



Review of Anna Zayaruznaya, *The Monstrous New Art: Divided Forms in the Late Medieval Motet* (Cambridge University Press, 2015)

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[1] Anna Zayaruznaya's book, *The Monstrous New Art: Divided Forms in the Late Medieval Motet*, presents an intriguing new perspective on a relatively small, complex, and much-scrutinized repertoire. The book is an expansion of the concept behind her important 2009 article, which portrays voice crossing in Machaut's motets as Fortune turning the tables on the usual position of voices, just as in the composer's poetry she is wont to level kings and raise the ignoble. In *The Monstrous New Art*, Zayaruznaya expands her purview to *ars nova* motets generally, and beyond voice crossing to any atypical patterning that effects (audible) divisions in a motet. For the author, "features which seem strange or unusual are places to look deeper rather than anomalies to gloss over" (20) and "the lens through which [she has] chosen to examine this repertory magnifies rifts and fissures, allegorical as well as psychological" (220). Zayaruznaya thus carves out a new subgenre of the *ars nova* motet that flourished in the half century between *Fauvel* (1310) and the 1360s, a significant bestiary comprising some twenty out of ninety extant *ars nova* motets (173). "Monstrous" here are those works whose text(s) treat themes of division and disunity, broadly construed to reference the character of historical people, mythological creatures (chimera, centaur, siren), allegorical figures (Fortune, Love, courtly lady, triune God), objects of piecemeal construction, and more subtly the stratified organization of "bodies" like medieval civil and clerical classes. Her vital connection is made when "motets whose upper voices dwell on a series of fragmented creatures . . . turn out to have musical forms that are equally fragmented" (62).

[2] Zayaruznaya stresses that the relation between hybridity in textual subject matter and musical organization is an abstract one. *Ars nova* motet composers pursued what she calls the broader congruence of "form-idea relations," driven by analogy and allegory (18). Zayaruznaya situates this relationship as an "important early chapter in the history of musical hermeneutics" (234) before the more direct mimesis of Renaissance text painting.

[3] The first chapter is devoted to a question upon which the acceptance of the monstrous subgenre is predicated: how can a motet have a body? Zayaruznaya finds ample evidence of this creaturely ontology. Not only do medieval bestiaries align meaning with morphology (21), "medieval music treatises are replete with body parts" (25). We are reminded of familiar

analogies like Guido's hand, Grocheio's likening of the tenor to a skeleton that gives structure to the whole, the varying note heads of mensural notation, and tails [*caudae*] tacked on to the end of antiphons.⁽¹⁾ Having established a concern for taxonomy and the proper arrangement of parts, Zayaruznaya brings an eye for division to bear on musical structure, showing in the case studies that follow how composers explored and exploited the new compositional possibilities afforded by an increasingly well-ordered motet genre.⁽²⁾

[4] As *ars nova* composers developed tenor isorhythm, an early form of intrinsically musical structure not based upon a poetic scheme (as in the *formes fixes*), they experimented with boundaries as a natural process in the very effort of defining them (see 222–25). Because the *ars nova* motet was an organic whole made up of interdependent parts, it could be conceived of as bodily. And if bodily, anything but the perfect alignment and coordination of all parts can be interpreted as deformity. Matching their potential for hybridity in form, many *ars nova* motets are also polytextual and speak from (or embody) three unique voices simultaneously. While the upper-voice poetry of many motets serves to amplify and interpret the classical subject of the tenor voice, it may also contradict the tenor, dividing the whole.⁽³⁾ Exploiting unity as a norm in the greater quantity of non-monstrous motets, motets based upon divided *materia* could play with that expectation as a means of expressivity; they could distort, subvert, and otherwise comment upon wholeness. As Zayaruznaya observes, “new standards of unification present new opportunities for division” (225).

[5] Some motet texts are straightforward in their descriptions of bifurcated or deformed creatures. Consider the essential example of Fauvel—the *ars nova*'s equine Godfather” (100)—a monster who is drawn in manuscript along a spectrum of horse-man: figuring as a centaur, a horse, and a horse-headed man (as in **Figure 1**). Divided creatures in medieval art, musical and otherwise, were usually negative *exempla*, examples what not to do, and they require a habitat of normative expectations to flourish (see 94, 175, and 222). The very embodiment of corruption and vice in fourteenth-century France, Fauvel is a low beast raised up by the vicissitudes of Lady Fortune (another monster of disparate body and schemes) to prominence in the royal household. He is depicted with hybrid form because he is a living representation of division; indeed, Fauvel's very name is an acronym (of sins: *Flaterie, Avarice, Vilainie, Variété, Envie, and Lascheté*).

[6] As the *Roman de Fauvel* was interspersed with motets, and the fourteenth-century French mind attuned to allegorical depiction, Fauvel's hybridity was not only presented visually and narratively, but also musically. Diagnosing abnormality in the disparity between its text and musical organization, Zayaruznaya pins down one particular motet from Fauvel for dissection. With its first-person tenor, whose isoharmonic repeat suggests an ABA setting, the motet *Fauvel/Autant m'est* embodies the very palindromic thing it names: Fauvel himself (46–52).⁽⁴⁾ Indeed, “neither the horse nor those grooming him can tell his head from his ass” (50).

[7] Such corporeal framing of musical structure continues to the present. Hepokoski and Darcy evoke a bodily composition when they speak of the deformation of sonata organization, a form type teeming with monsters and that proffers no textual license to musical disunity.⁽⁵⁾ A. B. Marx, too, conceived of the sonata organically, with a bifurcation of masculine and feminine themese that function together interdependently.⁽⁶⁾ Hermaphroditic hybridity was included in medieval bestiaries and decried as monstrous in the fourteenth-century ballade *Contre les hermaphrodites*, by Eustache Dechamps. While a motet that features male/female hybridity may fall under Zayaruznaya's purview, the subject is not broached by *The Monstrous New Art*. Machaut's motet 7 (*Lasse! / Ego moriar pro te*) is such a specimen nonetheless, with its simultaneous feminine upper voices and masculine tenor.⁽⁷⁾ David's lament in the tenor that he would die for his son, Absalom, prompts easy association with the ubiquitous *fin'amor* trope of a suitor so burning with desire that he would die for his lady. Such textual hybridity, we now know, often correlates with musical division, and there is much to be found here. Linking duets, which audibly reduce motet 7's texture, conclude the first three of six taleae (measures 33–39, 71–77, and 109–115 in Schrade's edition). These three *taleae* fill only two *colores*, and the duets at their joints draw attention to the uneven alignment of the motet's dependent parts. Such a 3:2 isorhythmic ratio in itself is not monstrously uncommon, but the duets also effect tonal hybridity. All three cadence without the leadership of the ostensibly foundational tenor voice because they distend their taleae beyond the chant's last note. Furthermore, while talea boundaries are an expected place to cadence, not one of the duets' cadences align with any other cadence in the motet⁽⁸⁾.

[8] This audible accentuation of misaligned and swollen components by the upper-voice pair occurs on top of Machaut's tonally divisive segmentation of the chant tenor. While his (pre-compositional) isorhythmic plan leaves off the first two *taleae* on A (circled in **Example 1** below), Machaut's polyphonic setting closes on the prior notes (C and D, respectively). In both cases, he orphans a pitch at the end of a *talea* that could more naturally begin the following one. And while these initial *taleae* end on A, their extending duets close on C and G.⁽⁹⁾ *Talea* III ends with a stepwise descent to D, ripe for cadence, but then

the third duet spills over this boundary, cascading down another step to conclude the first half of the motet on C (measure 114). Example 1 summarizes the tonal monstrosity in Machaut's motet 7, wrought through deformational segmentation of the tenor *and* its polyphonic realization, which resonates abstractly with the hybridity of its texts.

[9] In a motet tenor, structural hybridity and uncertain origin can be the bared teeth of a monster. Zayaruznaya's Example 3.4 characterizes the tenor of Vitry's motet *Hugo/Magister invidie* as monstrous by demarcating three zones "differentiated by range and modal orientation" (114–15).⁽¹⁰⁾ Her example shows both bi- and tripartite divisions of the *color*, analyzed by range and presumed final. Both cases of the bipartite division are problematic because the final makes tritones with salient melodic pitches. Her example is reproduced as **Example 2**.

[10] If the first bipartite zone (pitches 1–12) is centered on B \flat , the E \sharp with which it opens suggests an unusual hexachord (or tetrachord) with no diatonic mi-fa relationship. If, instead, the E–F succession represents mi–fa, then the tripartite zone (pitches 1–9) with its natural hexachord on C seems the best parsing and concurs with Clark's potential chant match (1999, 121–24). The second zone of the bipartite division presents a similar case, where the hexachord on F entails B \flat , and B \sharp (pitch 21) is found in its place.⁽¹¹⁾ This second half of the *color* fits squarely in the *mollis* hexachord if the B is flatted. Expanding slightly, the second and third zones of the tripartite division (pitches 10–24) also fit neatly in the *mollis* hexachord, if retaining the suggested B \flat , and this parsing also has the benefit of relieving the ascending step of pitches 16–17 from any cadential responsibilities. Perhaps this division of Hugo's chant, pitches 1–9 and 10–24, tonally divided and asymmetrical, makes for the more believable monster.

[11] Jennifer Bain's (2008) study of multiple tonal centers in Machaut's secular songs, which is not cited in the present book, nonetheless provides an enriching complement to Zayaruznaya's musical philology. Bain's exhaustive appendices tabulate how every polyphonic song of Machaut defines its (body) parts along the *formes fixes*; then, in cases we may now deem monstrous, shuffles and recontextualizes them. The polyphonic songs are "divided forms" indeed—only about a third of them begin and end on the same sonority—and hunting their texts for monsters may newly frame our interpretation of tonal and textural ingenuity within these fixed forms.

[12] Some motets are monsters not through a derangement of parts, but by the Janus-faced duplicity of them. Zayaruznaya demonstrates how voice crossing can be a musical representation of a textual reference to falsehood (119ff). Returning to Vitry's *Hugo/Magister invidie*, the motetus' second syllable "–go" is elongated to tenor-like duration and sounds lowest in the texture, evoking the common tenor "virgo." In this case, the "impious" and "perverse" Hugo is posing in the motet as the blameless Virgin Mary (121). With an eye for hunting monstrous quarry, Machaut can be found arranging a comparable deception between his motets 4 (*Puis que la douce/Speravi*) and 9 (*O livoris/Fera pessima*).⁽¹²⁾ The tenors of these motets are remarkably similar; M9 seems to be an excerpt of M4, as shown in **Example 3**.⁽¹³⁾

[13] M9 is overtly feral. Its tenor's "most evil beast" refers to that paragon of monsters, Satan, who is further connoted by Machaut's upper-voice poetry and arguably embodied by the triplum and tenor lines themselves.⁽¹⁴⁾ The triplum's introit names Lucifer the font of all pride [*superbie*], vividly depicting this sin through a lengthy solo, and later describing him as a dragon and a serpent. The serpentine undulations of the tenor melody corroborate this description, animating the beast of the texts. Given how forthright these voices are, the motetus need hardly hint that "the treachery of Iscariot lies hidden within."⁽¹⁵⁾

[14] If the tenor of M9 is a beast, then it lurks also in the shadows of M4. There the *fera pessima* can be seen posing as hope [*speravi*], both the tenor of M4 and one of three gifts with which Love comforts the suitor in the triplum. Yet in *fin'amor* tradition, the deified lady is unattainable.⁽¹⁶⁾ Her noble countenance veils a cruel heart and the "hope" of M4 is a sugared tenor.

[15] Zayaruznaya's new book succeeds in renewing a venerable and familiar body of music. From *The Monstrous New Art* emerges a lively menagerie of motets, and a needed sense of normativity in the *ars nova* is more sharply defined by a lack of the disunity she describes. My analyses of Machaut's motets 7, 4, and 9 above are only a modest demonstration of how her way of framing the fourteenth-century motet's unique counterpoint of texts and musics can inform and expand our understanding of the period. While undoubtedly a contribution that will bear much fruit among medievalists, *The Monstrous New Art* is also an important study in the early developments of text-music relations, formal unity, and the ontology of the musical work.

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Footnotes

1. In our own time, [Leach 2006](#) describes gendered semitones and sexed leading tones in this repertory. Although it won SMT's 2007 Outstanding Publication Award, Leach's arguments were sharply rebutted in [Fuller 2011](#). Leach's defense appears in the same issue ([Leach 2011](#)).

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2. [Busse Berger 2005](#) persuasively explores the influence of medieval mnemonic pedagogy on the mental composition of isorhythm and other polyphony.

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3. A framework for interpreting both textual and tonal interactions among lines of counterpoint in Machaut's motets, and their influence upon isorhythmic organization, is developed in [Lavacek 2014–15](#).

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4. Motets are cited here by an incipit of the motetus, following medieval convention, and tenor. [Zayaruznaya 2010](#), 11–32, considers the evolution and ramifications of motet naming conventions in valuable detail. The author herself names motets with the upper voices alone, as the more audible workers of division.

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5. See [Hepokoski and Darcy 2006](#), 11, for a technical definition of *deformation*.

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6. See [Hepokoski 1994](#) for a brief review of the gender controversy and [Burnham 1996](#) for a more detailed discussion.

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7. [Brownlee 2002](#) interprets both the triplum and motetus as the appropriately dual voice of Echo, who pines hopelessly for the love of Narcissus. His essay notes the manifold gender reversals involved in M7 as Machaut, a male poet, composes a female voice in the typical courtly role of a male. For a brief discussion of the construction of feminine identity in the Middle Ages through the traditionally male reference of the poetic voice, see [Hoffman 1989](#).

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8. [Hartt 2010](#) is a recent study of how Machaut planned his isorhythmic organization so as to maximally afford descending steps in the tenor through which to cadence each segment.

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9. The final and most frequent tonal center of motet 7 is D. Fuller ([1989](#), 223–24) discusses tonal ambiguity between D and A while proposing a possible source chant that ultimately closes on G.

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10. Also finding this tenor an oddity, Clark ([1999](#), 121–24), suggests that it may be partially borrowed and partially newly-composed.

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11. In an appendix, Zayaruznaya's edition suggests inflection to B \flat in the third *color* only, where it supports F.

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12. For an account of M9's tonal ambiguity, see [Fuller 1989](#), 207–209.

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13. Yet an exact match for motet 9's chant tenor exists; it is described by Clark ([1996](#), 26) and Bent ([2003](#), 372).

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14. Gen. 37:20 and 33. Zayaruznaya (34) reads the tenor as referencing the sin of envy, named explicitly in the motetus's incipit.

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15. Translation from [Robertson 2002](#), 308.

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16. The unattainability of the Lady seems the very engine of Machaut's vast creative output in the genre.

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