

CONTROLLING READERS: GUILLAUME DE MACHAUT AND HIS LATE MEDIEVAL AUDIENCE

Guillaume de Machaut (1300–77) was the master poet of fourteenth-century France. He established models for much of the vernacular poetry written by subsequent generations, and he was instrumental in institutionalizing the lay reader. In particular, his longest and most important work, the *Voir dit*, calls attention to the coexistence of public and private reading practices through its intensely hybrid form: sixty-three poems and ten songs invite an oral performance, while forty-six private prose letters as well as elaborate illustrations and references to its own materiality promote a physical encounter with the book.

In *Controlling Readers*, Deborah McGrady uses Machaut's corpus as a case study to explore the impact of lay literacy on the culture of late medieval Europe. Arguing that Machaut and his bookmakers were responding to contemporary debates surrounding literacy, McGrady first accounts for the formal invention of the lay reader in medieval art and literature, then analyses Machaut and his bookmakers' innovative use of both narrative and bibliographical devices to try to control the responses of his readers and promote intimate and sensual reading practices in place of the more common public performances of court culture. McGrady's erudite and exhaustive study is key to understanding Machaut, his works, and his influence on the history of reading in the fourteenth century and beyond.

(Studies in Book and Print Culture)

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Controlling Readers

Guillaume de Machaut and His Late Medieval Audience

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To my beloved parents, Ralph and Darleen McGrady

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Introduction: Reading and the Laity

Reading, not writing, was the dominant literary mode in the Middle Ages

– John Dagenais¹

Reading has a history that marks time by the responses of writers, bookmakers, and audiences to conventional interpretative practices.² When evolving theories on the purpose and value of texts, changing modes of delivery, advances in book technology, and newly acquired skills and preferences of a given audience converge, the resulting reading experience announces a rupture with the past. Late medieval France offers especially fertile ground to study the influence of these variables on reading because of the progressive realignment of book culture in response to a growing literate laity. From the twelfth century onward, French society increasingly depended on a literate culture to organize its legal, religious, and social structures.³ By the fourteenth century, the nobility had fully recognized the written word as a key source of power, prestige, and pleasure. The resulting upsurge in the demand for manuscripts was so great that industries and schools introduced over the course of the high Middle Ages to cater to clerics and academics expanded to answer the more profitable demands for books by court culture.⁴ This passion for books affected every aspect of daily life, including bureaucracy,⁵ religious observance,⁶ familial relations,⁷ and even living spaces, as manors and palaces carved out room for libraries and studioli.⁸ Artisans responded by creating new furnishings, such as improved lecterns, prie-dieux, and chests, to display and store books.⁹ In the codices produced for the nobility, workshops transferred to vernacu-

lar writings layouts and designs previously reserved for university textbooks.¹⁰ Hence they altered book dimensions and added apparatuses, such as tables of contents, indices, illuminations, and chapter headings. They instituted a layout more conducive to reading, creating an aerated page through consistent punctuation, greater interlinear and intercolumn spacing, and new scripts that reduced the need for obscure abbreviations.¹¹ This new lay constituency also affected the types of books written and reproduced.¹² For example, the translation campaign instigated by John the Good and enhanced by his son Charles V spoke to the needs of a growing literate public untrained in Latin but interested in learning and in promoting the royal family, the vernacular language, and nationalism.¹³ Yet further proof of the influence of lay literacy on book production is exhibited in Books of Hours, as they constitute the earliest example of a genre created exclusively in response to this new audience.¹⁴

Alongside efforts to accommodate the laity were the bitter complaints of learned bibliophiles concerning the actual skills of this so-called literate public. In 1344, Richard de Bury provided a scathing portrait of the lay reader: ‘Laymen, [...] who look in the same way at a book lying upside down as when it is open in its natural way, are wholly unworthy of the intercourse of books.’¹⁵ According to Richard de Bury, the lay reader might covet books and hold them in his grubby hands, but he would never be worthy of them or in possession of the skills necessary to unearth their riches. Malcolm Parkes’s study of medieval literacy bolsters the claims in the *Philobiblon*. His research shows that there was a striking difference between the skills of professional readers (clerics), pragmatic readers (bureaucrats), and recreational readers (the laity).¹⁶ But whether the laity mastered the reading methods of the learned, or indeed even expressed interest in doing so, matters little. For an entire industry sought to foster a lay reading experience that would introduce a more intimate and personal encounter with books in place of the dominant paradigm of public readings at court, where the audience was physically distanced from the written word.

In the case of the long-established domain of court literature, a laity now in possession of at least rudimentary reading skills instigated changes not only in the presentation, but also in the structure, content, and intended use of these writings. Traditionally composed for oral performance, courtly literature was typically mediated by performers and their interpretations sanctioned through community discussion.¹⁷ But to ca-

ter to a new type of audience, the industry reshaped the codex and populated vernacular books with textual and visual allusions to lay readers handling the written word. Already in the twelfth century, vernacular writers had made space in their texts for fanciful depictions of more intimate reading experiences: Yvain falls upon the scene of a young woman reading to her parents in a garden in Chrétien de Troyes's romance; a lady desperate to memorialize her love wraps the body of a nightingale in a fabric embroidered with text in Marie de France's *Laüstic*; and innumerable lovers in vernacular romance, from Tristan and Yseult to the Châtelain de Coucy and the Dame de Fauvel, depend on the written word to assure intimacy when distance or *losangers* renders physical meetings impossible. In a similar vein, thirteenth-century writers and bookmakers increasingly depended on the material artefact to give texture to similar lived reading experiences. For example, Richard de Fournival anticipates that his lady will be seduced by both sound and sight when studying his *Bestiaire d'amour*.¹⁸ The influx in the thirteenth century of hybrid books, that is, works that conjoined multiple genres and media, must be viewed as an effort to move earlier fictional accounts of intimate reading experiences to another level. For the hybrid text makes possible a multi-sensorial reading, as it requires an audience to mix reception technologies (e.g., singing, speaking, viewing) to access the text.¹⁹

Reading scenes play an integral role in the next generation of vernacular writings, where audiences found compelling models of intimate reading practices. Later vernacular poets populated their stories with private readers seeking out solitude and secluded settings, such as gardens and bedrooms, so as to read romances alone or with a lover. Dante's Paulo and Francesca reading the prose *Lancelot*, Toute-Belle in the *Voir dit* (1363–5) hiding from the court to read Machaut's *Fonteinne amoureuse*, and Flos's patron in the *Prison amoureuse* (1372–3) rereading and meditating on the poet's writings are only a few of the lay readers crowding late medieval literature. These authors also inserted reproductions of letters in prose into their narratives to incite audiences to extend the private reading practices favored for these intimate texts to the larger frame of the courtly romance.

Late medieval writers and bookmakers further enhanced the portrait of the individual reader through direct reference to actual book recipients. They used these moments to reshape the poet and patron relationship into that of a learned writer and a privileged reader. In spite of the

clear advantages associated with public performance as a venue for ‘publicizing’ a poet’s fame,²⁰ many late medieval vernacular writers nevertheless aspired that their books would penetrate the *camera regis*, moving from the loud banquet halls to the bedside tables and lecterns of their readers.²¹ This shift also entailed favouring small group gatherings or, better, emphasized the individual reader’s retirement from crowds so that silent meditation on the written word could be cultivated. For example, Jean Froissart insists on registering an intimate reading scene afforded his books. On two separate occasions in his *Chroniques* he details the translation of his courtly texts from the public halls to lords’ privy chambers. In the first case, Froissart recounts his evening visits to the private chambers of the Count of Foix, where he read aloud his lengthy Arthurian romance, *Meliador*.²² In the final volume of his *Chroniques*, Froissart speaks of Richard II’s receipt of his love poetry. Here again, Froissart offers a vivid portrait of the book moving from the public space to a more intimate realm. He boasts that King Richard first paged through the book while inquiring about its subject matter. Once he learned of its amorous content, the king ordered a servant to place the book in his private chambers for later reading.²³ Thus even within the context of a public book presentation, allusions to the potential for individual reading practices emerge.²⁴

For vernacular writers, the concept of the individual reader promised for them and their works an aura of authority traditionally reserved for spiritual and political counsellors. In an early fifteenth-century copy of the complete works of Christine de Pizan offered to Isabeau de Bavière, the *Cité des Dames* Master insists on the intimate reading experience in the frontispiece (British Library, MS Harley 4431, fol. 3).²⁵ Foregoing the conventional setting of a reception hall for the book presentation, the illuminator relocates the event within the walls of the queen’s private chambers. In this extraordinary scene, Christine offers up her sizeable book to the queen, who is seated on the edge of her bed. A tightly knit circle of ladies-in-waiting frames the event. Devoid of distractions yet decorated with sumptuous fabrics, ample seating (including a bedside chair and table), and space and light to accommodate various forms of intimate reading (whether individual or small group study), the room provides an ideal setting for the type of serious study Christine hoped the queen would bring to her compendium of didactic writings. In the accompanying dedication, Christine offers the queen the model of learned readers who seek in books wisdom rather than simple entertainment:

Car, si que les sages tesmoignent
 En leurs escrips, les gens qui songent
 De lire en livre volentiers,
 Ne peut qu'aucunement n'eslongnent
 ygnorence

[For as wise men testify in their writings, people who think of reading books willingly can only chase away ignorance]²⁶

Disposing of modesty topoi, Christine expresses the ambitions of late medieval vernacular writers that they be viewed as equals to wise men or the *auctores* and that their books be approached as the most effective remedy against human ignorance.

The efforts of vernacular authors to associate intimate reading strategies with their writings altered the roles of all who came in contact with the text. For bookmakers, the push to conceive of vernacular literature as worthy of private study and serious meditation secured the value of the material artefact at the same time that it enhanced their own role as intermediaries responsible for translating the work into material form. This increased emphasis on the benefits of reading secular writings also assigned greater responsibility to the audience. For the private reader, individual study was the first step to physical, moral, and spiritual improvement.²⁷ A shift from listening to fables and poetry as respectable entertainment to studying the vernacular work for deeper meaning resulted in an influx of debate poetry in which writers refrained from recording a judgment in their texts, deferring instead to their real audiences.²⁸ Increasingly called upon to expound on the text, to interpret its significance, and to take from it moral and ethical lessons, the laity was presented as only steps away from practising the meditative solitude associated with the learned. Encouraged to pick up books once produced for banquet halls, the laity was urged to retire to bedchambers, *studioli*, or even a recessed window seat, where the book became an escape route from the noise of contemporary life and an entrance into a more contemplative and personal space of quietude. The consequences of situating Froissart's Arthurian romance and love poetry or Christine's courtly literature within the parameters of the intimate and increasingly private realm of the bedroom should not be overlooked.²⁹ Romances and lyric poetry, long viewed as texts to be recited or read aloud, passed into an experimental period in late medieval France. Courtly works could be and were approached through different technologies that

spanned the reading spectrum from oral recitation to silent study.³⁰ Like professional readers, the laity was called upon to add to and enhance the vernacular text through meditative reflection.

No late medieval author engaged so intensely with the new status afforded courtly literature or helped institutionalize the lay reader more than Guillaume de Machaut (1300–77). In particular, his *Voir dit* calls attention to the coexistence of public and private reading practices in late medieval society through its intensely hybrid form. Within the frame of a 6867-line narrative, he includes a panoply of genres and registers, each distinctive because of its anticipated delivery mode. The sixty-three poems and ten songs invite an oral performance, while deictic references to the book's materiality, forty-six private prose letters, and elaborate pictorial programs privilege a physical encounter with the book. Through this complex structure, Machaut problematizes the text's material presentation and destabilizes the traditional aural experience. These issues take centre stage in the storyline, where a love affair serves as a backdrop for an unprecedented account of the composition, confection, circulation, and reception of the very book we read. The resulting presentation of the reading and writing experience in the *Voir dit* proved so tantalizing that over the next seven decades, bookmakers and poets would restructure, recycle, and rewrite the work in direct response to these issues.

The present study explores the construction of the lay reader and the lay reading experience in late medieval vernacular art and literature through a case study of Guillaume de Machaut's *Voir dit* (1363–5). The actual lay readers who may have encountered Machaut's work are less the subject of this study than the way in which they were imagined by the author, his bookmakers, and subsequent readers. This approach provides valuable insight into efforts to negotiate the varied reading behaviours that coexisted during this transitional period and the startling liberties adopted by an audience of scribes, artists, and poets who ultimately took control of the author's corpus. Scholars frequently praise the *Voir dit* for its seminal portrait of authorship, yet their studies rarely consider the primary role Machaut assigns readers in the construction of the author or the formidable contributions of bookmakers and poets to the master's authority.³¹ Robert Sturges is an exception and his scholarship offers an invaluable analysis of the fictional Guillaume struggling with his audience to fix meaning and authority, although he stops short of extending his findings to Machaut's immediate readers.³² Building on

this important scholarship, I argue that Machaut's self-conscious articulation of authorship emerged in response to a perceived aggressive audience that threatened to appropriate and rewrite his text at every turn. Ironically, it was the irreverence of his diverse audience of bookmakers, poets, and the laity towards his claims of ownership that ultimately bolstered his authority.

New philology demands that we acknowledge the many hands involved in the production of a codex and the multiple layers of interpretation that constitute a medieval work as it passes from author to a complex web of bookmakers before moving on to merchants, librarians, and audiences.³³ These once ignored or denigrated participants in book production are now aglow in the aura of authority previously reserved for writers. John Dagenais insists on the active engagement of bookmakers in particular. Identified first as 'readers,' bookmakers progressively assume the role of authors when they transform a source text through 'translation, amplification, prosification, rehandling, and rethinking into "new" texts.'³⁴ The present study pursues the argument that the manuscript matrix is the production of many hands. But it qualifies this sweeping statement by breaking down Dagenais's active readers into two subcategories referred to here as intermediary readers and inventive readers. On one side of the spectrum, intermediary readers are individuals who fulfil an intercessory role when producing a material rendition of a work. These readers include the many individuals conveniently grouped as bookmakers, such as editors, scribes, artists, and limners, but can also include public lectors and translators. They fulfil an intermediary position between author and audience or text and reader, and it is their influence on guiding the public's interpretation of the text that is emphasized.³⁵ Inventive readers are distinguished from their intermediary counterparts by the degree to which they appropriate the text as material for new creations. Whereas intermediary readers are focused on translating the author's text to an audience in a manner that harmonizes the demands of the text with the skills, interests, and intentions of the projected audience, inventive readers interfere with the smooth continuation of a work. They intercept the master text and proceed to reshape and redefine the work as a means of creating new distinctive writings. Inventive readers, functioning as writers while sometimes working under the guise of editor or performer, use previous compositions as fodder for new, wholly distinguishable works. They relocate the concepts and structures of earlier texts into their own imaginative landscape, thereby staking out new territories at the same time that they radically

alter our perception of earlier works.³⁶ This categorization of readers can give the false impression of a binary construction, yet this study will emphasize the fluidity between the two reading identities, frequently lingering over evidence that reveals editors and artists using the material artefact to communicate their own message or conversely, a poet guiding audiences in their reception of Machaut's corpus. Nevertheless the distinction is necessary to appreciate the full spectrum of reader engagement recognizable in medieval artistic production and, as shall be discussed in chapter 1, expressed by such luminaries as Hugh of St Victor and John of Salisbury, both of whom distinguished between subservient study and creative reading.

The *Voir dit* is particularly well suited to a study of the material and literary reception of texts because it self-consciously reflects on these very issues within its narrative frame. The *Voir dit* depends on both structure and content to explore the impact of lay literacy on vernacular literature. It incorporates three distinct registers – an octosyllabic verse narrative, lyric poetry, and prose writings – and three distinct media – text, music, and image – to recount first the love affair born of an epistolary exchange, and second the rendering of the affair into a coherent narrative. Adding yet another layer of complexity, Guillaume the narrator, a fictional double of Machaut the author, reflects on the hybrid performance of his work, as he composes and has copied songs, poetry, and romances to be presented at court by himself or Toute-Belle. The narrative details the reception of the book we read by a widely diverse audience that encompasses the poet's lady *qua* co-author, editor, and patron; the narrator's servant, friends, and lords; and a wider audience unknown directly by the fictive author but including both members of several courts and city dwellers. Some members of this audience read Guillaume's works privately but most hear them read aloud. The most remote members of the audience often only hear of his texts by way of performances or loose summaries that are closer to gossip than true recitations of the text. Guillaume experiences numerous frustrations at the hands of his readers who misinterpret, revise, and eventually reject his compositions as the ramblings of an old and naive man.

In spite of his failure to convince his immediate readers of the value of the work, the poet proceeds with the production of the *Voir dit*. He incorporates into his book, which is ostensibly prepared for his lady and his 'seigneurs,' the same songs and letters already read by this inscribed audience. He acknowledges on multiple occasions that at this next stage of reading, his future audience will most likely imitate the majority of

inscribed characters and listen to the text. But with equal frequency, Guillaume expresses the wish that each individual examine the documents gathered and physically engage in locating hidden materials embedded deep within the codex. Thus while detailing the poet's acceptance that the private communication of the lovers will be subsumed into public performance, the *Voir dit* also records the poet's efforts to persuade the external public to encounter courtly literature in a more intimate manner. He teases his public into studying the page through deictic references to the material existence of his poetry and letters as well as through the detailed description of images upon which he gazes and that are then reproduced in his books. He tricks the audience into actually examining the written word in order to decipher anagrams interspersed throughout the text. Inviting his readers to seek out additional materials elsewhere in the codex, he coaxes them into engaging physically with the material artefact. By implying through the title *Voir dit* the conjoined acts of seeing (a play on the shared orthography of 'truth' and 'to see' in Old French) and speaking (a play on the second meaning of *dit*), Machaut makes his 'True Story' a tale of the competing desires of a poet who wants his text studied and a court culture that would expect an oral performance.

To appreciate fully the complexity of the *Voir dit*, a three-tier approach is adopted in this study. Part I examines the representation of readers in late medieval textual and visual culture. Machaut's entire corpus depends on the coalescence of multiple reading technologies ranging from public performance (e.g., readings, recitations, re-enactments) to intimate reading (e.g., small group readings, private study) as well as multiple established reading models ranging from the professional to the devotional experience. He and his bookmakers drew from a rich storehouse of conventional imagery to articulate a new way of reading vernacular literature. They evoked through text, image, and layout the interests, social status, and wealth of various audiences, as well as their preferred forms of delivery, reading abilities, and interpretative skills.³⁷ This study will thus begin with an investigation of the sources for this novel reading experience. As late medieval artists and writers joined forces to construct this new readership, they drew from scholastic, monastic, and devotional iconography and methodologies to break the court audience down into individual readers who intimately encountered the written word.³⁸ Chapter 2 takes as its focus the actual accounts of reading in the *Voir dit*. We witness in Machaut's magnum opus the premier poet of the fourteenth century struggling to reconcile the boon

represented by a literate laity with the potential threat it constituted regarding the production of coherent texts. By examining in detail Machaut's assimilation and revision of established reading models to delimit a new role for the laity, we also gain access to a number of textual strategies he implements so as to control readers' engagement with, and reception of, his texts.

Neither the structural complexity of the *Voir dit* nor its metacommentary on delivery and reception escaped its first audiences, and both intermediary and inventive readers drew inspiration from Machaut's inscribed readers to define their relationship to the text. A limited but rich codicological and literary history of the *Voir dit* provides ample evidence of real readers engaging with the text. In Part II, we shall turn our attention to the codices containing the *Voir dit* to investigate the strategies adopted by intermediary readers when shaping the text for future audiences. Thus this section investigates multiple sites of amplification and contamination in the transmission of Machaut's *Voir dit*. The *Voir dit* survives in only four copies produced over approximately sixty years (1370–1430). In each case, the text appears within the larger frame of the author's collected works. The four extant copies of the *Voir Dit* considered here are Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereafter BnF), MS f.fr. 1584 (MS A); BnF, MSS f.fr. 22545–6 (MSS F–G); BnF, MS f.fr. 9221 (MS E); and Pierpont Morgan, MS M 396 (MS Pm).³⁹ So distinctive is the fifteenth-century copy of the *Voir dit* in MS Pm that it will be treated in Part III as a product of an inventive reader. The remaining three versions of the *Voir dit* document unique attempts to harmonize competing reading models anticipated by or inscribed in the text with new contexts represented by the imagined recipients of each codex. We will explore three forms of mediation. Chapter 3 addresses the ordering of the poet's collected works along with paratextual and metatextual guidelines introduced as a means of dictating readers' encounters with the text. In chapter 4, I investigate the role of illuminations in (re)constructing the reading experience and in guiding interpretation. Part II closes with a consideration of the role that layout plays in encouraging specific delivery practices.

Contemporary readers necessarily encountered Machaut's works through manuscript copies, whether they were members of audiences listening to the text or private readers holding the book. Having explored the reactions to the *Voir dit* first by its inscribed audience and then by the scribes and artists who served as intermediary readers, we turn in Part III to inventive readers who reimagine Machaut's hybrid

work. Chapter 6 presents the particular case of Eustache Deschamps, who shapes his own authorial identity through attentive and celebratory readings of Machaut's corpus. In addition to many intertextual allusions filtered throughout his writings, Deschamps's account of his public reading of the *Voir dit* reveals the important role this later poet assigned to the reading act and the written artefact in establishing a writer's authority. His documented performance makes apparent his use of reading and meditating to differentiate between professional readers like himself and the laity who should submit to the author's authoritative status. In chapter 7, we turn to Jean Froissart, long considered Machaut's most avid and respectful imitator. Froissart's *Prison amoureuse* will be revealed to be an engaged response, rather than a subservient imitation, of Machaut's work. In the *Prison amoureuse*, Froissart takes Machaut to task for his unfavourable presentation of a potentially destructive readership and substitutes his complaints with a masterful fantasy of his own: an author capable of reining in his readers so that their energy and curiosity nourish rather than undermine the master's text. In the closing chapter, we turn to the last extant copy of the *Voir dit* (MS Pm), where substantial editorial revisions reveal the *remanieur's* determined efforts to reinvent Machaut's work as a story of personal salvation.

The codicological and literary history of the *Voir dit* provides ample proof that as a text moves through a 'circuit of communication,' passing from the hands of the author through those of intermediary and inventive readers, the inevitable alterations and interpretations of the text contribute substantially to the creation of a literary work.⁴⁰ Each instance where readers exert an influence on the shape and meaning of a text results in a unique rendition of the text. Subsequent audiences may reject or build on those moments of intervention; regardless, these interpretations become integral to the text and contribute to subsequent iterations of the literary work. Moving from reception to interpretation also depends on the methods and technologies applied to the text by a given audience. By incorporating the cacophony of the many internal competing readers, the *Voir dit* forces us to face our own disruptive and disrupted reflection in its very pages and draws us into Machaut's system. As France's first vernacular writer to be accorded the coveted title of *poete*, Machaut earned his status through his double act of subduing his readers and challenging them to disseminate, disperse, recoup, and rewrite a hybrid and resilient text.⁴¹ In spite of bookmakers' dramatic re-imaginings of the work's presentation and later writers' aggressive recouping of the text and editorial efforts to abridge, rewrite, or

dismantle Machaut's text, the *Voir dit* has resisted complete disintegration for over 600 years. Indeed, it owes its continued popularity to its capacity to subsume readers' responses into its corpus.⁴²

The present study draws inspiration from reception theory to plot the development of the lay reader and to explore the relationship between late medieval concerns regarding audiences' authority and modern theories of reading. Scholars of reader response theory have increasingly drawn attention to the complex dance of codependency joining readers and the books they study.⁴³ What distinguishes the *Voir dit* from earlier accounts of the reading experience and what enriches contemporary theories of reception is the intense focus Machaut places on delivery as an instrument to control interpretation.

In the *Voir dit* Machaut clearly indicates his sensitivity to a ballooning audience that defied easy categorization. The *Voir dit* conjures up a stunning image of 'reading' in late medieval France, an image that resists such encompassing terms as 'readership' or even the notion of a single 'implied' or 'intended' reader so predominant in modern inquiries. Machaut envisages an audience of distinct individuals set apart by their chosen reception modes and their intentions. He intersperses his narrative with asides addressing a listening audience; at the same time, he alludes to individual readers who might hold a written copy in hand; finally, he surreptitiously instructs scribes and artists as to the layout of his work. Similarly, his hybrid composition speaks to a number of delivery modes ranging from musical performance to instances of intense meditation on the physical page. The work instigates a wide range of responses including lively debate among its audience as well as cross-referencing that requires flipping through surrounding texts in the hefty codices that contain the *Voir dit*. Furthermore, the structure of the work along with the narrator's reflections on the reading and interpretative process carve out space for an aesthetic reading of the text that could range from casual entertainment to a studious reading attuned to its didactic message.

Yet the *Voir dit* also contains abundant evidence of strategies intended to restrain the freedoms of individual readers. Through these restraints, the text brings its diverse, unruly, and powerful audience under control, although its success in fully subduing this audience remains questionable. Foregoing established conventions that stated that reading alone as opposed to listening to a text in public afforded the individual greater freedom of interpretation, Machaut presented the practice of individual study as a means of pulling the reader into the poet's system. As we shall

see, Machaut can easily be accused of taunting his readers by leading them down circuitous paths that repeatedly deny access to the truth of his 'True Story.' His real readers, including bookmakers, poets, and members of nobility, either played along or actively rejected his attempts to control their reading experience. Either way, their responses secured his authority because they became part of the complex literary web constructed to attract and subdue subsequent audiences.

As we witness one poet struggle to control the production, circulation, and interpretation of his text, we fall upon one of the most accomplished hoaxes of reading history. For it is here unveiled that France's first publicly proclaimed vernacular *poete* secured his fame through an attempt to rein in the power of an increasingly literate, savvy, and engaged audience intent on asserting its own authority over literary creation. As such, the *Voir dit* stands alone as not only the first vernacular metanarrative to tackle the issue of reader involvement in all stages of literary creation in both prescriptive and descriptive manners, but as one of the earliest explorations of the epistemological and hermeneutic questions that preoccupy modern reader response theory. Because Machaut faced a burgeoning lay audience that embraced a distinctive and dizzying array of reading experiences, he was impelled to approach these questions from various angles that have also been adopted by modern reception theorists but that have rarely been embraced by a single theory. Machaut's study of readers simultaneously explores a text's potential for controlling the reader and the reader's control of the text. Who creates, owns, defines, delimits, and names a work? By exploring the diverse and often conflicting responses of a noisy and raucous group consisting of poets, scribes, artists, page designers, bookbinders, patrons, contemporary poets, court audiences, and clerics living within and outside the *Voir dit*, the twenty-first-century reader is compelled to re-evaluate current definitions of author, text, and reader. By returning to a period and a literature influenced by an emerging literate laity, we discover a distant relative who may have more to tell us about reading in the era of postmodernism and the hypertext than is easily visible to our over-texted eye. Indeed the extreme efforts of Machaut to control his audience and the success of many to take control of his corpus illuminate the continued struggle of authors and readers played out in modern texts.

Guillaume de Machaut, as many scholars acknowledge, had a profound influence on late medieval literature and musical production. What has been ignored until now is the active role he, his bookmakers,

and his audiences played in redefining the reading experience during a period in French literary history when the laity was at least perceived as aggressively vying for control of the literary process. In the next chapter, we begin our exploration of the *Voir dit* by canvassing the vast terrain of visual and textual portraits of readers that would serve as fodder for Machaut and his bookmakers engaged in their own construction of the lay reader.

PART ONE

Inscribed Readers: The Invention of the Lay Reader in Text and Image

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In the triangle of author, work, and public the last is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but rather itself an energy formative of history.

Hans Robert Jauss¹

In his seminal essay on reception theory, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,' Hans Robert Jauss argues that to appreciate a work's distinctiveness, we must shift our perspective away from the author and the text to consider the relationship between text and reader. This shift is necessary, according to Jauss, because a work is not defined by its production but rather by its reception. As the opening epigraph eloquently states, Jauss does not view the public as a byproduct of literature but as an active participant in its creation. To take into account the contributions of an audience to any given text, the scholar must implement a tripartite analysis. This analysis requires close examination of internal cues to readers, a synchronic study of cultural expectations that shaped both text and its anticipated audience, and a diachronic survey of responses to the work. Only through this multilayered approach in which the reader occupies a primary role can the literary scholar perform an ethical reading of literature, a reading that captures both the uniqueness of a work and an understanding of the role it fills in the greater scheme of literary and social history. With Jauss's theory structuring this study, the present section establishes first the visual and textual representation of readers in manuscripts and vernacular texts produced from 1300 to 1500 for a French-speaking audience. We will then turn to the *Voir dit*, where Machaut's reactions to cultural expectations and social realities surrounding the issue of readers' role in literary production will be considered.

As already noted in the Introduction, a large corpus of scholarship has shown the influence of literacy on the laity's worldview as early as the twelfth century. From bureaucracy to vernacular literature, the written word progressively emerged as a means of fixing the law, assuring a stable history, and promising social cohesion. Yet if the twelfth-century laity increasingly approached books as storehouses, subsequent communities saw in books material vehicles that shaped a reader's experience. The physical page as much as the words it registered was viewed as worthy of meditation. In addition, new practices insisted on readers' physical engagement with the material book-object.

The next two chapters detail the emergence of the lay reader in late medieval culture. Chapter 1 explores key texts, iconography, and educa-

tional changes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that became fodder in later periods for constructing the lay reader. Guillaume de Machaut's use of multiple models of lay reading will be the focus of chapter 2. As the first metanarrative in French literature that self-consciously anticipates its own reception by an unpredictable audience equally apt to listen to a text performed as to meditate on its material transcription, the *Voir dit* provides a rich tapestry testifying to the diversity of practices associated with the lay reader. At the same time, the text registers the value system that one of France's major medieval writers assigned different reading methods. Machaut's reflections on interpretative methods had a profound effect on the literary landscape. In later sections, we will look to his bookmakers and his learned readers for evidence of their own recorded engagement with the work in general and more specifically with its inscribed audience.

1 Reading between the Lines: Responses to Lay Literacy in Late Medieval Manuscripts

Around 1412, the Boucicaut Master produced a deluxe edition of the *Livre des merveilles* for the Duke of Burgundy, Jean sans Peur (BnF, MS f.fr. 2810). The compendium, consisting of 297 folios, includes five travel narratives that cover a span of roughly eighty-five years, beginning with the voyages of Marco Polo around 1271 and ending with the adventures of Sir John Mandeville in 1356.¹ Of the 265 images decorating the manuscript, only the frontispiece to Jean Hayton's *Fleur des histoires d'Orient* includes a portrait of the patron.² This penultimate frontispiece depicts Jean sans Peur in a conventional book presentation event (Figure 1: MS f.fr. 2810, fol. 226r). Similar scenes fill late medieval manuscripts and are frequently treated as visual evidence of lay society's increasing role in book production. These images identify the written artefact as a commodity, a treasure whose contents are buried behind weighty clasps, gold leaf, and rich leather. The treasures contained within are not simply the recorded adventures of wayward travellers or the heroic acts of knights. Instead they represent an elaborately orchestrated event that allows the patron to appropriate both books and history.³ Yet to limit interpretation of presentation scenes to visual displays of princely power is to ignore an equally compelling pictorial narrative of the changing portrait of lay readers in late medieval art. For, as Brigitte Buettner maintains, 'miniatures were not passive illustrations of texts or mirrors of existing cultural patterns; rather they incorporated thoughts, fears and desires, and solidified them into discursive lines.'⁴ Like the literature they decorate, illustrations can serve as vehicles for exploring cultural shifts. In the case of the frontispiece to Hayton's *Fleur des histoires d'Orient*, close inspection of the

image shatters any reading that would view it as an uncommented account of book-exchange practices.

In the case of folio 226r, if we expand our focus beyond the duke's body, we discover that the book is located at the nexus of vibrant activity. While the conventional presentation scene is said to celebrate the patron as the owner of a coveted treasure, the surrounding events distract the viewer, arousing the desire to take hold of the gift-book, to unlatch its clasps, and to leaf through its pages. The miniature's architectural structure, with its arched entries and open windows, invites exploration. Arches penetrate walls to allow us full view of the furthest recesses of the room, where we discover an audience beyond the patron. Closest to the duke stands a group of courtiers observing the donation scene. If the courtier in red facing the activity returns our attention to the duke with his concentrated gaze, his companion in profile, with his back turned to us in a three-quarter stance, appears to gaze out the open window. That window, with its intricately patterned glass shutters swung open, offsets the opening across the room, where two additional men turn their backs to the book-exchange scene and stand transfixed by another book opened on the ledge. Their fascination with the codex before them catches our attention and like so many of the components of the illumination reverberates throughout the miniature. The small open book the two men examine counterbalances both the hermetically sealed gift-book in the author's hands across the room and the open windows. The very page the two readers scrutinize echoes the exchange between the duke and Jean Hayton. On the verso leaf held in place by the reader's firm grasp, we barely make out the sketch of a kneeling figure before a seated patron (Figure 2: MS f.fr. 2810, fol. 226r, close-up). This embedded donation scene invites external viewers to revisit the portrait of the Duke of Burgundy and Jean Hayton. A second look confirms that far from painting a traditional scene of princely power as sketched in the miniature of the small open book examined by the two men, the Boucicaut Master fills the frame with references to alternative reading experiences. For example, if the duke initially appears to sit on a throne, closer inspection reveals that beneath its burgundian cover, the duke's seat extends the length of the room to suggest a bed. Furthermore, if at first blush the overhang above the duke appears as a typical extension of a royal chair, closer scrutiny suggests a chimney. Is our patron sitting on the edge of a bed? Is he blocking our view of a hearth? Are we in his public receiving room or in his private chambers? Such blurring of boundaries invites the viewer to read between the lines, to see beyond

the architecturally delineated space of book reception so as to catch a glimpse of the complexity that defined late medieval book culture.

Attempting to capture the full spectrum of reading practices available to the laity, the Boucicaut Master merges public and private scenarios with stunning adroitness. His efforts to imagine different iterations of the reading event reflect common practices in late medieval France. Many medieval artists and writers generated composites of the lay reading event in their works through the use of hybrid expressions, multi-dimensional accounts of reading, and innovative hybrid compositions that joined together delivery-specific genres, such as song and poetry or text and image. The verbal equivalent of the Hayton frontispiece appears in the numerous direct addresses to lay audiences in courtly literature that conjoin sound and sight to describe the reading event. Hybrid expressions that gain popularity in the thirteenth century, such as *oïr lire*, *lire entendre*, and *lire doucement* intertwine aural and text-based reading practices. These hybrid terms anticipate a conflation of reading extremes when dealing with vernacular literature.

The current chapter retraces the emergence of this portrait of the literate laity in the texts and images decorating vernacular literature from the thirteenth through the fifteenth century. To appreciate the fluidity of the lay reading experience, we first consider the monastic and scholastic models of study that were institutionalized in the twelfth century. We then turn to vernacular writings to examine the impact of these models on the figure of the lay reader in subsequent centuries. Devotional and didactic writings prove most insistent in reproducing these reading models for a lay audience. As for vernacular romance, it presented its own distinctive issues, as it was traditionally associated with public performance. Rather than rewrite the relationship between text and audience, artists and vernacular writers proposed hybrid scenes that translated the intimate reading experience of the learned into the public domain, thereby blurring the communal experience of performance with the intimate reading of the private communiqué. The vast arc promised by this survey of textual and visual portraits of the reading laity has the advantage of spotlighting the pivotal role played by Machaut's *Voir dit*. As the first French metanarrative to engage with not only the proliferation and diversity of the lay reading experience but the actual impact reading practices could have on the value and meaning assigned a text, the *Voir dit* bears witness to an active negotiation of established reading models inherited from the twelfth century with the actual practices, skills, and desires of late medieval lay audiences.