

Chapter 4 Performance Reflections

The previous chapter examines songs that resonate with in-spiration from celestial beasts and filter down into the terrestrial zone and its courtly ecologies of breath and, therefore, voice, animating the singer's *pneuma* (spirit). Chapter 4 compliments this cosmic circulation by focusing on song that emanates from the terrestrial, critical zone—so called for the critical role that it plays in maintaining life—drawing connections between air, life, voice, and the soul. Life depends on air while death results from its absence, and the balance between these two extremes is at play in the three troubadour songs and the epic-in-scope *Lay de plour* analyzed in the chapter: Bernart Marti's "Amar dei," Bernart de Ventadorn's "Can lo boschatges es floritz," "Entre.l Taur e.l Doble Signe" (of disputed attribution), and "Qui bien aime a tart oublie" by Machaut. In its critical capacity to sustain all life-function, "air animates, and it animates song, which in turn animates both the world and its microcosm, the human self."¹ Through analysis of a late twelfth-century medieval diagram found in Reims, BM 672 that "as a whole addresses the place of human singing in the natural world to show how air and the human voice come together in audible, performed song in the wider context of macrocosmic harmony,"² Kay wonders whether the "most ecstatic form of human singing is one that, as well as being transformative, able to bring the dead to life, and capable of saving the singer's own life, also opens his mind to wisdom?"³ In the discussion that follows, all of those elements become clear: transformation, reanimation, and accumulation of wisdom.

¹ *Medieval Song*, 143.

² *Medieval Song*, 138.

³ *Medieval Song*, 144.

Balancing air between life and death

As eloquently charted by Kay, “Amar dei” (text attributed to Bernart Marti, 12th century) tells the story of an elderly protagonist on the tipping point between frustration, impotence, and impending death, brought on by age and “old skin,”⁴ and a transformation to wellbeing fueled by imagined kisses and romantic encounters with his love. It’s opening and final stanzas both contain the word “measure” (“mezura”), signaling a reasoned sense of control and stately refinement reinforced by exordial evocations of *Natureingang*,⁵ with its resonant breezes echoing with birdsong and filling the ecosystem with serene depictions of vegetation, and conclusive comparisons to royalty, wealth/enrichment, and honor. The stanzas in between, however, betray a loss of control as the lyric “eu” spirals into a state of raving irrationality where, in the medial fourth stanza, he “beat[s] the air” (“l’aer correi”) and incoherently speculates on his love’s sexual activity and immorality in a fit of paranoia.⁶ In the subsequent stanzas leading to the end of the song, visions of kisses and sexual gratification from his love recenter him and bring him back from the brink of depravity and/or death to a state of courtly balance.⁷ “From the low point in the song represented [in the] fourth stanza, the singer gradually returns to life. The final stanzas work from choking desperation to reasonable equilibrium, and a more conventional, conciliatory tone that is likewise audible in performance. In the end, the singer opts for compromise, song, and life, with the penultimate stanza professing joyful submission.”⁸

⁴ “...leis non grei, si.l veils quers pejura...” (“...let it not torment her if *old skin* gets worse...”), text edited by Kay, drawing on the editions by Fabrizio Beggiano, *Il Trovatore Bernart Marti*, Song 1, 55-46; and Simon Gaunt, *Troubadours and Irony*, 80-85, Ms E (100); translations by Kay. All translations and textual excerpts of this song are from the same sources.

⁵ Kay’s analysis of this song extends well beyond the traditional scope of the term. See *Medieval Song*, 156.

⁶ “...las, as que.s fara jamais? / Tan greu cuj revena, / tant ha blava vena, / c’uns veillums langora.” (“...alas, with whom will she ever do it? I think it will be difficult for her to recover, she has such evil blood that old age is made to suffer.”)

⁷ For more detail, see *Medieval Song*, 131-3.

⁸ *Medieval Song*, 133.

In order to bring voice to this song, which is transmitted without musical notation, we created a new contrafact using the melody of “Amis, Bernart de Ventadorn,” which is a *tenso* between Ventadorn and Peire d’Alvernhe (to whom the music is attributed) where the two debate the merits and pitfalls of preservation in *fin’amors* in light of the perils of unrequited love. While Bernart sings from the perspective of one defeated by love, Peire upholds the nobility of love in an effort to save his friend from being swept away in madness. The *tenso* offers a striking textual complement to “Amar dei,” as it embodies both alternate outcomes of the tipping point with which the lyric “eu” of “Amar dei” grapples—defeat from his lover’s scorn or sufficiency in the nobility of love. To accommodate the uncommon versification of Marti’s “Amar dei,” the first two lines of Peire’s borrowed melody are divided here into four lines in each stanza, and the distribution of syllables require alteration within each melodic line. Despite these metric adaptations, the host melody provides a fitting extant transmission, especially in regard to intertextuality, for bringing melody to Marti’s otherwise unsung song.

“Voice is a physiological manifestation of a breathing body’s animation as an animal, providing it with a means to express the impressions—and resultant imaginings—resulting from sense perception.”⁹ Our performance of “Amar dei” realizes this means of expression through its pacing of air and vocalism, gesturing towards the protagonist’s various states of composure, imagination/delusion, and consolation, alongside aural manifestations of inner imaginings and states of stupor embodied by the *vielle*. At the opening, the singer sustains airflow/vocalism in such a way as to depict the exordial sentiments stated above through slow and deliberately measured breath, while also creating an atmosphere that foreshadows both the impending spiral into hysteria and the subsequent recovery. From the second stanza onward, pacing of airflow and

⁹ *Medieval Song*, 128.

unfolding of melodic lines change to reflect his altering state of mind, while soulful animation of the text highlights each dramatic moment. The *vielle* augments this imaginative process, whipping the singer into a frenzy of doubt and frustration in an interlude between stanzas three and four, before he “beats the air” and impotently reaches the peak of paranoid hysteria. The *vielle* then fills in for the singer when the next line of text is omitted from the manuscript transmission, in effect signaling a moment of stupor and inarticulate irrationality. As the journey back to consolation continues to unfold, so do the pacing and accompaniment progressively calm, yielding to quiet internal reflection and sufficiency in the end.

Bernart de Ventadorn’s “Can lo boschatges es floritz,” on the other hand, does not end with such a conciliatory tone. While the two songs begin in similar fashion, calling on conventional natural imagery to evoke intense feelings of true love, the lyric “eu” of “Can lo boschatges” quickly spins into a rollercoaster of swirling emotions out of which he never emerges. “Much of the song is about the physiology of voice,”¹⁰ and by extension airflow and animation of the soul. The lyric “eu” complains of endless sighing; his disrupted breathing disturbs the regulation of his body temperature, resulting in alternating chills and warmth; his foolishly wagging tongue makes him want to violently strike his own teeth in order to silence it; his clamoring heart leads to an inarticulateness, etc.¹¹ “The troubadour’s only hope, in these closing lines, is that his lady might be willing to heal him—on past showing, a condition most unlikely to be met. Otherwise, he faces the extinction of that same life force, the [Aristotelian] animal soul, by which his voice and his love have so far been—if haltingly—sustained.”¹² He

¹⁰ *Medieval Song*, 134.

¹¹ For more detail, see *Medieval Song*, 134-5.

¹² *Medieval Song*, 135.

has shown his affection through word and voice, but the lady “barely nurtured” (“mas greu fui noiritz”)¹³ that affection, if at all.

This song, too, is transmitted without musical notation. In order to perform it, we created another new contrafact that borrows the melody of what could be read as a companion to “Can lo boschatges,” another song by Bernart, beginning “En consirer et en esmai.” While “Can lo boschatges” tells the story of a scorned lover who talks too much and whose love is not nourished by the lady, “En consirer” seems, when read consecutively, to precede the former as an interlocutor for Bernart engaged to confess his love for the lady, as if it were the opening of a love story doomed to fail. In it, Bernart’s tongue is paralyzed, and he cannot sing his song to the lady to tell her of his love for fear of rejection. After many stanzas of internal debate and self-deprecation, he decides to put his words into a letter to her, which if left unreciprocated would kill him. When interpreted in combination with “Can lo boschatges,” it does, in fact, lead him to death (at least poetically), and he spends the entirety of the second song faltering between vocalized physiological manifestations of the appetitive soul and inarticulate incoherence. The melody of “En consirer” proves a perfectly suitable host for the text of “Can lo boschatges,” as no alterations are required in order to fit text to music. Our performance experiments with this balance between rational song and incoherent vocalization through declamation, variations in overall pacing and textural/dynamic shaping, rhetorical gesture amplified by a heavily improvisational accompaniment, and a dramatic interpretation that dissolves into broken isolation during the final *tornada*.

In regard to the extensive *Lay de plour*, “Qui bien aime a tart oublie” by Guillaume de Machaut, that is analyzed in Chapter 4 and presented on this website, I wish mostly to allow the

¹³ Text edited by Mosché Lazar, *Klincksieck 1964*, Song 42, Ms C (56), translated by Kay.

cumulative effect of Kay's analysis alongside our performance to speak for itself. Great detail about the poetry and its context as a coda to the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre* can be found between pages 147 and 155, and it is offered here as “an especially intense marker of the precariousness of creaturely life and its constant proximity to death...[Song] cannot evade these realities; its nature, on the contrary, is to give them material expression and memorialize them.”¹⁴ In the context of the *Navarre* and its predecessor, the *Jugement dou roy de Behaigne* (explained in detail by Kay), both separated by a perspective-altering plague that caused the death of hundreds of thousands, the *Lay de plour* stands as a remarkably progressive foil to the troubadour and trouvère corpus. “The connections [it draws] between love, grief, breath, and death bear comparison with those found in the troubadours...but the fact that they are voiced by a woman lamenting a beloved lost to death may stand as a rebuke to male poets wallowing in misery at the mere unavailability of the one they desire.”¹⁵ Our performance—a rendering based upon a conflation of the notation found in Machaut MSS A and C accompanied stylistically by vielle—seeks to present the *lay* with the dignity, clarity, and power of dramatic interpretation it demands. As the phoenix rises from the ashes¹⁶ in an affirmation of life-after-death, the lady of the *Lay* rises in triumph upon the conclusion of her song.

Knowledge, song, and the wider universe

The troubadour song, “Entre.l Taur e.l Doble Signe” whose text is attributed variously to Raimon Vidal (1196-1252) and Arnaut Daniel (fl. 1180-1200), provides a final avenue in Chapter 4 through which the animation of air and song circulates back to Chapter 3 by

¹⁴ *Medieval Song*, 150.

¹⁵ *Medieval Song*, 152.

¹⁶ *Medieval Song*, 153-5.

connecting once again the celestial and terrestrial. Originating in the critical zone, the lyric “eu” exhibits a “vocabulary of *sciensa* in the sense of secure, advanced intellectual knowledge”¹⁷ through an intricately woven network of rhyme scheme, meter, and rhetorical word patterning that ascends to the cosmos, bringing us full circle in our circulation of air/breath/song from Chapters 3 and 4. Such scientific prowess demands an assertive, confident performance, and our straightforward/declamatory rendering of the song strives to embody this very ideal.

As in the other two troubadour songs performed in this chapter, “Entre.l Taur” is not transmitted with musical notation, so we created yet another new contrafact for this performance. As pointed out by van der Werf,¹⁸ the melody of Bertran de Born's "Rassa tan creis" was borrowed for the Monge de Montaudan's contrafact, "Mot m'enveya." The Monge's stanza-form contains only 9 lines of text and music, eliminating the 5th and 6th lines of Bertran's 11-line strophes. This altered form provides the model for our new contrafact version of "Entre.l Taur e.l Doble Signe," using the melody of Bertran's "Rassa tan creis," but following the form of the Monge's "Mot m'enveya." Both Bertran's and the Monge's songs are part of the *enuog* genre—songs of annoyance—and both exhibit something of an arrogant tone that lends an appropriate intertextuality as a host melody for the confident and assertive “Entre.l Taur.”

¹⁷ *Medieval Song*, 146-7.

¹⁸ *The Extant Troubadour Melodies* (New York: published by the author, 1984), 72.