

An Analysis of “Mode” in Guillaume de Machaut’s Lay mortel (“Un mortel lay”, Lay 12)

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The term “mode” is used in grammar, logic, computing, physics, statistics, music, and literary theory, not to mention everyday speech. Considered together with its compounds and relatives (modality, mood, metre, to name but three) which also have multiple meanings, it is clear that, as a concept, “mode” is a term which is bandied around easily but pinned down with difficulty. It is a term that has enjoyed a resurgence since the latter half of the twentieth century. In the wake of Northrop Frye (1957), Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), and the movements their works have provoked, the term “mode” has become both essential and multifaceted.

This essay attempts to deepen our understanding of the term “mode” through a multimodal analysis of the lay “Un mortel lay” (also entitled “Le lay mortel”) by the fourteenth-century Champagnois poet-composer Guillaume de Machaut. By identifying the modes present in Machaut’s lay, and through the analysis of some of these, I offer a medieval take on the interplay between music, text, and the visual. I focus on the manuscript page, that multimodal artefact on which we rely for our knowledge of the sounds and texts of the medieval period. However, I am – just as I argue medieval scribes to be – aware of the sonic value of the information on the page, its performative potential (Maxwell 2009).

I start with a brief overview of the uses of the term “mode” in the last few decades. The bulk of the essay is taken up with the analysis of some of the modes present in “Un mortel lay”, beginning with the visual and moving through the music before arriving at the modes of language. The essay concludes with a discussion of the limits of such an analysis, as well as how the clarification of the term “mode”, and its subsequent use, has informed an understanding of Machaut’s meditation on death, the Lay mortel.

PART 1: THE PROBLEMATICS OF “MODE”

When discussing Machaut’s lays, or indeed his musical poetry as a whole, it is often said to be written “in the lyric mode”.¹ This deceptively simple statement juxtaposes two problematic terms. “Lyric” is a term that did not enter the English language until the sixteenth century, when it is used to describe short, poetic texts, usually sung (Gorst 2013: 7). Nevertheless, with French as the aristocratic language of England for much of the Middle Ages, the term “lyrique”, with its similar meaning, would surely have been familiar to the educated classes.

“Lyric”, however, can also stand apart from “narrative”, and it is here that “mode” comes into play. If “narrative mode” constitutes action and storytelling, “lyric mode” implies contemplation, and a focus on the self. Yet as can be seen in the works of Guillaume de Machaut which incorporate lyrics, a lyric can in fact precipitate action: in the *Remede de Fortune* it is a lyric – a lay, in fact – which sets the narrative action in motion (Maxwell 2009: 95). The difference between “lyric mode” and “narrative mode” in late-medieval texts, therefore, seems to be one of form rather than function. Although narrative texts almost invariably rhyme, lyric texts are shorter, and conform to a particular rhyme scheme, or *forme fixe* (fixed form). In late-medieval France, the *forme fixe* par excellence was the lyric lay.²

The term “mode”, therefore, seems to be used to describe something not unrelated to “genre”, even if Frye distinctly separates the two (Frye 1957).³ In his response to Frye, Frederic Jameson argues that there are two “approaches” to “genre criticism”: the “semantic” and the “syntactic” (Jameson 1975: 136). The first of these “aims explicitly at giving an account of the *meaning* of the genre ... in this approach, the essence of genre is apprehended in terms of what we will call a ‘mode’” (Jameson 1975: 136-137). In the second of these, he claims, “the genre in question is dealt with in terms of ‘fixed form’” (Jameson 1975: 137). Jameson distinctly separates “fixed form” and “mode”, stating that genre can be conceived as either one or the other (Jameson 1975: 137). This separation of “fixed form” and “mode” is not tenable when dealing with the medieval lyric.

In a more recent study, which perhaps reflects the need to re-address the question given the interest which the phenomenon has aroused, Gunther Kress specifically asks: “What is a mode?” (Kress 2010: 84). In his answer, he traces two ways of deciding whether or not something is a mode. The first concerns “social practices and histories” and “emphasize[s] the *social* in Social Semiotics” (Kress 2010: 87). The other concerns

semiotics, drawing on the work of Michael Halliday: “a full theory of communication will need to represent meanings about actions, states, events in the world” (Kress 2010: 87). Ultimately, there is no simple answer: what is a mode for one group, society, or culture may or may not be for another. In terms of the present analysis, and in the light of Kress’s observations, identifying the modes that were current in medieval culture becomes all the more important.⁴

Taking into consideration Kress’s work, the term “mode” has come to have a more static meaning across a broader field than that of literary criticism. In the remainder of this essay I will apply the terminology of social semiotics to the medieval lyric lay. In doing so, I risk outraging those in whose view the purpose of historical musicology is to recreate, as closely as possible, the music of the past. Yet, together with scholars such as Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, it is my view that other scholarship based on medieval sources is not only interesting, but useful.⁵ It is my contention that the newer critical meanings of the term “mode” are better suited to enhancing our understanding of medieval pieces of music which are as fascinating as they are elusive, yet which offer such rich rewards to those who study them closely.

PART 2: THE MULTIMODALITY OF GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT’S LAY MORTEL

2.1 Background

“Un mortel lay”, also known by the title given in three manuscripts “Le lay mortel”, was written sometime before 1350, as it is transmitted in the earliest surviving repertory of Machaut’s works, which was produced around or shortly after that date: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1586 (Earp 1995: 77-79). It displays a lay structure which is typical of Machaut (and, therefore, of the *forme fixe*): twelve strophes; each to a separate rhyme scheme and metrical pattern, apart from the first and the last which share rhymes and metre. Its music is similarly typical of a Machauldian lay: through-composed, except for the first and last strophes which are usually the same music transposed up a fifth. Here, however, the music in the first and last strophes is identical.

The lay has come down to us with music in each of the group of six manuscripts that apparently contain Guillaume de Machaut’s “complete works”.⁶ There are also two complete text-only versions of the lay, and three fragmentary versions.⁷ Although this may seem like a paltry sum

in comparison with medieval “bestsellers” such as the *Roman de la rose* or the Bible, it is nevertheless a relatively large transmission history for a Machaut lay, or indeed for many of Machaut’s works. While he was lauded as a master poet and composer in his lifetime and into the fifteenth century, by the time of the advent of printing Machaut’s works had apparently faded in popularity, at least in written form.⁸

2.2 Modes at play in “Un mortel lay”

The modes at play in “Un mortel lay” can be divided into three categories, with some considerable overlap. These, and the relationships between them, are shown in Figure 1.

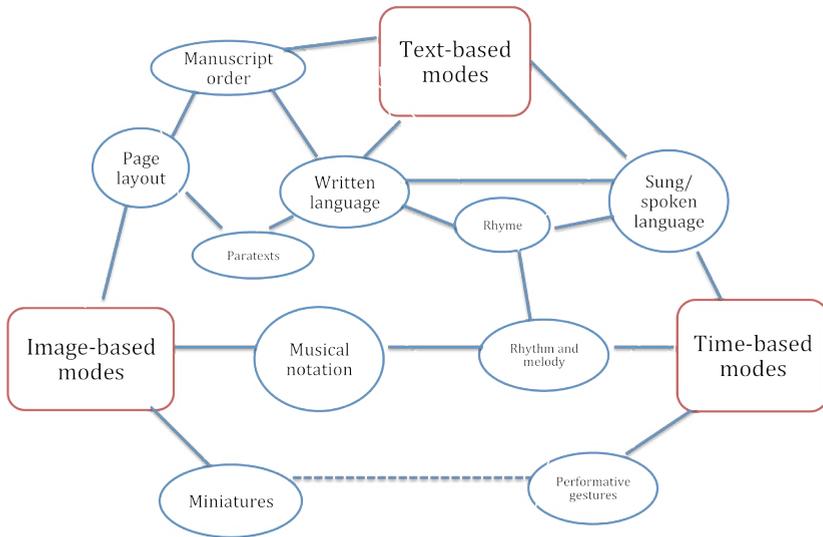


Figure 1. Modes in “Un mortel lay”.

2.2.1 Miniatures

I begin my analysis with the most visually appealing aspect of the medieval manuscript page: the miniatures. They can be considered a social semiotic mode in their own right, as well as sites of play of other modes.



Figure 2. Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 5203, fol. 139v (detail).¹⁰

The very presence or absence of miniatures in a medieval manuscript tells us much about the lavishness of the codex, the circumstances of its production, or the seriousness of its subject matter. Some manuscripts without images have space left for miniatures which were never executed (of the manuscripts under discussion here, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 843 and Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 683 fall into this category); others have had their images removed, presumably for their monetary value (Bern, Burgerbibliothek 218 transmits only a portion of “Un mortel lay” due to the removal of a folio which we can safely assume contained a miniature). Even within lavish presentation manuscripts, the distribution of miniatures is as important as that which they represent, as will be discussed.

Two of the manuscripts transmitting “Un mortel lay” display a miniature at the head of the lay. In one of these, Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 5203, this miniature is also at the head of the lay section, since, unusually, “Un mortel lay” is granted that honour (see section 2.2.3 below). The image, therefore, can be read both as pertaining to “Un mortel lay” and to the other lays in this section of the manuscript.

The miniature seems to depict a theme from the well-known tale of Orpheus, often cited in the late-medieval period not as a tale of loss, but as a tale of the power of music, poetry, and love (Friedman 1970).⁹ On the left a man plays a harp, on the right stand the gates of hell. Between

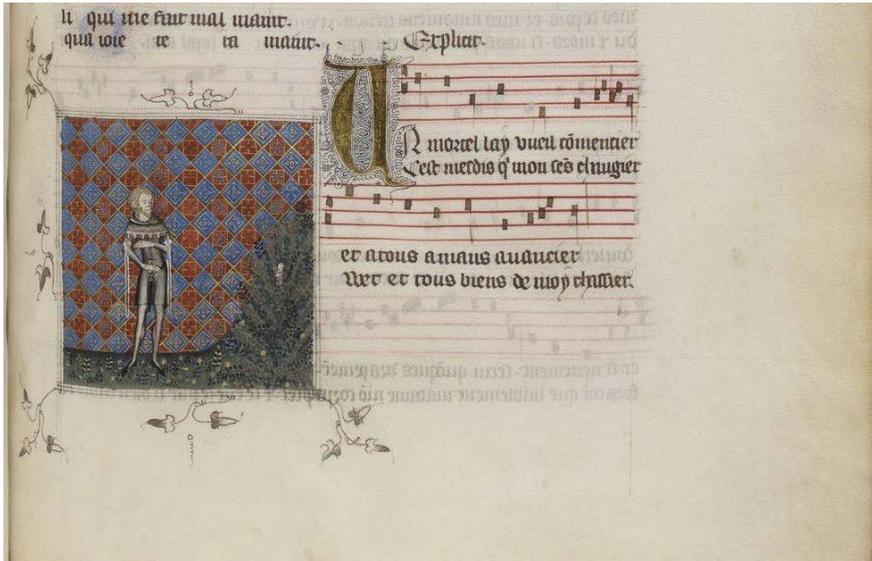


Figure 3. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1586, fol. 184r (detail).

them, two demons, or a demon leading a human figure (Eurydice), seem to be crossing the frame, towards the musician figure.

Using analysis tools provided by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), it can be observed that the musician is situated in the portion of the image which is “given”, and the gates of hell in the “new”. This is entirely in keeping with a manuscript that contains courtly love lyrics: words to be sung in the context of love (even if no music is present) are not normally associated with hell and demons. Here, then, the subject matter of “Un mortel lay” comes into play. As its opening words and title suggest, it is to do with death. Indeed, the protagonist claims he has already been killed by Mesdis (slander). In the miniature we see, through the figure of Orpheus, the power of music combined with love to speak from beyond the grave, to charm demons, and to lead the dead out from the underworld.

The other manuscript to transmit a miniature directly with this lay is Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1586. In this manuscript, every lay has a miniature, and thus they can be read as a sequence. This extensive decoration, which applies only to the lays, shows the value of this most challenging of the late-medieval *formes fixes*. The protagonist, here again male (the poem is written in a male voice), once again dwells in the “given” portion of the frame; the “new” portion contains a mysterious figure.

Sylvia Huot (1987: 265) suggests that the figure in the bush is Mesdis

(slander), the slayer of the lover according to the opening stanza of the lay. However, a close reading of the text of the lay is not conclusive on this point (see section 2.2.7 below). The two figures in the image do not appear to be making eye contact. The lover's eyes, following the red background detail, point directly out of the frame, over the book, towards the music. The eyes of the figure in the bush likewise appear to follow a red line from the background decoration, which this time leads towards the lover's dagger which hangs from the centre of his belt. The figure in the bush has his sights firmly focused on the phallic symbol of the dagger, itself an instrument of death, which is positioned at the very centre of male virility. The lover, on the other hand, through his focus on the musical notation, looks – like Orpheus – to music, its consolation, and to his immortality in song.

2.2.2 Page layout

As with miniatures, the layout of the manuscript page, whether taken in at first glance or studied in detail, carries a wealth of meanings. Compare the *mise en page* of the following presentation of the opening to “Un mortel lay” with that seen in Figure 3.

Of course, there are some obvious differences: this manuscript contains neither music nor miniatures. But there is more to *mise en page* than the elements of the page. First, although it is impossible to tell from the image alone, this manuscript is made with paper, not parchment, sometimes evidence of cheaper production methods. Secondly, the text is written in a distinct, cursive hand. This is a hand which is less formal than the bookhand seen in Figures 2 and 3, and one which has puzzled scholars working with this manuscript, as it frequently borders on the illegible. Secondly, the opening rubric “Un ~~ly~~ lay” features a correction that appears somewhat careless. There is a coloured initial letter for the start of the lay, and lines drawn across the column at the end of each stanza, but the beginning of the next lay (“J’aim la flour”) about halfway down the second column (and after only six of the twelve stanzas of “Un mortel lay” as presented in other manuscripts) is undifferentiated – anyone who did not know Machaut’s lays could certainly be forgiven for not immediately realising that a new one had begun at this point. The pages are unruled, meaning that the writing block is irregular. The manuscript contains a melange of lyric works, many of which are not by Machaut, and all of which are presented anonymously. All of this leads Earp (1995: 110) to suggest that “the manuscript has the look of a personal book, added to over a period of years”: certainly, the *mise en page* alone tells us that this is a far cry from the presentation manuscripts we have seen so far.

2.2.3 Manuscript order

As can be inferred from the above description of Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 6221, when analysing a work in a manuscript the other works the manuscript contains are relevant to the reading experience. I have chosen to separate “manuscript order” as a mode in its own right, since it, too, carries weight and meaning.

In the case of “Un mortel lay”, I have so far shown that it can open a manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 6221), head a section of lays (Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 5203), or occur in the middle (Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1586). Each of these positions means something different. The compiler of Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 6221, a manuscript which contains many works by several authors, saw “Un mortel lay” not only as fit to head his collection, but also fit for the only use of colour in the entire manuscript. In Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 5203 and Bern, Burgerbibliothek 218 its place at the head of the lay section, together with its miniature, also bestows importance on this lay.

The central position held by “Un mortel lay” in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1586 is also intriguing. Here, the death of the protagonist described in this lay possibly reflects the untimely death of the manuscript’s likely royal patron. Indeed, Huot (1987) has shown that there was a break in the manuscript’s production at this point, implying a change in status from being a presentation gift to a memorial.

In Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 9221, “Un mortel lay” also holds a central position in the lay section. This manuscript was also created for the royal house of France but some fifty years later; here it is not the patron who dies but the poet-protagonist of the lay section. He is then born anew in the next lay of the manuscript, and in doing so his devotion has turned from earthly ladies to the Virgin Mary. (For more details see Maxwell 2013a.)

In the remaining five manuscripts which transmit “Un mortel lay” the order of the lays is virtually identical, and almost certainly chronological. Many scholars, following Earp (1989) and a rubric in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1584, believe this to have been the preferred order of Machaut himself. It appears that the guiding principal is chronology, a lifetime’s work to be admired. Nevertheless, the “complete works” manuscripts are divided into sections: text sections containing narrative *dits* (tales), a collection of short lyrics (referred to as the “Louange des dames”), and the music. In these five manuscripts, the order of the *formes fixes* in the music sections reflects that presented in Machaut’s *Remede de Fortune*: the lay, the most advanced and most revered of the *formes fixes*, is presented first.

In this analysis of the mode of manuscript order I have demonstrated a Russian doll effect: from the smallest point of departure which is the position of the individual lay, to the position of the lays as a section, and to the overall order of whole manuscript.

2.2.4 Musical notation

Musical notation is a mode that has greatest effect on those manuscripts containing it.¹¹ In medieval presentation manuscripts, the presence of music notation is as much for its visual beauty as for its sonic value. The case of “Un mortel lay” is no exception.¹²

The first striking feature of this mode is the sheer amount of space it takes up. Machaut’s lays are monophonic (even if a few feature canons) so there is only one voice line to represent, but, at some 25 minutes in length, they are a vocal and compositional tour de force. They are also, therefore, a notational tour de force, particularly as the manuscripts that transmit “Un mortel lay” with its music also transmit other works with their music. For a reader leafing through these manuscripts, the arrival at the music section is immediately evident.

All of Machaut’s music is notated using rhythmic notation, a new development in the fourteenth century. The semantic meaning of this choice is clear, situating Machaut’s music in what was, for the time, the new tradition. It also allows him to explore the intricate rhythmic possibilities made possible by the new developments, and it is to this that I would now like to turn.

2.2.5 Rhythm

“Un mortel lay” displays a striking rhythmic cohesion.¹³ There are twelve principal rhythmic motifs, which display some variation, principally by extending single notes (such as the very first note of the lay) and elongating melismas. This first note of the lay is in fact heard eight times. This is due to the repeating structure of the first stanza, which is itself repeated as the last stanza. It serves as an overtly emphasized reminder of the morbid mortality expressed in the lay’s opening words. The flowing decorative melismas also carry overtones of drama and emotion: in this lay the protagonist meditates on his inevitable death. This is a far cry from a light-hearted dance-song. Of course, although “Un mortel lay” is certainly rhythmic, there is no reason at all to suppose that a performer should not draw on the potential that monophony carries for effective rhythmic manipulation.

2.2.6 *Sung/spoken language*

Closely linked to the more visual modes of music, the mode of song cannot go unmentioned in this analysis. We have no real idea of how often – if at all – Machaut's lays were sung.¹⁴ Indeed, given that they are also transmitted without music, it is tempting to suppose they were sung only rarely. Such a projection, however, does not take medieval performers' or listeners' memories into account. Scribes of musical works – even if they worked on the text only – would have at the very least been aware of the sonic value of their task, and at most may already have been familiar with the music in question (Maxwell 2009). Certainly, it would be unreasonable to think that a professional music scribe would not hear the music in his head as he worked (however, it is also true that there were unprofessional scribes who sometimes copied music without understanding it). Even where only the lyric texts are transmitted, the prevalence of public reading in the Middle Ages – and of private reading being vocalised rather than silent – means that sonic values can be attached to the words which we see on the page. In other words, the social semiotic meaning of lyric poetry – and arguably of literary works – in the Middle Ages is that it has a sonic value. It is worth hearing, whether spoken or sung: in a culture that was still predominantly oral, the sounding word was at least as important as the written.

2.2.7 *Written language*

I have left this most overworked of modes until last in order to demonstrate the rich meaning potentials which are conveyed without even considering the actual text of the lay. Indeed, it could be argued that written language is a medium rather than a mode, but, by showing how it fits in with the other modes already discussed, I wish to demonstrate that it can be understood as both medium and mode.

When the choice was made to write down a text in manuscript form in the Middle Ages it was not a decision taken lightly. Materials were expensive, professionals had to be employed, and the production of manuscripts took a large amount of time (several years for presentation manuscripts such as Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1586). It was, of course, possible to write without producing a bound manuscript, and this often happened in the case of letters, decrees, and so on. However, even these were often written not by their "author" but by a third party, a secretary. Machaut himself was a professional secretary, and, according to his *Voir dit* he employed secretaries to write down both his letters and musical

compositions which he had previously composed in his head (Maxwell 2013c). This is not unusual; it was the norm in medieval times (Carruthers 1990). Of course, were it not for writing, we would know nothing of the literature and music of the past.

Aside from the intended contents of a manuscript, the written word is found in paratexts such as rubrics that guide the reader, and catchwords that guide the manuscript compilers (and, when they remain visible, as they are in Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 683, the readers). Rubrics are used to frame “Un mortel lay” in the presentation manuscripts; when they are not present, such as in Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 6221, the long swathes of text run into one another. Essentially, rubrics and paratexts are a form of decoration as well as a convenience: for example, indices are relatively rare, and folio numbers, although mostly present in manuscripts as we see them now, were often added by later readers.

What can be gained from written language that cannot be gained from another mode? Most obviously, due to the lack of any continuing oral tradition, the answer is simply “the text”, in its narrow sense. Without the written lines of the lay there would be no need for its presentation in manuscript. More broadly, the centrality of the written word in manuscript form is the basis of the text that is the work. A less obvious answer, however, is the potential for private reading, and for meditation. Although silent reading was rare in the Middle Ages, private reading, either alone or with one or two others, was common among the educated classes. Although much meaning – and enjoyment – can come from a vocalised performance, prolonged meditation on a text came through the mediation of the written word. Defacement of the hellish creatures in the image in Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal 5203 is evidence that that manuscript was actually used, and was read.

So far in this article I have given only the briefest outline of the words of the lay. This is not to diminish their importance, but rather to demonstrate how that which is preserved so rigorously in modern editions is only part of that which, for want of a better metaphor, I shall call the bigger picture. Bearing in mind all that has been addressed so far, let us now prepare to read “Un mortel lay”. Its opening lines state its form and purpose, and introduce its first-person protagonist:

Un mortel lay vueil commencier
 Et a tous amans anoncier
 Comment Amours me vuet traitier
 Et mettre de joie en misere

I wish to begin a mortal lay
 And to announce to all lovers
 How Love wants to treat me
 And turn joy into misery ll 1-4 (stanza 1)

Thus at the opening to this meditation on death, our poet-lover is still alive but anticipating his end and the hands of Amours (love, here personified, as so often in Machaut's works and other courtly love poetry).

The stanza continues by naming Fortune – the eternal enemy of the lover – and “un faus traître meurtrier” (a false murderous traitor): Mesdis (slander). Due to the repetitions of the music, the namings of Mesdis and Fortune take place at the same point in the music as the naming of the lay itself, introduced by the long held note at the start of the lay, itself a build-up of suspense and drama (as discussed in section 2.2.5). Three other anthropomorphic characters are named in this stanza (and more will be named later in the lay): Franchise (frankness), Pitié (pity, who will feature again later), and Loyauté (loyalty), the dedicatee of the first of Machaut's lays as they are presented in the “complete works” manuscripts. All of these, who should comfort the lover, are absent from him in his time of need.

The second stanza sees a list of the traditional attributes of a lover (efforts, comforts, hopes, joy, honour), which are named as being absent, indeed banished, “par faus et mauvais repors” (by false and bad reports), which we can infer as the product of Mesdis. Declaring that these have killed him, the lover invites “mi bon et loyal ami” (my good and loyal (male) friend) to his body, through the phrase “Venez au corps” (l. 27).

Those three words are carefully chosen, for they are a citation from a well-known (and controversial) text in late-medieval France: the *Livre de Fauvel* (Book of Fauvel). They are not merely a citation from the text of the book (in fact, from a lay); they are also a citation of the text written on a scroll in a large miniature held by none other than the principal character, the beast Fauvel, accompanying a lay announcing his demise. In this miniature, the usurper Fauvel inhabits the left of the clearly divided frame; he is “given”, which is appropriate at this late stage in his tale. What is “new” is the religious shrine in the facing panel: Fauvel is a villain, not a paragon of Christian virtue. The “new” part of the image thus highlights both Fauvel's base nature, the satire of the tale, and the possibility of death-bed forgiveness as the ultimate mercy of the Christian God. The three words “venez au cors” (the spelling variant does not affect the meaning of the phrase) are clearly visible both on the scroll and at the end of the line of the lay immediately preceding the miniature. They



Figure 5. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 146, fol. 28 ter r (detail).

are used in the Fauvel lay, as in “Un mortel lay”, at the end of a line, thus governing the rhyme scheme for an entire stanza (Albritton 2009: 27-29; Dillon 2008: 277-282). These strong, multimodal links between two works a generation apart serve to situate Machaut’s lay in the context of its predecessor.¹⁵

Between stanzas two and three a rare enjambment takes place. Like the long melismas, this lengthening of the stanza to cross the change of rhyme scheme increases the drama surrounding the weeping over the protagonist’s body. It is also in the third stanza that the first mention is made of the lady, about whom we learn very little in the lay, except that she is to be honoured without blame (“Fors a s’onneur sans nul blame”, l. 38) and offered the lover’s heart. She is not to blame for killing the lover; she remains exonerated, but abstract. Indeed, stanza four begins by praising the lady, and in the second half nominates “Ire” as the murderer of the lover.

A change of tone takes place in stanza five, when the lover addresses his heart directly. His heart, already to be offered to his lady, is external to his body: it is a “body without organs” in Deleuzo-Guattarian

terminology. The whole of this stanza, which is written in short lines most of which are only three syllables in length, is a lament within a lament; a lament directed to the protagonist's organ of love, the heart.¹⁶

With the heart removed from the body, the sixth stanza is free to revel in the masochistic gratification of "mi grief compleint" (my sad complaint, l. 79) as the lover takes his pleasure in describing those pleasures that are denied to him, preferring to languish in his distress. On a similar theme, stanza 7 blames Pité (pity) for forbidding anyone to visit the lover and shed a tear for him in order to lend him a comforting death, which only prolongs his agony, itself prolonged in a repetitive line: "ma doulour douleureuse" (my sad sadness, l. 108). In the second half of the stanza Love (Amours) is blamed for granting neither immediate death nor a joyful life, but instead a fate of long suffering.

Stanza 8 returns to shorter lines, with the intense rhymes these entail. These mean that the lay appears to fight for breath, caught between love and the desire for death. The ninth stanza turns to regret, memorialising the time when the lover first set eyes on his lady, and was struck by the "mortel dart" (the deadly arrow, l. 170) now lodged in his heart. The echo between "outrage / Que je commencai" ("excess / which I began") in this stanza (ll. 160-161) and "m'outrecuidence" ("my arrogance") in the next (l. 173) shows at last that the lover ultimately, yet humbly, blames himself for his misfortune.

Stanza 10 brings in the allegorical figure of "Esperence" (Hope) who appears throughout Machaut's works and is central to his poetics (Leach 2012, chapter 3), where she represents comfort and wisdom. Here, however, she is mentioned as absent, replaced by "Desesperence" (despair). To the informed reader/listener – or the reader of the lay in sources containing large numbers of Machaut's works – the meanings of the contradiction are clear.

Stanza 11 is another stanza made up of short lines which here, perhaps literally, are the lay's and the lover's last gasps. Its two parts form a contrast: first, all the good things about love are listed (amongst others: "Humilite / Joliete / Grace, honneste / Et gaité ..." ("Humility / Beauty / Grace, honesty / And gaiety ..." ll. 192-196)). In the second half we are told that Pity has abandoned the lover, and instead he lists his sufferings. By this point in the lay we are familiar with this; indeed, this penultimate stanza serves as the start of the lay's conclusion. It is unsurprising, therefore, that it should revisit the most salient points already covered in the lengthy lyric.

In the final stanza the lover compares himself to Tantalus, condemned by Zeus, because of his own acts, to be tantalised for eternity by water

and fruit that are always out of his reach. In the lay's closing lines, the lover addresses the lady directly for the first and only time; she receives her lover's dying words, where he blames her merits for his death.

“Dame, mort m’ont, sans menacier,
Vostre dous oueil, vostre dangier
Et vostre amour que chier compere.”

“Lady, they have killed me, I threaten not:
Your sweet eye, your danger
And your love which costs dear.” (ll. 235-237)

Throughout the lay, both in the text and in the languishing musical setting, the lover finds his pleasure in his lament and impending death. The overstatement of the apparent tragedy, the naming of multiple murderers, the exaggerated melismas: all the melodrama is difficult to take entirely seriously, yet it is surely not the grotesque parody seen in the image of the lawless beast Fauvel preparing to receive the holy sacrament of the last rites. What we see, read, and hear in “Un mortel lay” is the intense pleasure of courtly love; a pleasure in which the heart is external to the body, in which there is an impossible gap between lover and beloved, in which desire leads to a death which does not matter since the self is renounced (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 173-174).

In “Un mortel lay” the protagonist becomes a “nonself”, obliterated in the cause of courtly love. In the context of the “complete works” manuscripts which present Guillaume de Machaut as an *auctores* to be admired, this is, of course, something which cannot be fully achieved with a single lay; we the readers know full well whose work we are reading. In anthology manuscripts, however, the situation is more subtle. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 6221 (Figure 4) kills even “Un mortel lay” halfway through; in it, the annihilation of the selves of the protagonist and author is complete.

CONCLUSION

I have demonstrated here how a consideration of some of the individual modes that make up the lay “Un mortel lay” can shed light on the work where a focus on a single mode – or even pair of modes – cannot. Here I have demonstrated that the inter-modal relationships extend beyond that of text and image (Huot 1987), text and music (Albritton 2009), text

and manuscript order (Maxwell 2013a) and even text and music-as-image (Maxwell 2009). Each of these analyses was certainly aware of other modes at play, even if they did not employ that terminology. However, the more modes that are taken into account, the broader the analysis can be.

"Mode" is not the answer to everything. A multimodal analysis such as this does not delve as deeply into individual modes as do monomodal analyses. In addition, multimodality accepts "texts" as they are: it does not offer new insights into recreating the sound of medieval music, for example, or for identifying scribal hands, or individual artists. Such intensive palaeographical, codicological, art-historical, and musicological work is of course of immense value to all scholars of the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, a heightened awareness of the multimodality of medieval sources can have a profound bearing on editing and reading practices, particularly as the majority of viewers of a manuscript do not (or cannot) access the manuscript itself, but instead view its digital image. Although there is a widespread movement away from monomodal editions of medieval works to editions that take into account more of the aspects of the page, the simple fact remains that medieval manuscripts are difficult for today's users to read and interpret. A multimodal understanding of these artefacts not only makes them more accessible; when combined with more traditional analyses it helps to unravel some of their secrets.

The ability of multimodality, and in particular social semiotics, to position medieval manuscripts in the wide tradition of human beings doing human things should not be overlooked. Manuscripts are living artefacts which can speak to us still, and scholars are increasingly expected to make their work accessible to the wider public. Times may change beyond recognition, but what moved our medieval forebears to feats of valour and works of genius also moves us now. If, by bringing medieval *people* closer to the people of today through an increasing understanding of our common human nature, then my use of social semiotics and multimodality will serve a purpose.

Yet, as the first part of this account demonstrated, "mode" remains a problematic term. Nevertheless, it is my contention that a shift in its usage away from general meaning (such as lyric mode) to the more specific meaning outlined in multimodal analyses such as this, can only be beneficial. Without embracing the full nuances of the term, much of what an analysis such as this has to offer is lost. At the same time, pretending that "mode" does not have a long history in literary analysis is futile. Instead, I propose that multimodal terminology should be aware of its place in the continuing tradition, drawing on the wisdom of the past, at the same time as presenting exciting avenues for the future.

NOTES

- 1 I would like to thank Emma Gorst and Dan Brielmaier for stimulating discussions on lyric and mode, with particular thanks to Dr Gorst for sharing her dissertation with me. A much-needed new edition of all of Machaut's works is currently in preparation (for updates see <http://machaut.exeter.ac.uk>). In the meantime, I wish to warmly thank Benjamin Albritton for sharing with me the edition he made of the texts of Machaut's lays. The translations into English are my own.
- 2 The term "lyric lay" is not to be confused with the earlier French "narrative lay", such as those of Marie de France (twelfth century), which do not follow a strict metrical structure.
- 3 For a discussion of "genre" which would later have a bearing on social semiotics, see Martin (1984) and its discussion in van Leeuwen (2008, 4).
- 4 Gunhild Kvåle's 2012 dissertation is of note here: in its introductory chapter it offers an overview of recent work in social semiotics and multimodality together with some theoretical background in the context of writing and image.
- 5 Leech-Wilkinson 2002: 8: "by 'interesting', I mean that it should engage the mind of the reader pleasurably and rewardingly, leaving him with ideas which he has not had before; by 'useful' I mean that it should engage with wider current concerns in such a way as to be transferable to other situations."
- 6 This important group of manuscripts, unique for their time in their focus on a single named author, consists of five complete codices and one fragmentary manuscript. The manuscripts Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1584, 1585, 1586, 9221, 22545-6 (one manuscript now bound in two volumes), and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ferrel-Vogüé (a privately owned manuscript, without shelfmark, housed at the Parker library) are complete. Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, 5010 C is fragmentary.
- 7 The text in versions in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 843 and Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 5203 is complete. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, NAF 6221 contains the first six strophes on its opening folio, and Bern, Burgerbibliothek 218 contains the text of strophes 6-12 (due to a missing folio). The fragmentary Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal 683 now contains only the first 66 lines of the lay, with space left for a miniature.
- 8 Machaut's mass continued to be sung on Saturdays in the cathedral in Reims up until the nineteenth century, despite the fact that no surviving printed edition of it dates from before the mid twentieth century.

- 9 As so often, I owe thanks to Domenic Leo for patiently listening to and commenting upon my analysis of miniatures, and in particular for pointing me in the direction of Orpheus.
- 10 It is noticeable that this miniature shows signs of damage from rubbing, which is not unusual in medieval miniatures containing devilish or evil figures.
- 11 That statement is not as self-evident as it may seem, since the very absence of this mode can also recall its presence, as seen with the missing folio of Bern, Burgerbibliothek 218 and as discussed more fully in Maxwell and Simpson 2014.
- 12 The one manuscript to transmit this lay with its music but which is not a presentation manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 1585) is for the most part a direct copy of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, Ferrel-Vogüé. It was almost certainly intended to serve as an exemplar to produce further manuscripts based on the contents and layout of the more lavish codex (Earp 2013).
- 13 This is also seen in the lay ‘Malgre Fortune’ (Maxwell 2013b). It is my intention to investigate the rhythmic structure of all of Machaut’s lays, and explore the rhythmic citations displayed within them.
- 14 It is worth noting here that this is certainly true for our own time: very few modern recordings currently exist of Machaut’s lays.
- 15 The *Livre de Fauvel* can be dated with some certainty to 1317. Machaut’s lays were unlikely to have been written before the 1320s, given their advanced form and his probable date of birth c. 1300. What is most intriguing is that he should refer specifically to a single miniature in a single, exclusive manuscript: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, fr 146 was almost certainly compiled not only for the royal house of France, but in fact specifically as a strict reprimand from Charles de Valois to his debauched nephew. For a full discussion see Maxwell 2004. Dillon (2008: 279) speculates that Machaut’s contact with *Fauvel* may have come from this very manuscript, hence the quotation of “venez au cors”.
- 16 The musical rhythms in this stanza would later be cited by Machaut in the lay “Malgre Fortune”.

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Guillaume de Machaut: “Un mortel lay” (Lay mortel, lay 12). Manuscripts mostly from the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, Paris. Digitised versions available to view on gallica.bnf.fr.