

Encoded Signatures:
Devotion and Artistic Self-
Presentation in the Motet
Ferre solet (1373)

Manon Louviot

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Encoded Signatures: Devotion and Artistic Self-Presentation in the Motet *Ferre solet* (1373)¹

Manon Louvriot

Douai, Bibl. Desbordes-Valmore, 1105/3 fragment 74.4/1 (hereafter the Douai fragment) is a music fragment composed of two parchment bifolios.² It contains two complete motets, one three-voice Gloria, and two voice-parts most likely from two different motets. The music for all of these is written in black (and, in one motet, red) mensural notation, perhaps by a single hand, and all the texts are in Latin. The exact provenance of the fragment is unknown, but circumstantial evidence situates it in northern France or Flanders.³ The *terminus post quem* of the fragment is 1373, as is evident from one of the complete motets, *Ferre solet/Ana theos de gracia*, which is the focus of this chapter.

Ferre solet is a four-voice *unicum* copied on fols. 3v–4r.⁴ Its Marian topic is conveyed through the melody of the tenor, which quotes an *Ave Maria* antiphon for the Annunciation (CAO 1539),⁵ and through the newly created poem of the triplum, which

¹ This chapter is available under the Open Access licence CC–BY–NC–ND. I dedicate this chapter to the memory of Daniel Saulnier, who supported my first steps in this work with his characteristic kindness, confidence, and wise insight. The production of this chapter received support from a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant under the European Union Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Grant number 864174), in the context of the project ‘BENEDICAMUS: Musical and Poetic Creativity for a Unique Moment in the Western Christian Liturgy c. 1000–1500’, led by Catherine A. Bradley. Thank you to Catherine A. Bradley and Johanna-Pauline Thöne for their comments on earlier drafts. I am especially grateful to Anne-Zoé Rillon-Marne and Gaël Saint-Cricq for their insight and thoughtful editorial leadership. My deepest gratitude goes to Nicholas David Yardley Ball, for his critical engagement and his careful language proofreading. Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations are mine.

² Images are available on DIAMM, thanks to the kind permission of the library: <https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/3939/#/>. For a detailed description of the fragment with musical transcription, see Louvriot 2021.

³ See Louvriot 2021, pp. 128–29.

⁴ The Douai fragment also transmits a *solus tenor*, whose function in *Ferre solet* is discussed in Louvriot 2021, pp. 114–16.

⁵ See Cantus Index at <http://cantusindex.org/id/001539>. The full prayer reads, ‘Ave Maria gracia plena Dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui’.

praises the redemptive powers of the Virgin Mary in a sophisticated Latin register. The meaning of the motetus's poem, while clearly devotional in character, is hard to understand. The music features a fair amount of sophistication on the rhythmic, melodic, and structural levels, with syncopated lower voices governed by changes of proportions and mensurations as indicated by two canons copied on fol. 4r.⁶

The poems set by the triplum and the motetus have a similar structure, as shown in Appendix 1: they are composed of octosyllables, grouped in eight (triplum) and five (motetus) sestains with an *aabaab*, *bbcbbc*, and so forth rhyme scheme. Each poem encodes a certain amount of text, two by means of acrostics and one by means of a *telestich*. A clerical status and a name are ciphered in a fragmented letter acrostic in the triplum: FRATER is a continuous acrostic, formed by the first letter of each of the first six poetic lines (see bold capitalised letters in Appendix 1), then JOHANNES is encoded through the first letter of each first and third, fourth and sixth poetic line (so each first and third poetic line of each triplet); finally, VAVASSORIS uses the first letter of every third poetic line. The first syllable of each poetic line of the motetus encodes a date of composition as well as a claim of authorship (see bold capitalised letters): ANNO DOMINI MILLESIMO TRECENTESIMO SEPTUAGESIMO TERCIO FECIT ISTUM MOTETUM (he made this motet in the year of our Lord thirteen seventy-three). Finally, the last syllable of each line of the motetus forms the opening words of the Marian prayer used in the tenor voice (see bold letters).

The scribe was obviously skilled in this kind of copying. The five pieces of the Douai fragment are copied with care and precision, in particular in the alignment of text and music.⁷ Moreover, the copyist took care to visualise the acrostics in their use of capital letters. This is especially visible in the triplum in which only some of the initial letters are part of the acrostic.⁸ Such careful work certainly suggests a scribe well aware of the acrostics, perhaps even an authorial copy.

While the motet uniquely contains a self-identification, a date of composition, a claim of authorship, and a prayer to the Virgin Mary, only circumstantial information is known about the identified maker, Frater Johannes Vavassoris. He was active around 1373, and his name suggests Norman origin;⁹ he was part of the regular clergy (as indicated by the title 'frater'), and, to judge by his mastery of Latin, he had a university background.¹⁰ Ongoing archival research has not yet yielded a precise identification, on account of the difficulty in matching the author of *Ferre solet* with

⁶ See the musical analysis in Louvriot 2021, pp. 112–14, 121–23. A discussion of the canons is found at 116–21.

⁷ On the efforts spent on the alignment of text and music, see Louvriot 2021, pp. 96–97, 112.

⁸ The same copying strategy is, for that matter, used in the motet voice copied on the following verso (fol. 4v), which also includes a fragmented letter acrostic (SANCTUS LAMBERTUS).

⁹ Yver 1990.

¹⁰ Louvriot 2021, pp. 128–29.

homonyms documented either in the university records¹¹ or in the papal archives.¹² Nevertheless, *Ferre solet* allows us to explore the performance of identity, even when we do not know who exactly is behind this name.

This chapter questions what the self-identification of Frater Johannes Vavassoris in a Marian motet tells us about the perceptions of his work and of his creative and spiritual individuality. First, I explore similarly hidden names in fourteenth-century poetry to highlight the functions of authorial encodings and better understand the self-presentation of Vavassoris, seemingly unique in late-medieval music. Then, to set the intellectual context for Vavassoris's encoded signature, I analyse how encoding names in literary productions interact with their target audience. Finally, I compare *Ferre solet* and its copy in the Douai fragment with self-representations in medieval sacred art and uncover the multi-layered relationship between the maker Johannes Vavassoris, his devotion to Mary, and the audience of his motet. By setting the uniqueness of the information ciphered in the motet against contemporary artistic and intellectual contexts, this chapter offers new understandings on the self-presentation of the composer in the fourteenth century.

Encoded Signatures as Authorial Affirmation

To date, the only comparable example to *Ferre solet* is Marchetto da Padova's motet *Ave regina/Mater innocencie*.¹³ Probably composed early in the fourteenth century – that is, almost seventy years before *Ferre solet* – Marchetto's *Ave regina* contains two acrostics: the first word of each distich in the triplum forms the same Marian prayer as in *Ferre solet* in full, while the first letter of each verse of the motetus poem forms MARCUM PADUANUM, presumably the name of the composer.¹⁴

¹¹ Indeed, several people sharing this name are documented as students of northern French colleges and universities in the 1370s, but there is either no connection to a regular status (leaving the identification at best hazardous), or the homonyms are described as part of the secular clergy and therefore cannot identify themselves as 'frater(s)'. See, among others, Courtenay and Goddard (eds.) 2013; Denifle and Chatelain (eds.) 1894, p. 461; Durand 1910, p. 586; and Gorochoy 1997, p. 708.

¹² The various 'Johannes Vavassoris' active in the late fourteenth century and mentioned in papal documents from both Rome and Avignon are never associated with musical activity. Although this does not preclude that some of them may have had musical training and given that 'Johannes' was a very common name and 'Vavassoris' a very common surname, any more precise claim of identification would be premature. See the mentions, for instance, in Di Bacco and Nádas 1994, pp. 51 and 56; and Hayez and Hayez (eds.) 1979, p. 55. Many thanks to Giuliano Di Bacco, David Fiala, and Fañch Thoraval for the stimulating discussions about the identification of 'Frater Johannes Vavassoris' during MedRen 2015 in Brussels and during the year 2019 (personal email communications). In that regard, my position is more cautious than that adopted by Margaret Bent and Johanna Thöne (as is clear in Bent's chapter in the current volume).

¹³ The motet is transmitted in Oxford, Bod. Lib., Canon. Class. Lat. 112, fols. 61v–62v and has been edited in Fischer and Gallo (eds.) 1976, no. 37. The motet is discussed in more details in Robertson 1995, especially pp. 300–304.

¹⁴ The motet is assumed to have been composed in 1305, probably for the consecration of the Scrovegni Chapel: see Gallo 1974. See also Robertson 2012. Other motets encoding

However, the use of authorial acrostics was very common in medieval poetry throughout Europe. Below, I discuss a few examples that have similarities to the literary encoding mechanisms of *Ferre solet*. By focussing on the ways and the reasons why the acrostics were formed and sometimes signalled, and ultimately on their functions, I illustrate and illuminate contemporary authorial strategies in other art forms, shedding further light on the literary signature found in Vavassoris's motet.

Geographically close to the presumed origin of Johannes Vavassoris is the poet Jean de Le Mote (fl. 1330–50), who was praised alongside Guillaume de Machaut and Philippe de Vitry as one of the best *faiseurs* (makers) of his day.¹⁵ He wrote *Le Parfait du paon*, a continuation in 3,921 verses of two previous poems on the legend of Alexander the Great (*Vœux du paon* by Jacques de Longuyon and *Restor du paon* by Jean le Court dit Brisebarre).¹⁶ At the end of his poem, Jean de Le Mote inserts his name (JEHAN DE LE MOTE) in an acrostic composed of the first letters of lines 3906–18 and signalled at lines 3905–6: 'Mon non couvertement vœl en ces viers atraire. / Je conmenche mon non, Diex me gart de contraire!' (I want to draw discreetly [attention] to my name in these verses. / I start my name, may God prevent me from contradicting [myself]!).¹⁷ Line 3905 claims discretion ('couvertement'), and the acrostic is indeed a hidden device, pointing at a posture of humble authorship. Of course, this comes in contrast to the unambiguous signal of the authorial encoding right in the next verse ('Je conmenche mon non'), and with the playful acknowledgement of contradicting himself. This acrostic certainly functions as an

a Marian prayer through acrostics can be found, for instance, in Turin, Bnu, J.II.9: *Assumpta gemma/Gratulandum* (fols. 60v–61r) and *Aurora vultu/Ave virginum* (fols. 61v–62r). These motets do not contain any authorial identifications. To my knowledge, *Ave regina* is the only other fourteenth-century motet containing an authorial acrostic. Fourteenth-century motets are rarely ascribed, even by other means than acrostics. For a brief (though incomplete, as Marchetto's motet is not mentioned) overview, see Boogaart 2018, pp. 159–60. Authorial acrostics in Latin motets are more common in the fifteenth century. Such an example is Petrus Wilhelmi in the motet *Pneuma/Veni/Dator/Paraclito*: in the quadruplum, the first letters of the first six words cipher the name PETRUS; in the triplum, the first letters of the first eight words cipher the name WILHELMI, and the first letters of the first ten words of the motetus cipher the city DE GRUDENCZ. For a discussion and bibliographic references on Petrus Wilhelmi, see Gancarczyk 2006. See the chapter by Bent in the current volume on Marchetto's acrostic and for a survey of acrostics and other authorial self-naming devices in late-medieval polyphonic compositions.

¹⁵ Jean de Le Mote is described as such next to Machaut, Vitry, as well as Colart Haubiart (whose output is unknown today) in a poem written in 1350 by Gilles li Muisis, an abbot and poet from Tournai (on Gilles, see also the chapter by Stones in this volume). Jean de Le Mote was affiliated to various bourgeois, princely, and royal courts, including the comital house of Hainaut, and the patronage of Philippa, wife of King Edward III of England. On Jean de Le Mote, see Plumley 2013, especially chaps. 6 and 7, and Menegaldo 2015.

¹⁶ *Le Parfait du paon* (and another poem, the *Voie d'enfer et de paradis*) were commissioned by Simon de Lille, the royal goldsmith to King Philippe VI of France. A modern edition is available in Carey (ed.) 1972. See also Rouse and Rouse 1997, and Plumley 2013, pp. 201–12.

¹⁷ Carey (ed.) 1972, p. 168.

authorial affirmation, perhaps to prove to his commissioner, Simon de Lille, that he was indeed the rightful author. In addition, verse 3919 dates the poem of the year 1340 (though not in an acrostic): 'T'an mil .iij. .C. .xl. volt ceste branche faire' (in the year 1340 I want to do this branch), clearly defining his poem as a ramification ('branche') of the previous versions of the legend of Alexander the Great. Inscripting his name as an acrostic therefore also ensured that he would become, and remain, part of this literary continuation.

A more complex acrostic can be found in the 1343 *Pharsale* by Niccolò da Verona, a highly literate Italian poet who was active in the fourteenth century.¹⁸ Written in Franco-Italian, the epic poem retells the story of the battle of Pharsalus (during which Caesar defeated Pompey) and is based on the early thirteenth-century chronicle of Caesar, the *Faits des Romains*. *Pharsale* is composed of 3,166 alexandrines divided into 117 *laissez* (a type of stanza of varying length, treating a single theme or idea). Towards the end, Niccolò da Verona signed, dated, and acknowledged his patron at lines 1934–37: 'Nicolais le rima do pais Veronois / Por amor suen segnor de Ferare marcois / E cil fu Nicholais, la flor des Estenois, / Corant mil e troi cent ans e qarante trois' (Niccolò rhymed it, he of the Veronese lands / Out of love for his lord, the Marquis of Ferrara / And this man [also] was Niccolò, the flower of the Este / In the year one thousand three hundred years and forty-three).¹⁹

In addition, the first letter of *laissez* 3–96 (ninety-four letters in total) recomposes three of these signature verses (lines 1934–35 and 1937). The *laissez* are of varying and unpredictable lengths, and therefore, the acrostic is spread out irregularly, making it very difficult to notice. Moreover, there is no indication in the text that the three signature verses are also encrypted as an acrostic. John F. Levy hypothesises that the acrostic functions like a 'hidden copyright mark' which 'would still be retrievable' even if Niccolò's signature verses, located visibly at the end, are removed.²⁰

Niccolò da Verona was not the first poet to cipher an entire poem as an acrostic in another work. He may have drawn this idea from Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75). Sometime between 1342 and the beginning of 1343, the Florentine poet wrote the *Amorosa visione*, a narrative allegorical poem of fifty *canti* organised in *terza rima* (three-line stanzas with a fixed three-line rhyme scheme). Taken together, the initial letters of all the *terza rima* throughout the fifty *canti* (1,503 letters in total) form three sonnets, which led this acrostic to be described by modern scholarship as the longest in Western literature.²¹ The final line of the first sonnet thus created provides the name of the author: GIOVANNI E DI BOCCACCIO DA CERTALDO. This first sonnet is dedicated to Boccaccio's presumed lover, Maria d'Aquino, whose first name is also ciphered through an additional acrostic composed of the initial letter of the first, third, fifth, seventh, and ninth lines, therefore creating an acrostic within

¹⁸ On Niccolò da Verona and his works, see Lelong 2011.

¹⁹ Levy 2013, pp. 206–11 for a discussion of the function of the acrostic and p. 206 for the translation.

²⁰ Levy 2013, pp. 209–10, 216.

²¹ See, among others, Wilkins 1951, p. 101; Kirkham 2001, p. 123. For the dating of the poem, see Branca (ed.) 1974, p. 6.

an acrostic.²² In most surviving manuscripts, the three sonnets hidden as an acrostic in *Amorosa visione* are spelled out before the main text. They are themselves prefaced by an explanation of their interaction with the poem and their author. It is not known, however, if such special prefatory emphasis originated with Boccaccio: ‘tre infrascripti sonetti si contengono per ordine tutte le lectere principali de rittimy della infrascripta amorosa visione e pero che in quelli il nome dell autore si contiene altramenti non sicura di porlo: sonetti sono questy’ ([In] the three sonnets written below are found in the order all the first letters of each *terza rima* [tercets] of this poem written below, *Amorosa visione*. And because in those [three sonnets] is contained the author’s name, no effort has been made to name him elsewhere. The sonnets are as follows).²³

Therefore, as Levy has observed, the function of a self-identifying acrostic is not limited to that of a signature. Such an acrostic can also, or indeed primarily, serve as ‘a virtuoso performance intended to call attention to itself and what it asserts about its author’, a function evidently at the core of the sophisticated acrostics of the motet *Ferre solet*.²⁴

Encoded Signatures as Interaction between Author and Audience

Playing with encoded signatures is characteristic of the fourteenth century, and these authorial acrostics are only one of the many ‘forms of oblique “naming by not naming”’.²⁵ Other literary means were explored by poets, of which the most well-known examples are probably the anagrammic signatures of Guillaume de Machaut (c. 1300–1377). The instructions that reveal them can be easy and straightforward, like at the beginning of *Confort d’ami*, a narrative poem of 4,004 lines, dated from 1357, at lines 35–40: ‘Si osteras premierement / Une sillabe entièrement / Au comencier dou ver onsieme / Et une lettre dou disieme / Pres de la fin; la les saras / Quant .i. petit y museras’ (So first eliminate / One whole syllable / From the beginning of the eleventh verse / And then cut out a letter from the tenth / Near the poem’s end; you’ll recognize them / After just a little thought).

But the instructions can also be much more intricate, like at the end of another narrative poem, *Le Jugement dou roy de Behaigne* (2,079 lines, *terminus ante quem* 1342), at lines 2055–63: ‘Mais en la fin de ce livret feray / Que qui savoir / Vorra mon nom et mon seurnom de voir / Il le porra clerement percevoir / En darrein ver dou livret et veoir, / Mais qu’il dessamble / Les premières .vij. sillabes d’ensamble / Et les lettres d’autre guise rassamble, / Si que nulle n’en oublie ne emble’ (But at the end of this book, I will see to it / That anyone / Eager to learn my name and surname / Will be able to recognize them clearly / In the book’s last verse, see them there. /

²² The acrostic of MARIA has been noticed by scholars very early on. See, for instance, Booth 1909, p. 81.

²³ Huot 1985, p. 110. The text reproduced here is drawn from the manuscript Wellesley, WCSC, P858, fol. 1r (<https://repository.wellesley.edu/object/wellesley16255>). See also Levy 2013, pp. 208–9.

²⁴ Levy 2013, p. 209.

²⁵ De Looze 1991, p. 164.

Let him simply remove / The first seven syllables from the whole / And reassemble them in another fashion, / Neglecting or omitting none).²⁶ The last verse of the book is, 'A gentil mal cuide humble secours'. Unscrambling the first seven syllables ('A gentil mal cuide hum'), one can read 'Guillemin de Machaut'.²⁷ Interestingly, this signature also has an explicit authorial function, as is evident in lines 2055–59.

Laurence de Looze identifies further functions of this signature: that of a 'ludic evocation of earlier anonymity' as well as a 'witty fiction that depends on the complicity of writer and reader'.²⁸ Indeed, as is quite clear from the more complex anagrammatic example of the *Jugement*, even if the reader is invited to discover or recreate the author's name, they can only do so if they already know the solution and, therefore, in which order exactly to 'reassemble [the letters] in another fashion'.²⁹ This perspective on literary creation in which the reader is actively involved in recreating the author's name from the anagrammatic passage is, according to De Looze, 'emblematic in fourteenth-century French letters'.³⁰

This recreational act was emulated in other countries too. An interesting comparison for *Ferre solet*, because it is also in Latin, is the *Vox clamantis* by the English poet John Gower (c. 1330–1408). The allegorical poem deals with the peasant uprising of 1381, focussing in particular on the sufferings and corruption of the Church and of England.³¹ Towards the end of the prologue of the first book, at lines 21–24, the reader finds instructions on how to compose the poet's name, a device, it has been suggested, he learned through the works of Machaut:³² 'Primos sume pedes Godefridi desque Iohanni / Principiumque sui Wallia iungat eis / Ter caput amitens det cetera membra, que tali / Carmine compositi nominis ordo patet' (Take Godfrey's first letters and bequeath them to John / Let Wales conjoin to them its beginning / Beheaded, let 'ter' grant the remaining letters / Showing, when combined, the name's arrangement).³³

²⁶ Text and translation adapted from Palmer (ed. and trans.), with Smilansky (ed.) and Leo (comp.) 2019: <http://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/palmer-machaut-the%20debate%20series-judgment-of-the-king-of-bohemia>.

²⁷ See Høpffner 1906, p. 405. On anagrams in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see Higgins 1991.

²⁸ De Looze 1991, p. 169.

²⁹ De Looze 1991, pp. 162–78 discusses further the shifts of strategies of (non-)naming throughout the Middle Ages. More examples from Guillaume de Machaut, his contemporary Jean Froissart, and a later comparand Christine de Pizan, can be found at pp. 171–76.

³⁰ De Looze 1991, p. 176.

³¹ Minnis 1988, pp. 170–71; Kirkham 2001, p. 124.

³² Sáez-Hidalgo, Gastle, and Yeager (eds.) 2017, in particular chap. 23 by Peter Nicholson (Nicholson 2017), and chap. 26 by Robert J. Meindl (Meindl 2017).

³³ Text and translation from The Gower Project Translation, last edited by Robert J. Meindl on 9 November 2022: <http://gowertranslation.pbworks.com/w/page/149185233/Vox%20Clamantis%20Book%20I>. This signature is often mentioned as an acrostic, but this is clearly an anagrammatic signature.

The desire for solid attributions that are engraved within the work itself – rather than changeable paratextual ascriptions that can vary across the copies of a work – and for interactions with the reader goes far beyond poetry. It was particularly favoured in preaching sermons and in thematic sermons – that is, those based on and developing a single theme from Scripture.³⁴ For instance, and for now remaining in England, a certain Robert of Basevorn wrote the *Forma praedicandi* c. 1322. One of the most well-known *artes praedicandi*, the *Forma* discusses the composition of the modern form of sermons, in particular distinguishing between an ‘English’ and a ‘French’ method.³⁵ In the introductory section, Robert announces an acrostic composed of ‘the capital letters’ providing the name of the dedicatee, his own name, and his status. The initial letters of the fifty chapters indeed spell out DOMINO WILLELMO ABBATI DE BASINGWERK ROBERTUS DE BASEVORN (To Lord William, Abbot of Basingwerk, Robert of Basevorn).³⁶ Robert of Basevorn wrote this text in response to sermons preached by impostors who were not recognised by the Church and did not have the legitimacy to write such texts. Thus, the acrostic here functions not so much as a ludic interaction with the reader than as an assertion of his authority and of his legitimacy as a writer of sermons.

The thematic sermons were very widespread in academic centres like Oxford or Paris and were also used as an opportunity to play with an author’s name. At French universities, for example, the candidate for the title of doctor opened his defence with a public debate on a theme chosen from Scripture, the same process as the thematic sermon. In the fourteenth century, the chosen theme could contain an onomastic allusion to the candidate’s own name. For instance, Dionysius de Montina (licensed in theology at Paris between Christmas 1374 and 2 February 1375) drew his topic from Acts 17:34: ‘in quibus et Dionysius Areopagita’ (among them was Dionysius the Areopagite). The chosen topic quotes his first name (Dionysius) verbatim, while ‘Areopagita’ refers to the ‘hill of Ares’ in which the Greek ‘pagus’ designates a rocky hill, therefore echoing the ‘montina’ (mountain) of Dionysius’s family name.³⁷ Obviously, this ‘made the selection of the theme very difficult’, but it was a means to ‘show the rhetorical capacities of the new Latinist’.³⁸ Playful, intellectual games around authors’ names therefore also served to demonstrate one’s academic skills.

Thus, although unusual in fourteenth-century motets, hidden authorial signatures were very common in other literary forms. The examples considered above demonstrate different and possibly overlapping functions of authorial acrostics and anagrams, including authorial affirmation, hidden copyright, artistic or rhetorical

³⁴ On the *Artes praedicandi*, see Briscoe and Jaye 1992 and Wenzel 2015.

³⁵ The text has been edited in Charland 1936 at pp. 231–323. See also Akae 2008.

³⁶ Text and translation from Baltzell Kopp 1971, p. 111. Note that the acrostic does not explicitly reveal the status of Robert as the author.

³⁷ Trapp 1956, p. 270. More examples of ‘heraldic mystifications’ (a term coined by Trapp) have been gathered by Ueli Zahnd at <https://puns.zahnd.be/index.php>. On Dionysius de Montina, see Sullivan 2004, p. 260.

³⁸ Trapp 1956, pp. 270–72. See the summary of university trajectories in the decades around 1400 in Courtenay 2011.

performance, interaction with the reader, assertion of legitimacy, or literary affiliation. Additional information, like dedicatee or date, can strengthen or clarify these functions. This points at interactions in the development of authorial consciousness and at a shared use of well-known literary devices like acrostics and anagrams to explore the possibilities granted by hidden authorial signatures.

In northern France and in England, the phenomenon was in all likelihood particularly lively not only in artistic forms but also within rhetorical contexts (theology, preaching, universities), which might reinforce the hypothesized Norman origin and university background for Johannes Vavassoris.³⁹ In any case, it seems very likely that Vavassoris was aware of such literary devices and conferred a multi-layered function on the ones he deployed in *Ferre solet*. In this motet, the acrostics were intended for authorial affirmation, artistic performance, and as I will show in the following section, devotional expression.

Encoded Signatures as Devotional Expression

The motetus of *Ferre solet* contains a telestich: the last syllables of each poetic line, grouped in threes, form the opening words of the Marian prayer: AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA. Four other motets cipher the Marian prayer, though always as an acrostic. In addition to the early fourteenth-century motet *Ave regina* by Marchetto da Padova mentioned above, later examples include two Marian motets in the manuscript Turin, Bnu, J.II.9. This book was copied in the first half of the fifteenth century, perhaps in northern Italy, and possibly following a commission by King Janus of Cyprus (r. 1398–1432).⁴⁰ In the motet *Aurora vultu/Ave virginum* (fols. 61v–62r), the words AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENAE are ciphered using the first letter (triplum) or the first word (motetus) of each poetic line. In *Assumpta gemma/Gratulandum* (fols. 60v–61r), the first syllables of each quatrain form the words AVE MARIA, and the prayer is continued similarly in the motetus (GRACIA PLENAE).⁴¹ Finally, the motet *Benedicta/Ave mater*, ascribed to Gilet Velut in a manuscript of fifteenth-century polyphony (Oxford, Bod. Lib, Canon. Misc. 213, fols. 102v–103r), similarly encodes the prayer over the two voices, starting here in the motetus: the first words of each sestain produce AVE MARIA GRATIA PLANA DOMINUS TECUM, and the first word, or group of words, of each sestain in the triplum continue BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS BENEDICTUS FRUCTUS VENTRIS TUI (note that the first word of the last sestain is not ‘Jesus’, as in the original prayer, but ‘expiatis’, as if to keep the focus on Mary).⁴² These four motets are all quite far

³⁹ Hanly 1997.

⁴⁰ The dating and provenance of the manuscript are most recently discussed in Kügle 2012. The manuscript and its cultural context are analysed in Clément et al. (eds.) 2021.

⁴¹ In both texts, there is a repetition of one letter in the middle of the acrostics (therefore rendering, in the triplum A VE E MA RI A, and in the motetus GRA TI A P PLE NAE). See Hoppin 1957, p. 99. On the devotional expression in these two motets, and in Turin, Bnu, J.II.9, see Thoraval 2021, pp. 157–64.

⁴² Hoppin 1957, p. 99. The manuscript is available online at <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/a4120d22-b62f-4b57-861d-43c839c790a0/>.

away chronologically from 1373, the date encoded in *Ferre solet*, but by encrypting the same words from the same prayer, they underline that composing acrostic on the Marian prayer was a relatively widespread practice in motet compositions.⁴³

However, *Ferre solet* is significantly different from these four motets. It is the only motet that combines the ciphered text with the use of the prayer (words and melody) in another voice, namely the tenor. Moreover, only *Ferre solet* combines an acrostic and a telestich in the same voice, the use of a telestich itself being seemingly a quite unusual practice. More subtly, the intended topic of *Ferre solet*, while broadly laudatory, is blurred by its complex Latin register, its unusual cultural references, and the recourse to numerous metaphors, which contrasts with the evident Marian praises found in the other four motets. There is once more a fundamental difference between *Ferre solet* and its closest comparand, Marchetto da Padova's *Ave regina*, which combines the acrostics of the prayer and a name (while the other three motets are anonymous or are ascribed through an addition at the top of the page): the unique presence of a clear claim of authorship ('fecit istum motetum') and also of a date (1373).

Additionally, *Ferre solet* as transmitted in the Douai fragment is unique in its highlighting of the encoded acrostics. As mentioned above, the letters composing the acrostics are capitalised. Moreover, the telestich is highlighted by means of a brief explanatory rubric copied on fol. 4r, in a leftover space after the motetus and before the contratenor and *solus tenor*. The rubric reads, 'lege finalez sillabas huius dicta[minis] / Ave maria gracia plena legi in illis T[enoribus]' (Read the last syllables of this poem / *Ave maria gracia plena* to be read in these tenors). The rubric is particularly interesting because it not only draws attention to a feature of the poem that could not otherwise be highlighted visually but also makes explicit the connection between the telestich and the tenor, which uses the Marian prayer.

While this is the only known copy of fourteenth-century music that draws attention to its own ingenuity and at the same time claims ownership of it, this attitude is very common in medieval art.⁴⁴ An illuminating comparison to the literary self-representation of Vavassoris is the scribal self-portraits added to skilfully decorated books. For instance, the scribe of an eleventh-century manuscript of Saint Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah drew himself at the end of the book with the accompanying mention of his name, Hugo, and the description 'imago pictoris et illuminatoris huius operis' (image [or reflection] of the painter and illuminator of this work).⁴⁵ The claim of craftsmanship can be strengthened by a self-representation of the scribe

⁴³ This Marian prayer was not the only liturgical text to be used in acrostics. For instance, the closing versicle 'Benedicamus Domino' is ciphered twice in the upper voices of the four-voice motet *Belial vocatur/Belial vocatur/Tenura* (transmitted in Burgos, Las Huelgas, s/n (c. 1320–30), at fols. 82r–83r): a first time through the first syllables of each word and a second time through the first letters of each word. The final verse of the text quotes the closing versicle in full. See Saint-Cricq 2010, vol. 1, pp. 109–10.

⁴⁴ See Kessler 2019. See the chapter by Stones in this volume on authorial colophons as regards the copying and decoration of gothic manuscripts.

⁴⁵ Oxford, Bod. Lib., Bodl. 717, fol. 287v: <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/99379ed1-a0c0-4a5d-b31a-eb9a9ed3of40/surfaces/fca2ae02-799a-4b0a-800a-e4bb60ceode/>. For a discussion of this manuscript and Hugo Pictor, see Gameson 2001.

at work on the very manuscript, as is the case of Frater Ruffilus or Rainaldus and Oliverus in another source, who depicted themselves within beautifully illuminated initials.⁴⁶ The devotional dimension of self-portraits by scribes is sometimes made explicit: for instance, Engilbertus represents himself in a twelfth-century homiliary literally praying to Christ within his work, his prostrated body forms the tail of the letter Q of ‘quod’. The claim for the copy of the manuscript is made clear through the caption ‘pictor et scriptor’ (painter and scribe).⁴⁷ In spite of the chronological distance, these illuminations and *Ferre solet* share at least two common features: the self-representation within their own sacred work and the ostentatious refinement of the work over which responsibility is being claimed. The intertwining of the quality of a sacred work and the power of the devotion is typical of medieval sacred art, and the literary inscription of Vavassoris’s signature and claim of authorship over the motet can be understood through this perspective. Vavassoris represents himself in a sacred motet and claims the authorship of the skilfully composed piece, perhaps hoping that his artistry will be an acceptable gift to the Virgin Mary. From this perspective, the intricacy of the motet and its visual highlighting can be understood as a way to enhance the efficacy of the Marian prayer.⁴⁸

In contrast to these illuminations, however, the authorial signature of Vavassoris is hidden, in particular when the motet *Ferre solet* is performed aurally. What happens to the devotional self-representation when the motet is performed? How can we reconcile the affirmation of authority over artistic ingenuity and devotional expression when the signature is hidden to the auditory perception?

Comparisons of the inscriptions in *Ferre solet* and inscriptions on church bells may provide further insight into these questions. Medieval inscriptions of all kinds (liturgical, authorial) on these liturgical objects were very common in the Middle Ages, and like motets, bells could be both silent and sonorous objects. But just like acrostics and teletichs in a motet, inscriptions on church bells are hidden to human perception, even when the object itself is sonorous. Analysing church bells, Vincent Debais has shown that ‘it is the bell itself, which, by ringing, disseminates the message of the inscription and sings the praise to Christ’ (c’est la cloche qui, en sonnant, propage le message de l’inscription et chante la louange au Christ).⁴⁹ The poetic

⁴⁶ Frater Ruffilus depicts himself at work on the initial R with his tools standing next to him, in the Passionary of Weissenau (Cologne, Bodmer 127, fol. 244r, twelfth century; <https://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/list/one/fmb/cb-0127>). On Ruffilus, see Berschin 2010 and Michon 1987. ‘Rainaldus scriptor’ and ‘Oliverus pictor’ depict themselves writing and painting the initial O in *De laudibus sanctae Crucis*, preserved in Douai, BM 340, fol. 9r (second half of the twelfth century; <http://initiale.irht.cnrs.fr/codex/8349>). See Gameson 2005.

⁴⁷ Trier, Stadtbibl. 261-11402°, fol. 153v. An excerpt of the folio featuring the self-representation of Engilbertus is digitised at <https://www.trierer-buecher.de/restaurierungen/homiliaries-paulus-diaconus/>. On Engilbertus, see Mariaux 2015, p. 407.

⁴⁸ The combination of artistry and prayer in motets becomes more widespread in the fifteenth century, as had been demonstrated in Blackburn 1997. For further details on painting and praying, see Palazzo 2016.

⁴⁹ Debais 2009, p. 208. See also Ingrand-Varenne, Pallotini, and Raaijmakers (eds.) 2023, which was published after the writing of the present chapter.

devices of *Ferre solet* also are not perceptible when listening to the polytextual motet, but when singers perform it, they disseminate the message of the inscription – that is, Vavassoris’s Marian prayer – regardless of whether the inscription is perceived by human ears or not.

Ferre solet and its written state in the Douai fragment highlight a complex phenomenon that combines both artistic self-staging and the function of the motet as a formalised expression of prayer. The comparands given in this chapter reveal that specifically in *Ferre solet*, some kind of balance is negotiated between these two functions, which may differ from earlier and contemporary examples.

Indeed, studying Marchetto’s *Ave regina*, Alberto Gallo and Anne Walters Robertson have argued that the acrostic naming of Marchetto da Padova (assuming it is indeed an authorial acrostic) is not so much a confirmation of the personality of the musician or of the fact of his composition, as it is an act of prayer, a personal participation of the musician in the religious meaning of his work.⁵⁰ This explains why the name is in the accusative (‘marcum paduanum’), positing Marchetto as the recipient of the beneficial effects of the prayer.⁵¹ By contrast, in *Ferre solet*, Frater Johannes Vavassoris names himself in the nominative, as the subject of the verb *fecit*.⁵² This grammatical difference combined with an active verb perhaps makes it a staging that is more focused on the fact of his authorship than that of Marchetto da Padova.

Vavassoris’s position is given visual prominence too, since his motet such as it appears in the Douai fragment is the only example that features visual highlighting and an explanatory rubric of the encoding mechanisms. In this sense, the signature in *Ferre solet* can be understood better in comparison with literary works, like those of Jean de Le Mote or Robert of Basevorn. On the one hand, Vavassoris draws the devotional function of the motet into a confirmation of his artistic self-presentation. On the other hand, the visual clues in the Douai fragment interact with the readers, supplying them with the tools necessary to recognise the sophisticated poetic and musical devices by which this self-presentation is integrated within the rest of his composition.

Appendix 1: Texts and Translation of the Motet *Ferre solet*

The texts are reproduced from Louvriot 2021, pp. 162–64, with a translation by Leofranc Holford-Strevens. Words that resist translation are rendered as ??? and the lone illegible word as ***.

⁵⁰ Gallo 1974 and Robertson 2012.

⁵¹ Gallo 1974, p. 304.

⁵² See Bourgain 2001, pp. 361–74, especially p. 362; Kessler 2019, especially pp. 61–62.

Triplum

| | | |
|--|--------------------------|--|
| [F]erre solet cor Gaudium Recipiens presidium A sumpto vitis (colore) liquore Totum vulgus convivium Exultat cum convivium [Rep]let suum hoc humore | 5 | The heart is wont to rejoice in receiving protection from having taken the juice of the vine. The entire mass of fellow citizens exults when it fills its banquet with this liquid. |
| Jesus nostri pro amore botrus insolito more Oppressus est torculari Heu nostro pro vigore [dur]o perpressus dolore Adhuc vinum se vult dari | 10 | Jesus for love of us was the grape bunch in unusual manner crushed in the wine press. Alas, for our vitality having suffered with hard pain, he still wishes himself to be given as wine. |
| Nostra fides debet fari quod pro nostro salutari Natus fuit de [virgi]ne Eos que est sine pari celo lucens terre mari Siderum ab origine. | 15 | Our faith ought to proclaim that for our salvation he was born of the Virgin, the dawn that is without peer shining for heaven, earth, and sea from the origin of the stars. |
| Vitis vera [y]magine fertur terna propagine [quam] pincerna pharaonis Agnovit sumpto germine sic crevit quod examine pree[st] gemmis uva bonis | 20 | The vine by a true image is borne by a threefold shoot that Pharaoh's cup bearer recognised in his sleep by its growth. It has so grown that on testing the grape excels with good buds. |
| Vere [Virgo] dei donis tulit unam de personis que est deus ac deitas Abbas non divisionis immo summe unionis in [trini]tate unitas | 25 30 | Truly [the Virgin] by God's gifts bore one of the Persons, who is God and Godhead, the father not of division but of supreme union, unity in trinity. |
| Satis videtur veritas quod aucta celi civitas in hujus assumptione Sursum clamet humilitas tua [nam]que castitas digna est electione | 35 | It seems sufficiently the truth that the citizenry of heaven has been increased in her Assumption. Let humility cry upwards, for your chastity is worthy of being chosen, |

| | | |
|--|----|---|
| Omni exaltatione atque dominatione super omnia sidera | | of every exaltation and domination over all the stars. |
| Rose flores non tam bone sunt [sub] vitis ditione veni et nobis impera | 40 | The flowers of the rose are not as goodly under the command of the vine; come and rule us. |
| Iure tua sunt supra cito nobis da federa mater misericordia | 45 | The things above are rightly yours; swiftly give us covenant, mother of mercy, |
| Sic quod vana hec [o]pera transeundo per prospera gustemus vinum glorie | | so that, passing by these vain works through things propitious, we may taste the wine of glory. |

Motetus

| | | |
|---|----|--|
| Ana theos de gracia. Noys ac providencia. Domini alnum procul ave Mite ac[c]epit u***ya Nitens deica usya | 5 | God of grace, mind, and intelligence received the Lord's life-giving <i>Ave</i> mildly from afar Gleaming with the divine essence to whom the <i>Ave</i> is borne [to Miletus]. |
| Leoni nam gentem huma Si non valet plus quam spuma Monet que te maculari Trenara sunt ad infima Censura fera[tu]r yma Te [gens] mergens in mari | 10 | For bury the people to the lion if it is not worth more than foam that warns you are being stained they are at the depths of Taenarum. Let the censure be borne to the bottom, hiding, plunging in the sea. |
| Sileant cum prudencia Momenti in presencia Septim inunda sic hos flagr[a] Tu quod cum pertinacia Animati superbia Gemant omnes et nos fragra | 15 | Let them be silent with prudence in the presence of the movement seven whips flood these thus Thou, because with pertinacity animated by pride all may groan and |
| Sinu tuo ut sagaci Mo [re] sacra nos pingaci Tergas tua mundicia Cipressus rore vinaci. Odor sapor de te nasci. Fere possu[nt] qui omnia | 20 | that in your wise bosom ??? Cleanse with your cleanliness cypress with winous dew Smell and taste to be born of thee which can do pretty well everything |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| Citra deum innant imple. | 25 | This side of God they float, fill |
| Istringos nos et adimple. | | us ??? and fulfil |
| Tumulum cordis pincerna | | the tomb of the heart O cup bearer |
| Morum corda nostra reple. | | fill our hearts with sound morals |
| Te si graciae ut supple | | thee if of grace as fill |
| Tum rimantur sempiterna | 30 | then they search for things eternal; |

Tenor

Ave maria gracia plena dominus tecum benedicta tu in mulieribus Alleluya

(Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women.
Alleluia.)