

The *virelai* is a poetic form, often set to song, of the 14th and early 15th century. It typically begins with a refrain, which then appears between each of three verse stanzas. Within each verse stanza, the structure is “bar form,” with two sections sharing the same rhyme scheme and music (called the “*stollen*”), followed by a third unique section (called the “*abgesang*”). The third section of each stanza – the *abgesang* – typically shares its rhymes and music with the initial refrain. Thus, it can be schematically summarized as AbbaA. Here “A” represents the repeated refrain; little “a” represents the verse of different text, however, set to the same music as the refrain (big “A”); and little “b” represents the remaining verses (different texts) set to different music from the refrain.

While this structure is relatively consistent within the genre, the number of lines and the rhyme scheme can vary from poem to poem. For example, the refrain and *abgesang* may be of three, four or five lines each, with equally variable rhyme schemes (i.e. ABA, ABAB, AAAB, ABBA, AAAB, or AABBA). The aesthetic structure often involves an alternation of longer with shorter lines. Furthermore, it is not unusual for all stanzas to share the same set of rhymes, allowing one to build the entire poem on just two rhymes. *Le harpe de melodie* uses four rhymes (see poem on previous page).

Note that the rhyme scheme of the additional text does not fit the *forme fixes* of the virelai; thus, it is reasonable to conclude that this text is not meant to serve as additional text to be sung. One is then left to wonder what its purpose might be. Though this additional text is not explicitly marked as a “canon” (rule for the construction of the piece) in either manuscript, the poem’s language is embedded with canonic allusions common to the 14th century.

Through a careful reading, it is clear that this text provides instructions for the piece’s performance. The text indicates that a second voice must be derived from the Cantus (likely then by canon of some kind).

Furthermore, this additional text suggests that the first section concludes on “d;” this is confirmed by a typical cuing device (four dots in a square) five notes before the end of the Tenor (after the note “d”) in the Chantilly Manuscript version of this piece (see Figure 6 on next page). Furthermore, in the Chicago Manuscript version of this piece, there is a long line spanning the entire staff following this same “d,” likely indicating the same cue rather than a rest of maximum duration, which would be out of place in this piece (see Figure 5 on the next page). Given this instruction to end on this “d” however, there are multiple ways to conclude here on “d,” so multiple possible realizations of this cadence are provided herein.

Additional Text in a modified *Rondine* format
(as seen in Chantilly Manuscript)

Rondine = AbbaabA abbaA
Modified Rondine = AbababA ababA

A Se tu me veulez proprement pronuncier
b sus la tenur, pour mie[u]x estre de cort,
a diapenthe te covient comenchier,
b ou autrement tu seras en discort;
a pars blanc et noir per me sans oublier;
b lay le tonnant ou tu li feras acort -
A se tu me veulz ꝛc. [proprement pronuncier.]

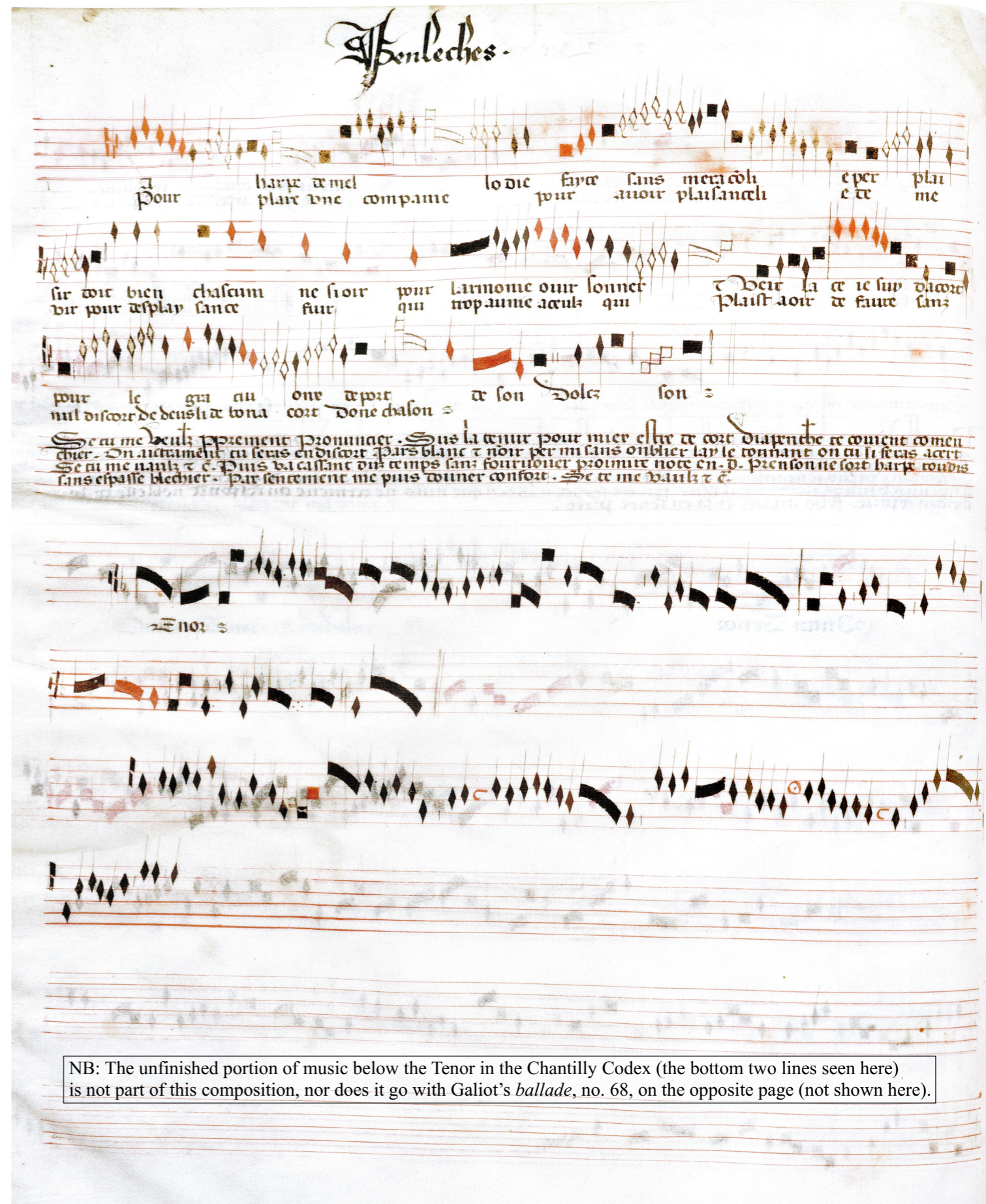
a Puis va cassant duz temps sans fourvoier;
b proinere note en .d. prent son resort;
a harpe toudis sans espasse blechier:
b par sentement me puis donner confort -
A se tu me veulz ꝛc [proprement pronuncier.]

Poetic Translation:
(trans: Jordan A.Key)

If you so wish to play me without offense,
to sound upon the tenor with due accord,
a fifth above your canon should commence,
or else you’ll find your way to crass discord;
Take heed of colored notes and shrewd pretense
arriving all where you will make a chord,
if you so wish to play me without offense.

Both go with haste no fault to recompense;
observe the D - reprieve she will afford
amidst the enigmatic harp’s suspense.
So play me, then your soul I will reward -
if you so wish wish to play me without offense.

Senleches: "La harpe de melodie"
Musée Condé, Chantilly, France (F-CH), MS 564 "Chantilly Codex." f. 43v. ("Senleches")



NB: The unfinished portion of music below the Tenor in the Chantilly Codex (the bottom two lines seen here) is not part of this composition, nor does it go with Galiot’s *ballade*, no. 68, on the opposite page (not shown here).

On Refrains in Medieval Poetry and Music:

It should be noted that often in medieval manuscripts the place and restatement of a refrain (either musical or poetic) is usually not written out; rather, the placement is only suggested by cues, such as giving only the first words or first line of the refrain part. In the Chicago Manuscript, this can be seen both on the column of the harp at the end of the sixth ribbon (Figure 1), as well as in the song's text within the harp on the third stave of music after the words on the second line of text, "plaist a oir" (Figure 2). In the first of these cases, one sees the fragment "se ꝛc," which corresponds to the opening line on the column, "Se tu me veulez proprement pronuncier," indicating that at this point there is a refrain of at least this line (we will come to the meaning of "ꝛc" below). In the second case, one sees the fragment "la ꝛc," which corresponds to the opening line of the song's text, "la harpe de melodie," indicating that at this point there is a refrain of at least this line, if not the whole stanza, for which this phrase is the first line. These same uses of text fragment to indicate refrain can be seen in the Chantilly Manuscript.

For example, in the Chantilly Manuscript one can see two refrains within the additional text written between the Cantus and Tenor music. Search for the phrase "Se tu me veulez;" you will see it at the beginning of the first line, the beginning of the third line, and the end of the last line, though each time it appears after the first it appears without the complete poetic line. You might even notice that after the shortened "se tu me veulez" phrase on line three and at the end, you see the extra signs "ꝛc," which is actually an abbreviated form of "et cetera" often abbreviated in modern usage as "etc.". The first character in this abbreviation is called the "r rotunda" and is sometimes used for *et* in etc. to yield ꝛc. You can see the abbreviation in a typical Latin font in Figure 3.

Other subtle indicators of refrain can appear in medieval poetry. One example of this is seen in the Chicago Manuscript. Where as in the Chantilly Manuscript we saw at the end of the additional text, "se tu me veulez ꝛc," at the end of the same text in the Chicago Manuscript on ribbon around the column of the harp, we only see a symbol that looks somewhat like a question mark (see Figure 4). Interestingly, this same symbol also appears previously on the column at the first refrain indication in the sixth ribbon fragment after the "se ꝛc" discussed before (see Figure 1 again). Such symbol alone, once established, can indicate refrains without any additional text cues. Especially in cases where space is sparse or there are many refrains, such symbols will be more commonly employed.

When the poetic form is tied to a known musical structure, the extent of the refrain (one line, two lines, whole stanzas, etc.) is easy to deduce. However, when the poem is divorced from other structures that can assist in deducing form, the extent of the refrain becomes more questionable. Sometimes refrains can be determined through the context of the poem. For example, if it makes narrative, grammatical, or poetic sense to repeat the first line of the refrain but adding any further lines of the refrain will confuse the narrative, grammatical, or poetic structure, then an argument can be easily made to only repeat the line rather than the stanza. Equally, if adding the entire stanza of the referenced refrain line causes no issues within the poem, then one could justifiably repeat the entire stanza.

Such ambiguity in the extent of refrains naturally begets evolutionary variations in poetic structures that required refrains. The additional poem provided to *La Harpe de Melodie* is a great example of such a poetic evolution. In this appended poem, it makes no sense to repeat any information after the single refrain line when refrains are required; doing so would not work in the flow of the poem. However, a repeat of just the first line works well. This shortens the refrains from a stanza down to a single line of just a handful of words, which now stand as pithy reentry of the opening idea in the middle and at the end of the poem. As such, these single line refrains are typically called "rentrement" or (French for "reentry").

This appended, perhaps canonic, poem does not perfectly match any popular poetic form from medieval France. However, it does closely match the *Rondeau Prime* or *Rondine* forms.

The *Rondeau Prime* is derived through the elision of long refrains in the *Rondeau Quatrain*, which has verse structure ABaAabAB where AB is a four-line refrain with a poem of 16 lines (rhyme scheme ABBA-abAB-abba-ABBA). If we reduce the refrains of the *Rondeau Quatrain* to one line (rhyme scheme ABBAabA-abbaA) we get a 12-line poem with clear single-line refrains (or "rentrements") in lines 7 and 12, which is similar to our poem appended to *Le harpe de melodie*. The *Rondeau Prime* is traditionally understood as divided into one *septet* (7 lines) plus one *cinquain* (5 lines), as shown in the poem on the previous page. Granted, the rhyming pattern is not quite the same (ABBAabA-abbaA in the *rondeau prime* vs. ABababA-ababA given by Senleches).

The *Rondeau Prime* variation, when constructed explicitly at its outset with a one-line refrain in mind (rather than a stanza refrain: ABBA or the like), is sometimes called a *Rondine* (or "little rondeau"). Since the first couplet of the poem does not seem to suggest itself as a complete idea and since the first four lines do not suggest a nice refrain in the context of such a short poem, and since the first line can operate as either a complete refrain ("se tu me veulez proprement pronuncier") or partial refrain ("se tu me veulez") within the poem, I suggest this poem is a variant of the *Rondine* (AbbaabA-abbaA) rather than the *rondeau prime* (ABBAabA-abbaA). It seems as though Senleches intended this poem to have only a one-line refrain rather than a refrain-stanza with shortened *rentrements* (AbababA-ababA rather than ABABabA-ababA).

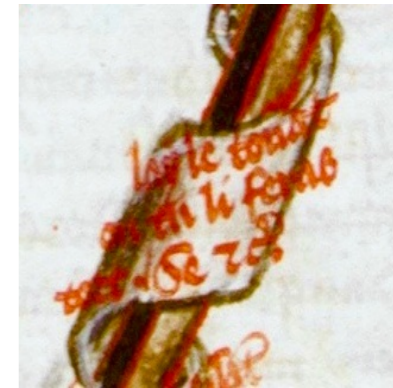


Figure 1: Chicago MS

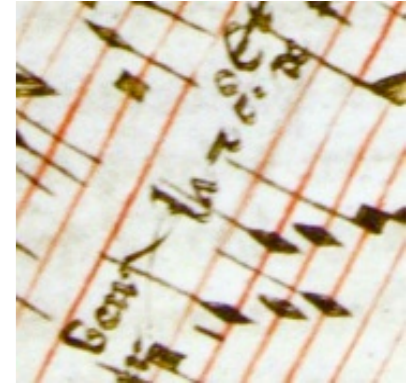


Figure 2: Chicago MS



Figure 3: Latin abbreviation of "et cetera"

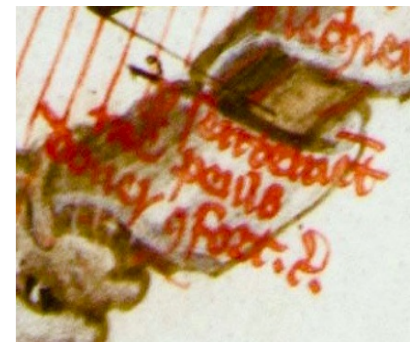


Figure 4: Chicago MS

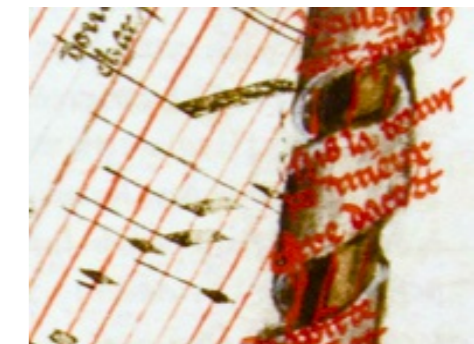


Figure 5: Chicago MS

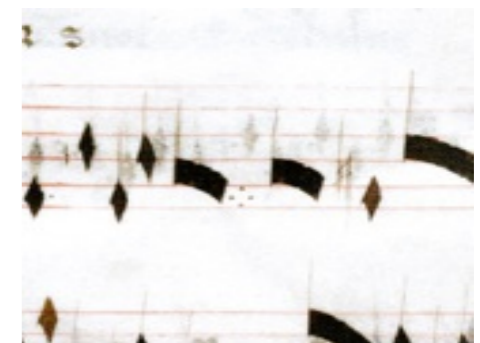


Figure 6: Chicago MS

La Harpe de Melodie

("The Melodious Harp")

- Virelai in canon -

Version 1

Jacob Senleches (fl. 1382/1383 – 1395)

Transcription: Jordan Alexander Key

Red notes in source are represented by red colored notes in the transcription.

White notes in source are represented by blue colored notes in the transcription

Ligatures in source are indicated by a dashed slur in the transcription, encompassing all notes of the ligature

Mensuration signs appear in the transcription as they do in the manuscript.

The score is presented in three systems. The first system includes a Discantus 1 & 2 part (top left) and a Tenor part (bottom left). The Discantus part features a sequence of red notes followed by blue notes, with a dashed slur over the latter. The Tenor part begins with a mensuration sign (2) and a key signature of one flat. The main vocal line starts with a mensuration sign (2) and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are: "1. & 5. La har - - - - - pe", "4. Pour plaire - - - - - u". The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics: "de me - - - - - lo - di - e fay - - - - - te sans me - ran - co -", "ne com - - - - - pag - ni - e, pour a - - - - - voir plai - san - che". The third system shows the continuation of the vocal line and the Tenor part. The Tenor part features a series of blue notes with dashed slurs. The vocal line includes mensuration signs (3:2) and a key signature of one flat. The lyrics continue: "de me - - - - - lo - di - e fay - - - - - te sans me - ran - co -", "ne com - - - - - pag - ni - e, pour a - - - - - voir plai - san - che".

* "E" suggested here to agree better one measure later in the comes canonic voice against the Tenor's "a" note below.

-li - - - e per de plai me - - sir, vir, doit bien chas - cun pour des - plai - san -

res - jo - ir pour l'ar - mo-ni - e o - ir son - ner et ve - - ir; ce fu - ir qui trop a- nui - e a ceulz qui plaist a o - - ir.

go directly to verse 2
verse 4 and 5 only

(Chicago Manuscript)

2. Et pour ce je suy d'a - cort. pour le gra - - ci - oux de -
3. De fai - re sanz nul dis - cort. de - dens li de bon a -

port cort, de - son douz son. u - ne chan - son. return to beginning for verse 4
cort, u - - ne chan - son. return to beginning for verse 4

La Harpe de Melodie

("The Melodious Harp")

- Virelai in canon -

Version 2

Jacob Senleches (fl. 1382/1383 – 1395)

Transcription: Jordan Alexander Key

Discantus 1 & 2

La harpe de mel

Tenor

1. & 5. La
4. Pour

har - - - pe
plaire - - - u

de me - - - lo - di - e fay - - te sans me - ran - co -
ne com - - - pag - ni - e, pour a - - voir plai - san - che

* "E" suggested here to agree better one measure later in the comes canonic voice against the Tenor's "a" note below.

-li - - - e per de plai me - - sir, vir, doit bien chas - cun pour des - plai - san -

li - - - e de me - - vir, -

4:3 3:2 3:2

res - jo - ir pour l'ar - mo-ni - e o - ir son - ner et ve - - ir; ce fu - ir qui trop a - nui - e a ceulz qui plaist a o - - ir.

4:3 3:2

repeat on verse 4 only.

2. Et pour ce je suy d'a - cort. pour le gra - - ci - oux de -
 3. De fai - re sanz nul dis - cort. de - dens li - de bon a -

port cort, de - son douz son. u - ne chan - son.
 u - ne chan - son.

1. 2. return to beginning for verse 4

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