soul |
| *je ne prens plaisir en nul ame* | I do not get pleasure from any love |
| *qui soit aujourduy soubz la nue.* | that today might be found under the sky. |

(Laborde, fos. 34$^{v}$–35)

It is most likely that Mureau is the author of this artful poem. In some ways, for example in the theme of keeping back what one really wants to say, it appears like a preparation for the much more concentrated poem in *Je ne fais plus*. It is clearly in a female voice, and its tone is intimate, addresses a male of equal social standing by the use of 'ta (tu)' and 'mon plus qu'ame'. It is in *rimes équivoque* with the rhyme words '(-)nue' and '(-)ame', and its construction demands a one-line refrain following the *couplet,* not the half refrain as is usual in poems made for music. The sense does not permit a stop in the refrain after three lines. In the musical setting, the first line alone with its cadence to the mode's fifth degree makes a fine, varied bridge to the *tierce.*

It is noteworthy that the later user of the MS Florence 176 recognized the music and added Mureau's name, when he looked at three settings of poems, which were more ambitious literarily than the usual run of polyphonic chansons. If he had not remembered them, two of the three would have remained anonymous in the repertory. Maybe the text incipits triggered his memory, and the ascriptions relate to the poems as well as the music.

I am well aware that my interpretation of the achievements of Gilles Mureau includes several improvable assumptions. The sources keep quiet about many circumstances. As it is well-known, the identification of the composer of a given song often depends on sheer luck as in the case of Mureau, and information on the authors of the poems is even more difficult to unearth. Here I confidently assume that Mureau wrote the poems as well as the music, because the story to tell would not be much different if I am wrong about this. If he simply set music to poems obtained from others or delivered from patrons, his knowledge of and involvement with contemporary poetic practice would make a just as interesting story. And, with a look forward, if Basiron did not know of Mureau's setting of *Tant fort me tarde*, then his two reworkings of the topic, and the radical different result he ended up with, would again be just as interesting as in my story.

The double role of poet and composer matches the impression of an industrious young man eager to advance his prospects inside the church by impressing the secular powers active in the cathedral's surroundings. In Mureau's music, it is remarkable that three of his songs use a very high tessitura as if they were explicitly destined for boys' voices.[23] This seems relevant considering Mureau's occupation as a teacher and performer with the boys at the Chartres *maîtrise*. Still more characteristic is his tendency to declaim the words clearly in tranquil note values for longer stretches and preferably in more than one voice at the same time. His concern for the intelligibility of the words in performance and his interest in the use of sound as a compositional tool seem modern and forward-looking on the background of contemporary tendencies and may have influenced younger chanson composers. However, this is to some degree contradicted by such old-fashioned traits as his use of a high contratenor crossing above the tenor at cadences, and the tendency to parallelism between voices, or passages in *fauxbourdon*-style.

### *Philippe Basiron*

Gilles Mureau was on the fast career track to a secure position in the clerical hierarchy, and he may have appeared as a role model for a striving young *magister puerum*. Philippe Basiron (*c.*1448–1491) was a few years younger than Mureau and had a career parallel to his, but probably not as successful. Philippe Basiron was in October 1458 admitted as a choirboy in the ducal chapel in Bourges along with his younger brother Pierron (d. 1529).[24] The Sainte-Chapelle of the Bourges Palace was constructed between 1392 and 1405 as the private chapel of Duke Jean de Berry. Its personnel included 13 canons, headed by the treasurer and the cantor, 13 chaplains, 13 vicars, and 6 choirboys. This quite tight organization had according to its statutes wide-ranging musical duties in performing polyphony on a daily basis, with important roles bestowed on the organ and the organist. The reception at the same time of two talented choirboys, who probably had begun their education in another institution, must have been an event of some importance to the daily musical work. The chapter bought a keyboard instrument, a *manichordum*, in 1463 for Philippe, still a choirboy, in order to further his studies of counterpoint and his ability to play the organ; this occurred shortly after the composer Guillaume Faugues' three-months stint in 1462 as master of the choirboys. Starting in 1464 Basiron began to assist in the teaching of the younger choirboys, and gradually he took over a greater share of the master's duties. He obtained the rank of *vicarius* in 1467, and finally, after some complications he was in 1469 elected to the position of *magister puerum*, which the chapter had promised him at an earlier date. In January 1474 a new *magister puerum* was installed. Lack of sources prevents us from knowing anything of

23 In addition to the two already mentioned, also the rondeau quatrain *Pensez y se le povez faire.*

24 All information concerning the biography of Basiron comes from Paula Higgins, 'Tracing the Careers of Late Medieval Composers. The Case of Philippe Basiron of Bourges', *Acta musicologica,* 62 (1990), 1–28.

Basiron's whereabouts and activities during the years between 1474 and *c.*1487. At the end of the 1480s Basiron appears as occupying a house and garden in Bourges, which he possessed as part of his vicariate in the church Saint-Pierre-le-Guillard, a position affiliated with the Sainte-Chapelle. He died just before the end of May 1491, and his position and house was transferred to his younger brother Johannes, *capellanus* at the Sainte-Chapelle.

Even if the situation of Basiron does not appear to be flourishing at the end of his life, he does seem to have enjoyed the protection and appreciation from powerful men in his surroundings. When compelling the chapter of the Sainte-Chapelle to fulfil its promises of the post as *magister puerum*, he was able to invoke alternative prospects of entering the service of clericals like the cardinal of Angers, Jean Balue, or the archbishop of Bourges, Jean Coeur, both magnates close to the king; and in another controversy with the chapter over a canonry and prebend in 1471, King Louis XI intervened on the side of Basiron.[25] Exactly during these years Basiron had created a name for himself as a chanson composer. Four of his songs found their way into the original layer of the Laborde chansonnier, and three of them can be found in the Wolfenbüttel chansonnier.

The Wolfenbüttel scribe in fact seems to have had a weak spot for the music of Basiron. In the planning of the chansonnier, he had first to make the initial letters of the first 13 songs (12 plus Frye's 'Ave regina celerum' added as the opening piece) spell out the name of the receiver, a royal secretary, in the form of an acrostic, 'A Estiene Petit'.[26] As soon as he had finished this closely defined job, he entered two songs by Basiron (fos. 13$^{v}$–17) followed a few pages later on by a third one (fos. 20$^{v}$–22) – thereby displaying a striking interest in his music. Furthermore, it is conceivable that some of the songs placed in between or after the songs by Basiron might be ascribed to him as well. Basiron's name does not originally appear in the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers. Just like it was the case with Mureau, the three songs under Basiron's name in Laborde would have remained anonymous, if not the so-called 'Index-Scribe II' had recognized them as his works and added his name during the finishing of Laborde in the atelier of the scribe of Florence 2794 and his successors around 1480, a workshop with close connections with the French court chapel.[27] The fourth chanson in Laborde, *Tant fort me tarde*, Basiron's most successful song, surfaces in an Italian source transmission, where

25 Higgins, *Tracing*, 7–11.

26 Cf. David Fallows, '"Trained and immersed in all musical delights": Towards a New Picture of Busnoys', in Paula Higgins (ed.), *Antoine Busnoys. Method, Meaning, and Context in Late Medieval Music* (Oxford, 1999), 21–50 (at 41–43 and 49–50); Alden, *Songs, Scribes*, 188–206; idem, '*Ung Petit cadeau*: Verbal and Visual Play in the Wolfenbüttel Chansonnier', in Fabrice Fitch and Jacobijn Kiel (eds.), *Essays on Renaissance Music in Honour of David Fallows: 'Bon jour, bon mois et bonne estrenne'* (Woodbridge, 2011), 33–43.

27 Cf. Peter Woetmann Christoffersen, 'The French musical manuscript in Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ms. 2794, and the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers', available at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/NOTES/Flo2794art.html.

it is ascribed to 'Phelippon' in the slightly later Ferrarese chansonnier, Roma, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2856.[28]

On the whole, Basiron gives the impression of being well integrated in a milieu, where it was of value to be able to appreciate and participate in poetry and music. During the years around 1470 he was well regarded by clerical and secular powers, and the scribes of the Wolfenbüttel and Laborde chansonniers assumed that his music was of interest to their patrons – and he was still a very young man, only around twenty years of age. His songs do indeed reflect an attention to artful poetry, and moreover they show an even stronger interest in the music of his older colleagues and in trying to sharpen his own powers on it and in developing the musical material.[29]

'Nul ne l'a telle, sa maistresse' may well be one of his earliest songs, and it can be found in three of the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers. It is a charming bergerette, exuberant in its adoration of the 'maistresse'. Its theme as well as its music has been developed from a direct quote of the widely circulated rondeau *Je ne vis oncques*, which was performed at the famous *Banquet de Faisan* hosted by the Burgundian duke Philippe le Bon in Lille in 1454. *Je ne vis oncques* appears with an ascription to Binchois in the Nivelle chansonnier (anonymous in Laborde and Wolfenbüttel), while it is ascribed to Du Fay in the Italian manuscript, Montecassino, Biblioteca del'Abbazia, MS 871. The ascription to the Burgundian musician Binchois seems most convincing, and it was apparently under his name that the song circulated in the Loire Valley.[30]

The quote of both text and music from Binchois' opening line occurs in the second line of the bergerette's first *couplet* (line 6, see below). The poet moreover carefully paraphrased the first line of Binchois' first *couplet,* which is sung to the same music as the opening line, as his second line in the second *couplet* (line 8). In this way, both times the musical quote is sung, it is with words identical to or very close to the words belonging with Binchois' music (see the lines in bold in the poems below). For the remaining lines in the *couplets* he has found rhymes of the same quality as heard in Binchois, *rime équivoque*, 'me semble / ensemble'; and the same quality is maintained in the refrain and *tierce* with *rimes léonines*. The concept of an 'I' and his heart who together praise

28 Paula Higgins has resolved the questions surrounding different forms of Basiron's name (P. Basiron, Phelippon, Philippon de Bourges) in the sources, cf. Higgins, *Tracing*, 17–21.

29 Typical are his two arrangements or double chansons for four voices based on the superius from the rondeau 'D'un autre amer mon cueur s'abesseroit' by Ockeghem, which appear in a Florentine manuscript from the 1490s, Bologna, Civico Museo Bibliografico Musicale, MS Q17, as part of a series also including an anonymous three-part arrangement of Ockeghem's superius. Also interesting in this respect are the two rondeaux, 'Puis que si bien m'est advenu' and 'De m'esjouir plus n'ay puissance', which stand side by side in Laborde (fos. 20$^{v}$–21$^{v}$). Basiron's name appears above the last one only, but they evidently are connected by the use of similar material; see further Christoffersen, *The chansons of Basiron's youth*. Basiron also participated in the highly competitive game of composing cantus firmus masses, among them his *Missa L'homme armé*, probably dating from the early 1470s.

30 Cf. the discussion of the sources at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH189.html.

the lady is clearly adopted from *Je ne vis oncques*. Its tone is possibly a bit more secular than the obvious allusions to the Virgin Mary in Binchois' song; but maybe the musical quote was meant temembrance of the spiritual tone of Binchois' song.

Nul ne l'a telle, sa maistresse,
mon cueur, que vous et moy avons,
se bien considerer savons
les biens dont elle a grant largesse.

Au vray dire ce qu'il me semble,
**je ne viz oncquez la pareille.**

Tant belle et tant bonne est ensemble
**que plus la voiz, plus me merveille.**

De son maintien regardons qu'esse,
affin que nous parachevons
cest bruit si grant que nous devons
dire en tous lieux sans point de cesse:

Nul *ne l'a telle, sa maistresse,*
*mon cueur, que vous et moy avons,*
*se bien considerer savons*
*les biens dont elle a grant largesse.*[31]

(Laborde, fos. 13$^{v}$–15)

**Je ne vis oncques la pareille**
de vous, ma gracieuse dame,
car vo beaulté est, sur mon ame,
sur toutes aultres nonparaille.

**En vous regardant m'esmerveille**
et dis: 'Qu'est cecy Nostre Dame?'

Je ne vis *oncques la pareille*
*de vous, ma gracieuse dame.*

Vostre tresgrant doulceur esveille
mon esperit et mon oeil entame,
mon cueur donc puet dire sans blasme,
puis qu'a vous servir s'apareille.

Je ne vis *oncques la pareille*
*de vous, ma gracieuse dame,*
*car vo beaulté est, sur mon ame,*
*sur toutes aultres nonparaille.*[32]

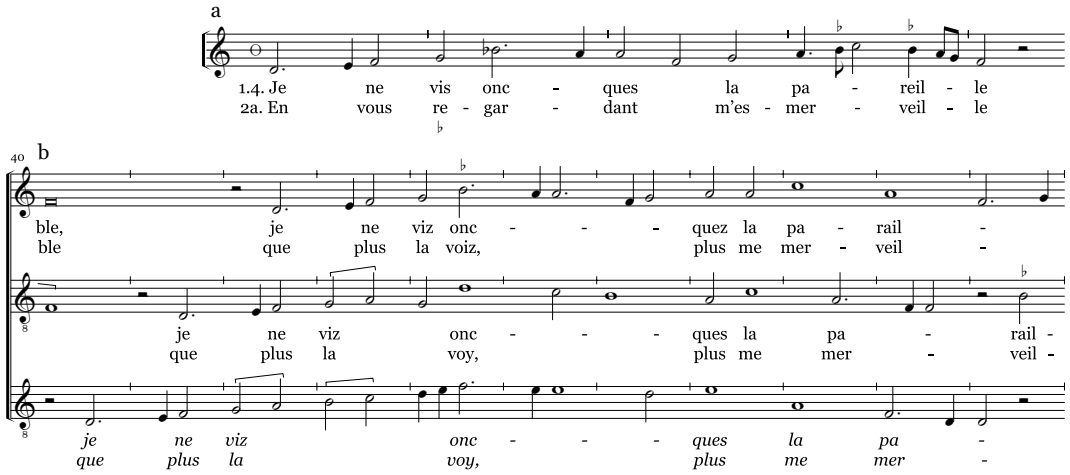
(Nivelle, fos. 51$^{v}$–52)

There cannot be any doubt that the poem was created by the composer, and that the music already then was at its planning stage. The musical quote is placed with great care in order to give it maximum effect. The *couplets* open in a subdued homorhythmic declamation of 'Au vray dire ce qu'il me semble' (To tell in truth what appears to me), which is brought to a cadence on F (bars 29–40). Here the contratenor drops out and intones Binchois' ear-catching opening line from the note *d*: 'je ne viz oncquez la pareille' (I have never seen her equal), which is then imitated in unison and at the octave by

31 Translation: No one has such a woman, as his mistress, / as you and I have, my heart, / if we know well to consider / the virtues she has in abundance. // To tell in truth what appears to me, / I have never seen her equal. / She is all at once so beautiful and so good / that the more I see her, the more I marvel. // Let us regard her manner as it is, / that we can enhance / her grand reputation, which we ought to / spread everywhere and without cease: // No one has such a woman, as his mistress, / as you and I have, my heart, / if we know well to consider / the virtues she has in abundance.

32 Translation: I have never seen the equal / of you, my gracious lady, / for your beauty is, by my soul, / by all others unrivalled. // When I see you, I wonder / and say: Could this one be Our Lady? / I have never seen the equal / of you, my gracious lady. // Your perfect sweetness rouses / my spirit and blinds my eye, / my heart then can say so without guilt, / because it is ready to serve you. // I have never seen the equal / of you, my gracious lady, / for your beauty is, by my soul, / by all others unrivalled.

tenor and superius – the only three-part imitation in the song (bars 40–44, see ex. 3). The continuation of the musical quote in the upper voice is supported by a *fauxbourdon*-like texture in the tenor and the high contratenor, the last singing in parallel fourths below the superius. This is quickly replaced by staggered descending triads in all voices; as we shall see, this is something of a trademark for Basiron. Otherwise, the setting is varied and with extensive melismas at the end of lines. There is not much further imitation, only a short snatch of octave canon, and *fauxbourdon* progressions seem to be the composer's favourite way of cadencing; accordingly the song's contratenor lies above the tenor in many passages. The song's formal layout conforms perfectly to the conventions of bergerette-settings in the Busnoys generation. It shows the clear contrast between the *refrain/tierce* section and the *couplets* by means of mensuration, *tempus perfectum* followed by *tempus imperfectum diminutum*. Furthermore, the *seconda volta* of the *couplets* ends in a glittering flourish like many other songs of this type from the early 1460s. While the form seems up-to-date, the sound and technique of the song appear a bit dated. In this song, we discover that a young composer in the 1460s still found the techniques of the Binchois generation attractive and useful. However, in comparison with his admired model, his effort fades somewhat; it seems far from Binchois' technical maturity and precision of expression.[33]




Ex. 3a-b, Gilles Binchois, *Je ne vis oncques* (Nivelle, fos. 51ᵛ–52), upper voice, bb. 1–5 (a); Philippe Basiron, *Nul ne l'a telle* (Laborde, fos. 13 ᵛ–15), bb. 40–50 (b).

33 The French-Italian chansonnier Seville, Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina, MS 5-I-43 transmits an anonymous bergerette with text incipits only, 'Le bien fet', which is an exact parallel to *Nul ne l'a telle* as regards the use of a quotation of all three voices from the first line of *Je ne vis oncques* as its second line of music in the couplets (see further http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH556.html). This song could be an early attempt at the theme of *Nul ne l'a telle* by Basiron. A more credible explanation may be that the relative success of *Nul ne l'a telle* inspired a colleague to try his hand at something similar.

Mureau's *Tant fort me tarde* apparently stimulated Basiron to try his hand on creating something like it. The result was two chansons with quite different results. The version of the story of their genesis, which to me seems the most plausible, goes as follows: The poetic text of 'Je le scay bien ce qui m'avint', a rondeau quatrain, was created as a response to or a continuation of the rondeau cinquain *Tant fort me tarde*.[34] Both poems use (or try to use) the highly literary form of *rimes équivoques*. *Je le scay bien* not only reuses one of the rhyme words, 'ame', of *Tant fort me tarde* (highlighted in bold in the poems below), the opening words of the first couplet ('De joye'), and the crucial formulations of the *tierce* ('soubz la lame; / je suis mort' – 'car il est mort soubz la lame', all in bold), but it also transforms the other rhyme word 'venue' (accentuated in italics below) into compounds of '-vint' and thereby moves the situation from something happening or about to happen into a contemplation of the past.

Tant fort me tarde ta *venue*
pour compter ma descon*venue*,
mon plus qu'**ame**, que sur mon **ame**
je ne prens plaisir en nul **ame**
qui soit aujourduy soubz *la nue*.

**De joye** mon plaisir se *desnue*,
si douleur t'est puis sou*venue*;
mille foiz le jour te recl**ame**:

Tant fort me tarde *ta venue*.

Or est ma sante cert*es nue*,
je ne scay quel est de*venue*,
desconfort m'assault que point n'**ame**
et me veult mectre **soubz la lame**;
**je suis mort**, s'il me con*tinue*.

Tant fort *me tarde ta venue*
*pour compter ma desconvenue,*
*mon plus qu'ame, que sur mon ame*
*je ne prens plaisir en nul ame*
*qui soit aujourduy soubz la nue.* [35]

(Laborde, fos. 34$^{v}$–35)

Je le scay bien ce qui m'a*vint*;

dernier jour que vous vy, mad**ame**,
je eu tant de dueil que, par mon **ame**,
je ne sceus que mon cueur de*vint*.

**De joye** onc puis ne me sou*vint*

et n'ay pas tort, par Nostre D**ame**:

Je le scay bien *ce qui m'avint*
*dernier jour que vous vy, madame.*

Oncques puis a moy ne re*vint*

se ne l'avez, Dieu en ait l'**ame**,
car **il est mort soubz la lame**,
il estoit bon des ans a *vingt*.

Je le scay bien *ce qui m'avint;*

*dernier jour que vous vy, madame,*
*je eu tant de dueil que, par mon ame,*
*je ne sceus que mon cueur devint.*[36]

(Wolfenbüttel, fos. 20$^{v}$–22)

34 The relationship between the two poems was first described by Paula Higgins in Higgins, *Tracing*, 18–21.

35 Translation, see above, p. 13.

36 Translation: I know well what happened to me; / the last day I saw you, my lady, / I had such pain that I, by my soul, / did not know what became of my heart. // Never hereafter could I recall any joy, and I am not in the wrong, by Our Lady, / I know well what happened to me / the last day I saw you, my lady. // It will never again come back to me, / if you do not catch it, God help the soul, / for

The poetic voice of *Tant fort me tarde* fears for its mental health, and feels that the beloved will put it 'below the tombstone', that it shall die, if the situation remains unchanged (as far as I can understand this opaque poem). In *Je le scay bien*, the poet's heart is dead and lies 'below the tombstone'; it had only twenty years of good life. Basiron was young when he wrote this poem, but we probably should not put too much weight on the 'twenty years', as the number was produced by the rhyme structure – but it is thought provoking, and fits into the chronology. The connections between the two poems are clear enough, but the differences in attitude are just as striking. The poet of *Tant fort me tarde* is bold, takes on a persona who addresses the beloved as 'ta / tu' and 'mon plus qu'ame', which signals an equal social standing and an intimate relationship, and the persona is *female*. In sharp contrast, the voice of *Je le scay bien* is conventionally *male* and uses the standard courtly addresses of 'vous' and 'madame', and in line 6 slides into the invocation of 'Nostre Dame' (Our Lady – a reminiscence of Binchois' *Je ne vis oncques*?).

The poetic voices we meet in these two poems are clearly different. The *maître de grammaire* from Chartres, Gilles Mureau, is a quite self-assured poet entering into the role-play of ambitious clerks and nobles, while the poet of the traditional love-complaint *Je le scay bien*, who we can be quite sure is the young Basiron, depends heavily on his model in order to produce something workable. Basiron's musical setting of the poem or rather his general style may also show some affinity with Mureau's music. Basiron uses the same disposition of voices and ranges (superius and tenor an octave apart within a range of *Bb–d″*; Mureau: *B–c″*). However, there is no traces of Mureau's trademark, the use of the tension of cadential figuration at the beginning of phrases or along the road to push the music forward, neither do we at any substantial degree meet Mureau's care for adjusting the lower voices to the text. The aesthetic ideals of composing with stretches of canonic imitation and cadences in *fauxbourdon*-style are common to both musicians, but Basiron uses them to expand his phrases over longer stretches. His setting of the fourth line in *Je le scay bien* is characteristic; it goes on for 22 *brevis*-bars in straight octave canon between tenor and superius and really draws out the words. An ear-catching feature is the staggered play with *brevis*-values in triadic formations, which next are elaborated with the help of stepwise motion and differentiated note values, and in the process is chopped up in shorter segments.

Apparently quite satisfied with his efforts of matching Mureau's chanson with his own words and music, Basiron found that the ideas laid down in *Je le scay bien* could be reused to much greater effect in a setting of Mureau's original poem. Basiron's *Tant fort me tarde* uses the same voice disposition and overall range as *Je le scay bien*, but the ranges of the upper voices have been restricted to eight and nine notes respectively,

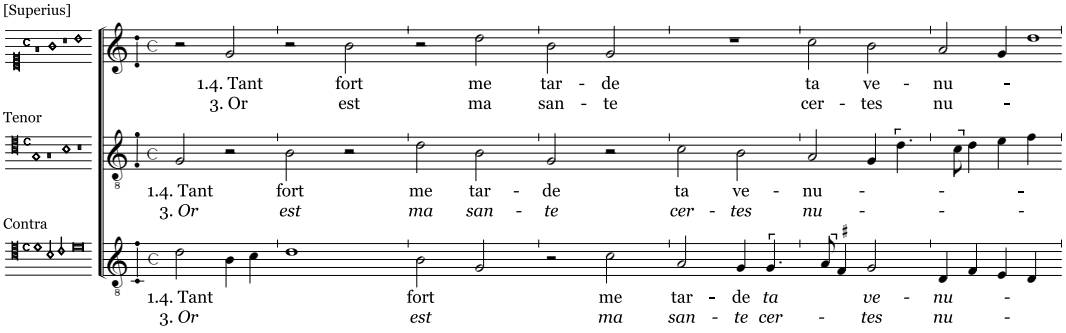
> it lies dead under the tombstone; / it had twenty good years. // I know well what happened to me; the last day I saw you, my lady, / I had such pain that I, by my soul, / did not know what became of my heart.

and the mensuration is now *tempus imperfectum* without diminution. The elements from *Je le scay bien* that he develops are primarily the use of canonic imitation, the passage in staggered descending thirds and fifths, and the drawn out ending in short segments. Basiron has made it possible to respect Mureau's formal layout of the poem and to perform his own setting with a short one-line second *couplet*. But this is as far as his respecting the intended meaning of the poem reaches; his setting seems rather like a travesty of a lovesick courtly song.

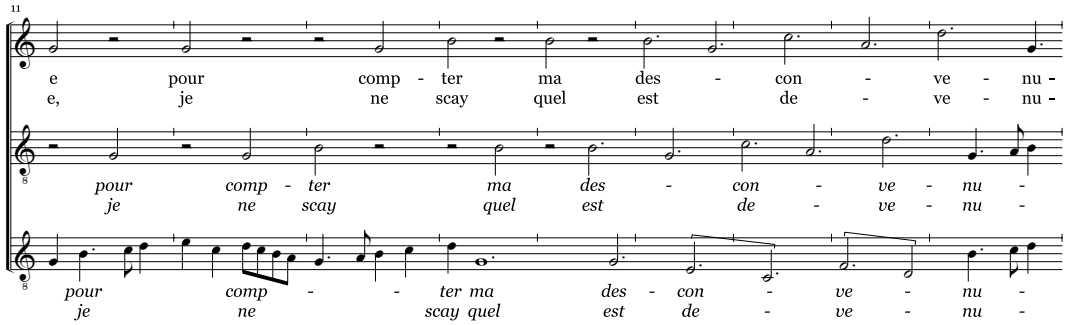
The octave canon between the upper voices is here explored to a much higher degree. It covers most of the song except for the run-ups to the cadences. The canon is flexible, the distance between the voices is fluctuating between a *semibrevis* and a *brevis*. It starts with the tenor in the lead, but this is reversed in the third line, placing the upper voice in the lead until the end. The basic material of the song is presented in the first line: A triad on G is 'chopped up' with rests, and the resulting single notes and short segments sound in alternation or staggered and are followed by conjunct motion up and down (see ex. 4a).

This idea dominates the setting; four out of the five verse lines are set in this 'chopped' fashion. The second line (bars 11–23) starts like the first, but then prolongs the *semibreves* with dots, which have the effect of displacing the feeling of a steady beat. This effect is strongly supported by the contratenor, which enters in *minima*-syncopation already in bar 14 (see ex. 4b). The displacement of the beat and the staggered descending thirds create a floating, 'kaleidoscopic' passage, which is more effective than the corresponding passage in *Je le scay bien*; and it contrasts nicely with the following third verse line – the only one without 'chopping'.

The rondeau's second section starts as a variation of the song's opening, now with the superius in lead. A lively canon in complementary rhythms leads to the fifth and last line, in which the idea of 'chopping' is developed into a sort of antiphony between the upper voices. Here the contratenor has to function as the structural counter voice to the resulting monophony of the upper voices.




Ex. 4a, Philippe Basiron, *Tant fort me tarde* (Laborde, fos. 34$^{v}$–35), bb. 1–7.



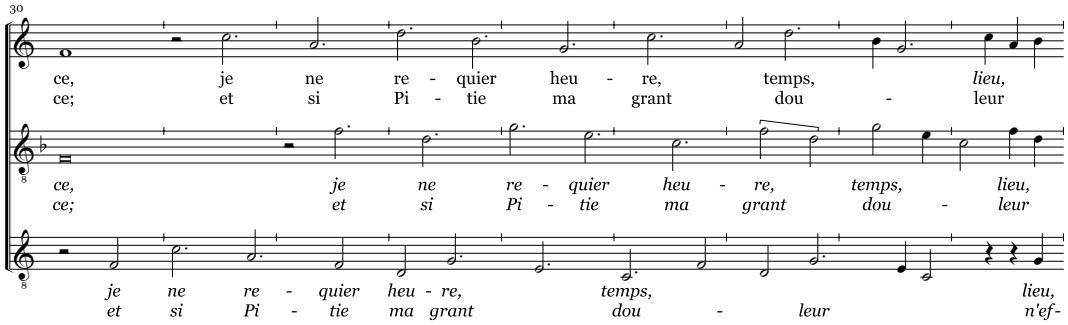

Ex. 4b, Philippe Basiron, *Tant fort me tarde* (Laborde, fos. 34$^{v}$–35), bb. 11–19.

The canon technique displayed in this setting is extremely simple. Basiron has discovered that everything works out painlessly if he keeps the canonic voices within the range of a fifth (occasionally a sixth) and lets the contratenor take care of everything else below or in between the canonic duet. Passages in *fauxbourdon*-style, which characterized the sound in *Je le scay bien*, are mostly absent. The setting was made with close attention to the text. The 'chopping' patterns are made to fit the words: 'Tant / fort / me tarde' (cf. ex. 4a) or 'pour / compter / ma / desconfort' (ex. 4b) etc. The resulting effect of stammering and word repetitions can only have been designed to make fun of Mureau's sincere love poem, turning it into a travesty of courtly affectation.

Basiron has transformed the poem by Mureau with his music. Mureau's own setting was loyal to the poem, made a sensitive/intimate performance possible, if perhaps a bit conventional. Also Basiron's derived poem in *Je le scay bien* took the meaning of Mureau's poem at face value, even if the music here begins to get the upper hand in long self-growing phrases and canons. In Basiron's setting of *Tant fort me* tarde, one has to take in the words of Mureau differently because of the musical setting, which is flamboyant, ironic and entertaining in a new way, making thoughts about ending 'below the tombstone' appear somewhat stilted or comical. The music has here in a way grabbed the power.[37]

We can now try to track some of the impulses for this change. The stimulus to develop the techniques already explored in *Je le scay bien* was with great probability proffered by a highly successful song by an older composer, namely Caron's famous *Helas, que pourra devenir*, or alternately the impulse was propagated through a song by Johannes Tinctoris, *Helas, le bon temps que j'avoie*.

37 Maybe Basiron's setting gained Mureau's rondeau a place in the popular song repertory. Its refrain is paraphrased in a strophic song, which was printed in two popular song anthologies from the second decade of the fifteenth century. The popular song reuses its first line and many of the original words, but now the female speaker is rather bored with her lover, she cannot be content with only one lover; cf. Brian Jeffery, *Chanson Verse of the Early Renaissance* I–II (London 1971–76), I, 174–75.




Ex. 5, Caron, *Helas m'amour* (Laborde, fos. 12$^{v}$–13), bb. 30–38.

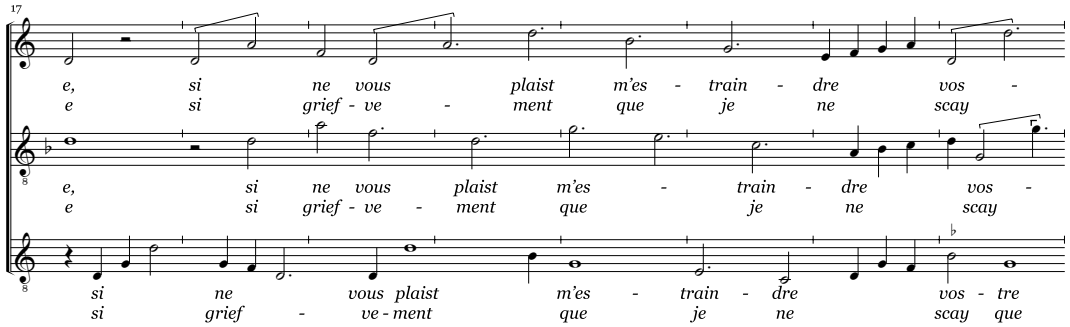
Caron was active during the period 1455–75 in Northern France,[38] and his *Helas* was well known in Basiron's region as is clearly confirmed by its appearance in the Dijon and Wolfenbüttel chansonniers. In Laborde, Caron's setting appears with the rondeau quatrain 'Helas m'amour, ma tresparfaicte amye', which was probably the song's original text.[39] Its presence in these three sources in different versions indicates that the song had been in circulation for some time already in the 1460s. Caron's music demonstrates the same exploration of canon technique as Basiron's and has a spectacular, rhythmically disruptive passage in staggered descending thirds and triads in dotted values sung by all voices (see ex. 5), and Caron's setting might in its own way treat the poem ironically; or maybe we should rather say that Caron was more challenged by the formal layout of the rondeau and by the virtuosity of the free canons than by the words of the poem. In terms of the use of canon at the fifth, rhythmical flexibility and sheer craftsmanship, Caron's song was much more accomplished.

The idea of this ear-catching passage combined with canon could also have reached Basiron with a song by Johannes Tinctoris (*c.*1435–1511), *Helas, le bon temps que j'avoie*, as intermediary. This song is without any doubt modelled on Caron's *Helas*, and it is most probably also composed with the poem 'Helas m'amour, ma tresparfaicte amye' as its original text.[40] Tinctoris here displays his command of the same technical elements as

38 Cf. Rob C. Wegman, 'Fremin le Caron at Amiens: New Documents', in Fitch and Kiel (eds.), *Essays on Renaissance Music*, 10–32.

39 The song is in many sources and appears in several modern editions (cf. Fallows, *A Catalogue*, 181–82, and http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH092.html), but only the three 'Loire Valley' chansonniers (Laborde, Dijon and Wolfenbüttel) transmit the complete texts.

40 The earliest source for this song is Seville 5-I-43, which was copied in Italy by a northern scribe around 1480; further on sources and editions, see Fallows, *A Catalogue*, 178, and http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH_X/Sev5-I-43_60.html. Nothing speaks against that he composed it during the 1460s, while he worked in the Loire region. It could very well be contemporary with his rondeau, 'Vostre regart si tresfort m'a feru', which the Dijon scribe copied into Dijon and Laborde, in both cases with an ascription to 'Tinctoris', and it seems that the version of Caron's *Helas* that Tinctoris knew was very similar to the version preserved in Laborde.




Ex. 6, Johannes Tinctoris, *Helas le bon temps [Helas m'amour]* (Seville 5-I-43, fos. 44$^{v}$–45), bb. 17–24.

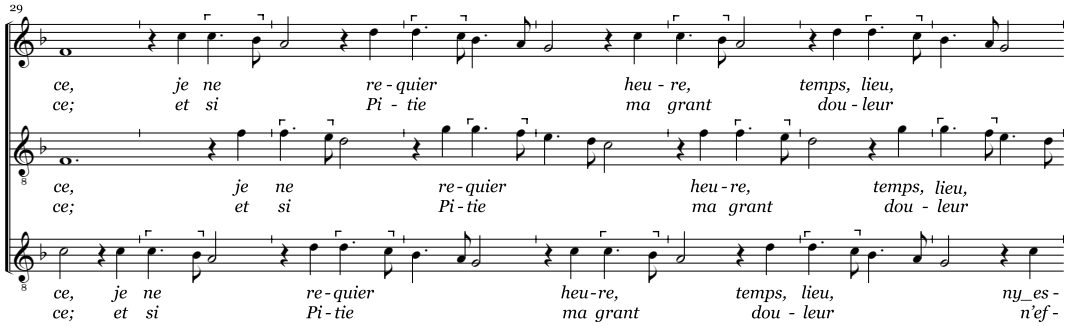
Caron including free canon and the passage in staggered triads in irregular rhythms (see ex. 6; the example shows my reconstruction of the text underlay). Tinctoris was certainly well acquainted with Caron's song. In his *Liber de arte contrapuncti, Liber secundus* of 1477, Capitulum XXXIII, Tinctoris brings a music example from precisely this song.[41]

While the two songs by the older composers, Caron and Tinctoris, are technical complex and skilful, but exhibit a weak coordination between the poetic text and the music, Basiron's simplification of the technical parameters enables him to coordinate the music with the words. This makes it considerably easier to hear what is happening in the song – and why it is funny. An examination of examples 4–6 makes it evident that Basiron and Tinctoris are indebted to Caron who made this effect popular. Of course, the idea of staggered triads are quite obvious in connection with canons in unison or at the octave, and possibly their use was en route to become clichés,[42] but the effective rhythmical disruptions and the placement of the passages in the rondeau form here make the inspirational and competitive threads between the songs and their composers credible.

To continue the discussion of the songs and the reworkings, which Caron's *Helas* inspired, it is interesting to take a look at Heinrich Isaac's interpretation of the song. Isaac (*c.*1452–1517) reworked all the voices of Caron's *Helas*, and moved the music a generation onwards – he too wanted to show off his prowess against this venerated

41 The Latin text can be found at http://boethius.music.indiana.edu/tml/15th/TINCON2; a modern edition in J. Tinctoris, *The Art of Counterpoint (Liber de arte contrapuncti). Translated and edited by Albert Seay* (Musicological Studies and Documents 5, 1961), 130–31. Besides the strong structural similarities and the similar ranges of the voices, the majority of sources for Tinctoris' *Helas* have the same disposition of key signatures, with a flat signature in the tenor only, as in Laborde's version of Caron's *Helas* and in the music example in Tinctoris' *Liber de arte contrapuncti*.

42 Cf. Jenny Hodgson, 'The Illusion of Allusion', in Meconi, *Early Musical Borrowing*, 65–89, and John Milsom, '"*Imitatio*", "Intertextuality", and Early Music', in Suzannah Clark and Elizabeth Eva Leach (eds.), *Citation and Authority in Medieval and Renaissance Musical Culture. Learning from the Learned* (Woodbridge, 2005), 141–51.




Ex. 7, Heinrich Isaac, *Helas que devera [Helas m'amour]* (Florence 229, fos. 5$^{v}$–6), bb. 29–36.

background. His piece is preserved in five late fifteenth-century sources and in some sixteenth-century MSS and prints as well, among them the Florentine chansonnier, Florence 229, where it appears with the text incipit 'Helas que devera mon cuer' and an ascription to 'Henricus Yzac'; in most sources it has the text incipit 'Helas' only or is without text.[43] Also this composition can in a satisfactory way be combined with the rondeau quatrain, which appears with Caron's song in Laborde; this text transmission apparently was the one known to Isaac as well as to Tinctoris. In a way, Isaac missed the whole point of Caron's rondeau, when he streamlined it into a regular, systematic music typical of a younger generation. Every imitation is now neat and preferably involving all three voices, the intervallic strict canons at the fifth are changed into diatonic canons, and its rhythm is steady without exciting surprises – and the whole is quite elegant. The musical excitement we may experience in Caron's *Helas* – when the staggered descending thirds and triads in dotted values sung by all voices suddenly suspend the steady beat of the preceding long melismas – is here ironed out in favour of clarity and regularity (see ex. 7; the example shows my reconstruction of the text underlay).[44] This simplification of musical expression and its evident kindness to the listener may eventually be seen as a fulfilment of some of the ideas that Basiron was playing with in his *Tant fort me tarde.*

With these last examples we have glimpsed a tendency in which the development of musical ideas has been gaining the upper hand in relation to the texts of the songs. In the case of Basiron (and Isaac to some degree) this has been tempered by a new respect for an intelligible delivery of words. Mureau's care for the words and in some spots for the meaning of the words is only one of the tendencies pointing to the future of the French chanson; another is the extended involvement with imitation and sequences. It is interesting to discover that the two young composers during the years up to and

43 For lists of sources and modern editions, see Howard Mayer Brown, *A Florentine Chansonnier from the Time of Lorenzo the Magnificient. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale MS Banco Rari 229* (Monuments of Renaissance Music VII; Chicago, 1983), I, 209.

44 The entire reconstruction can be seen at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH_X/Flo229_006.html.

around 1470 – the preserved material is silent about them composing chansons later on – really took part in developing tendencies, which became of great relevance during the next decades in the music of much more productive composers as Loyset Compere and Alexander Agricola. Another point is that the stylistic foundation for the young composers' working 'at the front of the art' may seem a bit out-dated. They and many of their contemporaries in the same sources used old-fashioned cadences, contratenors above the tenors and passages in *fauxbourdon*-style as valid alternatives to more modern sounding devices as low contratenors, three-part imitation etc. – completely unaware that musicology has classified such traits as stylistic markers of an older generation.

As part of my discussion of the songs of Basiron's youth I have searched for candidates for an attribution to the young Basiron. The search has been directed primarily at the songs that could have been copied along with the ascribed songs from a common exemplar.[45] In Wolfenbüttel between *Nul ne l'a telle*, no. 15 in the manuscript, and no. 18, *Je le scay bien*, both by Basiron, we find two anonymous three-part songs, which are in Laborde and Copenhagen as well, 'Je ne requiers que vostre bien vueillance' and 'Le joli tetin de ma dame'. A study of the sources shows that both of them could have been copied into the three chansonniers along with Basiron's songs by three different scribes using the same or closely related exemplars, and both of them are obvious candidates for an ascription to Basiron. In *Je ne requiers* the composer is experimenting with the musical layout of a rondeau, and in the happy erotic song *Le joli tetin*, the 'chopping up' of melodic lines and the repetition of melodic cells in the final phrase is clearly related to Basiron's *Tant fort me tarde*.[46]

In Laborde four folios have disappeared between folio 21 and folio 22. The careful index to the original contents provided by the Dijon scribe permits us to reconstruct the original sequence of songs: First came Basiron's *De m'esjouir* (fos. 21$^{v}$–21a), followed by two songs now completely missing, *Ce qu'on fait a catimini* (fos. 21a$^{v}$–21b) and *Le joli tetin* (fos. 21b$^{v}$–21d). Everything points at that we must include also *Ce qu'on fait a catimini* among the candidates for an ascription to Basiron, especially as it is present also in Wolfenbüttel (fos. 48$^{v}$–49).

I think that the song is typical of Basiron and offer it as my last example. If not by Basiron, it still shows the urge to compete with and develop the material in the situation where a composer thinks that he may do better. It is a setting of a macaronic poem, which mixes French with Latin. It is blatantly erotic – and much more cynic than the happy *Le joli tetin*. The poem 'Ce qu'on fait a catimini' was also set by the older composer Gilles Joye (*c.*1425–1483) in a different version. His song is preserved in the Mellon chansonnier, New Haven, Yale University, Beineke Library, MS 91, fos. 10$^{v}$–11, and in

45 Cf. Christoffersen, *The chansons of Basiron's youth.*

46 See also the editions of the songs at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH015.html and http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH017.html.

three later sources.[47] The text in Wolfenbüttel could very well have been revised by the composer with Joye's setting as his model. He has only reworded the lines without Latin words (shown in Italics in the example below), and he reused some words from the older version (shown in bold); all in order to obtain a more effective and rich rhyme word, '-ement' instead of just '-é', and one which contrasts stronger with the first rhyme '-mini'. Not much is changed in the meaning of the poem.

Ce qu'on fait a catimini
touchant multiplicamini,
***maiz qu'il soit*** *fait secretement,*
*est* ***excuse*** *legerement*
in conspectu Altissimi.

Et pourtant operamini,
mez filles, et letamini,
*ce* ***n'est*** *que tout esbatement*

ce qu'on fait a catimini
touchant multiplicamini,
maiz qu'il soit fait secretement.

Et se vous ingrossamini,
soit in nomine Domini;
*endurez le tout doulcement,*
*ja n'en perdrez vo saulvement,*
maiz que vous confitemini.

Ce qu'on fait a catimini
touchant multiplicamini,
maiz qu'il soit fait secretement,
est excuse legerement
in conspectu Altissimi.[48]

(Wolfenbüttel, fos. 48$^{v}$–49)

Ce qu'on fait a quatimini
touchant multiplicamini,
***mais qu'il soit*** *bien tenu secre,*
*sera tenu pour* ***excuse***
in conspectu Altissimi.

Et pourtant operamini,
mes fillez, et letaimini,
*car jamais* ***n'est*** *revele*

ce qu'on fait a quatimini
touchant multiplicamini,
mais qu'il soit bien tenu secre.

Et se vous ingrossemini,
soit in nomine Domini;
*vous aves a proufit ouvre,*
*qui vous sera tout pardonne,*
mais que vous confitemini.

Ce qu'on fait a quatimini
touchant multiplicamini,
mais qu'il soit bien tenu secre,
sera tenu pour excuse
in conspectu Altissimi.

(Mellon, fos. 10$^{v}$–11)

47 Edited in Leeman L. Perkins and H. Garey (eds.), *The Mellon Chansonnier* I–II (New Haven, 1979), no. 9. The anonymous setting is edited in Martella Gutiérrez-Denhoff (ed.), *Der Wolfenbütteler Chansonnier. Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Codex Guelf. 287 Extrav.* (Musikalischer Denkmäler X; Mainz, 1988), no. 39, and at http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH237.html.

48 Translation: What you do covertly / concerning 'let us multiply', / as long as it is done secretly, / is easily excused / in the sight of the Most High. // And then, let us do it, / my girls, and enjoy, / it is nothing but good sport / what you do covertly / concerning 'let us multiply', / as long as it is done secretly. // And if your bellies grow, / let it be in the name of the Lord; / endure it all sweetly, / you will not miss your salvation by that, / provided that you confess. // What you do covertly / concerning 'let us multiply', / as long as it is done secretly, / is easily excused / in the sight of the Most High.

The setting is light-hearted and much funnier than the quite pedestrian setting by Joye. It uses a structural duet of superius and tenor an octave apart complemented by a contratenor, which for much of the time keeps below the tenor, but rises above it in the first line. The song opens in what sounds like a three-part imitation; but soon after the entry of the last voice, it turns into an extended passage in *fauxbourdon*-style that underscores the words 'fait a catimini' (do covertly) with striking clarity. The rest of the words are set tongue-in-cheek using flexible canonic imitation on triadic motives and chasing descending thirds with lots of syncopation, which disturbs the steady beat. The second section of the rondeau runs the lines together and accumulates the syncopations, so that the last line of the refrain and of the *tierce* are performed by the upper voice off-beat all the way through: the assurances to young girls, 'in conspectu Altissimi' and 'maiz que vous confitemini', are apparently not quite trustworthy.

The few traces we have of the two young musician's activities as chanson composers can be interpreted as indicators of their efforts to improve their social standings and cultural capital by displaying capabilities in music and poetry. The targets of Basiron's efforts were probably to be found in courtly circles, and Mureau's were his patrons in the Chartres area. They show a competitive edge that may be connected with the nature of their service in the church. Both were choirmasters, *maître d'enfans, maître de grammaire* or *magister puerum*, and thus responsible, wholly or in part, for a musical and educational institution within the church, the *maîtrise*. Tinctoris worked in Orléans as *succentor* at the cathedral and studied canon law at the university in the early 1460s, and according to his own account in *De inventione et usu musicae*, Tinctoris spent some time in the 1460s as teacher of music to the choirboys at the Chartres Cathedral, probably teaching side by side with Mureau.[49]

As Paula Higgins pointed out, the role of the choirmaster became more important during the middle of the century as the education of singers able to master polyphony came in still greater demand.[50] A choirmaster renowned in polyphonic music could add considerably to the prestige of the institution and help to attract gifted pupils and not least rich donations from patrons. Maybe we should understand the choirmaster's endeavours in poetry and song as an artistic bridge to the secular world – a good standing according to the cultural values of this sphere could only be to advantage. Naturally, this increased the demands on the qualifications of the choirmaster, and if wanting, a master was quickly replaced by another. Mureau's lifelong attachment to the *maîtrise* of Chartres may have been something of a record of staying power, but Basiron's more than four

49 Cf. Ronald Woodley, 'Johannes Tinctoris: A Review of the Documentary Biographical Evidence', *Journal of the American Musicological Society,* 34 (1981), 217–48 (at 229), and Tinctoris' text at http://boethius.music.indiana.edu/tml/15th/TININV.

50 Cf. Paula Higgins, 'Musical "Parents" and Their "Progeny": The Discourse of Creative Patriarchy in Early Modern Europe', in J.A. Owens and A. Cummings (eds.), *Music in Renaissance Cities and Courts: Studies in Honor of Lewis Lockwood* (Warren, MI, 1996), 169–86 (at 173 ff.), and *idem,* 'Musical Politics in Late Medieval Poitiers: A Tale of Two Choirmasters', in Higgins, *Antoine Busnoys*, 155–74.

years in Bourges were respectable too. It is highly probable that they all knew each other personally. Not only did choirmasters circulate between positions and therefore kept an eye on open positions, but in this case there are many possibilities for personal meetings with Mureau as the central figure. He was a colleague of Tinctoris in Chartres, maybe he had even studied at the university of Orléans along with Tinctoris to qualify for the post as *maître de grammaire*, and later he held land near Bourges, which strengthened his ties to this area. The upcoming composer Basiron on his side probably did not remain stationary at home. In 1469 he did journey to Paris to be approved in his new position as *magister puerum* by the treasurer of the Sainte-Chapelle who resided in Paris.[51] En route it would be natural to stop over in Orléans or Chartres. To become personally acquainted with his somewhat older colleagues, Mureau and Tinctoris, could evidently mean a lot to the young Basiron. He may have had opportunities to absorb different impulses from them; from Tinctoris the advantages in learning from musical precursors and trying to imitate and surpass them, and from Mureau possibly the power of poetry!

*Postscript April 2017*

Late in 2014 a small music manuscript was sold at an art sale in Brussels. Shortly afterwards the buyer approached the Alamire Foundation for a musicological evaluation. The manuscript appeared to be a new member of the group of music manuscripts known as the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers from the 1470s. Moreover, it was in pristine condition without losses of folios and in its original binding. In 2016 the manuscript was bought by the King Baudouin Foundation and deposited on permanent loan with the Alamire Foundation in Leuven. It will be presented to the public at an exhibition in New York in July 2017 under its new call name, the *Leuven Chansonnier.*

The songbook contains 50 songs, all for three voices except for one four-part song, and all without composer attributions. The majority of its repertory of French chansons and one small motet belongs to the core repertory of the Loire Valley chansonniers, but it also adds twelve new songs. This 'new' chansonnier on fos. 27$^{v}$–29 brings the well-known song *Je ne fays plus, je ne dys ne escrips* in the same musical version as it is found in the manuscript Florence 176. In the new source, however, it is accompanied by the complete poem. In this way my statement that 'None of the chansons by Mureau can be found in the "Loire Valley" chansonniers' (p. 6) is proved wrong. The single hit song by Gilles Mureau did in fact make it into the Leuven chansonnier.

51 Higgins, *Tracing*, 7.

*Abstract*

The cultivation of poetry in fixed forms, known as the *Art de seconde rhétorique,* was important to the leading classes of society in fifteenth-century France. Fluency in composing poems and in conversing on literary subjects was desirable as means to support social advance and recognition – not least among the ambitious strata of clerks, lawyers and merchants. This study wants to raise the question whether a similar desire to participate in the greater cultural field were part of the driving forces behind the composing of polyphonic chansons. The question is reviewed by examining the few preserved chansons from around 1470 by two composers who made their entire careers in the service of the church as singers and choirmasters. Gilles Mureau (*c.*1442–1512) was around 1470 well established in a life-long career at the Chartres cathedral, while the slightly younger Philippe Basiron (*c.*1448–1491) already had reached the pinnacle of his career as *magister puerum* of the Sainte Chappelle in Bourges, a position he apparently left in 1474.

Both musicians presumably composed chansons in their youth only, in their twenties, and they demonstrate an acute awareness of the contemporary poetic scene. We can be quite sure that Mureau wrote his own texts and used the whole range of artful poetic skills, and when composing he had the performances by the choirboys in mind. Basiron reacted in his production to this sort of songs, among them one of Mureau's, by borrowing and rewriting poetry and by transforming musical ideas into his own creations.

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