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Voice and Public Interiorities

Chaucer, Orpheus, Machaut

DAVID LAWTON

"A voice neither universal nor personal . . . a common voice"

Whatever happened to voice? Critical use of the term is often diffident, and as far from standardized as any critical term can be. Paul Zumthor's comment in 1983 remains true: "It is strange that, among all the institutionalized disciplines, there is not yet a science of voice. Let us hope that one is forthcoming."[1] It is unlikely to be a science. The term voice itself appears more often than not in inverted commas, in order perhaps to distinguish literary voice from actual, physical voice (a not unproblematic distinction); but we have no such compunction about inverted commas in our use of the term "body." And, as with body, the definitions implied by the use of "voice" are many and various. I suspect that a certain reticence about voice in Anglo-Saxon contexts still lingers from the suspicion that "voice" is an unreconstructed leftover from New Criticism. I believe that New Criticism is strong and still relevant in the area of voice; but in truth the term has since been much reconstructed, especially by scholars working in European languages: such as Zumthor himself, Barthes on the "grain of the voice,"[2]

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1. Paul Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*, trans. Kathleen Murphy-Judy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 4.

2. Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice" (1972), in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 179–89.

Mladen Dolar on voice as the Lacanian *objet petit a,*[3] and Adriana Cavarero's work on a philosophy of vocal expression.[4] I would argue that voice is among the most productive terms we have for understanding literature; that our experience of reading and writing literature is crucially bound up with questions of voice; and that the literary history of voice, though divided into episodes each important enough to seem like new beginnings, is continuous from the medieval period, specifically from the new medieval voicing of literature composed in the vernacular languages. A longer perspective would also be valuable: both biblical and classical texts are central to medieval practices of voicing, but as a prehistory that is drawn upon and remodeled when medieval writers come to narrate the vernacular. A continuous history of voice in English and other European literatures needs to begin with the medieval, and with the function of voicing in producing what I have called public interiorities.[5]

The subject of this essay is therefore the interrelation between voice and "public," the latter defined both as public life of and in institutions, alongside their practices of written record, and also as the common European literary heritage of classic texts that offer models for vernacular voicing. I shall focus here on the Ovidian, and two of the three shaping figures of the artist in the *Metamorphoses:* in reverse order of importance, Pygmalion and Orpheus. Together with the third such figure, Narcissus, they insistently relate voice (Orpheus's song, Pygmalion's prayer, Echo) and image (Eurydice's specter, Pygmalion's statue, Narcissus's reflection). In medieval grammatical theory, the complementarity of voice and image is fulfilled in letters themselves. This is the science that Chaucer cheerfully twists in glossing the appearance of images in the Houses of Fame and Rumor:

> Whan any speche ycomen is
> Up to the palais, anoonright
> It waxeth like the same wight
> Which that the word in erthe spak,
> Be it clothed red or blak,
> And so wereth his liknesse
> That spak the word, that thou wilt gesse
> That it the same body be,

3. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006).

4. Adriana Cavarero, *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression,* trans. Paul A. Kottman (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005). I have also been much instructed by Steven Connor's history of ventriloquism, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5. David Lawton, "Voice after Arundel," in *After Arundel,* ed. Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 133–54.

Man or womman, he or she.
And is nat this a wonder thing?
(*House of Fame* 1074–83)[6]

This is the eagle's adaptation of stock passages in Boethius' *De Musica* and, most obviously, Donatus on the "multiplicacioun of soun": speche, or word, or voice, is *aer ictus,* ayr ybroken, a series of ripples that in the *House of Fame* turns at the last into visual images, likenesses. The eagle's explanation upends Donatus' focus on the written form of utterance, letters, which are supposedly the images of sounds, and takes a huge, surreal step backwards from the utterance to its maker. Voice and image are identical, but alienated from one another. These voice-images here are like the dead in Homer's underworld: as Proust describes memory, "real without being present, ideal without being abstract." But their language is that of the living, coming not only from literature, the international and the classic, as in the House of Fame, but also from new social institutions, as in the House of Rumor, whose voices are pushing their way into literature for the very first time—guild, parliament, bills, the government offices of Chancery and Privy Seal, the shared interiorities of devotion and commonplace book.

A range of historical meanings is relevant to a study of late medieval voice. The concept is spread across several classical terms, with the human voice distinguished from the sounds of musical instruments but then often explained in terms of one type of instrument or another (percussion or string).[7] Voice is almost nothing, in one musically derived definition *aer ictus,* or like starlight; we perceive it as it dissipates, having already left a body. Yet, as Elaine Scarry reminds us, body and voice "are among the most elementary and least metaphorical categories we have."[8] This does not make voice an easy subject. For Clement of Alexandria, according to Peter Brown, it was "the most delicate instrument of all . . . Greek and Near Eastern ears had a sensitivity to the human voice that takes some mental effort if the modern Anglo-Saxon imagination is to recapture it."[9] For Aristotle in *De*

6. Quotations from *The Riverside Chaucer,* gen. ed. Larry Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

7. Charles Burnett, "Sound and Its Perception in the Middle Ages," in *The Second Sense: Studies in Hearing and Musical Judgment from Antiquity to the Seventeenth Century,* ed. Charles Burnett, Michael Fend, and Penelope Gouk (London: Warburg Institute, 1991), 43–69.

8. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 182.

9. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 126.

Anima, the voice proceeds from the soul (as air, as spirit); it is the outward form of the imagination. And so voice is both a signature, "I," singularity, and a clear marker of difference, "not I," multiplicity (so both Many and One). It sometimes operates as a trace, the mere presumption of a body, as in the standard use of *vox* to mean text, the already spoken or written. So voice has to do crucially with translation and interpretation; intertextuality, or "intervocality";[10] performance and the memory or potential of performance (Zumthor clearly had in mind a notion of scribal performance as voicing when he coined the term *mouvance*); a dialectic of presence and absence; the subject; words not always fully inhabited by a speaker. Medieval readers are trained in voice. Culturally standard modes of reading—in schooling, in religious practice—do in fact extend an invitation to their readers to inhabit, or try, the voices of the texts they read. I think here of Jody Enders's work on rhetorical *actio;*[11] of Marjorie Curry Woods's account of the pedagogical uses of rape in Pamphilus and Galatea;[12] of Anne Astell's account of the Song of Songs, where readers are asked alternately to occupy, or audition for, the roles of both Bride and Bridegroom;[13] and Matthew Parker's program for reading the Psalms: "Whoever taketh this book in his hand here reputeth and thinketh all words he readeth (except the words of prophecy) to be his very own words spoken in his own person."[14] Impersonation begins at home. And if one emblem for the cultivation of voice is, as in the last example, David, his classical counterpart is Orpheus—whose inevitable association with voice is signaled in the received etymology of his name as Oraia-Phone, Consummate Voice.[15] To conceptualize voice is at once to think of Orpheus. It is true for *sonus,* music in general (ninth-century attempts at musical notation worked with a stave that represented Orpheus's lyre),[16] and for *vox,* that special music of the human voice.

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10. The term is Paul Zumthor's, *La lettre et la voix* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 161.

11. Jody Enders, *Rhetoric and the Origins of Medieval Drama* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992).

12. Marjorie Curry Woods, "Rape and the Pedagogical Rhetoric of Sexual Violence," in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56–86.

13. Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), especially chap. 7.

14. Matthew Parker, *The Whole Psalter Translated into English Metre* (London, 1567), quoted in James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 163–64.

15. John Block Friedman*, Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 89.

16. I am grateful to Christopher Page for pointing this out to me, and to the Middle English seminar at the University of Cambridge, in which I read the first version of this paper in January 2009.

In thinking through the relation of literary voice to literary (and political) public, the single most helpful resource is Anne Middleton's groundbreaking essay, published in 1978, on "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II."[17] The voice delineated in the essay is one that articulates shared values of its community. Middleton argues that "public poetry" is to be defined not by its subject but by its relation to its audience; indeed, she claims, its subject is that relation itself. A useful analogy might be with Erasmus's *Adages,* which anthologizes many hundreds of *sententiae* that are the common property of Erasmus and his public, collected under the rubric "Friends hold all things in common" (the title of Kathy Eden's study).[18] Yet this community of shared sentence is not altogether inclusive—it's actually defined precisely by the knowledge of the sentences it presumes; and the anthologizer stakes an uncommon claim to something like intellectual property in the act of representing it. Middleton's account of public Ricardian poetry is to be supplemented by her slightly later distinction between a text's audience, which is actual, and its public, which it imagines;[19] there is normally a shortfall between the two. One might call that shortfall, in Huizinga's sense, playful. The voice of public poetry speaks "as if to the entire community, not to a coterie or patron" (98). The transparency Middleton ascribes to it is, as she clearly shows, factitious, part of its own self-fashioning. Nor is it a single voice, since, like Erasmus's *Adages,* it is composed of many hundreds of antecedent sentences. But it is a voice: for Langland and Gower, "a voice neither universal nor personal but a "middel wei" between the two, a common voice," that—it sounds rather Jeffersonian—of "an enlightened citizen among peers" (114).

Given this hallmark, it is perhaps troubling that Middleton is adamant in excluding Chaucer from "the idea of public poetry," except, as she says, intermittently and by indirect discourse. She has good reason for this, since she sees Chaucer addressing a narrower public of "new men," but I would be worried by an implication that one cannot be both public and indirect—someone ought to tell politicians—and, more, that Chaucer's multiple voices disqualify him from enlightened citizenship. I suspect against its will, the essay contributes to a long history of Chaucerian exceptionalism. In 1982 it marked, and added impetus to, a necessary movement of the field away from a Chaucer or even "Age of Chaucer" center; at the time, the "reign

17. *Speculum* 53 (1978): 94–114.

18. Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the "Adages" of Erasmus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

19. Anne Middleton, "The Audience and Public of *Piers Plowman*," in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background*, ed. David Lawton (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1982), 101–23, 147–53.

of Richard II," following Burrow's *Ricardian Poetry,* was a more capacious alternative.[20] Middleton was concerned to decenter Chaucer from the literary history of the long fifteenth century, and her impulse was in that sense profoundly just. Large as Chaucer looms, experimentation with voice occurs in very different forms outside his work, and continues after him, and sometimes in spite of him, in a fifteenth century whose innovative multivocality is still inadequately recognized. Middleton's was a necessary move in opening up the fertile review of the fifteenth century that has occupied much of the intervening generation, yet one that came dangerously close to quarantining Chaucer as anomalous. (In a changed critical climate I risk an equal and opposite danger here, by centering a discussion of voice on Chaucer.) The effect of the quarantining was compounded when in criticism contemporary with and after Middleton's, Bakhtin entered the equation and, in what I see as a radical misunderstanding of his work, much fifteenth-century poetry is cast as "monologic" in contrast to Chaucer's "dialogic."[21] In fact, the voice that presents itself as single and transparent and the voices that flaunt themselves as many are both multiple, the one more heterogeneous than it pretends to be, if only in consequence of the sentences that help compose it, the other operating its diversity from a staple, surprisingly less variable, stylistic repertoire (many voices from a much smaller range of styles). This is a formal mathematics of voice that applies both to Chaucer and to poets who come after him such as Hoccleve, Lydgate, and Skelton.

Middleton's essay did much to re-energize voice as a critical category in medieval studies that could be recuperated—as, for her and most others, *persona* could not be[22]—from the New Criticism. In the intervening years, voice has been theorized, as already mentioned; it has been historicized, as for example in the work of Emily Steiner on the idea of the commune[23] and Matthew Giancarlo's fine recent study of literature and parliament,[24] which

20. J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the "Gawain" Poet* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971).

21. I argue the point about Bakhtin in "English Literary Voices, 1350–1500," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 238–39.

22. Middleton, "Audience and Public," 109: "The problem of the *persona* virtually disappears if we take these voices seriously." I have tried to maintain both terms, as in my essays "Skelton's Use of Persona," *Essays in Criticism* (1980): 9–28, and "The Subject of *Piers Plowman*," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 1 (1987): 1–30.

23. Emily Steiner, "Commonalty and Literary Form in the 1370s and 1380s," *New Medieval Literatures* 6 (2003): 199–222; see also her *Documentary Culture and the Making of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

24. Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

puts voices at the center of both artistic and political representation; it has been textualized, as in the work of Mary Carruthers (I think here of her insistence that an *auctor* is a text, not a person);[25] it has been essentialized, as in some gender studies. These form a range of critical perspectives in which voice passes between text and reader, between poet and public. Mindful of Katherine Zieman's fine work, and her claim that "Chaucer articulates the literary through a conceptualization of 'voice,'"[26] I would like to reposition Chaucer in this landscape—as a public poet, and a poet concerned with voice.

"real without being present, ideal without being abstract"

First, a new definition is in order. The term voice itself has a long prehistory, latterly too caught up in battles between speech and writing, presence and absence, and from ancient times in a state of complex tension between the physical voice and the word's more abstract, sometimes apparently more idealized or even metaphorical, meanings as breath or spirit. What do I mean by voice? I begin with a much later turning point in the history of voice: *In Search of Lost Time.* Proust's Narrator makes western literature's aboriginal, and surely its most portentous, telephone call. Since no words are better than Proust's, and there is no hubris greater than the illusion that one can summarize his prose, I shall give his account very largely in his own words. It occurs at an early moment in what are not yet mass communications, when the telephone is almost impossibly new-fangled and very few families have them in their homes. In order to receive the call from his grandmother, the Narrator is taken by his friend Saint-Loup to the post office at Doncières, where at a pre-arranged time he is connected manually by an operator. His grandmother's purpose is to persuade him to stay on in Normandy with Saint-Loup for the good of his health rather than return to her in Paris (and so she conceals from him her own serious illness). After initial difficulty,

> I spoke, and after a few seconds of silence I suddenly heard the voice I mistakenly thought I knew so well, for until then, whenever my grandmother had talked with me, I had always followed what she was saying on the open score of her face, in which her eyes were so predominant; but today what I was hearing for the first time was her actual voice. And because the propor-

25. Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 190–91.

26. Katherine Zieman, "Chaucer's *Voys*," *Representations* 60 (1997): 70–91 (71).

tions of that voice seemed different the minute it was isolated, reaching me on its own in this way, unaccompanied by the facial features, I was aware for the first time how affectionate that voice was; . . . and with it alone beside me, experienced without the mask of her face, I noticed for the first time how pain had cracked it in the course of a lifetime.

But was it solely the voice, heard in isolation, that created the new impression that tore at my heart? Not at all: it was, rather, that the isolation of the voice was like a symbol, an evocation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, separated from me for the first time. . . . By telling me to stay, my grandmother filled me with an anxious, desperate desire to return home. The freedom she was now granting me . . . suddenly seemed as painful as the sort of freedom I might experience after her death (when I would still love her and she would have abandoned me forever). I cried out, "Grandmother! Grandmother!," and I wanted to kiss her; but all that I had beside me was her voice, a ghost as bodiless as the one that would perhaps come back and visit me when my grandmother was dead. "Speak to me"; then, suddenly, I ceased to hear the voice, and was left even more alone. My grandmother could no longer hear me, was no longer in communication with me; we had ceased to be in contact, to be audible to each other; I continued to call her, groping in the darkness, with the feeling that calls from her must be going astray . . . I felt as though it were already a beloved ghost that I had just allowed to disappear into the world of shadows, and standing there alone in front of the telephone, I went on vainly calling, "Grandmother! Grandmother!" like the abandoned Orpheus repeating the name of his dead wife.[27]

The invocation of Orpheus and Eurydice here spells out the figure that has structured Proust's entire account: that of the underworld visit. At the beginning of the call,

As soon as our call has rung out, in the darkness peopled with apparitions to which our ears alone are opened, a shred of sound—an abstract sound—the sound of distance suppressed—and the voice of the dear one speaks to us . . .

The dear ones, the voices of the dear ones speaking, are with us. But how far away they are! . . . A real presence, the voice that seems so close— but is in fact miles away! But it is also a foreglimpse of an eternal separa-

27. I quote the translation of Proust by Mark Treharne, *The Guermantes Way* (New York: Viking, 2004), 128–30.

tion! Many times, as I listened in this way without seeing the woman who spoke to me from so far, I have felt that the voice was crying out to me from depths from which it would never emerge again, and I have experienced the anxiety that was one day to take hold of me when a voice would return like this (alone and no longer part of a body I was never to see again) to murmur in my ear words I would dearly like to have kissed as they passed from lips forever turned to dust.

Proust's language here (poignantly and pointedly, for the Narrator's grandmother is modeled on Proust's mother) casts the voice as the image of Odysseus's mother in the underworld visit of *Odyssey* Book XI: it may look real, but when you try to embrace it, there is nothing but air. Proust's did not invent the connection between this underworld image and the voice; it has a long and powerful history. As already seen, Chaucer employs it in his much more upbeat version of an otherworld journey, the *House of Fame,* when in the House of Rumor the space is crammed with apparent bodies that are, in fact, only the airy projection of the speaker of words on earth—that is to say, voices. It is hard to appreciate the sheer imaginative energy of this association when we are so used to skype and satellite transmission, but it is such imaginings—for Chaucer, scientific at least as much as literary—that eventually enable the invention of the telephone.

Indeed, there is a lesson in the cultural specificity of the Proust passage. The extraordinary strangeness of the telephone experience there, the textbook alienation, is almost lost to us in our own culture, surrounded as we are by people announcing to unseen interlocutors that the plane has just landed or the bus is three minutes late—people narrating themselves by cellphone; though aspects of Proust's Narrator's experience will still appear familiar to those of us old enough to recall phone calls between Britain and Australia thirty or more years ago, where one battled the void of time-lag and the sussuration of electronic high surf. As a medievalist, though, I do not make use of postmedieval examples (as here) in order to be "transhistorical," whatever that is, but rather to make the point about cultural specificity, here about the historically fluctuating nature of our relation to voice. We can just about recover some aspects of the Proustian, but we have real historical difficulty imagining the impact of older forms of technology, such as that of writing in a previously mainly oral culture—though I think that Proust's account of the telephone call allows us to glimpse some sort of spectral, empathetic analogy.

How many voices do we hear in Proust's account? The Narrator, in past and (fictitious) present, the constantly moving time of the text in reading; the grandmother, both as she is heard on the telephone and as she is rec-

ollected, these being different; the operator; Saint-Loup as the albeit silent entrepreneur; white noise; the Orpheus myth; and the babble of ghosts in the Homeric underworld—voice here is plural, never singular. Yet it is plural in rather a singular way: the experience that the reader is made to undergo, of overhearing a private phone call from one end, enacts Paul Valéry's brilliant term for literature itself, *monodialogue*.[28]

Are these voices we hear real or ideal? We know that Proust's text addresses and radically transforms his life experience, but in unpredictable ways: his mother turns into the grandmother; two separate places turn into Combray; the Narrator himself turns preposterously heterosexual. Voicing here becomes a process of disembodiment and mythical reincorporation, the world of the text itself a fantastic underworld. The experience of hearing his grandmother's voice convinces the Narrator that he has lost her: she is both there and not there. One can pun prettily and long on presence and absence without getting to the core of this uncanny voice without a face. When the Narrator next sees his grandmother, he sees a sick, red-faced old stranger: the voice without a face is more real than the old body, but only because loss is a process, not an instant. When the grandmother is disconnected, her voice lost, she is committed irrevocably to memory. Voice here is therefore akin to memory itself, "real without being present, ideal without being abstract."[29] So her voice is as wrongly real as a voice without a face can be; it is also, in its unrepeatable sweetness, ideal, an ideality sustained in a kind of desperate dialogue at a level that makes it mythical. These are the qualities that I would attribute to literary voice—beyond presence and absence, beyond even public and private, both ideal and real, both embodied and phantasmal. Above all, such voices are voices in reproduction, simultaneously themselves and not themselves: reproduction and reproducibility are at the core of literary voice, and alienate it from the physical, even, as here, cruelly, from the mortal.

As often in Proust, this is a self-defining moment: the air is thick with questions about what art can possibly do. No wonder that the account concludes with Orpheus. The image is a resonant one throughout Proust's work, as a figure of apprenticeship, writing as singing, and as a figure of lost love, doomed before it starts by the myth it re-enacts. Falling in love in Proust

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28. Paul Valéry, *Cahiers 1894–1914*, ed. Nicole Celeyrette-Pietri and Judith Robinson (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 1:196, 242; and see William Marx, "The Dialogues and *Mon Faust*: The Inner Politics of Thought," in *Reading Paul Valéry: The Universe in Mind*, ed. Paul Gifford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 155–64; and Christine M. Crow, *Paul Valéry and the Poetry of Voice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 45.

29. The translation is Richard Howard's: Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 58.

is always the Orphic search for the lost Eurydice. It links the Narrator with Swann, who searches for Odette at night in the cafes of the Bois de Boulogne and is approached by prostitutes on the street: "Anxiously he clutched at all these dim forms, as though, among the phantoms of the dead, in the realms of darkness, he had been searching for Eurydice."[30] The image is echoed when the ageing Narrator describes revisiting the Bois in 1913 and sees the women of his past acquaintance, as they pass by, as the ghosts of their former selves. His art is an underworld, a place of phantoms, and for that very reason an art of the voice, of voices, the figure for which is Orpheus.

"Is that your los?"

And so to Chaucer, for whom these same associations hold true. In the *Book of the Duchess,* the dreamer follows a little dog into a grove in the forest, and there he finds the Man in Black singing of his grief at his wife's death, surrounded by wild beasts with his back against a great oak. This is of course exactly how Ovid describes Orpheus. The landscape is Augustan, and it is Augustus—the Emperor Octavian—who can be heard hunting afar. And the dreamer has been reading one of the two great Augustan poets, Ovid, whose Ceyx and Alcyon story is retold, minus the metamorphosis that alone motivates it in Ovid, to demonstrate the dreamer's prior sleeplessness and absolute lack of feeling. The Black he encounters is his tutelary opposite; the dreamer overhears him when, as he thinks, he is without human company, lament the death of his wife White. It is an intercalated lyric, and an accomplished one: Black sings or recites a formal *planh* that breaks the couplet rhyme scheme of the poem. There follows the dreamer's conversation with Black, at the end of which the hitherto insensate dreamer expresses the feeling of which he has been incapable, compassion, and does so in a rhyme, *routhe/trouthe,* that is to become a signature of Chaucer's poetic career at its most serious or contentious moments:

> "She is deed." "Nay!" "Yis, by my trouthe."
> "Is that your los? By God, it is routhe."
> (1309–10)

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30. Here and in subsequent references (by volume and page) I have preferred the translation of Moncrieff and Kilmartin, revised D. J. Enright: Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (New York: Modern Library, 1992), 1:326. I have always consulted the original French, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999).

The conversation ends at dusk when "this kyng," whom I take to be not Black but the Emperor Octavian, returns to his castle and the poem punningly pays tribute to John of Gaunt, Earl of Richmond, who has lost his wife Blanche—a loss that is clearly the occasion, but not in my view the ostensible subject, of the poem.

I think I may have the first to argue the key point here, that "this kyng" does not signify John of Gaunt (for all that he was later able, albeit implausibly, to style himself "King of Castile") but rather the Emperor Augustus—in which case the Man in Black does not return to the home comforts of some Yorkshire castle but remains separated from the dreamer's real time by more than a millennium in the darkest of Ovidian dark woods.[31] It is the dreamer who changes, rediscovering the power of feeling, not Black, who cannot bear the grief that in this poem he must not only endure but embody, "for Y am Sorwe, and Sorwe is Y" (597). It seemed to me then as now that given this heavily Ovidian text, and given Chaucer's consuming interest in all things Augustan, both Ovidian and Virgilian, there can be no mistaking the primacy of the classical reference or what it means, that the bereaved Man in Black is a figure of Orpheus. The point has since been rediscovered by Jane Chance, who reads the *Book of the Duchess* in terms of underworld descents by heroes or heroines of classical literature—the men Hercules, Theseus and Orpheus, and the women, as Chance would argue Alcyone herself and certainly Alcestis—before deciding on Orpheus as the key term: "A group of underworld references piled one atop another by the Black Knight mourning behind his oak tree type him as an Orpheus in his grief."[32] She also compares Orpheus' loss, incidentally, to Daedalus's loss of Icarus, thus aligning the key mythological references of three out of four of Chaucer's major dream visions: Orpheus in *Book of the Duchess,* Daedalus and the labyrinth in *House of Fame,* Alcestis in *Legend of Good Women.*

All this does not occur in the context of some sort of nightmarish Joycean pubcrawl, in which the consciousness of the focalizing subject is suborned by authorial intertextuality, but rather in the context of a dream landscape whose Augustan reference could hardly be more clearly articulated by the poet. Moreover, the Ovidian reference, and the marking of Black as Orpheus, are considerably more forceful and concerted than the elegant but last-minute and formally anagrammatic tribute to John of Gaunt, the loss of whose wife is the occasion but not the direct subject of the whole Orphic schema. If this has not been stressed in the criticism, that can only be because the

31. David Lawton, *Chaucer's Narrators* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 48–57.
32. Jane Chance, *The Mythographic Chaucer: The Fabulation of Sexual Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 28.

criticism has remained loyal to the notion of the poem as a consolation; and that, to my mind misconceived, commitment determines Chance's mythographic reading of the Orpheus allusion, which she sees, without discussion, as entirely moral, Boethian or indeed Boccacian: it's time Orpheus gave up his enervating attachment to lost earthly objects (so much for wives) and gave himself to thoughts of heaven. This is certainly an available reading, but it is not, as we'll see, an inevitable one. Nor am I convinced that it is Chaucer's. Unless the Man in Black is John of Gaunt, and as John of Gaunt is then the "king" who returns to Richmond castle—neither of which, in my view, is textually defensible—there is no sign in Chaucer's poem of any commendation of transcendence. On the contrary, Black's grief is as irresoluble as his poetry is consummate, like Orpheus. The dreamer is the lucky one, able to bond with a homosocial rather than a heterosexual mentor, and by virtue of the role, and compliment, the poem confers upon him—as perhaps within the circle of John of Gaunt, but assuredly as Orpheus's apprentice.

It is the power of Sorrow that the apprentice learns. We need to deepen the notion of Chaucer we have inherited as the great comic poet. Black is desolate, Troilus is inconsolable, Troilus and Arcite die, good women mostly perish, the Griselda story and others show Chaucer drawn to the theme of torture, three of four certainly Chaucerian extant prose texts and the lost *De Miseria Humanae Conditionis* are about how to bear the damage that life inflicts upon us, and, if the Retractions are correctly placed, Chaucer's career ends on a note of bitter renunciation. The odd fabliau provides welcome relief. It may be true in other ways that Chaucer "lacks high seriousness"— as, say, Samuel Beckett does in the face of human abjection. Life is too serious for tragedy. For all Chaucer's reputation in and for comedy, which criticism has ceaselessly repeated from Dryden to, say, John Bowers,[33] his real transgression is that he is the unsentimental poet of human pain and suffering and loss, unmatched in this by any English contemporary or European peer, and often without transcendence:

> His spirit changed hous and wente ther,
> As I cam nevere, I can nat tellen where;
> Therfore I stinte—I nam no divinistre;
> Of soules finde I nat in this registre.
> (*Knight's Tale,* 2809–12)

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33. John Bowers, *Chaucer and Langland: The Antagonistic Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), takes Matthew Arnold's view of Chaucer to its limit and casts the comic Chaucer as the beginning of a dominant literary tradition of jocular Englishness.

It is not the case that Chaucer always eschews the transcendent, though it is a peculiarity that when he resorts to it—as in the Prioress's Tale or the very end of *Troilus*—his voice sounds most exceptionally unlike a "common voice." Yet he has an extraordinary capacity to stick determinedly with the reality of human pain—not, most likely, in denial of the divine, but as if to recognize a horizon between the two. Such a capacity marks Chaucer as being just as much a public poet as any of his less Ovidian contemporaries. If, as the Orpheus story teaches us, even love is the harbinger of intolerable suffering, so that Chaucer's work addresses equally those who would win and those who have lost their chess game with Fortune, then no theme, sadly, speaks to more people. Being Orpheus' apprentice is nothing if not a public project.

It maps onto a mythological program—Alcestis, Theseus, Daedalus: the connection helps us see why Chaucer's labyrinth is a *labor-intus,* and corresponds to the cup of sorrows that the poet as a *homo dolorosus* must drink (*House of Fame,* 1878–80: Orpheus as Christ?). To follow the mythography just one step further is to find references all in the same place linking Orpheus to Tantalus, Sisyphus, Ixion, and the Furies—all, for example, formative (with Orpheus's mother Calliope) in the frame of the *Troilus.* The path of Orpheus is a serious vocation, leading Chaucer into prose translation, the *Boece,* as well as poetry. Boethius's *Consolation* provides the textual place just cited in Book III meter 12 and, together with Ovid, is Chaucer's *locus classicus* for the figure of Orpheus. To read this is to inquire into the mythography, to ask what the Orpheus story means to Chaucer and whether its voices too may be multiple.

"True singing is another kind of breath"

"Happy is he who can look into the shining spring of good; happy is he who can break the heavy chains of earth." The Boethian meter opens with its contrast of heaven and hell, and then gives a summary of Orpheus' descent that equally balances the power of poetry and the power of grief. It is pity evoked by his poetry that causes the underworld to relent, with the condition only that Orpheus not look back. When he does, uniquely in Boethius, "Orpheus Eurydicem suam / uidit, perdidit, occidit."[34] Commentators differ about the reading of this line, as to whether *occidit* refers to Orpheus or

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34. The translation cited is Friedman's; the text is that edited by J. Keith Atkinson and Anna Maria Babbi (Verona: Fiorini, 2000), IX, X.

breaks the parallelism by being the one verb of which the subject is Eurydice. In either case, we read an act of supreme compression in the haste to reach a moral. The moral is double: love cannot observe any law; and whoever, instead of raising this mind to sovereign day, "is conquered and turns his eyes into the pit of hell, looking into the inferno, loses all the excellence he has gained." If we compare Walton's translation with Chaucer's, to which, according to Ian Johnson, Walton's seeks to be corrective imitation,[35] we find Walton altogether stronger in drawing the *contemptus mundi* moral at start and end. Man must disentangle himself from "bondes of this worldly wrechidnesse," says Walton, glossing Boethius, while Chaucer sticks with "the bondes of the hevy erthe"; "Lo all that evire youre labour hath yow dight / Ye loose it when ye loken into hell," concludes Walton, forcefully enough, while Chaucer slightly softens and points the moral by concluding, if anticlimactically, with Trivet's gloss on hell, "that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe." The point is clear either way: Orpheus is undone by the trammels of worldly sensuality. But where Walton's translation tends to repudiation, Chaucer's has a flatter, sadder, renunciation. It is a note that recurs in Chaucer's treatment of human love, and it privileges the poetry, and the sorrow, over the love that occasioned it. It is as if art outgrows love. Rilke draws the moral when he reads the teaching of Orpheus: "song is *not* desire: so you taught." And again, from the third sonnet to Orpheus (I quote Don Paterson's translation):

> Youth—
> Don't fool yourself that love unlocks this art ;
> For though love's voice might force your lips apart
>
> you must forget those sudden songs. They'll end.
> True singing is another kind of breath.
> A breath of nothing. A sigh in a god. A wind.[36]

Rilke's sonnet is another profound exploration of the Orpheus myth in terms of poetry and, particularly, in terms of voice. We should follow Chaucer in acknowledging such anachronism as a force in reading—that is, the inter-

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35. I. R. Johnson, "Walton's Sapient Orpheus," in *The Medieval Boethius*, ed. Alastair Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1987), 139–68. See also Johnson's edition of the Walton commentary in *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, Nicholas Watson, Andrew Taylor, and Ruth Evans (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 34–38. The edition of Walton used only for these few lines is *Boethius: De Consolatione Philosophiae, Translated by John Walton*, ed. Mark Science, EETS o.s. 170 (London, 1927 [1925]).

36. Don Paterson, *Orpheus* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), 5.

vening intertexts that shape our reading from the interval between old books and ourselves. Thus Rilke, for us, properly illuminates Chaucer.

Yet the renunciation of love in favor of art can quickly become a chilly solipsism, a sort of My Last Duchess moment: it can become the scandalous version of Orpheus Jean de Meun has Genius provide, as poet-pederast. This is clearly an influential viewpoint. In an elevated poem it entirely dominates Poliziano's important *Fabula di Orfeo* in the fifteenth century, and it becomes normative in Bruce Holsinger's account of Orpheus.[37] Yet I find no trace of it in the *Book of the Duchess.* In fact, the *Book of the Duchess* bears no evident mark of Boethius either; these influences are yet to be seen, and they contribute to what I am representing as a career-long reflection on Orpheus, that is, to say on the poet's voice. Chaucer would have been aware from the start, though, of the extraordinary range of often contradictory interpretations Orpheus inspires, as poet but also as priest. He is related to Apollo and healing, but also to Dionysus and madness. As well as the austerely moralist and misogynist view of Boethius, there is the *Ovide Moralisé,* which defeats any distinction between secular and religious by reading the love of Orpheus and Eurydice in terms of the Song of Songs. There is also the much more secular romance Orpheus, complete with happy ending, which Chaucer would have known from *Sir Orfeo,* and a more general minstrel categorization which seems especially pertinent to the *dits amoureux:* Orpheus as the compiler of lyric anthologies, their highest genre being complaint, or lament.

There is no need here to give an exhaustive account of the mythography, which is readily available in Friedman's still valuable study, supplemented by Holsinger's vigorous revisionism, and collections of primary sources such as that from *Medioaevi* in 2000, *L'<Orphée> de Boèce au Moyen Age.* The most important point of contention is the value of Eurydice herself: is she worth going to hell for, and if so is she worth turning for? Is this second loss a fault on Orpheus' part, or is it inherent in Eurydice herself? There's the Platonic tradition that blames Orpheus, not only for turning but for the manner of his going to hell; unlike Alcestis, he is not prepared to do the job properly by dying, and is punished for his half-heartedness. But if Orpheus is generally seen as exemplary, what does that make Eurydice? There's some ambiguity in the Boethian meter itself, even though that initiates the more misogynist

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37. Bruce W. Holsinger, "Orpheus in Parts: Music, Fragmentation and Remembrance," chapter 7 of his *Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 295–343. For the three texts of Poliziano, see the editions by Stefano Carrai (Milan: Mursia, 1988) and Antonia Tissoni Benvenuti (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1986). On the homoerotic Orpheus of Jean de Meun, following Alanus, see Marilynn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn, *Myth, Montage, and Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture: Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 47.

and censorious commentary. Is she the mind, that which Orpheus seeks to draw to the upper skies, or is she the sensuality that brings it down again? Trivet and Walton agree on the latter, where Chaucer hesitates. Her death by snakebite lends itself to an overtly Christian, moralizing reading; but it is by no means inevitable or universal in the commentary traditions. For Fulgentius, Eurydice is Orpheus' equal partner: together they compose the marriage of eloquence and wisdom, of music and rhetoric. She is Orpheus' soul, or his voice—perhaps even the chthonic undervoice; and it is Orpheus' loss of her rather than the vengeful Maenads that literally tear him apart. In the traditions of commentary readily to hand Chaucer would have found not a harmonious view but multiple and conflicting voices; and it seems to me that the Orpheus story can be taken to license and originate such multiplicity. It is the irresoluble condition of the Orpheus story. It leads Poliziano in the fifteenth century to write three versions of his *Fabula di Orfeo,* albeit that he attributes it to *subitus calor:* two are lyric, varying in prosody, number of speakers, and balance between Latin and the vernacular; and the third is a full-fledged drama. It also leads Harrison Birtwistle in his superb modern opera *The Masks of Orpheus* to represent each of his three main characters (including Aristaeus) by three different means and to tell three conflicting stories: Eurydice is faithful, or not; dies or does not, is rescued or lost.[38] To be a poet in the manner of Orpheus is to be conflicted, torn and multiple, not whole but in pieces. It is an aesthetic that would instill a love of contradiction and oxymoron; poets and commentators after Ovid augment this, and for the most part do not seek to reconcile it. Such is the nature of literary voice.

I would argue, then, that the question of literary voice leads Chaucer and other medieval makers to Orpheus, where they find a myth—and reinvent it as an aesthetic program—of separation, fragmentation and division, held in suspension by the art, the over-voice, of the poet. It is, to be sure, an intellectual and rather European view of the poet's function: the parallels I find for it are in English commentary and French and Italian poets rather than in an insular poetic tradition. This does not make it an exercise in solipsism compared to the public poetry of Middleton's account. Orpheus' poetry has a profound social effect, on animals and gods as well as humans. The only person it does not help is Orpheus himself, and that is the function of sorrow: the expression of sorrow being, now as then, poetry's most evident and widespread social function. Moreover, Orpheus has the prime social func-

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38. Harrison Birtwistle, *The Mask of Orpheus*, BBC Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andrew Davis, 1999, compact disc.

tion in the mythography of civilizer, the builder of sympathetic societies. "It is fayned that . . . Orpheus assembled the wilde beasts to come in heards to his musicke, and by that meanes made them tame, implying thereby, how by his discreete and wholesome lessons uttered in harmonie and with melodious instruments, he brought the rude and savage people to a more civil and orderly life"; "For as the workes of wisdom surpass in dignity and power the works of strength, so the labours of Orpheus surpass the labours of Hercules."[39] This might make Orpheus the prototype of a public intellectual. Certainly, his role is seen as a public role, one that does not need to "stretch" itself to accommodate difference but rather, and I think crucially, bases its civil society in multiplicity. This is hardly or self-evidently apolitical.

It is also crucial to the history of culture. There is a compelling musical analogy: Monteverdi's *Orfeo*.[40] Produced in Mantua in 1607, *Orfeo* was not the first opera (and indeed Monteverdi's name for it was not opera but melodrama: sung theater), but it is universally seen as foundational. The impetus was in sustained, coterie intellectual and aesthetic activity in Florence and other cities, involving a revaluation of the vocal relationship between music and poetry. We find a comparable rethinking at the turn of the fifteenth century, in Deschamps' emphasis in *L'Art du Dictier* that lyric poetry is natural music and does not necessarily have to be sung (to artificial music).[41] In both cases the revaluation foregrounds a single voice; and indeed the structure of Monteverdi's melodrama imitates the form of poetic collections in moving through framed narrative by way of climactic set pieces of lament. I'm inclined to suggest that Chaucer criticism might look at the interplay in Monteverdi's work between multiple voices and a single voice, for it is the reinvention of monody out of polyphony that in many ways provides the dynamism of Monteverdi's formal innovation—whereas I suspect that in Chaucer scholarship we (and I) have reached the point of overemphasizing the polyphonic. This may seem a surprisingly direct connection, but there is evidence that the development of musical forms leading to Monteverdi's

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39. Respectively George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 6; Francis Bacon, "The Wisdom of the Ancients," *Philosophical Works*, 835, quoted by Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

40. I have closely consulted the performance by Ensemble La Venexiana, *L'Orfeo: Favola in musica, Mantua 1607,* in the 2007 Glossa edition with commentary. I have also consulted F. W. Sternfeld, "The Orpheus Myth and the Libretto of *Orfeo*," in *Claudio Monteverdi, Orfeo*, ed. John Whenham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 20–34; F. W. Sternfeld, *The Birth of Opera* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Mark Ringer, *Opera's First Master: The Musical Dramas of Claudio Monteverdi* (Pompton Plains, NJ: Amadeus Press, 2006).

41. Eustache Deschamps, *L'art de dictier*, ed. and trans. Deborah Sinnreich-Levi (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1994), 63–67.

opera is itself a response to literary stimuli, particularly to the interplay and complexity of voices in Petrarch's poetry that occasion new musical modes in the madrigal.

The choice of Orfeo is clearly part of a mythological program for Monteverdi, one that will lead him to Ariadne and to Ulysses (the connection between Orpheus and Ulysses is made by Boethius and repeated by Petrarch: Orpheus' tree grows in Penelope's bedchamber, and Ulysses' bow is strung with Orpheus' lyre). The performance takes place in Mantua's palazzo ducale, along from the Duke's new chamber whose ornament takes the form of the labyrinth. Moreover, Monteverdi's is one of twenty or so representations of Orpheus over as many years in proto-operatic Italian musical drama. Not only is the Orpheus myth of obvious appeal for early opera; it is also, in its emphasis on both music and voice, uniquely reflexive. "In the beginning," writes F. W. Sternfeld of Monteverdi's work, "was the myth, and the myth was Orpheus."[42] It is the case I am making about Chaucer. Why might this be? The answer takes us beyond analogy. It must be, I think, that times of great formal musical or poetic innovation entail major changes in the conceptualizing of performance and speech, in other words voice; the subject of artistic metamorphosis is voice, and the metamorphosis of voice is Ovid and Orpheus. Orpheus as voice is the hallmark of a modernism. (As it is for Birtwistle, who later turns, in separate works, to Theseus and to the Minotaur.)

Ovidian style, with its constant contrasts of tone and mood, leads Monteverdi and his librettist Struggio to the late substitution, not quite of a happy ending, as in Glück, but to a heavenly apotheosis for Orpheus, and a final pastoral dance. The very deviation from Ovid is Ovidian, a response to his quicksilver shifts in tonality, and Monteverdi refused to work on an opera of *Narciso* precisely because it did not allow such contrasts. And Ovidian mythology also enters the very form of Monteverdi's work. The great climactic lament of *Orfeo* is structured in the form of an echo—a repeated "Farewell"; and this follows Ovid's linkage, reiterated by Petrarch, between Eurydice and Echo, Orpheus and Narcissus (the mythographic connection that informs the whole of Cocteau's film *Orphée,* product of a yet later modernist revision of the legend). The linkage of the two myths is a reminder that the aesthetic is as much about seeing as about sound: voice is visual as well as verbal. To hear a voice is to imagine a body: this is where the impulse for musical drama originates. And it is something Chaucer knows very well: that is why in the *House of Fame* (1073–83) we are told that words spoken

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42. Sternfeld, *Birth of Opera*, 3.

on earth produce the illusion of a body in the houses of Fame and Rumor. I should like to complete this rapid survey of Chaucer's modernist, Orphean aesthetic by touching on the implications voice has for vision; and that will entail looking at just one more Ovidian mythological figure, Pygmalion.

"A breath of nothing"

The connection between Pygmalion and Orpheus arises from Book X of the *Metamorphoses,* where it is Orpheus who narrates Pygmalion. It is also a commonplace in the poetry of Chaucer's European, not English, contemporaries: for example, Froissart in *Le Paradis d'Amours* (where the narrator writes of the pain love causes him, "Car jains par figure vraie / Limage pymalion," but immediately laments "Je ne sui pas orpheus");[43] and, more significantly, Petrarch, who in sonnet 135 and elsewhere takes upon himself as lover the dual identity of Orpheus and Pygmalion.[44] This may be a more fruitful connection for Chaucer than Jean de Meun, given Jean's pigeonholing of Orpheus as pederast, though Jean's reworking of Pygmalion is definitive and fully explores the myth's Ovidian ambiguities: is it a life-affirming narrative of the power of love, which brings a statue to life, or a deathly narrative of the effects of misogyny, the turning away from real women to the solipsistic construct of art?

The most sustained medieval imagining, however, of what it means for the poet to undergo secondary metamorphosis from Orpheus into Pygmalion occurs in Machaut, in *Le Voir Dit*—the master work in which Machaut sets up an extended riddle of voice. I mention it here because it returns us—in the form of paradox or oxymoron—to the central questions of truth and form with which I opened this discussion of voice. A young female poet declares her love for Machaut as master poet, as Orpheus, and the text of *Le Voir Dit* anthologizes her work as well as Machaut's own—the most monumental of intercalated lyrics. We can hardly avoid asking questions about whether she really existed, or who she was, about whose voice or how many voices we hear in "her" work.[45] Yet this is merely to play the game of Mach-

43. Jean Froissart, *An Anthology of Narrative and Lyric Poetry*, ed. and trans. Kristen Figg (London: Routledge, 2001), lines 1122–39.

44. Theresa Migraine-George, "Orpheus and Pygmalion as Aesthetic Paradigms in Petrarch's *Rime sparse*," *Comparative Literature Studies* 36 (1999): 226–46.

45. Guillaume de Machaut, *Le livre dou voir dit*, ed. and trans. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson (New York: Garland, 1998). This book has an extensive discussion of the biographical question. See also Kevin Brownlee, *Poetic Identity in Guillaume de Machaut* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). For a different, and polemical, view, see Laurence de Looze, *Pseudo-Autobiography in the Four-*

aut's poem, and the textual evidence will be received differently in different disciplines, scholars of music and song concentrating on the discussion in the letters exchanged by Machaut and Toute-Belle of Machaut's own work, literary scholars for their part reading through irony and intertextuality. These correspond to different levels of the text, each of them real enough. In any case, the example of Proust may suggest the radical and unpredictable extent to which a writer transforms life experience, even where it forms a basis of the work. Though the woman's real name may be hidden in an acrostic anagram, she is called Toute-Belle, a screen name for a screen woman, and is characterized largely as the product of the lover's fantasizing. Indeed, Machaut does not meet her until well into the poem: she approaches him by letter, and he falls in love with the idea of one in love with him, a love pursued by a sequence of intermediaries, messengers and letters, with a degree of physical separation, such that the role of Pandarus in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* looks straightforward by comparison. The Machaut of the poem constructs her before he knows her. Jealousy is therefore the shadow of his love and requires no cause—it is the inevitable next stage in the affair between the old poet and his young admirer. The poem enters an unstable cycle of jealousy and lies, of deception and betrayal. Love is at best "reciprocal torture" (the phrase again is Proust's: V:137).

In this context, the Pygmalion references—signaled overtly by Machaut (e.g., lines 6526–27)—are disorienting, since they speak of anterior texts, not cancelling the particularity of Machaut's "true" experience but deliberately diffusing it and broadening its abstract range. As Machaut's love for Toute-Belle progressively turns into, or manifests itself, as suspicion and hatred, so Machaut progressively reinvents her, overtly assuming the role of Pygmalion—except that the fantasies he follows are negative. He takes her image (clearly described in the text, and depicted in the illuminations, as a Pygmalion-size image, large but less than life-size), and it becomes his proxy for her. He is a reverse Pygmalion, turning his woman into a statue: "We are sculptors," writes Proust (V:182). "We want to obtain of a woman a statue entirely different from the one she has presented to us." Machaut's Narrator dreams that her image has changed the colour of her dress from blue to green, and turned away her head. His response is deathly, as in Proust, whose Narrator—a good medievalist—sees in the sleeping Albertine "a dead woman . . . her sheets, wrapped around her body like a shroud, had assumed, with their elegant folds, the rigidity of stone" (V:485). Machaut's Narrator

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teenth Century: Juan Ruiz, Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Geoffrey Chaucer (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997).

figuratively entombs his beloved. He takes the painted image of Toute-Belle and he locks it inside his coffer, Orpheus enacting as Pygmalion Eurydice's death and descent into the pit. (The image is released by the poem's end, but the mythology overshadows the uneasy rapprochement with which the poem closes.)

Indeed, Machaut's Narrator has a further dream in which he realizes that his beloved Toute-Belle is actually Fortune, whose image is twofold, smiling and scorning, and whose pattern is always to follow exaltation with betrayal. In that Boethian sense, to blame her is irrelevant: the beloved, writes Proust (V:131), "is a sea which like Xerxes we scourge with rods in an absurd attempt to punish it for what it has engulfed." But if she is his Fortune, she is also his work, his art. When she first sends her image, Machaut's Narrator *dresses* it, though it's painted (thus supplying the third, Pygmalion's, dimension). He then writes to her that he would send her his manuscript of his collected works except that it is still being "notated"—that is, having the music added—that is, in another sense, dressed. Her image and his collected works are complementary and cognate. His jealousy and his song construct her equally, and she is imprisoned in the conventions of his prosody just as her image is confined in his coffer.

The conjunction of the two myths is, one might say, Machaut's Proustian moment, quite as shocking as the hounding to death of Albertine, modernism as little short of murder. It confronts the most uncomfortable aspect of the Orpheus myth. In the world outside opera, Orpheus *must* lose Eurydice again, for without her loss he has no subject. Since he loves his own art, she must forever be its subject, its rival and its victim. Blanchot puts it tactfully: "Eurydice is the limit of what art can attain; concealed behind a name and covered by a veil, she is the profoundly dark point towards which art, desire, death and the night all seem to lead."[46] Ultimately, as in Monteverdi, the best and the most her voice can do is to echo his in valediction. What becomes of multivocality here? It turns tyrannical. Literally, as addressed by Machaut to Toute-Belle or Orpheus to Eurydice, the only choice it offers is failure. Orpheus has so much more to offer his male admirers (such as Chaucer). Yet in this suppression the poet is knowingly self-destructive, literally torn apart by his own misogyny. So, for example, Troilus' death, or in the intertexts Pandarus', can be seen as their final act of revenge against Criseyde. (If you don't deserve me, nobody does.) One could read Chaucer's *Troilus* against both Machaut and Proust, demonstrating that the great theme of all three is

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46. Maurice Blanchot, "The Gaze of Orpheus," in *The Gaze of Orpheus and Other Literary Essays*, trans. Lydia Davis and ed. P. Adams Sitney (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill, 1981), 99.

not love but jealousy, that Chaucer is a poet fascinated not only by pain but by torture. "I loved her," writes Proust's Narrator of Gilbertine, and therefore "I was sorry not to have had time and inspiration to insult her, to hurt her, to force her to keep some memory of me" (I:200). The voice—in Proust, in Chaucer, in Machaut—is complicated, bitter, full both of other texts and of more personalized grievance. It is a strange mixture of anger and urbanity, but no less public a voice for that. Machaut's poem in fact depends on his fame as a public figure—it is a celebrity text; and in any case misogyny has never been afraid to present itself in public as civility. It is the most disturbing of all the involutions of voice and the metamorphoses of Orpheus.

The question of truth, then, is nightmarish and disorienting. But *Le Voir Dit* is also a major public landmark in the ongoing history of negotiation between voice and music. Machaut is a true Orpheus: a composer as well as a poet. For the musicologist, this leads to a very different experience of the poem from the literary critic's, in this case as a vast and reliable archive. Not only do the *de luxe* manuscripts—those placing *Le Voir Dit* as the keystone of Machaut's massive oeuvre—contain the music for a large number of the poems; but also the correspondence in the work between Machaut and Toute-Belle, containing detailed discussion of music and setting, comprises the earliest collection of composer letters in music history. Implicitly, they support the point Deschamps will make a generation later, for not all the poems are judged to need a musical setting. In that limited sense, they are evidence of the slowly widening gap between musical and literary voice: voice moving away from music, as in opera it will eventually return (with the result that continuo is needed for narrative intelligibility). This shift is also part of the Orphic function of fourteenth-century poetry—and it serves as a reminder that Zumthor's term *mouvance* was grounded in voice rather than text, and was intended to signal not a general indeterminacy but the openness that comes from a specific reliance of text on voice. Discussions of modern textuality have often obscured this medieval sense. We would retain it by borrowing a basic musical term, and thinking of the Orphic poet's work less as a text than as a score, a work that invites performance and is completed by it (except that it is never completed, as the sequence of performance remains open and indefinite). Such transferable capacity for performance, such unstable reproducibility, is the public work of voice.