

How to win the Binchois game

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How to Win the Binchois Game

David Fallows

for Markus Jans to mark his 70th birthday

Example 1a shows a song by Binchois with the last three bars missing, and the reader must guess its final pitch. Perhaps we can eliminate D, since that is the pitch of the mid-point cadence at bar 15. Perhaps we can also eliminate E, since it is the cadence pitch of the penultimate line at bar 24. F would be too much of a surprise as it has not appeared previously in the piece and the same could be said of C. So we have a choice between G, which is the cadence note of the first double phrase and A, which is the cadence note of the first line. Given that the music of the first line (bars 1–4) is almost exactly the same as the music of the last line (bars 26–9), perhaps we would expect the second half of that last line to end on G, as at bar 8. On the other hand, to give the first and last lines of the stanza exactly the same tonal process would also be counterintuitive. So that leaves only A as the final pitch, which is indeed the correct solution (Ex. 1b).

But the reasoning here is by no means watertight: many would respond by saying that it is decidedly strange for the last line to cadence twice on the same pitch. And that, in short, is the Binchois game, first played in October 1995 at a seminar for the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. On that occasion I presented various chansons by Binchois with the last three bars hidden, and I asserted that nobody could confidently predict the pitch on which the chanson would end. For the present discussion I start with *Margarite, fleur de valeur* partly because Markus Jans made it the topic of his article for the Festschrift marking my sixty-fifth birthday – and I have been meaning for the past five years to give him the response he deserves, which I now offer, with apologies for the delay.¹ (In this and the other musical exam-

¹ Markus Jans, “‘Dieu vous doinst hui en bonne estraine tout le desir de vostre cœur’: Observations on Binchois’s *Margarite, fleur de valeur*”, in: *Essays on Renaissance Music in*

ples I omit the contratenor lines, partly to save space but also because they are irrelevant to the discussion, as should become clear in due course. I also add no editorial accidentals, if only because they could prejudice the issues.)

In fact, Jans pointed to another possible solution to the end of *Margaritha, fleur de valeur*: if we were to have cut the music short two notes earlier, a possible concluding pitch would have been the low A, a note that has had considerable prominence in both the second and the third lines. One could argue for a long time about that possibility, though my own sense is that ending on the low A would result in a melody that was far too lopsided for the melodic purity that we associate with Binchois – rightly or wrongly.

I say rightly or wrongly because that is central to the entire discussion of Binchois. While Du Fay spent much of his early career in Italy, where newly rich courts paid well for the best musicians from the north, Binchois remained for most of his career at the court of Burgundy, which we tend to think of as the absolute epicentre of musical culture during those years. His art was the art of restraint and control, whereas Du Fay, whose lines are in some ways far more predictable, is a composer who jumps off the page and always has new ideas. That, I think, is why both Markus Jans and I love the songs of Binchois, why we have both written two articles about his music and would be happy to write more. Though far less showy than Du Fay, he sounds like the more cultivated, the more courtly composer, the one whose music we can regard as the standard pattern alongside which everything else in those years must be seen and heard.²

Honour of David Fallows: Bon jour, bon mois et bonne estrenne, ed. Fabrice Fitch and Jacobijn Kiel, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 2011, 218–226. This essay benefits not only from the stimulus of that article, but also from careful reading and informed reactions by both Markus Jans and Dagmar Hoffmann-Axthelm.

² Besides, the available information seems to show that in the 1420s and 1430s the songs of Binchois were far more widely copied than those of Du Fay, even though our sources for those years are mainly Italian and Du Fay was actually present in Italy during those years whereas Binchois was in the Low Countries. See details in David Fallows, “The Most Popular Songs of the Fifteenth Century”, in: *The Cambridge History of Fifteenth-century Music*, ed. Anna Maria Busse Berger and Jesse Rodin, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2015, 787–801: 788–791.

Mar - ga - ri - te, fleur de va - leur,

6 Sur tou - tes au - tres sou - ve - ray -

12 - ne, Dieus vous doinst hui en

19 bon - ne es - trai - - ne

24 Tout le de - sir de vos - tre coeur.

Ex. 1a: Binchois, *Margarite, fleur de valeur*.

Though I never previously published anything on the Binchois game myself, it was taken up by my host on that occasion in New York, Dennis Slavin. As he reports in his article on the topic, published in 2000, he played the game with various seminars over the next year; and he tabulated the results with the title: “The Binchois Game: Style and Tonal Coherence in some Songs from the Mid-fifteenth Century”.³ More recently, the game figures prominently and appears in the titles of three key chapters of Astrid Opitz’ book on modality in Binchois, to which I shall return.⁴

³ In *Binchois Studies*, ed. Andrew Kirkman and Dennis Slavin, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000, 163–180.

⁴ Astrid Opitz, *Modus in den Chansons von Binchois*, Sinzig: Studio Verlag 2015 (Saarbrücker Studien zur Musikwissenschaft 18).



EX. 1b: Binchois, *Margarite, fleur de valeur*, last bars.

In Slavin's report, the topic was broadened substantially and seems to me to have hidden my main point. What I had really wished to say in my presentation was that with most music of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the tonal process is clear: either the first cadence or just occasionally the second cadence is usually on the final of the piece. But in this respect, Binchois is far harder to read than other composers of those years: even with almost the entire piece in front of you it can be very hard to guess how the music will end.

On the other hand, Slavin's article presented a wide range of information and statistics. Oddly, in offering the various different alternatives for the songs of the fifteenth century, he failed to mention the one that had been important to me, namely the first cadence: his statistics were all about the first note (in either tenor or discantus) and how it related to the final. So in returning to the topic after all these years, and writing formally about it for the first time ever, I wish to focus more precisely on what I was aiming to say then.

In my view, Slavin began already with a false move by citing Tinctoris. By and large, people tend to trust Tinctoris on most matters, as the most prolific theorist of his time, with the largest spread of ideas. What readers do not always register is how many of his comments are at best puzzling and at worst demonstrably wrong. This is the case with his remark about tonal process. As quoted by Dennis Slavin, he writes in the *Liber de natura et proprietate tonorum* that "of fifty composed songs, there is scarcely one that does not begin on that place in which it finishes".⁵ Taking at random two chansonniers of around the time he was writing, the Wolfenbüttel Chanson-

⁵ "[...] quod ex quinquaginta compositis cantibus vix unus sit qui ex eo loco non incipiat quo et finiat". See Johannes Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica*, ed. Albert Seay, 2 vols., no named place: American Institute of Musicology 1975 (*Corpus scriptorum de musica* 22), vol. 1, 82.

Es - cla - ve puist il de - ve - - - - nir

8 En u - ne ga - le - e sur mer

15 $\text{\textcircled{S}}$ Qui mon - stre - ra sam - blant d'ai - mer S'il

21 ne le veult par - main - - te - - nir.

Ex. 2a: Binchois: *Esclave puist il devenir*.

nier fails to match for 15 of its 56 songs; and the Mellon Chansonnier, in which the direct participation of Tinctoris has plausibly been proposed, no fewer than 21 out of 57 open and close on different pitches. Perhaps Tinctoris just failed to choose his words properly: almost all the songs in both manuscripts cadence on the pitch of either the first or the second main cadence.

In fact, Slavin himself effortlessly shows with a full tabulation of the songs of Du Fay, Binchois, Ockeghem, and Busnoys that the statement of Tinctoris fails to hold (though it holds more for Ockeghem and Busnoys than for Du Fay and Binchois). Even so, he continues his exploration in precisely those terms and accordingly finds that a very high proportion of the songs of the fifteenth century are thereby irrational. As I said, if you go to the first or the second cadence, almost all the repertory is rational (just as it is in the fourteenth century). And it is just in that respect that Binchois seems a loner.

Let us now turn to *Esclave puist il devenir* (Ex. 2) and ask the same questions: the first and third lines cadence on A, the second and fourth lines cadence on D, and the mid- point cadence has B over G (in fact with an E



EX. 2b: Binchois: *Esclave puist il devenir*, last bars.

below them in the contratenor). Even though the piece begins on E, with an E-triad at the mid-point, I am inclined to think that E would not be an appropriate closing pitch, despite Tinctoris. And I would rule out C and F as having absolutely no role in the song otherwise. On the other hand, G seems a possibility, being the tenor-pitch at the mid-point cadence, though that would perhaps be a serious surprise. So the alternatives here would be D, thereby repeating the pitch of the cadence at the end of line 4, or A, returning to the pitch of the first cadence and doing what most other composers of the time would have done.

Given that last assertion, perhaps no reader will be surprised to learn that the final pitch is indeed D, repeating the cadence pitch at bar 25, and embellishing the last two bars of that phrase. Once again, Binchois does not do what most other composers did in those years and return to the pitch of his first cadence.

All the same, there are considerations that I have not raised; and I am sure they will already have crossed the mind of several readers. Simply put, to confine one's attention to the top line or discantus is probably to miss the point. The essence of the music is in the tenor and that is where we should be looking most intently.⁶ And more particularly we should be looking at the modal structure of the tenor. In the case of *Esclave puist il devenir*, it is easy to see that the tenor is a simple dorian on D, with its reciting tone on A.

Of course, one of the odd features of chant modality is that it is normally defined by the last pitch. If we happen not to have the last pitch, we are perhaps in trouble, since the tenor here has a range from low A to tenor A: it could theoretically be in dorian mode on A. But that mode would have its tenor on E, which has no place at all in the first two lines of the printed

⁶ This is of course not to imply any judgments about “successive composition” and whether one voice was physically written down before another. Such judgments naively simplify the act of composition.

edition. The third line of text does, on the other hand, begin with A and E, with E functioning as the upbeat to the fourth line; but even here I would be inclined to argue that this was just a momentary change of colour. Seen from the rest of the tenor, the final cadence was inevitably going to be on D.

If we return to *Margarite fleur de valeur*, the picture is not at all so simple. While the first cadence of the tenor is on A, the surrounding outline is at first unclear, with the pitch D playing an important role. On the other hand, the pitch E becomes increasingly important towards the end, given added emphasis with the two-bar end of the third text-line and with the high E introducing the final melisma. Those considerations must surely mean that the conclusion on A is inevitable.

When I first spoke about the Binchois game in 1995, the general orthodoxy – which I passionately shared until very recently – was that modal theory was not applicable to early fifteenth-century polyphony except where a chant was borrowed. The received statement was that of Richard Crocker who had in 1962 noted that no theorist before Tinctoris mentioned modes in the context of polyphony.⁷ Five years later, in describing for the first time the Berkeley theory manuscript, he noted with considerable surprise that already in the 1370s one of the treatises had some words about modes in polyphony. But he added: “But I maintain my chief argument – that medieval polyphony was not conceived as modal or seriously analyzed as such”.⁸ The passage in the first Berkeley treatise reads as follows:⁹

Restat et nunc quidem de cantibus aliis, puta motetis, baladis, et huiusmodi, de quibus tonis sive modis iudicandi fuerint aliqua declarare. Sit igitur finale iudicium omnium tonorum seu modorum cuiuslibet cantus, videlicet motetorum, baladarum, rondellorum, vireletorum, et huiusmodi istud.

Primo quod omnis cantus huiusmodi finiens in re quocumque, aut finiens in sol B quadrati, aut in la naturale, aut in sol vel in la B mollis, est primi vel secundi toni. Item omnis cantus huiusmodi finiens in mi quocumque, aut finiens in la B quadrati,

7 Richard L. Crocker, review of Edward E. Lowinsky, *Tonality and Atonality in Sixteenth Century Music*, in: *Journal of Music Theory* 6 (1962), 142–153: 152.

8 Richard L. Crocker, “A New Source for Medieval Music Theory”, in: *Acta musicologica* 39 (1967), 161–171: 166–167.

9 Berkeley, University of California Music Library, MS 744 (*olim* Phillipps 4450), 14.

est tercii vel quarti toni. Item omnis cantus huiusmodi finiens in fa naturale, aut finiens in fa vel in ut B mollis, est quinti vel sexti toni. Item omnis cantus finiens in sol vel in ut naturale, aut finiens in fa vel in ut B quadrati, est septimi vel octavi toni.

Oliver B. Ellsworth translates:¹⁰

And now, it remains to clarify some things about other songs (for example, motets, ballades and the like) with respect to the judging of their tones or modes. Let the judgment therefore be with respect to every final of the tones or modes of any song – motets, ballades, rondeaux, virelais, and the like.

First, every song of this type that ends on any re, on sol B quadratum, on la naturalis, or on sol or la B mollis, is in the first or second tone. Every song of this type that ends on any mi or on la B quadratum is in the third or fourth tone. Every song of this type that ends on fa naturalis or on fa or ut B mollis is in the fifth or sixth tone. Every song that ends on sol or ut naturalis or on fa or ut B quadratum is in the seventh or eighth tone.

That hardly amounts to sophisticated modal discussion. The theorist simply defines the modes in terms of final and staff-signature. There is no attempt to distinguish authentic from plagal modes, for example, except later in the context of ecclesiastical chant. That was thought not to have happened before Tinctoris, whose discussion, however, seems so scattershot that he plainly did not have his mind on the job:¹¹

Verbi gratia, siquis universaliter mihi diceret, “Tinctoris, peto abs te cuius toni sit carmen *Le serviteur*”, responderem universaliter primi toni irregularis, quoniam tenor pars principalis ipsius carminis sit huiusmodi toni. Si tamen particulariter peteret cuius toni esset supremum aut contratenor, particulariter responderem et illud et istum esse secundi toni etiam irregularis. Ad particularem vero tenoris interrogationem respondendum esse sicut ad universalem, nullus est qui dubitat, et simili modo de ceteris accidentibus toni interrogatum respondere oportebit.

¹⁰ Oliver B. Ellsworth, *The Berkeley Manuscript University of California Music Library, MS. 744 (olim Phillipps 4450): A New Critical Text and Translation*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1984, 84–85.

¹¹ Tinctoris, *Opera theoretica* (see n. 5), 85–86.

Albert Seay translates:¹²

In other words, if anyone generally would say to me: “Tinctoris, I ask of you of what tone is the song *Le serviteur*”, I would reply generally of the first irregular tone, since the tenor, the principal part of this song, is of this type of tone. If, however, he would ask specifically of what tone is the supremum or contratenor, I would reply specifically that the former and the latter are also of the second irregular tone. There is no one who doubts that the question must be answered from the tenor in particular just as in general, and it will be fitting to reply, when asked, in a similar way about other situations of a tone.

Anyone who has glanced at Du Fay’s setting of *Le serviteur hault guerdonné*, which was not only a very famous song at the time, but the only known setting before Tinctoris wrote,¹³ knows that the contratenor is in precisely the same range as the tenor, therefore also in the first irregular tone, not in a lower range and therefore in the second tone.¹⁴ But at least he seems to be clear that the main indicator of mode in polyphony is with the tenor.

Certainly, when I first spoke about the Binchois game, we had recently seen the publication of Christian Berger’s *Habilitationsschrift*, with its

12 Johannes Tinctoris, *Concerning the Nature and Propriety of Tones*, translated by Albert Seay, Colorado Springs: Colorado College Music Press 1967, revised second edition 1976, 24–25.

13 All other versions are listed in David Fallows, *A Catalogue of Polyphonic Songs, 1415–1480*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, 253.

14 Frans Wiering’s revision of Harold Powers, “Mode, III, 1(ii)”, in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians: Second Edition*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London: Macmillan 2001, vol. 16, 800, adds a table that gives the voice-ranges of Du Fay’s song, marking the contratenor as having a range from *d* to *d'* with a final on *g*, thereby claiming that it is in mode 2; he at least had the decency to add ‘[?]’ after the stated ranges, because the first sounding note of the contratenor is in fact the low *c* – a note that the contratenor holds for more than 15 semibreves of the entire song (almost one-sixth of its length). But of course the other voices have their finals on *c* and *c'*; and there seems no serious way of arguing that *g* is the final of the contratenor in any sense other than the most literal – as implicitly agreed in the slightly fuller discussion of the passage in Frans Wiering, *The Language of the Modes: Studies in the History of Polyphonic Modality*, Breukelen: Frans Wiering 1995, 96. Perhaps the sanest exploration of the matter is in Opitz, *Modus in den Chansons von Binchois* (see n. 4), 105–109.

extended discussion of hexachords and modality in fourteenth-century songs.¹⁵ But shortly afterwards Sarah Fuller published her fundamental demolition of his entire approach, so matters continued to stand more or less as Richard Crocker had left them.¹⁶ And that viewpoint was to some extent endorsed by Harold Powers in his important paper of 1992, in which he explored the modal assignments proposed by Pietro Aron for polyphonic songs of the fifteenth century and concluded that any attempt to use his assignments:¹⁷

can only lead to misrepresentations of the compositional tonalities or a misprision of the theoretical method.

In the next year there was a conference at Novacella devoted the topic of modality in the music of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.¹⁸ But although several of the papers directly tackled the matter of modality in the polyphony of those years only Leeman Perkins actually applied modal principles to the music;¹⁹ and he did it largely as Leo Treitler had done it thirty years earlier, namely in terms of the principles laid down by Marchetto and

15 Christian Berger, *Hexachord, Mensur und Textstruktur: Studien zum französischen Lied des 14. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 1992.

16 Sarah Fuller, "Modal Discourse and Fourteenth-century French Song: A 'Medieval' Perspective Recovered?", in: *Early Music History* 17 (1998), 61–108. A response appears in Christian Berger, "Machaut's Balade *Ploures dames* (B32) in the Light of Real Modality", in: *Machaut's Music: New Interpretations*, ed. Elizabeth Eva Leach, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press 2003, 193–204, particularly on 195–196. But in any case, the verdict must remain that his interpretation of the accidentals is so counterintuitive that nobody need be surprised that his radical proposals have still had no wider impact over a quarter of a century later.

17 Harold Powers, "Is Mode Real? Pietro Aron, the Octenary System, and Polyphony", in: *Basler Jahrbuch für Historische Musikpraxis* 16 (1992), 9–52.

18 Published as *Modality in the Music of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries/ Modalität in der Musik des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ursula Günther, Ludwig Finscher and Jeffrey Dean, Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag 1996 (American Institute of Musicology: Musicological Studies & Documents 49).

19 Leeman L. Perkins, "Modal Species and Mixtures in a Fifteenth-Century Chanson Repertory", in: *Modality in the Music* (see n. 18), 177–201.

then Tinctoris, describing each mode in terms of a pentachord and a tetrachord, though giving more scope to what Tinctoris called *commixtio modi* than seems rational.²⁰

But two recent publications have significantly changed the landscape here. First is Carlo Bosi's book on modality in the songs of Du Fay and Binchois, published in 2013 but going back to an Oxford DPhil dissertation submitted in 2003.²¹ Second is the 400-page book of Astrid Opitz devoted to mode in the chansons of Binchois, published in 2015 and going back to a doctoral dissertation accepted at Saarbrücken in 2012.²² Both authors devote considerable space in their opening chapters to evaluating previous literature in the sanest possible light; and both offer enough robust arguments to justify reopening the question of modality in the polyphonic songs of the fifteenth century. They completely changed my own mind on the matter.

On a purely theoretical front Opitz brings an important new document to the table (pp. 92–93), one that has been known for twenty years but was not perceived as relevant. This is in the treatise in Vercelli, first mentioned in an article by Maria Caraci Vela²³ and later published complete by Caraci and Anna Cornagliotti.²⁴ The justified excitement of the Italian editors in identi-

20 Leo Treitler, "Tone System in the Secular Works of Guillaume Dufay", in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18 (1965), 131–169.

21 Carlo Bosi, *Emergence of Modality in Late Medieval Songs: The Cases of Du Fay and Binchois*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2013 (Salzburger Stier: Veröffentlichungen aus der Abteilung Musik- und Tanzwissenschaft der Universität Salzburg 8).

22 Opitz, *Modus in den Chansons von Binchois* (see n. 4). For the sake of completeness, one should add that her first exploration of the topic was published as "Bernhard Meiers Betrachtungen zur Tonart in der Handschrift Porto 714: ein nicht zu verwerfender Analyseansatz", in: *Das modale System im Spannungsfeld zwischen Theorie und kompositorischen Praxis*, ed. Jochen Brieger, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 2013 (Hamburger Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft 29), 69–100.

23 Maria Caraci Vela, "Una nuova attribuzione a Zacara da un trattato musicale del primo Quattrocento", in: *Acta musicologica* 69 (1997), 182–185.

24 *Un inedito trattato musicale del medioevo: Vercelli, Biblioteca Agnesiana, Cod. 11*, ed. Anna Cornagliotti and Maria Caraci Vela, Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo 1998 (Studi e testi SPMF 1), 76–77, transcribed from fol. 178. Further extensive discussion appears in Maria Caraci Vela and Roberto Tagliani, "Deducto sei: Alcune osservazioni e una nuova

fyng the song *Deduto sey* as a work of Zachara da Teramo seems to have clouded their eyes to the historical significance of that passage, which Opitz identified,²⁵ namely as another source of evidence for viewing polyphonic songs in terms of their modality. The treatise includes the following passage:

[...] che debiamo considerare secondo la regola de li toni que “Deduto sey” è del quinto tono, et la raxone si è questa che finisce in ut per b molle et hè autenticho; aduncha diremo qu’el suo principio sarà in Csolfaut e la fine sarà in Ffaut grave.

[...] that we should consider according to the rule of the modes that *Deduto sey* is in the fifth mode, and the reason that is the case is that it finishes on Ut with a flat signature and is authentic; and we say that because it opens on Csolfaut and its end is on the low Ffaut.

As it happens, the two staff-notation sources we have of *Deduto sey* have the music written a fifth lower than stated in the Vercelli treatise, thus with the tenor opening on F below Gamut and ending on the low B-flat, with two flats in the signature.²⁶ It also survives as an intabulation in the Faenza codex, written an octave higher than as described in the Vercelli treatise, with a single-flat signature. That the Vercelli treatise thereby reports a state of the piece at variance with either of the surviving versions adds credibility to the status of the music. But perhaps the main issue is that it describes the song’s

proposta di edizione”, in: “*Et facciam dolci canti*”: *Studi in onore di Agostino Ziino in occasione del suo 65° compleanno*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini, Teresa M. Gialdroni and Annunziato Pugliese, Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana 2003, 263–294.

²⁵ And she credits Pedro Memelsdorff with having drawn it to her attention.

²⁶ Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS 2216, pp. 98–99; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, n. a. fr. 4917, ff. 25v–26v. Of the various modern editions, perhaps the most useful is in *The Works of Johannes Ciconia*, ed. Margaret Bent and Anne Hallmark, Monaco: Éditions de l’Oiseau-Lyre 1985 (Polyphonic Music of the Fourteenth Century 24), no. 42. More recent, and presenting the two staff-notation sources on facing pages, albeit with an idiosyncratic reading of the accidentals, is *Ein venezianisches Liederbuch aus dem Anfang des 15. Jahrhunderts: Die Handschrift Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Nouv. acq. fr. 4917 [PZ]*, ed. Christian Berger, Mainz etc: Schott 2016 (Musikalische Denkmäler 12), no. 32.

Se je sous - pi - re, plains
 et pleu - re, Cent mil - le fois plus que ne
 di, C'est pour l'a - mour de mon a - my
 Per qui seu - le - te
 je de - meu - re.

Ex. 3a: Binchois: *Se je souspire, plains et pleure*.

mode purely in terms of its tenor, as Tinctoris was to do perhaps half a century later.

Turning to another Binchois song, *Se je souspire plains et pleure* (Ex. 3), helps to see this in focus. Looking at the discantus alone, the first cadence is what one would perhaps call a half cadence on A, the next on D, the next a full cadence on A. Then another A cadence and two cadences on D. That would perhaps suggest closing on either A or D. On the other hand, the moment you look at the tenor, the picture changes completely: it is entirely centred on *g* and *d*, and plainly a regular mode 8, closing on G.²⁷

²⁷ This is to view modality in terms of tetrachords and pentachords as fully described for the first time in Marchetto's *Lucidarium* (though similar views are outlined as early as the tenth century in the *Alia musica*). That 'modality' is a complex term with many diffe-



Ex. 3b: Binchois: *Se je souspire, plains et pleure*, last bars.

Amours et souvenir de celle (Ex. 4) tells the same story. The discantus cadences on E, then F, then D, and at the end of the third text-line it cadences on A. Any of those pitches could perhaps create the close. But again, the story of the tenor is entirely different: very briefly, the main pitches throughout are D and G, plainly outlining a transposed dorian with a final on G, and that is how the piece ends.

In those respects, then, Binchois functions absolutely according to the rules, perhaps more so than many of his colleagues. Where he seems to differ from them is in avoiding the temptation to let the tenor dictate the main cadence points of the discantus. And in that particular respect it seems to me that Binchois is a rather more sophisticated composer than most of his contemporaries. And I hope that this conclusion will make Markus Jans as happy as it makes me. The evidence of the early sources is that Binchois had a far greater renown than Du Fay, but it wasn't always easy to see why from the music itself. Now, it seems to me, it is easier to see.

On the other hand, simply following the tenor does not always answer the question. When I chose the title "How to Win the Binchois Game" I was using the language of the websites that tell us "How to win at poker". The secret is to win more often than you lose, or at least that is certainly the case with poker. There are certain hands with which you can never win. One example that always comes to mind, in the case of Binchois, is another song that has fascinated Markus Jans as long as it has fascinated me, namely the lovely *De plus en plus* (see Ex. 5). I am not even going to play the game of cutting off the last three bars, because I know that nobody could possibly guess the end unless they already knew the song well.

rent meanings and shades of meaning should not need stressing here. But I would like to stress that my approach here is purely pragmatic: that the conclusions happen to match Marchetto's view of mode is, in my opinion, just a happy coincidence.

A-mours et sou-ve - nir de cel - - le Que tieng sur
 tou - tes a mes - tres - - - se Tien-nent mon
 cuer en grant des - tres - - - - se
 En at - ten - dant bon - ne nou - vel - - -

Ex. 4a: Binchois: *Amours et souvenir de celle*.

Here, the first two lines are based almost too clearly around C, with cadences on C and G, and with a tenor line that perhaps looks at first as though it were in G mixolydian but then seems to settle down on a C-mode with the reciting note on G. After the mid-point cadence we have a surprising cadence on D, which is quickly dissolved on to another cadence on G; but anyway, that D-cadence would be heard as in line with thousands of *ouvert/clos* cadences in the fourteenth century, leaving us with a choice of whether he will cadence on G or on C; but then, as though out of nowhere, he closes on D.

For Bernhard Meier, with his main focus on the discantus, this was a typical example of what Tinctoris called *commixtio modi*. He parsed the first two lines as mode 5, the third as mode 6 and the remainder as mode 2.²⁸ This is an approach adopted also by Carlo Bosi and Leeman Perkins, but I am not at all happy about changing mode so often in such brief composi-

²⁸ Bernhard Meier, "Die Handschrift Porto 714 als Quelle zur Tonartenlehre des 15. Jahrhunderts", in: *Musica disciplina* 7 (1953), 175–197: 195, note 57.



Ex. 4b: Binchois: *Amours et souvenir de celle*, last bars.

De plus en plus se re-nou - vel - - - le, Ma

doul - ce da - me gente et bel - - - - le,

Ma vo - lon - té de vous ve - ir.

Ce me fait le tres grant de - sir Que j'ay de vous o -

-ir nou-vel - - - - le.

Ex. 5: Binchois: *De plus en plus se renouvelle*.

tions. On the other hand, Astrid Opitz (pp. 364–77), with her focus not on the discantus but on the tenor, construes the whole as being a tetrardus that cadences irregularly on its reciting tone, that is, a regular mode 8 piece that ends on D rather than G. While I admire the logic of this (and her drawing attention to a similar case in the far shorter and simpler song *Je demande ma bienvenue* by Acourt), I simply cannot hear it that way. The close on D

seems as perfect and as conclusive as any in fifteenth-century music. Perhaps one could in fact invoke the principle of *commixtio modi* here and argue that the remarkable high B-flat in bar 18 suddenly changes the tonal direction from mode 8 to mode 2. One thing is certain: Binchois was not working clumsily without any plan. He knew what he was doing. Its impact is unforgettable. Nobody is likely to challenge my view that it is one of his most perfect creations.

