
The Connection between Words and Music in the Songs of the Trobadors

Author(s): Barbara Smythe

Source: *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Jul., 1908), pp. 329-336

Published by: [Modern Humanities Research Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3713202>

Accessed: 25/06/2014 00:56

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Modern Humanities Research Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Modern Language Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORDS AND MUSIC IN THE SONGS OF THE TROBADORS.

IN the *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, Volumes II and III, Restori has devoted an article to the melodies which accompany many of the poems in the MSS. of Provençal songs, and has dealt with the popular songs from which the Trobadors derived their poetry and music, the influence of Church music, etc. He transcribes into modern notation melodies by various Trobadors and devotes a special chapter to the songs of Peirol. He remarks that the question of the relation between metre and melody is a very complicated one and that a study of the music can help but little towards solving it. Given that the lyrico-melodic art of the Trobadors originated in popular poetry, he says, we cannot understand the nature of this art without going back to the origins, and this, beyond a certain point, we are unable to do. The oldest popular music we have (twelfth century) shows various melodic schemes independent of metrical schemes. It is probable that originally one type of melody had a corresponding type of stanza, but we do not know this. Certainly the melodies and the stanzas of the existing Trobador songs are often quite independent of each other as to form, but it may be supposed that the poets intended a connection of some sort between music and words.

In the following notes on this connection I do not attempt to treat the subject in an exhaustive manner. I have based my study on some of the melodies given in three MSS. in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, Nos. 22543, 844 and 20050 of the *fonds français*, R, W and X in Bartsch's list.

On comparing the musical and metrical structure of the songs, no one can fail to be struck by the fact that the melody does not always correspond exactly with the metrical division of the stanza. In about half the cases studied, the melodies flow on without repetition of any phrase throughout the whole stanza. The metrical form of these stanzas

written 'sub una oda continua' very often admits of no sub-division and it is therefore to be expected that the melody also should form an undivided whole, *e.g.* Peire Vidal's 'S'ieu fos en cort que hom tengues drechura' (melody in MS. R) in which the lines of a stanza rime not with one another but with those of the next stanza, and Bernart de Ventadorn's 'Eras no vei luzir solelh' (melody in MSS. R and W) with its 'rims derivatius,' naturally have a continuous melody. But it is less natural to find that the latter's 'Cant vei la lauzeta mover' (melody in MSS. R, W and X¹) is written 'sub una oda continua.' The stanzas of this song are divided into two equal parts, the first four lines are sub-divided into two 'pedes' and the last four into two 'versus.' The lines are all octosyllabic and the rime system is a b a b c d c d. Yet no single line of the melody is repeated, except l. 4, which is echoed in l. 7.

As a matter of fact, the double sub-division 2 pedes + 2 versus in the melody seems very rare; when any part of the melody is divided it is almost always before the 'diesis' only. In many cases the stanza also is divided into 2 pedes + cauda, *e.g.* Iaufre Rudel's 'Lanquand li jorn son lonc en may' (melody in MSS. R, W and X²). But often the second half of the stanza is sub-divided, though not the second half of the melody, *e.g.* Peirol's 'Manta gens me mal razona' (melody in MS. R). In one case, on the other hand, namely Iaufre Rudel's 'Can lo rieu de la fontayna' (melody in MS. R), the form of the stanza would lead us to expect a continuous melody, but here the melody of ll. 1 and 2 is repeated in ll. 3 and 4.

It soon becomes clear that the connection between the music and the words of a poem is not merely a connection of form. Repetition of melodic phrases is a feature of the popular songs from which the Trobadors are generally supposed to have derived their art, and the 'oda continua' is, as Restori points out, a more learned form, borrowed from Church music. We do not find, however, that this repetition of melodic phrases was used only by the early Trobadors, and that as the art developed it was entirely discarded for the more advanced form. The 'oda continua' is found accompanying the songs of such early writers as Marcabru and Peire d'Alvernhe, while in those of such late Trobadors as Peire Cardenal and Guiraut Riquier a repetition of some part of the melody takes place.

¹ Also in MS. G. Restori gives a transcription into modern notation of all four readings.

² Restori gives a transcription into modern notation of the version of MS. X.

What reason then had the Trobadors for repeating a melodic phrase in some songs but not in others? A comparison of some of the melodies with the stanzas to which they are sung has suggested to me that some Trobadors at least wrote their music to correspond not with the form so much as with the sense of their poetry.

As examples of music written according to the general subject of the poem we may take two melodies by Marcabru, the earliest Trobador whose music has come down to us. This Trobador employs a popular form a b a b c c d, for the music to his *pastorela* (a popular *genre*) but writes his crusading song 'sub una oda continua'.¹ As Restori has remarked, this song owes much to Church music because of its subject.

We find also that some melodies are written to correspond with the special meaning of the stanza, *e.g.* the first stanza of the song by Bernart de Ventadorn alluded to above runs as follows:

Can vei la lauzeta mover
de ioy sas alas contra'l ray
que s'oblida, laissa's chazer
per la dossor c'a'l cor li vay,
ailas tal enveya m'en ve
de qui qu'en vey aiazion
meravilhas ai car desse
lo cor de dezirier no'm fon².

Although the first four lines can be sub-divided into two equal parts, the *meaning* is not so divisible, *i.e.* the four lines describe the flight of the lark without any repetition of ideas: 'When I see the lark moving its wings towards the sun for joy, so that it forgets itself and lets itself sink for the sweetness that fills its heart.' The last four lines are entirely taken up with the poet's description of the emotions aroused in him by the sight of the lark: 'Alas, such envy comes to me of whomsoever I see rejoicing, I marvel that my heart does not break at once with longing.'

Here a repetition of any part of the melody would be inartistic, as serving to give prominence to the form, at the expense of the meaning, of this stanza—and indeed of any stanza in the poem. I found several

¹ The four existing melodies by Marcabru, 'Dirai vos senes doptansa,' 'Bel m'es quan son li fruit madur,' 'Pax in nomine Domini' and 'L'autrier jost'una sebissa' have been published in *Quatre poésies de Marcabru* by MM. Jeanroy, Dejeanne and Aubry. A transcription of the two I mention is given by Restori.

² As the melodies I mention are all taken from MS. R, I have given the texts also as they stand in MS. R, only correcting a few obvious mistakes.

other poems written, like this one, 'sub una oda continua,' the stanzas of which were metrically sub-divided.

The first stanza of another song by Bernart de Ventadorn runs as follows (melody in MSS. R and W¹):

Can par la flor iosta'l vert fuelh
 e vei lo tems clar e sere
 et aug lo chan[s] d'auzels pel bruelh
 que m'adossa'l cor e'm reve,
 mais l'auzel chanton a lauzor
 ieu plus ai de ioi en mon cor.
 dei ben chantar car tug li miei iornal
 son ioi e chan que no pens de ren al[s].

Here the first four lines can be sub-divided, not only because of their form but because of their meaning as well. In them the poet describes the beauties of spring: 'When the flower appears by the green leaf, and I see the weather clear and bright, and hear the song of the birds in the wood, which sweetens and gladdens my heart.' The four lines, though all given up to the description of the springtime, can be easily broken up into sub-divisions of sense, and so the melody accompanying the two lines which describe the flowers and the bright weather is repeated in the third and fourth lines which describe the birds' song.

This sub-division of the first half of the stanza into two identical melodic phrases is used by Bernart de Ventadorn in several songs, and in no case does the repetition of the phrase accord badly with the meaning of the words.

It is usually the first stanza with the meaning of which the music seems to correspond best in cases where certain phrases are repeated, but this is only natural, as the poets probably had the first stanza specially in their minds when composing the melodies.

Among other songs whose music is divided into 2 pedes + cauda is the 'Alba' of Guiraut de Bornelh (melody in MS. R²), another example of a popular form of poetry set to a popular form of music. In this song the melody of l. 1 is repeated in l. 2, the remainder of the stanza being sung to a different melody. The effect of this repetition is especially artistic in the first stanza, but it is quite suitable in all except, perhaps, the fifth and sixth.

It is not always easy to understand why the second as well as the

¹ Also in MS. G.

² A transcription is given by Restori. See also E. Bohm in the *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen*, vol. cx, p. 113 ff. Bohm has written a piano accompaniment to this beautiful melody, and to Peirol's 'Manta gens me mal razona,' mentioned below.

first half of a stanza should not be musically sub-divided, when the meaning would permit of it. Take for example a song by Peirol (melody in MS. R¹, where the song is attributed to Peire Vidal); its first stanza runs :

Manta ien[s] me mal razona
 car ieu non chant pus soven,
 mais aisel que m'ochayzona
 no sap cosi longamen
 m'a tengut en greu pessamen
 sil que mon cor[s] m'enprezona,
 tot ay perdut iauzimen
 tal desconort me dona.

The first four lines of the melody are divided into two pedès, but the last four are undivided.

The repetition of a melodic phrase in the second as well as the first half of a stanza is not at all usual. The only examples I have come across are the 'Canson redonda' of Guiraut Riquier, Bernart de Ventadorn's 'Pus mi preiatz, senhor' and Peire Vidal's 'Baros de mon dan covit' (these melodies are all in MS. R²). The melody of the 'Canson redonda' corresponds exactly with the form of the stanza, *i.e.* the melody of ll. 1 and 2 is repeated for ll. 3 and 4, l. 5 having a different phrase, and the melody of ll. 6 and 7 is repeated for ll. 8 and 9, l. 10 having another new phrase. The first stanza of the song by Bernart de Ventadorn runs as follows :

Pus mi preiatz, senhor
 qu'ieu chant, ieu chantarai,
 e cant cug chantar, plor
 mantas ves que essai.
 greu veiretz chantador
 ben chan can mal l'estai,
 a mi del mal d'amor
 va mielhs que no fes may,
 e donex perque'm n'esmai?

This song may almost be said to have the division 2 pedes + 2 versus, for the melody of ll. 1 and 2 is repeated in ll. 3 and 4, and that of ll. 5 and 6 in ll. 7 and 8. There is, however, a ninth line which has a different melodic phrase. This division of the melody suits the meaning of the stanza fairly well, but the same can hardly be said of 'Baros de mon dan covit' :

Baros de mon dan covit,
 fals lauzengiers deslials,
 car en tal don' ai chautit
 on es beutatz naturals,

¹ Transcribed by Restori. See Note 2 on p. 332.

² 'Pus mi preiatz, senhor' is also in MS. G.

e tot aquo que tanh a cortesia,
 be soi astrucx sol que mos cors lai sia,
 car sa valors e son fin pretz pareis¹
 denan totas c'anc d'amor no s(e) feis,
 per que soi ricx s'ela'm denha dir d'oc.

The melody of l. 1 is repeated in ll. 2, 3 and 4, except that the last note of ll. 2 and 4 is a tone lower than in the other lines. The melody of l. 5 is repeated in l. 6 only—and not quite exactly, and that of l. 7 in l. 8—also not quite exactly, while l. 9 has yet another phrase.

Guiraut de Bornelh's 'Leu chansonet' e vil,' which has a nine-line stanza, is differently divided. The melody of ll. 1 and 2 is repeated in ll. 5 and 6, but ll. 3 and 4 differ from ll. 7 and 8. This arrangement, however, clearly marks the division of the eight short lines into two equal parts.

Other unusual forms are found (1) in 'Conortz aras say yeu be' of Bernart de Ventadorn (melody in MS. R²), where the melody of the first four lines is repeated in the remaining four, though the rime system of the second half of the stanza differs from that of the first half. The sense, however, is similar in both halves:

Conortz aras say yeu be
 que vos de me non pensatz,
 que salutz ni amistatz
 ni messatges no men ve.
 be sai trop fas lonc aten,
 et er be semblanz huey may
 que so qu'ieu cas autre pren
 pus no men ven aventura.

(2) In 'No m'agrad' iverns ni pascors' of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras. Here the melody of ll. 1—4 is repeated in ll. 9—12, ll. 5—8 having a different melody. The long stanza falls naturally into these subdivisions, but it must be admitted that there is no greater similarity in sense between the first and third parts than there is between the first and second, or the second and third.

In a few cases, certain phrases of the melody are repeated, but not in such a way as to make the whole melody regularly divisible. In two such cases it almost looks as if the similarity between two lines of music is due to an error of the copyist. In the version given in MS. R of Bernart de Ventadorn's 'La dossa votz ai auzida,' the melody of l. 1 corresponds exactly with that of l. 3. In the same MS., the third line of Peire Vidal's 'Anc non mori per amor ni per al' has the same melody as the sixth line. In the versions of MS. X, however, there is no such

¹ MS. R has *plazens*.

² Also in MS. G.

correspondence in 'Anc non mori,' while in 'La dossa votz' it is the fourth line, not the third, that corresponds (not quite exactly in this MS.) with the first.

The other cases are more interesting. One is 'Can l'erba fresqu'e'l fuelha par' of Bernart de Ventadorn (melody in MS. R). Here the first line has the melody of the fourth and the fifth that of the sixth. It might be expected that the melody of the first half of this stanza would be divided into two pedes, as the sense of the first stanza would well permit of it, though the other stanzas divide less easily. The conclusion of the first half of the stanza is instead marked by the repetition of the first phrase in the fourth line. As line 6 of stanza 1 gives a sort of echo of line 5:

ioi ai de luy e ioi ai de la flor,
ioi ai de mi e de midous maior—

so the music is echoed, with good artistic effect.

The other song is by Guiraut de Bornelh. Only four melodies by this Trobador have come down to us, and all are given in MS. R only. Two, the 'Alba' and 'S'ieus quier cosselh, bell'ami' Alamanda,' are written in the regular 2 pedes + cauda form, while the division of 'Leu chansonet'e vil' has already been mentioned. If the remaining example is a fair specimen of this poet's melodies, he must have spent as much care over the music as he did over the words of his songs. It is the song 'Non puese sofrir c'a la dolor' (on which the famous war-song 'Be'm platz lo gais temps de pascor' is modelled):

Non puese sofrir c'a la dolor
de ma den la lengua no vir,
e'l cor¹ a la novela flor
lancant vey los ramels florir
e'ls chans fors pel boscatie
de'ls auzeletz enamoratz,
e sitot m'estau apessatz,
ni pres de mal usatie,
cant vey cams ni vergiers ni pratz
ie'm renovel e m'asolatz.

Here the melody of the first line is repeated in the fourth, and that of the third line in the seventh. The first half of the first line is also repeated in the first half of the eighth—one of the two hexasyllabic lines in the stanza. The first four syllables of the other hexasyllabic line (l. 5) have the melody of the first half of the second line.

It cannot be said that this song is a good illustration of the theory

¹ MS. R has *chant*.

that the music is written to correspond with the meaning of the poetry. The repeated melodic phrases do not help the sense of the words in any stanza. Perhaps Guiraut de Bornelh, being decidedly a formalist, thought more of the form than of the meaning of his stanza when he set it to music, for the form of the melody can be shown to correspond with that of the poem. The diesis, according to the metrical arrangement of the stanza, falls after the fourth line, and the melody of l. 1 is repeated in l. 4 to mark the close of the first half of the stanza—as in the song by Bernart de Ventadorn quoted above. The melody of l. 3 of the second half (l. 7 of the whole stanza) equals that of l. 3 of the first half, and the two shorter lines, 5 and 8, echo the first half of the second and first lines respectively.

The repetition of half a line of music is not unusual, *e.g.* the melody of the first part of l. 3 of Guiraut de Bornelh's 'Alba' is repeated in the second part of l. 4.

The reading in MS. W of 'Can vei la lauzeta mover' has the first half of the melody of l. 2 more or less exactly echoed in ll. 4, 5 and 7. In the reading of MS. R, however, this is not the case (though in both MSS. l. 4 and l. 7 are identical), but the melodies given in these two MSS. for this song are obviously only variants of the same melody.

BARBARA SMYTHE.