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Allegory, Symbolism, and Metaphor in *le Roman de Fauvel*

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## Abstract

*Roman de Fauvel* is a 14th century work composed of poetry, story, an overarching narrative, and music to accompany the literature. In this study, our research is dedicated towards finding and analyzing the many instances of allegory and symbolism in the highly philosophical, satirical, and critical work. Using French 13th and 14th century historical context, we determine the origins of the subject matter of these allegories. Through this historical lens, we can observe what du Bus wants to convey through allegory as a response to his historical climate, and we can take that response and assign meaning to it in the form of literary and musical analysis. In summation, this paper will be about allegory in *Roman de Fauvel*, the meaning of the allegories, the purpose of them, what history influenced them, and why they are important in our literary and musical history.

The 14th C. French manuscript entitled *le Roman de Fauvel*, translated to *The Romance of Fauvel*, is one of significant interest for music historians and other music professionals alike. The most noted of the era of *Ars Nova* literature, *Fauvel* was written in two parts, the first being finished around 1310, the second, 1314. This essay provides a basis of context regarding the manuscripts, as well as explanation of symbolism and metaphor within *le Roman de Fauvel*.

14th Century Europe was a place full of misappropriation of funds and power. Many important manuscripts were created during this time period, such as *le Roman de Fauvel* as well as the Old French epic *le Roman de la Rose*. These manuscripts function as some of the oldest literature studied in modern times and are case studies for Renaissance thinking regarding people of higher stature than most in the time period. Fauvel (meaning fawn, the color of his coat) was a satirical interpretation of many wrongdoings from people in power, specifically Pope Clement V and King Philip IV. The story follows Fauvel as he attempts to climb the social ladder of the elite and marry Dame Fortune. The symbolism in the text comes through whether it be the name of a character, or an action of the characters..

While much of the text survives, it pales in comparison to the music that is found within the books. The music, attributed to one Gervais du Bus, also is claimed to have music written by Phillipe de Vitry as well. Within the epic itself, there are about 169 pieces of music coming from different genres popular at the time. Known composers include Phillipe de Vitry, Phillipe le Chancelier, Gaultier de Châtillon, and Adam de Saint Victor<sup>1</sup>. From the classic liturgical chant to polyphonic motets, much of the music was written anonymously. Because du Bus has the most music written in his name, he has been coined the author to much of the music.

While most scholars have come to a conclusion, there is still a debate about who was the original author of "Fauvel". Much of the discourse about who actually wrote the pieces of literature is whether or not du Bus had a hand in it. According to the manuscripts, the first portion of the text does not have an author attributed to it. In the second portion, there was very little indication of an author, but it ended up being attributed to Gervais du Bus<sup>2</sup>. General consensus in the scholarly community for *le Roman de Fauvel* is that the author was most likely from the Duchy of Normandy. The scholarly community is also divided in terms of determining how many authors there were; one or multiple. There was a study done to determine there were

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Bagby, "Le Roman de Fauvel." sequentia.org.

<sup>2</sup> Roberta D. Cornelius. "Piers Plowman and the Roman de Fauvel." *PMLA* 47, no. 2 (1932): 363-67. <https://doi.org/10.2307/457882>.

two different writing scripts found, but the leading expert on the manuscript does not agree because the study was not conducted on the full manuscript.

With the *Roman de Fauvel* completion in 1317/18, there was a lot of history before its completion that could provide reason for the symbolism and allegory of the story. One significant event that both guided the story and sets a date that we can observe for the completion of the epic was the coronation of Philip V<sup>3</sup>. In prose of the interpolations, specifically in the motet *Servant regem/O Philippe*, Philip V's reign is celebrated in full, which suggests that the later stages of the *Fauvel* were written near the beginning of Philip V's reign. Validation to this claim also can be seen in the power struggle of 1316 after Louis X's death. He appointed himself as regent in the time before Louis X's son was born. However, the son, John I, died after only five days of life. To fill this void in the French political hierarchy, Philip V convinced significant candidates for the regency, primarily Charles of Valois, to support his campaign in becoming king, and the other candidates followed in support of Philip V<sup>4</sup>. This is important to the development of the *Roman de Fauvel*. This alliance and friendship developed between Valois and Philip V resulted in Du Bus writing in support of Philip V, with du Bus working under Valois. The power struggle of Philip V both reinforces a possible date for the completion of *Fauvel*, but also explains the origin of the writing of some texts and motets within it. Most of the historical events before *Fauvel* that really made an impact on the content of the allegories within the work have to do with Charles of Valois. Thus, in addition to du Bus's own creative vision, Valois and the position of Valois as a powerful man in the 14th century played a role in the subject matter of *Fauvel*.

A large component of the allegory and symbolism in *Fauvel* is the focus on society's corruption through the lens of satire. The societal unrest surrounding France during the Middle Ages suggested major forms of corruption. Examples expressing this unrest can be seen within *Fauvel*. In the form of metaphor, the phrase '*étriller Fauvel*' appears within the text of *Fauvel*, which means "currying Fauvel."<sup>5</sup> That concept proved to be very influential at the time, and happens to influence our dialect. This is the origin of the phrase 'to curry favor', and other similar phrases. To curry someone is to treat them in a particular way that might influence their feelings towards you, with intent to manipulate for your own gain. In the story of *Fauvel*, Fauvel

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Wathey. "Fauvel, Roman de." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 31 Oct. 2021.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-000000937>

<sup>4</sup> John. A. Wagner. "Encyclopedia of the Hundred Years War." Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Wathey. "Fauvel, Roman de." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 31 Oct. 2021.

<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-000000937>

currys up to the popes and kings of his country in order to manipulate them and receive power from them, which is how he manipulates his way into a position of power. If Fauvel is a representation of the evils of our world and of manipulation, then the act of currying up to people with more power than you is a representation of 14th century French society. Almost 90% of the French population were classified as peasants<sup>6</sup>. Those who had power weren't peasants because they were born into power, or because they curled their way up the feudal system. France as a whole was feudalistic, creating a massive divide in wealth between the few who were welcome in the feudal system. In *Fauvel*, du Bus criticises this system with symbolism and allegory, and a majority of that criticism is issued through the literary device of Fauvel.

In discussing the history of Fauvel, it is important to bring attention to the primary figure that inspired most of the allegory and symbolism of the Beast epic. The key figure that served as inspiration for the interpolations of *Roman de Fauvel* was Enguerrand de Marigny. Marigny was born in 1260 in Normandy, and was a powerful figure in French history, known best for his deception and snake-like ascension through the French hierarchy of power. After 1302, Marigny made attempts to obtain more power through the French government, going as far as becoming a knight, then Count de Longueville, the grand chamberlain to the king, that being the most powerful position he held<sup>7</sup>. In observing Marigny's ascension through French royalty, both du Bus and de Vitry obtained an interest in critiquing Marigny (the interpolation happened at the time where Marigny was at his worst, in 1314). The reason that du Bus wrote in opposition to Marigny is because of his abuse of power, and manipulation of powerful figures. The devices through which du Bus criticized Marigny were symbolism and allegory, representing him as evil. Marigny, as chamberlain to Phillip the IV, had Phillip under his control, and used Phillip's power as king and relations with the Church to create policy that was in Marigny's favor. He was a man who knew everything the king knew, and encouraged King Phillip to make radical changes away from established policy as an abuse of power, harming the French nation in the process. Marigny, during his power trip under the protection of Phillip, raised taxation and debased the coinage of France. He also was hated by the king's brother, Charles of Valois, which is important to note due to Valois's relationship with du Bus, the creator of the *Roman de Fauvel*. Under employment by Valois, du Bus was encouraged to write in favor of Valois, and in opposition to his Valois's enemies. At the end of Marigny's life, he

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<sup>6</sup> Duby, Georges. "France in the Middle Ages 987-1460: From Hugh Capet to Joan of Arc". Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Enguerrand de Marigny." Encyclopædia Britannica, Invalid Date.  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Enguerrand-de-Marigny>.

was charged for financial corruption in his administration, and was accused of sorcery by Valois, resulting in his execution in 1315. Using this context, we can see that the interpolations of *Fauvel* were written from a Valois-positive viewpoint. We can see how the allegory of Fauvel in both the source text and the interpolations are influenced by the trail of corruption left by Marigny.

The satirical allegory is considered a Beast epic because the animal characters speak and act like human beings.<sup>8</sup> The first contributor to cast Fauvel, the central character, as a symbol of triumphant evil was Gervais du Bus in the twelfth to thirteenth century. Fauvel possesses colors of dark yellow and red which represents falsehood and hypocrisy (Fig. 1) His name, Fauvel, possibly associates with the name Faus symbolizing treachery and deceit.<sup>9</sup> A significant element in the *Roman de Fauvel* that categorizes Fauvel's characteristics throughout the story includes the Tournament of Vices and Virtues.

Within the Tournament of Vices and Virtues, a place in the *Roman de Fauvel* where we see struggle between good and evil is represented through the colors of the images in col. A on fol. 37 in the Paris Fr. 146 manuscript. The text setting confirms the moral values portrayed in these images because the setting is centered around the pureness of Holy Mary. The somber hues and pale ink washes of the painting symbolize danger and evil. Contrasting with the evil elements in the image, brilliant and bright colors associate with the Virgin Mary to show her as a gleaming vision. Her power is symbolized towards the right while dressed in bright oranges and yellows. Underneath, lines of praise fall beneath the image.<sup>10</sup> The choice of colors when presenting images played a prominent role in emphasizing the contrast between the dark forces versus the light forces in Medieval stories. An additional symbol to consider in the *Roman de Fauvel* includes the symbolization behind the notation in the manuscript.

The notation in the *Roman de Fauvel* serves a binary function: descriptive and prescriptive. Furthermore, music now can include aspects of illustration and continue to include aspects of authoritarianism. During the *Ars Nova* period, the notation acts as a double system operating at once in the

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<sup>8</sup> "Beast Epic," Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster), accessed October 31, 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beast%20epic>.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Wathey. "The Allegory and the Literary Context of the Original Poem." "Fauvel, Roman de." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 31 Oct. 2021. <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000009372>.

<sup>10</sup> Nancy Freeman Regalado. "Allegories of Power: The Tournament of Vices and Virtues in the Roman de Fauvel (BN MS Fr. 146)." *Gesta* 32, no. 2 (1993): 135-46. <https://doi.org/10.2307/767171>, 138.

medium of sight and sound.<sup>11</sup> Because of this duality, we can observe the manuscript and recognize the messages the author is trying to send; however, listening to the music gives the audience the full context of the story. The music amplifies political messages about the past and concern for the future. Additionally, cues and clues bring to life the graphic aspects of the musical text.<sup>12</sup> Notation in the *Roman de Fauvel* plays two major symbolic roles: notation as iconography and notation as variété.

Firstly, one of the ways notation served an iconographic role includes decorations that contextualized musical writing. Images of Fauvel's palace walls depict deceit, fraud, and falsity to continue to connect the name Fauvel to falsehood. The palace description within the notation uses word painting to emphasize the grandiose palace. The highly decorated walls reflect Fauvel's power and authority--the images of Fauvel's palace wall now being looked at as a guide to instill power and authority in present day monarchs. As a result, with the music covering a wide range of genres, the music contains several purposes in the manuscript: music can be a visual script while participating in the construction of an exemplary message. In this example, the message reflects the glory of the horse-king. Taking a step back and looking at the book full of significant images, texts, and music, it appears to become like the palace walls described throughout the story.<sup>13</sup> This encourages the reader to experience the book as a decorated space with the totality of its notated surfaces in the context of the story.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, notation serves as a vital symbol in its variété. The notation in the Fr. 146 begins to raise questions during the ars nova period such as: what could a sign be? What kind of variety could it express? A term that the *Fauvel* repertory discusses is the single notation sign of *figura* which encourages the principle of temporal variety.<sup>15</sup> The character, Fauvel, is the epitome of variété because Fauvel appears to look like one thing, but instead acts deceptively. Additionally, Fauvel appears in human form while also appearing as a man-horse.<sup>16</sup> The variety of Fauvel is unique because his appearance is described in the notation first, following illustrations interpolated throughout the manuscript. When music and image work together, they both inform on the nature of signs and provide both variety within sameness.<sup>17</sup> With the substantial amount

<sup>11</sup> Emma, Dillon. "SEEN AND NOT HEARD: SYMBOLIC USES OF NOTATION IN THE EARLY <em>ARS NOVA</em>." *Il Saggiatore Musicale* 23, no. 1 (2016): 5-27. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/90001054>. p. 5

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 19.



of variety in the Fr. 146, the manuscript has made it possible for music to possess conflicting natures all in one character, time, and place.

The allegory, symbolism, and metaphor in *le Roman de Fauvel* challenged the art of musical and literary writing. With the historical context of the political happenings in France, the world now experiences the Fr. 146 manuscript to see how a king can act deceptively and to see the struggle between light and dark forces. Because of Gervais du Bus's criticism of the feudal divide in 14th century France, the characters and the music can possess conflicting natures in one time and place. Today, we can look at the manuscript and still see the message the authors of *Roman de Fauvel* were trying to send. On the other hand, when we observe the music through sight and sound we can understand the story in its full context and experience it at its full potential. Overall, reading about the background and historical context in this essay paves the way to fully understanding the symbols and allegories in *le Roman de Fauvel*.



Fig 1. Du Bus, Gervais. *“Le Roman de Fauvel”*.

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8454675g/f28.item.r=roman%20de%20fauvel#>

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