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Dr Caroline Ardrey

The University of Sheffield
Humanities Research Institute
34 Gell Street
Sheffield
S3 7QY

United Kingdom

c.ardrey@sheffield.ac.uk

Dialogism and Song: Intertextuality, Heteroglossia and Collaboration in Augusta Holmès's setting of Catulle Mendès's "Chanson"

CHANSON

Si ton front est comme un roseau
Qui s'effare dès qu'un oiseau
Le touche,
Mon baiser se fera moins prompt
Pour ne pas étonner ce front
Farouche !

Si tes yeux, ces lacs lumineux,
N'aiment pas qu'un soir triste en eux
Se mire,
Pour ne pas assombrir tes yeux,
Je prendrai le masque joyeux
Du rire !

Mais si ton cœur las est pareil
Au lys qui, brûlant au soleil
Ses charmes,
Penche, de rosée altéré,
Sans feindre, hélas ! j'y verserai
Des larmes.

— Catulle Mendès

Augusta Holmès was once amongst the most important composers of her time. She was born in 1847 to an Irish father and French mother, and, in her youth, Holmès's father established a salon for her at their home in Versailles, giving her a space in which to develop and showcase her talents. Part of a well-connected and musical family, Holmès carved out a place for herself in French artistic circles at a young age: the poet Alfred de Vigny was her godfather and she shared her early compositions with her friend Franz Liszt. She would later become acquainted with Richard Wagner, and forged friendships with figures including Auguste Rodin, Auguste Renoir and Stéphane Mallarmé. Fellow composer Camille Saint-Saëns described her as being of "une physiognomie artistique des plus intéressantes [...], elle est connue, appréciée, classée,"[1] while Mallarmé, under the guise of Ix in *La Dernière Mode,* deems her "un des compositeurs notables de l'époque."[2] Although she never married, Holmès had a long-standing relationship with the poet and *homme de lettres*, Catulle Mendès, to

[1] Camille Saint-Saëns, *Harmonie et Mélodie* (Paris: Calman Lévy, 1885).
[2] Stéphane Mallarmé, *La Dernière Mode* (Sixième Livraison), *Œuvres complètes* (Vol II), ed. Bertrand Marchal (Paris : Gallimard, 2003), p. 610.

whom she bore five children.[3] Mendès played a key role in the complex web of personal and professional relationships which governed the world of art and literature in nineteenth-century Paris, establishing himself as an important artistic nexus through his work as editor of literary journals such as *La Revue fantaisiste* and *La République des lettres*, as well as of the three volumes of the poetry anthology *Le Parnasse contemporain*, published in 1866, 1871 and 1876.

Holmès was a capable lyricist and librettist, and wrote the words to most of her published songs and operatic works herself, though she also set to music select poems by contemporaries, including Alfred de Musset's "A Lydie" — a translation of an ode by Horace — and Emmanuel des Essarts "Chanson Catalane." Despite their close personal ties, Holmès and Mendès only produced one known collaborative work — an art song, entitled "Chanson", for which he wrote the words and she composed the melody and piano accompaniment; the score was published in issue six of Stéphane Mallarmé's fashion magazine, *La Dernière Mode.* The magazine was a short-lived endeavour for Mallarmé, circulating for just eight issues between September and December 1874. Mallarmé wrote the main copy for the magazine himself, under various pseudonyms including Ix, Madame de Ponty and Miss Satin, though he sourced literary contributions — poems and short stories — from friends and contemporaries. Recent critical interest in *La Dernière Mode* makes much of the sections of the magazine penned by Mallarmé; however, the emphasis on the poet's authorial role and editorship of the magazine has typically led scholars to give short shrift to the poetry and prose offerings by authors including Emmanuel des Essarts, François Coppée and Léon Cladel, which appeared in each issue. As part of a wider project to explore the role of collaboration in *La Dernière Mode* through an examination of these commissioned pieces, the present study will focus on Holmès's setting of Mendès's poem, "Chanson", looking at the way words and music interact in the song, and exploring the performative possibilities opened up by the conditions of its creation, publication and reception. Informed by Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "Discourse in the Novel", the article sets out to establish a methodology for analysing song in terms of heteroglossia and dialogism, using this theoretical framework as a basis for a close reading of the "Chanson."

Using Bakhtinian dialogism as a methodology for song analysis

Dialogism — a concept put forward by Mikhail Bakhtin in his essay "Discourse in the Novel", written in the mid-1930s — can be briefly summed up as the view that there is "no existence, no meaning (q.v.), no word (q.v.) or thought that does not enter into dialogue or 'dialogic' ('dialogichekii') relations with the other, that does not exhibit intertextuality in both time and space."[4] The study of song in terms of Bakhtinian dialogism is not commonplace; this is, I suggest, related to Bakhtin's hierarchical view of literature, which

[3] Cf. Gérard Gefen, "About this recording", *HOLMES: Orchestral Works* (CD liner notes) (Hong Kong: Naxos, 1994) <http://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.223449&catNum=223449&filetype=About+this+Recording&language=English>.

[4] Graham Roberts, "A Glossary of Key Terms" in *The Bakhtin Reader*, ed. Pam Morris (London: Arnold, 1994), p. 247.

sees prose and, in particular, the novel as superior to poetry. The supremacy of the novel, for Bakhtin, comes from its dialogic nature — that is, its ability to present different voices and different language systems within the same narrative discourse — while poetry is presented as being typically monologic. However, this premise is contradictory as, on the one hand, Bakhtin states that "the world of poetry is always illuminated by one indisputable discourse,"[5] and on the other, he claims that "the dialogic orientation of discourse is a phenomenon that is, of course, a property of any discourse."[6] Recent scholarship by academics such as Mara Scanlon[7], Jacob Blevins[8] and Stephen Pierson[9] has undermined the hierarchical distinction between poetry and the novel, and has challenged Bakhtin's rejection of dialogism in poetry by applying the theoretical framework offered in "Discourse in the Novel" to lyric poetry.

Bakhtin's notion of dialogism is fundamentally concerned with speech and verbal performance, which can be either oral or imagined. The concept of dialogism hinges upon Bakhtin's contention that linguistic utterances are suffused with heteroglossia, which fragments monologic speech and reveals the many layers of social, cultural and ideological values which are inherent in linguistic expression. Bakhtin defines heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse."[10] This "double-voiced discourse" is a feature of collaborative texts, as Seth Whidden notes: "literary collaboration is an example of Bakhtinian heteroglossia, with multiple languages existing in every word."[11] The nature of this heteroglossia is altered and enriched when collaboration crosses the boundaries between art forms and, in the case of song, the plethora of languages contained within each word is further refracted through the filter of music

As an aesthetic product rather than a mode of discourse with a primarily communicative function, music, like poetry, has often been seen as anathema to Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, and, admittedly, a leap of logic is needed to apply a theory rooted in language to a medium which is — except in the case of song — almost entirely non-linguistic. However, in light of the multiple layers of meaning that can be expressed in sung performance — through musical, linguistic and paralinguistic features — I argue that Bakhtinian dialogism is a very apt methodological standpoint from which to examine song and, in particular, word and music collaborations. After all, as Graham Roberts explains, in Bakhtin's theory "a voice will always have a particular 'intonation' ('intonatisiya') or accentuation ('aktsentuatsiya'), which reflects the values (q.v.) behind the consciousness (q.v.) […]. To listen to the other's voice

[5] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist (Austin,TX: The University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 286.
[6] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 279.
[7] Cf. *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over,* eds Mara Scanlon & Chad Engbers (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[8] Cf. *Dialogism and Lyric Self-Fashioning: Bakhtin and the Voices of a Genre*, ed. Jacob Blevins (Selinsgrove, PA, Susquehanna University, 2010).
[9] Cf. "Dialogism and Monologism in "Song of Myself" in *Poetry and Dialogism: Hearing Over*, pp. 20-38.
[10] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 324.
[11] Seth Whidden, "Introduction: On Collaboration" in *Models of Collaboration in Nineteenth Century French Literature: Several Authors, One Pen,* ed. Seth Whidden (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 1.

means to subject that voice to a 'refraction' ('perelom'), in such a way that what is produced constitutes a 'reaccentuation' of the original voice."[12] When any text is 'voiced' these paralinguistic features become more salient; when words are fused with music, the linguistic content is further refracted and the potential plurality of different viewpoints is multiplied, making song a particularly fruitful subject for analysis through the filter of Bakhtinian dialogism. Indeed, given the potential layers of refraction implicated in song, which, arguably, go beyond that of purely linguistic modes of expression, it is somewhat surprising that, while a few isolated studies in musicology have attempted to apply Bakhtin's theory to piano and orchestral music,[13] to date, there has been scant critical interest in using the notion of dialogism in the study of song.

Bakhtin's theoretical writings — in particular his later works — acknowledge and promote the proximity between music and the manifestation of a multi-voiced discourse in literature, through the use of musical terminology. In his 1963 book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin develops the notion of polyphony, using this musical metaphor to highlight the many layers of interpretation which can arise through the staging of a text either in the mind, through reading or — as in the case of literature in the oral tradition and, similarly, in song — through performance.[14] Polyphony, in literary terms, "is precisely what happens between various consciousnesses, that is, their interaction and interdependence."[15] Bakhtin argues that this interaction is particular to the novels of Dostoevsky, though the same principle can be applied to other texts — not only novels, but also to poetry and, perhaps even more so, to song, which, through performance, unites the individual consciousnesses of lyricist, composer, performer and audience. In "Le Grain de la voix", Roland Barthes highlights the internal tension created when a text is performed orally.

> Le grain de la voix n'en est pas — ou n'est pas seulement — son timbre; la signifiance qu'il ouvre ne peut précisément mieux se définir que par la friction même de la musique et d'autre chose qui est la langue (et pas du tout le message).[16]

It is in the space of this "friction" between music and that "autre chose" which is language that the dialogic nature of song can be realised. The dialogic quality of song is emphasised by the expectation of performance, which presents the song as a latent site of intertextual

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[12] Graham Roberts, "A Glossary of Key Terms" in *The Bakhtin Reader* ed. Pam Morris, London: Arnold, 1994, pp. 251 – 252.

[13] For example Kristian Hibberd in his analysis of polyphony in Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony and Jeffrey Kallberg in his study of nineteenth century piano nocturnes. Cf. Kristian Hibberd, "Shostakovich and 'polyphonic' creativity: The Fourteenth Symphony revisited", in *Shostakovich Studies* 2, ed. Pauline Fairclough (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 190-206 & Jeffrey Kallberg, "The Harmony of the Tea Table: Gender and Ideology in the Piano Nocturne", *Representations*, 39 (Summer 1992), 102-133.

[14] Though as with his distinction between poetry and the novel, Bakhtin establishes a very clear hierarchy, arguing that only select texts – namely, the novels of Dostoevsky and, to an extent, the works of Balzac – are genuinely polyphonic; indeed, in the author's preface, to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin states his specific goal to examine the concept of "the whole" in the polyphonic novel, through a unique focus on Dostoevsky's oeuvre. See "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel", in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 3-4 & p. 79.

[15] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* p. 36.

[16] Roland Barthes, *Le Grain de la voix: Entretiens* (Paris : Seuil, 1981), p. 241.

dialogue whose multiple voices can be brought to life through oral performance and auditory reception. The score of the song, then, is, as Wolfgang Iser asserts, "a kind of junction, where other texts, norms, and values meet and work upon each other; as a point of intersection its core is virtual, and only when actualized — by the potential recipient — does it explode in its plurivocity."[17]

Iser's emphasis on the audience as a means of "actualising" the "other texts, norms and values" which intersect virtually in the literary text or the musical score alludes to a fundamental dialogue between creator and audience which, I argue, is fundamental to Bakhtin's theory and, applied to the study of Holmès's setting of Mendès's "Chanson", allows for a mode of song analysis which — in contrast to a structuralist approach — values and celebrates the collaborative, interdisciplinary creative process by which songs are produced. The reception of song, like the reception of any text, is refracted by knowledge or perceived knowledge of the conditions of its production. This Bakhtinian reading of song operates in line with the New Historicist notion that "the work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator or a class of creators, equipped with a complex, communally shared repertoire of conventions and institutions and practices of society."[18] Given the tight-knit social and personal relationships of the Mallarmé-Mendès-Holmès circle, this contextually-oriented stance is particularly apt for analysing the "Chanson." Holmès and Mendès's relationship would have been a subject of scandalous intrigue for the readers of *La Dernière Mode.* Mendès married Judith Gautier in 1866, though the marriage was an unhappy one, as Gérard Gefen and Joanna Richardson attest.[19] Mendès and Holmès embarked upon a secret affair in the late 1860s but it was only in 1874 that he officially separated from Gautier to be with Holmès, who by this time had already borne two of his

[17] Wolfgang Iser, "Toward a Literary Anthropology" in *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 271.

[18] Stephen Greenblatt, "Towards a Poetics of Culture" in *The New Historicism*, ed. H. Aram Veeser (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-14, (p. 12).

[19] Both Gérard Gefen, in his biography of Augusta Holmès, and Joanna Richardson, in her biography of Judith Gautier, note the obvious tensions in Mendès and Gautier's marriage in the late 1860s and early 1870s, explaining that Judith Gautier became aware of Mendès's relationship with Holmès as early as 1869, as suggested by a letter to Cosima Wagner of 25 August 1870. cf. Joanna Richardson, *Judith Gautier: A Biography* (New York, NY: Franklin Watts Inc., 1986), p. 88. Gefen describes how, when the couple were on a trip to Vienna in 1873 (during which Gautier also had the misfortune of contracting cholera), she discovered that Mendès had set up a home for Holmès in the Austrian capital, in a neighbouring apartment, more sumptuous than their own marital home from home. In spite of this discovery, Gautier ignored Mendès's flagrant infidelity : "elle supporta […] parfaitement le ménage à trois pendant près de cinq ans (par peur de la solitude, sans doute, comme elle le confesse elle-même." Gérard Gefen, *Augusta Holmès, L'Outrancière* (Paris : Pierre Belfond, 1987), p. 136.

children.[20] Published so soon after Mendès's official separation from Judith Gautier, the "Chanson" could be read as a codified public announcement of the relationship between Mendès and Holmès, adding to the "repertoire" of social-cultural circumstances which multiply the dialogic relations informing our reading of the song.

A Bakhtinian reading of Holmès and Mendès's collaborative "Chanson" should also take into account the song's relationship to the other external contributions to the magazine, both within this issue, and across the eight instalments of *La Dernière Mode*. Also featured in this sixth issue of the magazine are Théodore de Banville's sonnet "Marguerite d'Écosse" — part of his 1874 collection *Les Princesses* — and the first part of Léon Cladel's *nouvelle* "L'Hercule"; both of these texts incorporate historical or mythical figures, establishing their place within a rich intertextual network.[21] The contemporary circumstances of the song, its relationship to other texts — both journalistic and literary — in the magazine, and its link to external historical, cultural and textual reference points all serve to situate the song within "the environment in which it lives and takes shape, [...] dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance."[22]

Dialogism in the "Chanson"

Thematically speaking, the words of the "Chanson" can be read as a pastiche of the medieval tradition of the *canso,* a song dating back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which "is typically aristocratic in tone and directed by an aspiring poet-lover to an unattainable lady."[23] The language and imagery in the song reinforce the status of the work in the neo-medieval tradition of the 1800s; the delicate images of reeds and birds, and the lexis of the "coeur chaste" highlight the themes of chastity and female vulnerability bound up with medieval

[20] Mallarmé's intimate relationship with Holmès and Mendès is suggested by the fact that he seems to have been in on the secret of their ongoing illicit relationship, as noted by Joanna Richardson (Richardson, p. 92); while Richardson does not provide concrete evidence for this, she, like Gefen, cites a letter from Mallarmé to Holmès in which the poet expresses his concern for the composer's well-being, after she appeared sad and distracted at a social gathering of July 1871. This encounter would have been during the early stage of Holmès's second pregnancy by Mendès, and Mallarmé's written expression of concern supports the argument that he had a close personal connection with the couple. For further information on Holmès and Mendès's unsettled relationship see Colin B. Bailey, "The Daughters of Catulle Mendès" in *The Annenberg Collection: Masterpieces of Impressionism and Post-impressionism*, eds Susan Alyson Stein & Asher Ethan Miller (New York, NY, / New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Yale University Press, 2009), p. 133.

[21] According to English and French translations of Bakhtin's writings, the term "intertextuality" / "intertextualité" does not feature as part of his theory of heteroglossia and dialogism; nevertheless, the notion of intertextuality is inherent in the concept of Bakhtinian dialogism, and the ideas of heteroglossia, dialogism and polyphony would be central to the development of the concept of intertextuality by Julia Kristeva and influenced the work of later theorists including Roland Barthes, Michael Riffaterre and Gérard Genette. Cf. Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2003). I will thus use the adjective "intertextual" and the noun "intertextuality" as part of my argument for understanding the dialogic nature of Holmès"s setting of Mendès's "Chanson", whilst emphasizing the importance of voice which makes Bakhtin's theory such an apt methodology for analysing song settings of literary texts and, indeed, song in general.

[22] Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel", p. 272.

[23] Anne L. Klinck, "Introduction" in *An Anthology of Ancient and Medieval Women's Song* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 1-16 (p. 6).

romance, affirming the place of the "Chanson" within an ongoing dialogue of medieval literary production and reception.

The literature of the Middle Ages was a source of fascination to nineteenth-century scholars, and to artists and literary figures, who adopted what they believed to be medieval conventions as part of an idealised Romantic re-creation of courtly love poetry. Indeed, it has been argued that the very idea of courtly love was a nineteenth-century "invention"; Gaston Paris coined the term *amour courtois* in his 1883 article on "Lancelot du Lac: Le Conte de la Charrette"[24] to refer to the medieval concept of *fin'amor*, suggesting a growing interest — both popular and scholarly — in medieval literature in the late 1800s.[25] The courtly songs of the Middle Ages were typically performed by male *troubadours* (or, in the north of France *trouvères*); as such the appropriation of the literary and romantic conventions of medieval French poetry in Mendès's poem carves out a place for the "Chanson" within an oral tradition, paving the way for it to be set to music.

The layers of "refracted" discourse offered by the "Chanson" are multiplied by the gender shifting invited by the conditions of its publication and reception. The song creates a strange paradox as the sentiments of the male suitor are intended to be interpreted by a female performer.[26] The dialogue between word and music, and, indeed, between the vocal melody and piano accompaniment in Holmès's song setting can be read as giving voice to the woman, who, in the poem, was silenced by the patriarchal conventions of courtly love and by the masculine perspective offered by the speaker. The "Chanson" can thus be seen as a re-framing of the medieval *canso,* which — although not necessarily misogynistic — was a realm of male self-expression, in which men competed with each other to show off their linguistic and lyrical prowess.[27] The transformations of gender and the idea of gendered performance offer another plane of refraction for the dialogic subject.[28] Jacob Blevins notes that Bakhtin's theory of dialogism can usefully applied to lyric verse because the "lyric subject of a poem [is viewed] not as a single character, but as an instance of the game of

[24] It is worth noting, here, that Augusta Holmès had begun a one-act opera, entitled *Lancelot du Lac* in 1870, though this was never finished and remains unpublished. Holmès's interest in this medieval tale as the inspiration for what was to be her first operatic work underscores the vogue in the 1870s and 1880s for re-inventing medieval tales and traditions, and highlights its influence on her musical oeuvre.

[25] Cf. David Hult, "Gaston Paris and the Invention of Courtly Love" in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, eds R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 192 – 224.

[26] Although the range of the voice part means that this melody could be performed by a mezzo-soprano or baritone, the nature of the song - an art song for the salon - and the context in which the song is published - in a women's fashion magazine - suggest that both Holmès and Mallarmé envisaged this as a song for a female performer.

[27] Questions of gender and feminism in Medieval poetry and, in particular, in the *canso* have been the subject of much debate by scholars; for a comprehensive account of recent readings of the place of women in medieval French literature see E. Jane Burns, "Courtly Love: Who Needs It? Recent Feminist Work in the Medieval French Tradition", *Signs* 27.1 (Autumn 2001), 23-57.

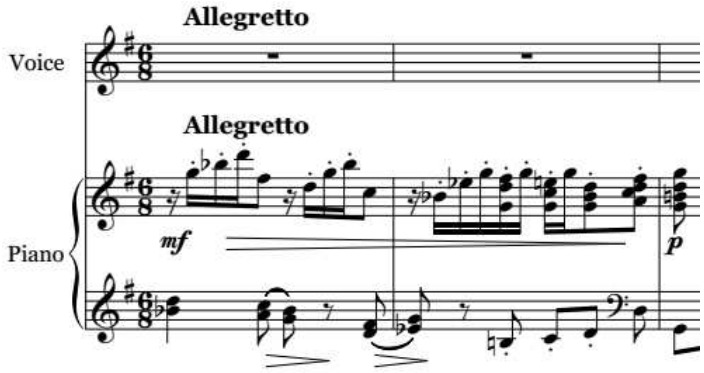
[28] Although there is not space in this short article to consider the question of gender as performance in great detail, it is important, here, to emphasise the relevance of Judith Butler's theory, put forward in *Gender Trouble*, that "the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence." Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 25.

imitating various characterizations, a game that engages the reader in his or her simultaneous recognition of the subject imitated *and* of the fact that it is really merely an imitation, only a game."[29] The play with voice afforded by Holmès's musical setting of the "Chanson" similarly engages the speaker in a "game of imitating various characterizations", which transforms the gender dynamic of the medieval tradition referenced by the song, and establishes the speaking subject as a site of "dialogized heteroglossia". The question of gender raised by oral performance emphasises the importance of the social and cultural context in which texts are produced and received;[30] I argue that the conditions surrounding the production, publication and potential performances of the "Chanson" all have an impact on the reception of the song by readers of *La Dernière Mode* and by audiences who hear it performed in the salon.

A Bakhtinian analysis of the "Chanson"

The opening of the "Chanson" is marked "Allegretto" in both the voice and piano parts, suggesting a light-hearted, if anxious mood. The first two bars of the song are detached from the main part of the song, and set the scene for the unfolding of this medieval-inspired romance.

Figure 1



The groups of staccato semiquavers and quavers in the right hand of the piano part (see fig. 1) reflect the lover's excitement as he prepares to declare his feelings, while the gradual diminuendo through this introductory episode suggests his tentative approach. The "Chanson" is fraught with uncertainty, in part thanks to the repetition of the word "Si" at the

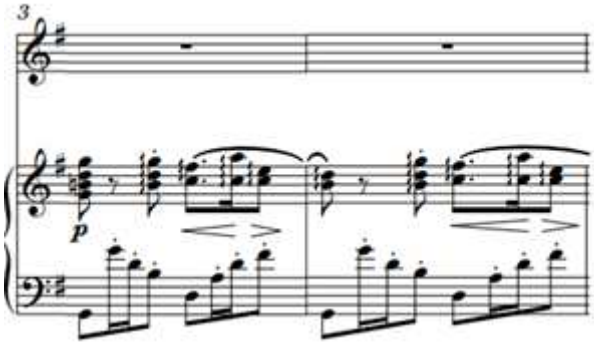
[29] Cf. Jacob Blevins, "The Man with the Blue Guitar" in *Dialogism and Lyric Self-Fashioning: Bakhtin and the Voices of Genre,* p. 205.

[30] In the introduction to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Caryl Emerson notes that "a voice, Bakhtin everywhere tells us, is not just words or ideas strung together: it is a "semantic position," a point of view on the world, it is one personality orienting itself among other personalities within a limited field." In order to understand this "point of view on the world", a Bakhtinian reading should take acknowledge the importance of the cultural, social and political climate in which a text is produced. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* p. xxxvi.

start of the first two stanzas, and “Et si” at the start of the final stanza. This instability is reflected musically throughout the song by the recurring accidentals and shifting key signatures. These two introductory bars are in the key of G major, though this is slightly undercut by the prevalence of B♭s and E♭s — accidentals which appear in the parallel minor — and it is only after the first two bars that the song settles into the key of G major, where it remains until the beginning of the second verse. The decorative introduction in figure 1 ends on the tonic chord of G major, marking a moment of commitment, as the left hand of the piano accompaniment moves down the keyboard (one might say to its rightful place) and into the bass clef, ready for the main part of the song to begin.

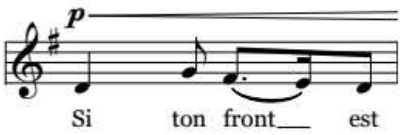
Bars three and four introduce a lilting rhythmical dotted quaver pattern which is an ongoing theme in the piano accompaniment and later also becomes a recurring motif in the vocal part.

Figure 2



The phrasing of the motif crosses over bar lines, suggesting a carefree attitude, perhaps alluding to the transgressive nature of the move the suitor is about to make in expressing his feelings to his beloved. The rhythmical pattern introduced in bars 3 and 4 is echoed in the first bar of the voice part (bar 5) in an altered configuration, with a more regular melodic shape, and this time contained within a single bar.

Figure 3

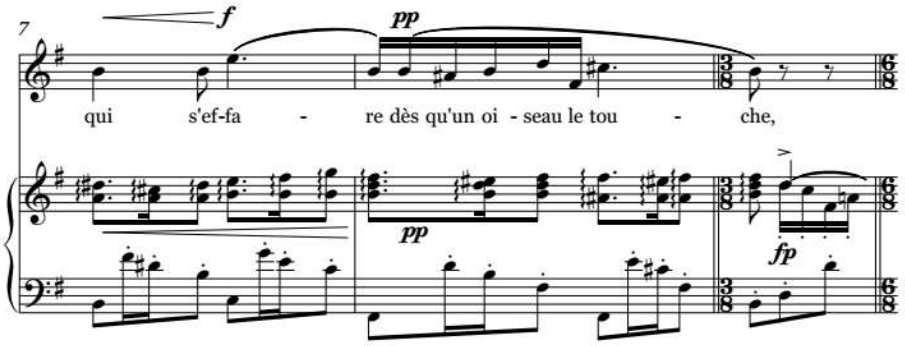


Comparing figure 2 with figure 3, we see that the motif introduced by the piano in bars 3 and 4 changes from the undulating melodic shape, seen in the top line of the right hand piano part, (G-F#-A-E-D) to a simple melodic “arc” (D-G-F#-E-D); the singer also refines the rhythmical pattern, replacing the staccato quaver which precedes the dotted motif with a legato crotchet. There are, I suggest, two possible readings of the altered repetition of this motif. One might see this rhythmical pattern established by the piano as a means by which the speaker can practise addressing his beloved, before he dares to speak his feelings aloud.

The conformity to the strictures of bar lines in bar 5 suggests a measured and perhaps tentative approach to the actual declaration of love, adhering to established conventions surrounding courtly romance. In this reading, an internal tension — both structural and melodic — is established between the imagined rehearsal — performed in the right hand line of the piano — which continues its melody throughout the first line of the "Chanson", and the real, "voiced" expression of the singer, who enters in bar 5. The fact that "song" of the right hand of the piano is in chords offers a multiplicity of potential voices, all working in dialogue with that of the singer.

Whatever doubts are suggested by the hints of the minor key and the careful following of the strictures of the bar lines, the opening bars of the voice part are marked with a crescendo, implying a growing confidence on the part of the lover. This newfound self-assurance is reinforced by a subtle act of defiance, as the units of the musical phrase begin to spread across bar lines, as in the piano part. For example, in bars 7 one might normally expect the word "s'effare" to last for three quaver beats, in keeping with the triple time signature of the "Chanson"; however, Holmès's setting allows this word to carry on for an extra semi-quaver, spilling into bar 8.

Figure 4

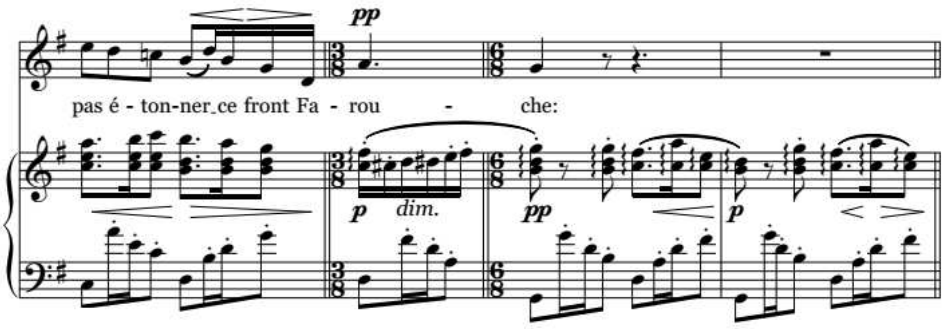


This disruption of the rhythmical flow has a knock-on effect, causing the remainder of this bar to seem rushed and flighty, like the timid lover who is frightened even by the delicate touch of a bird's wing, and delaying the final quaver of the phrase until the beginning of bar 9. This act of transgression, perhaps, suggests the lengths the suitor will go to win his lady's heart; conversely, the piano accompaniment in bars 7–9 fits neatly into the bar lines, foregrounding the structural deviance of the vocal melody. At this point of the song the suitor and his lady seem to be working in dialogue, engaged in a game of transgressive advance and retreat.

The second part of the first verse (bars 10–15) brings further uncertainty, evident through a series of unsettled chords. This harmonic instability reflects the repeated "Si", which begins each stanza of Mendès's poem, suggesting that the speaker is judging his actions carefully to respond to the sensibilities of his desired companion. Echoing bars 7-9 (fig. 4), in bars 13-15 the lover seems to gloss over the words "étonner ce front Farouche", tripping lightly through a set of semi-quavers, based around the G-major arpeggio; this delicate ornamental passage

presents display of male vulnerability, paralleling the timid reaction of the beloved, and suggesting that at this tense moment, the suitor, too, might be described as “farouche”.

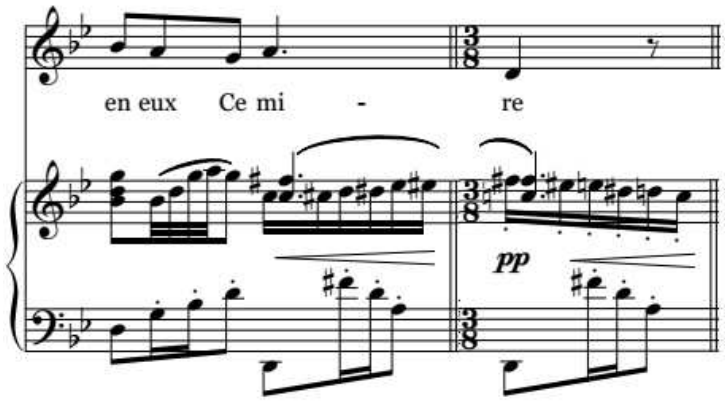
Figure 5



In the accompaniment, these final bars of the first stanza bring a resolution, with a chromatic run of semi-quavers in bar 14, leading back to the tonic chord of G major. The first phase of the suitor’s profession of love is over, and the light-hearted dotted quaver motif resumes at the start of bar 15, as if allowing the lady space to consider her suitor’s romantic declaration and to offer a response.

In the second verse of the “Chanson” the female beloved seems to take the upper hand, and the sombre tone of both the words and the music hint that, perhaps, the suitor’s actions will not be enough to win his lady’s affection. This middle phase of the song sees a change in key, modulating into B♭ major; as the relative of G minor, this shift was prefigured in the opening lines of the vocal part, through the prevalence of the minor third (B♭). The poetic cliché of the beloved’s eyes as “lacs lumineux” is paralleled by the musical cliché of the key change, which signals a darker, more reflective passage. The momentum created by the lilting dotted quavers in the opening lines of the song is lost as this motif is superseded by straight quavers, which underscore the melancholy mood of the words. The metaphorical presentation of the beloved’s eyes, which “défendent qu’un soir triste en eux se mire” illustrates the idealistic nature of this nineteenth-century interpretation of courtly love. The idea of reflection also emphasises the dialogic nature of the song, in which each utterance — verbal or non-verbal — is responsive, and works in dialogue not only with other voices in the same work, but also with the textual experiences of composer and reader. In bars 23-24 of Holmès’s setting of the “Chanson” the tensions between these heteroglot voices are played out, as the motif of reflection is taken up in the accompaniment, through the chromatic runs in the right hand, starting on a C# which almost mirror each other, first ascending then descending.

Figure 6



[31]

However, by listening closely and looking at the extract above, we can see that this is not a true reflection, as the descending chromatic scale skips a note, missing the C# and jumping a whole tone from D♮ to the C♮ on which it began. This imperfect reflection suggests that the beloved will not return the image of love she sees before her — despite the speaker's efforts, there is still a chance that his love may remain unrequited. In *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century,* Barbara W. Tuchman describes the typical trajectory of courtly romance which

> moved from worship through declaration of passionate devotion, virtuous rejection by the lady, renewed wooing with oaths of eternal fealty, moans of approaching death from unsatisfied desire, heroic deed of valor which won the lady's heart by prowess, consummation of the secret love, followed by endless adventures and subterfuges to a tragic denouement. [32]

The three verses of the "Chanson" seem to reflect the early stages of this process; my reading of the inverted chromatic run in the piano accompaniment in bars 23-24 emphasises the power of the female respondent, who can control her suitor, luring him in with her beauty and creating romantic tension by her "virtuous rejection". Through the interaction of the piano and voice, and the intertextual referencing of the conventions of courtly love, the "Chanson" thus offers a re-framing of this patriarchal literary tradition in which men compete to win their lady's love, instead revealing the (usually silent) power held by women.

Following the imperfect reflection of the chromatic runs in the piano accompaniment, the right hand is given a "voice" of its own in bars 24 – 29, singing a melody which parallels that of the singer, but a third higher. This, I suggest, can be read as the voice of the lady who is now given the opportunity to enter into "conversation" with her suitor.

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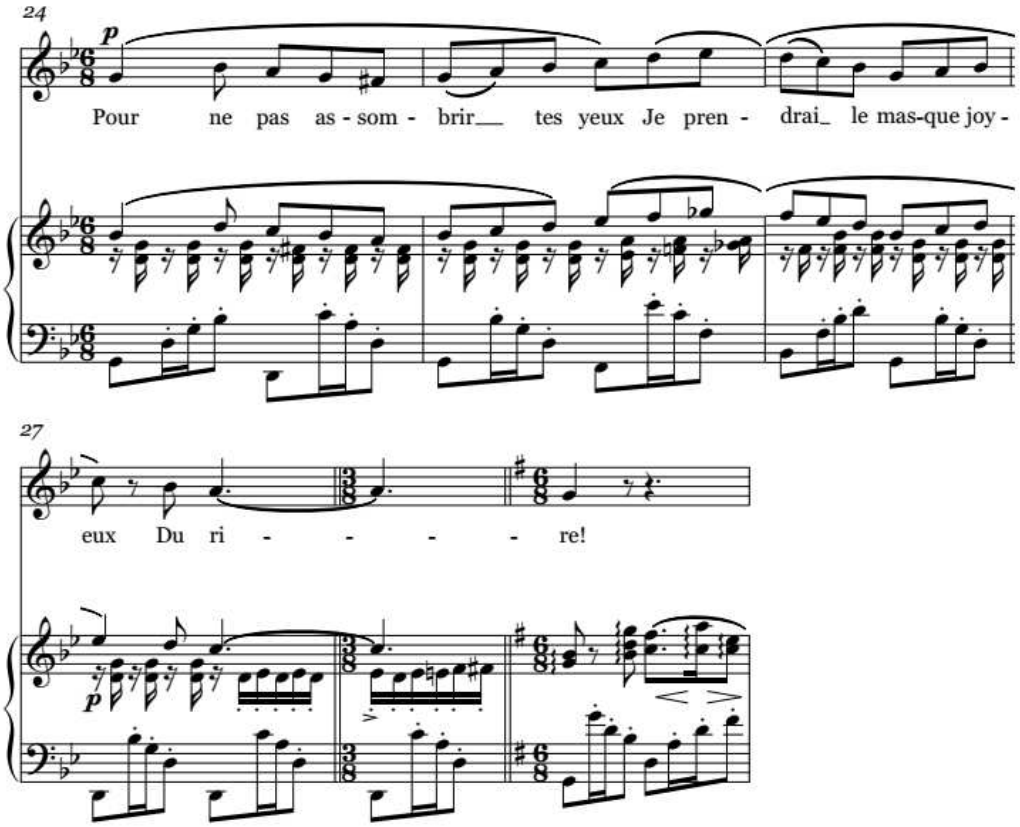
[31] The misspelling and capitalisation of "se mire" in this typesetting have been copied from the original manuscript in *La Dernière Mode*.

[32] cf. Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1978), p. 67.

Figure 7

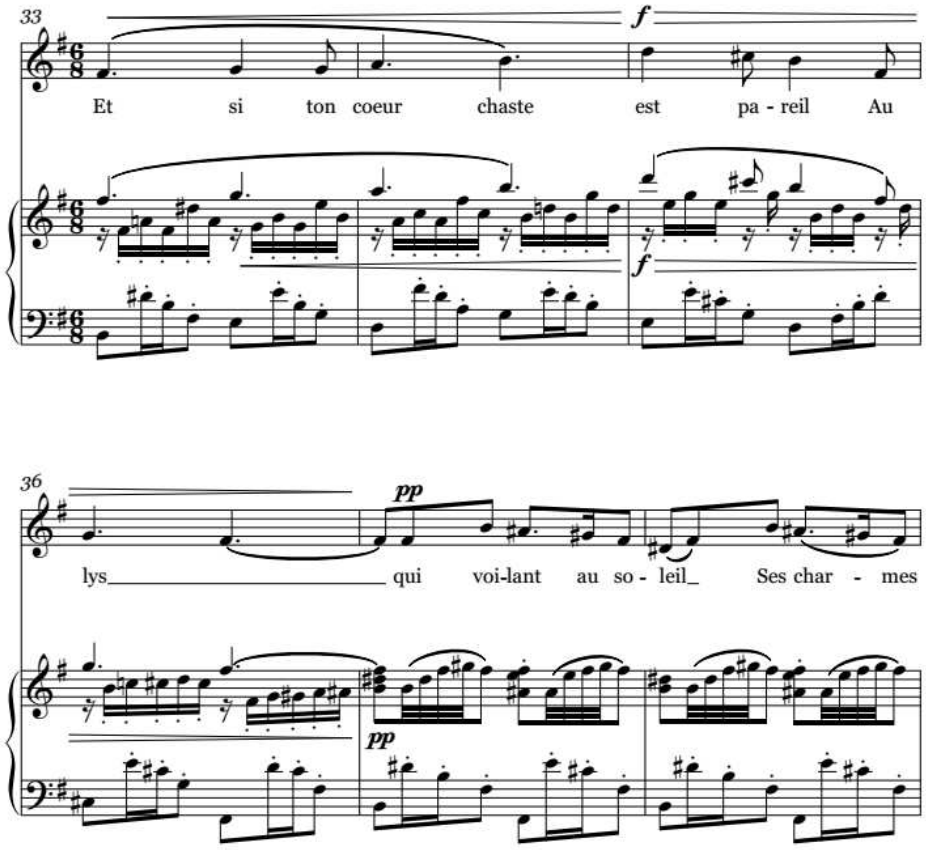


The close match and comfortable harmony between the tune of the vocal line and that of the top line of the accompaniment suggests that the beloved is succumbing to the lover's advances; this is reinforced in bars 29-32 as the dotted quaver pattern introduced in bars 3 - 4 returns once again in the right hand of the accompaniment, re-instating a joyful mood on the word "rire".

The opening of the final stanza — this time beginning "Et si" — brings another change of heart which serves as a reminder of the beloved's "unattainable" status and reinforces the uncertainty which colours the entire song. Beginning in bar 33, the mood of verse three shifts to one of resignation, expressed by the drawn-out legato opening which matches the delicate simplicity of the "lys" to which the beloved's "coeur chaste" is compared. The image of the lily has heraldic associations, evoking the fleur-de-lys and reinforcing the song's intertextual relationship to the courtly love conventions of medieval poetry; lilies are also associated with chastity and purity and this flattering simile reflects the suitor's fears that his virtuous lady will not yield to his advances.[33] In bars 33-36 the voice and piano are — quite literally — singing on the same note, with the right hand of the accompaniment playing a sort of descant which echoes the voice part, an octave above.

[33] For a detailed assessment of the significance of the lily in Medieval literature, see Mary Channon Caldwell, "Flower of the Lily: Late-Medieval Religious and Heraldic Symbolism in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Français 146" *Early Music History,* 33 (January 2014), 1 – 60.

Figure 8

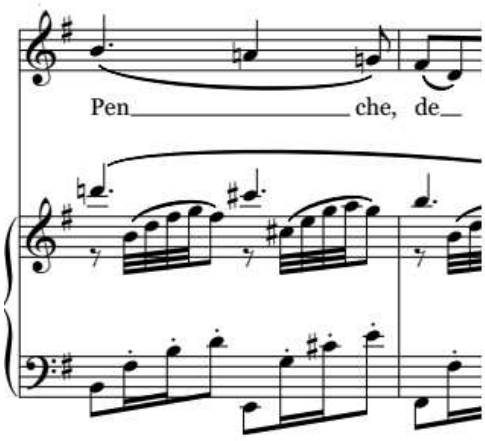


This *cantabile* phrase in the right hand of the piano part can be read as expressing the beloved's sentiments at this point in the song; the fact that she "sings" on the same note as the suitor suggests a meeting of minds and hints that perhaps his declaration of love might be enough to capture his lady's heart. The description of her "coeur chaste" which hides its charms from the sun emphasises the beloved's beauty but also draws attention to the dynamic of anticipation and unfulfilled desire, which moves the suitor to tears.

The dotted rhythm seen at the beginning of the "Chanson" returns in the voice part in bar 37, adding a lively momentum and reinvigorating the song, just as the suitor claims to be able to do to his lady's heart if he finds it wilting like a sun-parched lily. However, this passage is marked *pianissimo*, suggesting that the lover is still tentative and cannot yet celebrate the triumph of having overcome his lady's "virtuous rejection". The tension between the subdued quality of the voice part suggested by the dynamics and the spirited lilting of the dotted rhythm in bars 37 and 38, highlights the sense of continued uncertainty at this late stage of the song, and invites a plurality of different readings, based on the dialogue between these different potential voices co-existing within the vocal line. The final lines of the song return to the opening key of G major, suggesting that such tensions might be resolved; nevertheless, despite the major key's clichéd association with happiness and fortuity, the cheerful mood is undercut the prevalence of accidentals — in particular A# (B♭) and D# (E♭) — which hint at the parallel minor, as in the opening lines.

The song remains unsettled throughout the second half of this final verse: the mood changes again at the word “Penche” in bar 39, which is drawn out and, with its descending melodic pattern, seems to perform the process of leaning over, disrupting the jovial flow of the opening motif repeated in the preceding bars.

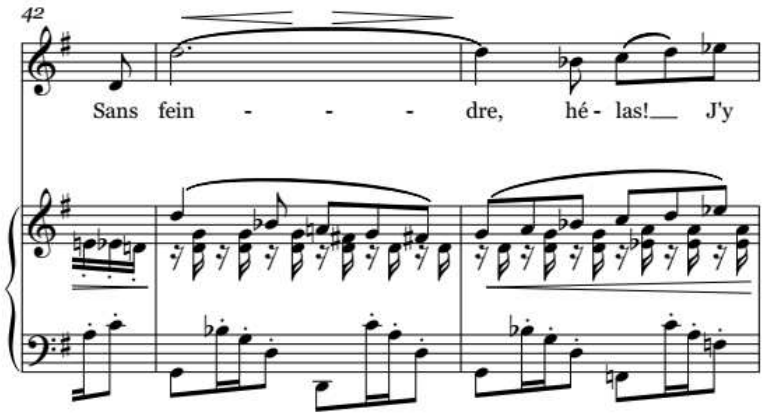
Figure 9



At this point, the balance in the dialogue between voice and piano changes: the low register and slow descent of the voice part allows the piano to take centre stage, and the top line of the right hand sings its own tune whilst sustaining the simple quaver / semi-quaver bass in the left hand. The slow melodic descent, seen in both the voice and top line of the right-hand piano part, is countered by the decorative ascending runs, which symbolise the beauty of the beloved, and characterise her once again as a temptress, whom the suitor cannot possess.

The closing bars of the “Chanson” offer a dramatic and tragic conclusion: the octave interval of “sans feindre” gives the suitor a chance to reveal his true feelings in a rather exposed musical passage. The poignancy of his emotion is reinforced by the crescendo and diminuendo on the word “feindre”, seemingly intensifying before being reined in, embodying the paradox of concealing and revealing which is central to the tradition of courtly romance. The exclamatory “hélas” builds up to the top E♭, which forms the climax of a melodic “arc”, as the lover removes his mask and allows the intensity of his emotions to be revealed.

Figure 10



With this outburst over, the melody descends back to the lower end of the vocal range, returning to a resigned pattern of straight quavers, based on the G minor scale. By this point, all seems to be lost and the song ends on a sombre note as the suitor realises that sadness is his fate because, in order to revive his beloved's wilting heart, he must shed tears at her resistance. Ultimately, the song seems to present an unresolved process of courtly romance, in which the suitor is trapped in continual cycle of "virtuous rejection" and "renewed wooing" with no hope of winning over his delicate lady.

Conclusions and implications of a Bakhtinian reading of song

Although there has not been scope in this article to examine the implications of ideas of performance in the magazine as a whole, considering Holmès's setting of Mendès's "Chanson" through the filter of Bakhtinian theory emphasises the rich network of inter-art and intertextual references at play in *La Dernière Mode.* Mallarmé's use of various pseudonyms — female and male — points to the polyphonic nature of the magazine, highlighting its aptitude for analysis in light of Bakhtin's ideas of heteroglossia and dialogism. By adopting the mask of journalistic personae such as Madame de Ponty and Miss Satin, Mallarmé creates "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses [...], a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world."[34] However, the reading of the text is further refracted by the intra-textual network which Mallarmé creates in the magazine, through the external contributions – poems and short stories – which are included in each issue. The heteroglossia present in the "Chanson", and explored in this article can thus be understood as operating on a micro-level within the confines of a much larger dialogic text, as well as on a macro-level chiming in with "the environment in which it lives and takes shape, dialogized heteroglossia, anonymous and social as language but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance."

[34] Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* p. 9.

The dialogue between Holmès's setting of Mendès's "Chanson" and traditions of medieval oral poetry examined in this article illustrate that heteroglossia is not only present in literary works or confined to linguistic media; in fact, dialogic relations can operate across a range of different art forms. Studies of word and music have tended to isolate these two elements of song, or to assume that words must always predate music; the Bakhtinian analysis put forward in this article allows for reading of song which overcomes this assumption and accommodates the complex relationship between words and music as being, at once, entities in their own right and yet inextricably linked by and within the song. Whether attributable to one or more creators, the words and music of a song each have their own individual intertextual links and references, which are further multiplied when they are united in this alchemical entity. In turn, once the song has been read, performed or heard, both words and music are further suffused with a dialogism which refracts and multiplies the polyphony of each. The reciprocal relationship between the reception of song and of its constituent parts makes Bakhtin's theory a particularly useful framework for understanding inter-art relations and is particularly relevant to the voiced art of song, which creates an ideal environment for the proliferation of heteroglot voices.

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