Senior Recital: Jingyun Ng, Soprano

Stuff from the Refrigerator
Music by women composers, trouvères and from the Cabaret

In this evening recital you are invited to indulge in the musical delights from an old refrigerator — Medieval and Baroque pieces thawed for your enjoyment and fresh produce from the 1930s & 2000s.

Immerse in the concoction of flavours from music by women composers, French medieval trouvères and from the Cabaret!

From the Spice Rack - bitter & biting spices of the Baroque era

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677) From Opus 7, Diporti di Euterpe, 1659:
I. Lagrime Mie (Tears of Mine)

Mervyn Lee (harpsichord)

From the Chiller - soured onions & smoked goods of the 1930s:

Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) Selections from the musical drama Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (Rounded Heads and Pointed Heads), 1936:
I. Die Ballade vom Wasserrad (Song of the water-wheel)
II. Lied von der belebenden Wirkung des Geldes (Song of the Invigorating Effects of Money)
III. Das <<Vielleicht>> Lied (The ‘Perhaps’ Song)

Cheung Kam San (piano)
From the Freezer: thawed remnants of preserved Medieval delights:

Anonymous  
Trouvère (~1300s)  
*Aucun vont — Amor qui cor — Kyrie*  
(Also go — Love that the heart — Lord)

Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)  
*Qui es promises — Ha! Fortune — Et non est qui adjuvat*  
(That is promises — Ha! Fortune — And no one helps)

Priscilla Fong (mezzo-soprano),  
Chan Kai Song (baritone), Kester Tay (bass-baritone)

Anonymous  
Trouvères (~1300s)  
Selection of *chanson d'ami* (love songs) by female trouvères:  
I. *L'on dit q'amors est dolce chose*  
(They say that love is a sweet thing)  
II. *Biais douz amis, or ne vouz amuit mie*  
(Dear sweet friend, do not be distressed)

Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377)  
*Rondeau: Ma fin est mon commencement*  
(Round: My end is my beginning)

Pei Yi-Ting (violin), Mervyn Lee (viola da gamba)

From the Food Compartment - glowing maraschino cherries, tender chicken carcasses

Lori Laitman (b. 1955)  
*Men With Small Heads*, 2000:  
I. Men with Small Heads  
II. Refrigerator, 1957  
III. Small Tin Parrot Pin  
IV. Snake Lake

Jingyun Ng (soprano), Cheung Kam San (piano)
PROGRAMME NOTES

In this evening recital you are invited to indulge in musical delights from an old refrigerator — Medieval and Baroque pieces thawed for your enjoyment and fresh produce from the 1930s & 2000s. Immerse in the concoction of flavours from music by women composers, French medieval trouvères and from the Cabaret!

We arrive at the spice rack: Experience the biting, metallic and brutal taste of loss in Italian composer Barbara Strozzi's Lagrime Mie (Tears of Mine). Hitting the shelves in 1659, this chamber cantata for soprano and basso continuo is one of a multitude of gems from Strozzi’s eight full collections of works that were published during her lifetime. She was the most prolific composer of secular vocal music during the 1600s where her reputation as a singer and composer flourished from her strong affiliation with the male-dominated Venetian Accademia degli Incogniti (Society of the Unknown) and later the Accademia degli Unisoni (Academy of the Harmonious). These groups were two key intellectual and artistic circles of her time that developed the Baroque forms of theatrical and musical practices.

In this cantata, Strozzi sets text written from a male-perspective about the irrevocable pain of losing a lover. Strozzi commonly features text from male members of the Incogniti and Unisoni in her works which she would also perform during the gatherings. The cantata opens with a doleful, weeping passage as I, the singer, cry out for my lover Lidia. I have caused her to suffer and she is now trapped in a place where I cannot reach. I bemoan how even fate denies me the ultimate comfort: death. Only tears alone can melt away this pain of eternal loss.

From the chiller we catch a whiff of soured onions, smoke and cigarettes that beckons us to a more recent past: Bask in the echoes of soldiers marching in the distance in songs from Hanns Eisler's Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (Rounded Heads and Pointed Heads). Eisler composed this musical drama in conjunction with text and plot by Bertolt Brecht, a renowned German 20th Century playwright and theatre practitioner. Completed in 1936, this long-withstanding Eisler-Brecht musical drama collaboration is about the barbarism of rising socialism and the rich-poor divide in Germany during the 1930s World War era.

Eisler’s ‘Die Ballade vom Wasserrad’ ('The song of the water-wheel') is sung by a prostitute named Nanna, who muses about the inescapable reality of being of the working class — she is the water that incessantly turns the water-wheel. She boasts about nurturing the fancies of great men, and suggests that perhaps the great and noble will someday turn against each other and she will no longer need them to survive. We hear the cryptic bitterness of a court judge in ‘Lied von der belebenden Wirkung des Geldes’ (Song of the Stimulating Power of Money).
The judge sings about the manipulative power of money on Man and we hear the song repetitively shift from military-style instrumental prelude and interludes, to a lyrical section to illustrate this contrast. He pointedly warns that whether a person is good or bad, money will always make “the man a different man”, “the world a bitter world”, and the law will always serve these people who will selfishly fight for their own survival. Lastly, in ‘Das <<Vielleicht>> Lied’ (The ‘Perhaps’ Song), we hear the conundrum of lower classmen who dream of an impossible escape from their dreary fate. The piano drones below, a death knell waiting to silently steal their final breath as they sleep. Beneath this still and hauntingly translucent veil, their hope rings in the dark.

Digging into the deepest recesses of our freezer, we are engulfed by the rusty, smoky flavours of medieval music from the 1300s. First, we experience the bittersweetness of love's goodness and also the greatest of its evils, Envy, in Aucun vont - Amor qui cor - Kyrie eleison (None go - Love that the heart - Lord have mercy). This is a bilingual motet which was in both French and Latin, composed by an anonymous trouvère (although possibly by Guillaume de Machaut, whom we will encounter later this evening). The proverbial statements in the song caution the listener against the vacillating duality of love. The bilingual text is set in the upper two voices. As the melodies interweave with each other, the occasional repose in the music is temporary, teasing the listener just as Love does to lovers. Below, the lowest voice chants the cantus firmus line, “Kyrie eleison” (Lord, have mercy).

The second motet called Qui es promesses - Ha! Fortune - Et non est qui adjuvat (That is promises - Ha! Fortune - And no one helps) reflects on goddess Fortune's false promises of comfort, hope, and virtue. It is an isorhythmic motet for 3 voices composed by Guillaume de Machaut. Unlike his other free-roaming poet-composer-performer contemporaries, Machaut was a unique case of the French trouvères because he held both secular and religious posts in institutions of noble background. In the top voice we hear that Fortune's promises are “excrement covered with richness”, while the middle voice describes being stranded out at sea without Fortune's goodness. The bass line is a stretched out version of a chant that vehemently insists that “there is no one who helps”.

Venturing further into the freezer of preserved food, we discover delightful chanson d'ami pieces (love songs, or lyric monologues) composed by anonymous women trouvères from the 1300s. Medieval French women musicians learnt poetic and musical skills informally and often played musical instruments, such as a small harp, while singing. ‘L'on dit q'amors est dolce chose’ (They say that love is a sweet thing) is about a woman yearning for her lover and the sweetness of his memory. However, with each strophe, her refrain reminds the listener that this love both torments and delights her. In ‘Biaus douz amis, or ne vouz anuit mie’ (Dear
sweet friend, do not be distressed) I sing to my lover, charming him with my profession of her unconditional love towards him, and with the promise of our secret rendezvous.

We end our tasting session of Medieval delights with Machaut's Ma fin est mon commencement (My end is my beginning) which is a rondeau (round) that Machaut conceived as a musical joke. His self-referencing text state that the “third melody is repeated thrice and goes back against itself, to the beginning”. The music is repeated in the form of A B a A a b A B, where the musical material in all parts in section A are flipped horizontally to make up section B. The end of the song is the beginning of the song — with this palindromic tune, finally emerge from the corners of our refrigerator.

Thus we return to our more usual food compartment where familiar food items await: Consume — at your own discretion — the glowing maraschino cherries and tender chicken carcasses in Lori Laitman's song cycle Men With Small Heads (2000). Laitman is an American 21st century female composer hailed as one of America's most prolific composers of art songs. With the nimble and witty text by Thomas Lux, we gaze into bottled memories of a 6-year-old child. The singer recounts the puzzling ‘Men with Small Heads’ she saw as a child and also the seemingly life-threatening visits to the doctor for a health-check! In 'Refrigerator, 1957', we are treated to a cacophony of preserved food: maraschino cherries, boiled potatoes and chicken carcasses await! ‘A Small Tin Parrot Pin’ fondly reminisces a lovely yet peculiar bright green and creamy purple parrot pin bought from a bin. Finally, a ssssnakey narrator invites you to dip your toes into the cool waters of 'Snake Lake' — the perfect promise to complete your night.
Text andTranslations for Senior Recital (Jingyun)

Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677), Lamento: Lagrime Mie (Lament: Tears of Mine), published 1659

LAMENTO

Lagrime mie, à che vi trattenete,
Perchè non isfogate il fier’ dolore,
Chi mi toglie’l respiro e opprime il core?

Lidia, che tant’ adoro,
Perchè un guardo pietoso, ahimè, mi donò
I paterno rigor l’imprigionò.
Tra due mura rinchiussa stà la bella innocente,
Dove giunger non può raggio di sole,
E quel che più mi duole
Ed accresc’il mio mal, tormenti e pene,
È che per mia cagione prova male il mio bene

E voi lume dolenti non piangete!
Lagrime mie, à che vi trattenete?

Lidia, ahimè, veggo mancarmi, l’idol mio,
Che tanto adoro!
Stà colei tra duri marmi per cui spiro
E pur non moro.

Se la morte m’è gradita,
Or che son privo di spene,
Dhè, toglietemi la vita
(Ve ne prego) aspre mie pene!
Ma ben m’accorgo, che per tormentarmi
maggiornemente,
La sorte mi niega anco la morte.

Se dunque è vero, o Dio, che sol del pianto mio
Il rio destino ha sete.

Lament

Tears of mine, why do you hold back,
why don’t you wash away the pain
which takes my breath and crushes my heart?

Lidia, whom I adore,
Because she gave me a pitying glance,
Has been imprisoned by her severe father.
The innocent girl is locked up within walls
Which the sun’s rays cannot penetrate,
And what pains me most,
And increases my torment,
Is that I am the cause of my beloved’s suffering.

And you, my eyes, are not weeping!
Tears of mine, why do you hold back?

Alas, how I miss my Lidia, my idol,
I love so much!
She is shut up within marble walls and I sigh
but I do not die!

If death might be granted to me
now that I have no hope,
take my life,
(I beg of you) oh my sufferings!
But I am well aware that in order to torture me
even more.
Fate even denies me death,
it is true then, oh God, that only for my tears
the wicked destiny desires

Selections from Hanns Eisler’s Die Rundköpfe und die Spitzköpfe (Rounded Heads and Pointed Heads), published 1936

Die Ballade vom Wasserrad
Von den Großen dieser Erde
melden uns die Heldenlieder:
Steigend auf so wie Gestirne
gehn sie wie Gestirne nieder.
Das klingt tröstlich, und man muss es wissen.
Nur: für uns, die sie ernähren müssen
ist das leider immer ziemlich gleich gewesen.
Aufstieg oder Fall: Wer trägt die Spesen?

The Song of the Water Wheel
From the greats of this Earth
They tell us the Heroes’ songs:
Rising up like heavenly stars,
They go like stars into nothingness.
This sounds comforting, & one must know it.
Only: for us, they must feed them,
This has unfortunately always really been the same.
Rise or fall: who carries the expenses?
Freilich dreht das Rad sich immer weiter
dass, was oben ist, nicht oben bleibt.
Aber für das Wasser unten heißt das leider
nur: Dass es das Rad halt ewig treibt.

Ach, wir hatten viele Herren,
hatten Tiger und Hyänen,
hatten Adler, hatten Schweine
doch wir nährten den und jenen.
Ob sie besser wären oder schlimmer:
Ach, der Stiefel glich dem Stiefel immer
und uns trat er. Ihr versteht: Ich meine
dass wir keine andern Herren brauchen, sondern
keine!

Und sie schlagen sich die Köpfe
blutig, raufend um die Beute
nehmen andre gierige Tröpfe
und sich selber gute Leute.
Unauflhörlich sehns sie einander grollen und
zerfleischen.
Einzig und alleinig
wenn wir sie nicht mehr ernähren wollen
sind sie sich auf einmal völlig einig.

Denn dann dreht das Rad sich nicht mehr weiter
und das heitere Spiel, es unterbleibt
wenn das Wasser endlich mit befreiter
Stärke seine eigne Sach betreibt.

Lied von der belebenden Wirkung des Geldes
Niedrig gilt das Geld auf dieser Erden
Und doch ist sie, wenn es mangelt, kalt.
Und sie kann sehr gastlich werden
Plötzlich durch des Gelds Gewalt.
Eben war noch alles voll Beschwerden
Jetzt ist alles golden überhaucht
Was gefroren hat, das sonnt sich
Jeder hat das, was er braucht.
Rosig färbt der Horizont sich
Blicket hinan: der Schornstein raucht!"
Ja da schaut alles gleich ganz anders an.
Voller schlägt das Herz. Der Blick wird weiter.
Reichlich ist das Mahl. Flott sind die Kleider.
Und der Mann ist jetzt ein ander Mann.

Ach, sie gehen alle in die Irre
Die da glauben, daß am Geld nichts liegt.
Aus der Fruchtbarkeit wird Dürre

Certainly rotates the wheel always further,
That, what is above, will not stay up.
But for the water below this unfortunately means:
that the wheel forever carries on.

Ah, we had many men,
Had tiger and hyena,
Had eagle, had swines,
Still we nourished them and everyone one.
If they were better, or worse:
Ah, the boots resembles boots always
and it joined us. You all understand: I mean that
we need no other men, instead none!

And they strike each other heads senseless
and bloody, around the prey
They will call each other greedy,
And themselves good people
Incessantly we see each other growling and
tearing into pieces.
Solely,
if we no longer want to feed them,
They are at once completely united.

Because then, the wheel will turn no further,
and the fair game will remain underneath,
when the water is finally liberated,
it pursues its own thing.

Song of the Stimulating Effect of Money
The value of money is low on earth
Yet when it is lacking, this earth is a cold place.
But then it can suddenly become very hospitable
Suddenly, through the power of money.
A minute ago everything was full of complaints
Now everything is tinged with gold.
What has frozen, is now basking in the sun.
Everyone has what he needs.
The horizon is rosy.
Look up: the chimney is smoking!
Yes, all at once everything looks completely
different.
Hearts beat fuller. The horizon will be wider.
Meals are generous, clothes are smart.
And the man is now another man!

Ah, you all are hopelessly mistaken
If you think that in money lies no importance.
Fruitfulness will become sterility
Wenn der gute Strom versiegt.
Jeder schreit nach was und nimmt es, wo er’s kriegt
Eben war noch alles nicht so schwer
Wer nicht grade Hunger hat, verträgt sich
Jetzt ist alles herz- und liebeleer.
Vater, Mutter, Brüder: alles schlägt sich!
Sehet, der Schornstein, er raucht nicht mehr!
Überall dicke Luft, die uns gar nicht gefällt.
Alles voller Haß und voller Neider.
Keiner will mehr Pferd sein, jeder Reiter.
Und die Welt ist eine kalte Welt.

So ist’s auch mit allem Guten und Großen.
Es verkümmert rasch in dieser Welt
Denn mit leerem Magen und mit bloßen Füßen ist man nicht auf Größe eingestellt.
Man will nicht das Gute, sondern Geld
Und man ist vom Kleinmut angehaucht.
Aber wenn der Gute etwas Geld hat
Hat er doch, was er zum Gutein braucht.
Wer sich schon auf Untat eingestellt hat
Blicke hinan: der Schornstein raucht!

Ja, da glaubt man wieder an das menschliche Geschlecht.
Edel sei der Mensch, gut und so weiter.
Die Gesinnung wächst. Sie war gewachsen.
Fester wird das Herz.
Der Blick wird breiter.
Man erkennt, was Pferd ist und was Reiter.
Und so wird das Recht erst wieder Recht.

Das Vielleicht Lied
Vielleicht vergeht uns so der Rest der Jahre,
Vielleicht vergehn die Schatten, die uns störten,
Und die Gerüchte, die wir kürzlich hörten,
Die finster waren, waren nicht das Wahre!
Vielleicht, dass sie uns noch einmal vergessen,
So wie wir gern auch sie vergessen hätten?
Wir setzen uns vielleicht noch oft zum Essen.
Vielleicht sterben wir noch in unseren Betten?
Vielleicht, dass sie uns nicht verdammen,
sondern loben?
Vielleicht gibt uns die Nacht sogar das Licht her,
Vielleicht bleibt dieser Mond einst voll und wechselt nicht mehr?
Vielleicht fällt Regen doch von unten nach oben?
Vielleicht fällt Regen doch von unten nach oben!

When money ceases to flow freely.
Everyone clamours for and takes what he can
When things still aren’t all that difficult.
Whoever isn’t downright hungry can put up with things
Now, all is heartless and loveless.
Father, mother, brothers: all fight each other!
Look, the chimney, it smokes no more!
The air is thick, it does not please us
Everywhere is full of hatred and envy.
No one wants to be the horse, everyone the rider.
And the world is a bitter world.

So it is the fate of everything good and great.
Things die off quickly in this world,
Because with empty bellies and bare feet,
People aren’t in the right mind for greatness
One wants money, not goodness,
And they feel dejected.
But when the good man has some money
He has what he needs for security.
You, who’ve already geared yourselves for crime,
Look up: the chimney smokes!

Yes, then one believes once more in the human race.
People are noble, good and so on.
The conviction grows. It was weakened.
The heart becomes stronger.
The horizon will become broader.
One knows, who is a horse is and who is a rider..
So the law is once again the law.

The Perhaps Song
Perhaps the rest of the years will go by
Perhaps the shadows that bothered us will pass,
And the rumors that we all heard
The dark ones were, were not the truth!
Perhaps they forget us again,
So how have we forgotten them?
We may often sit down for a meal,
Perhaps we are still dying in our beds?
Perhaps that they do not condemn us and rather, praise us?
Perhaps the night will even give us the light
Perhaps this moon will be full and will not change anymore?
Perhaps rain falls from the bottom up?
Perhaps rain will fall from the bottom up!
Aucun vont sovent  
Por lor envie  
Mesdisant d’amur,  
Mais ilh n’est si bone vie  
Com d’amer loiaument,  
Car d’ameir vient tote cortoisie,  
Tote honur  
Et tos bins ensegnemens.  
Tot ce puet en li proveir ki amie  
Wet faire sense boisdie  
Et ameir vraiament,  
Car ja en li n’iert assise Vilonie  
Ne convoitise  
D’amasseir argent  
Ains aime bune compagnie  
Et despent ades largement,  
Et si n’at en li felonie  
N’envie  
Sor autre gent.  
Mais ver chascun s’umilie  
Et parolle cortoisement  
S’ilh at dou tot, sense partie,  
Mis sun cuer en ameir entierement.  
Et sachies k’ilh n’aime mie,  
Ains ment,  
Si silh soi demainne autrement.  

Some often  
through envy,  
speak ill of love;  
But there is no life  
as good as loving loyally.  
For from loving comes all courtesy,  
all honour,  
and all good breeding.  
All this can one experience with a lover,  
to love without pretense,  
to love truly.  
Because never in love will there be villainy  
nor covetousness  
to gain money  
Instead he loves good company  
and spends freely,  
and he has in love no treachery  
nor envy  
of others.  
Instead he is humble to all  
and speaks courteously  
if he has wholly, without division,  
given his heart entirely to love.  
And you may know that he loves not at all,  
but lies,  
if he conducts himself otherwise.

Amor qui cor vulnera  
Humanum, quem generat  
Carnalis affectio,  
Numquam sine vicio  
Velaropotes esse,  
Quoniam est necesse  
Ex quo plus diligitur  
Res que cito labitur  
Vel transit, eo minus  
Diligatur Dominus.  

Love that wounds the  
Human heart, that generates  
Carnal affection,  
Can never, or rarely  
Be without vice,  
Since it is necessary,  
the more a thing  
that quickly escapes  
or passes is loved, the less the  
Lord is loved.  

Kyrie Eleison  
Lord, have mercy.
Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377), isorhythmic motet

Qui es promesses de Fortune se fie
Et es richesse de ses dons s'asseure,
Ou clis qui croit qu'elle soit tant s'amie
Que pour li soit en riens ferme ou seure,
Il est trop fols, car elle est non seure
Sans foy, sans loy, sans droit et sans mesure,
C'est fiens couvers de riche couverture,
Qui dehors luist et dedens est ordure.
Une de fausse pourtraiture,
Où nuls ne doit croire ne mettre cure;
Sa convenance en vertu pas ne dure,
Car c'est tous vens, ne riens qu'elle figure
Ne puet estre fors de fausse figure;
Et li siens sont toudis en aventure
De trebuchier; car, par droite nature,
La desloyal renoie, parjure,
Fausse, traitre, perverse et mere sure
Oingt et puis point de si mortel pointure
Que ceaus qui sont fait de sa norriture
En traison met à desconfiture.

He who trusts in the promises of Fortune
and feels secure in the riches of her gifts,
or he who believes her to be so much his friend
that for him she will be firm or be sure in anything
he is foolish, for she is not sure,
without faith, without law, without justice, and
without measure,
it is excrement covered with richness,
which is filth gleaming without and within.
She is an idol of false portraiture,
in whom none should believe nor trust for
protection:
his virtuous propriety does not last,
for it is all wind, nor can anything she represents
be anything other than a false figure;
and her followers are always in danger
of falling; for, by her true nature,
disloyal Fortune denies, perjures;
false, traitorous, perverse and sour mother,
she soothes and then pierces with such mortal
wounds
that those whom she has nourished she
traitorously destroys.

Hal Fortune, trop sui mis loing de port,
Quant en la mer m'as mis sans aviron
En un batel petit, plat et sans bort,
Foible, pourri, sans voile et environ
Sont tuit li vent contraire pour ma mort,
Si qu'il n'a i confort ne garison,
Merci n'espoir, ne d'eschaper ressort,
Ne riens de bien pour moy, car sans raison
Je voy venir la mort amere à tort
Preste de moy mettre à destruction;
Mais celle mort reçoit je par ton sort,
Fausse Fortune, et par la traison.

Ha, Fortune, I am placed too far from port
when you put me on the sea without an oar
in a little boat, flat and without sides,
weak, rotten, without a sail;
and all around the winds go against my death,
so that there is no comfort nor salvation,
pity, nor hope, nor means of escape,
nor anything good for me; for without reason
I see bitter death coming unjustly,
ready to destroy me;
but this death I receive through your spell, false
Fortune, and through your treachery.

Et non est qui adjuvat.

And there is no one who helps

Anonymous Women Trouvères (~1300s), chanson d’ami (love songs, or lyric monologues)

L'on dit q'amos est dolce chose,
Mais je n'en conois la dolcor;
Tote joie m'en est enclose,
N'ainz ne senti nul bien d'amor.
Lasse! mes mal ne se repose,
Si m'en deplaiant et faz clamor.
Mar est batuz qui plorer n'ose,

they say that love is a sweet thing,
But I do not know its sweetness;
All its joy is barred to me,
Nor have I ever felt any of its pleasures.
Alas, my pain never ceases,
So I lament and cry out.
She is woefully defeated who dares not weep
N’en plorant dire sa dolor.
Ses duels li part qui s’ose plaindre;
Plus tost en puet son mal estaindre.

De ce me plaing qu’il m’a traie;
S’en ai trop grant duel acolest,
Quant je qui sui leais amie
Ne truis amor en mon ame.
Je fui ainois de lui baisie,
Si lo fis de m’amor saisie;
Mais tels baise qui n’aime mie:
Baisier ong maint amant trai.
Ses duels li part qui s’ose plaindre;
Plus tost en puet son mal estaindre.

Estre cuidai de lui amée
Quant entre ses braz me tenoit;
Cum plus iere d’amors grevee,
A son parler me refaisoit;
A sa voiz iere si sanee
Cum Piramus quant il moroit:
Navrez en son flanc de s’espee,
Au nom Tisbé les iaiz ovroit.
Ses duels li part qui s’ose plaindre;
Plus tost en puet son mal estaindre.

And in weeping express her grief.
She who dares lament chases her sorrow away;
She can sooner extinguish her pain.

My complaint is that he betrayed me;
And I have reaped such great sorrow.
For I am a faithful lover
Yet I find no love in my beloved.
Time was when I was kissed by him,
So I gave him possession of my love;
Yet there are those who kiss but do not love:
Kisses have led many a lover astray.

She who dares lament chases her sorrow away;
She can sooner extinguish her pain.

I thought I was loved by him
When he held me in his arms;
When I was most tormented by love;
He restored me with his words;
By his voice I was revived
Like Pyramus when he lay dying:
Pierced in the side by his own sword,
On hearing Thisbe’s name he opened his eyes.

She who dares lament chases her sorrow away;
She can sooner extinguish her pain.

Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1377), rondeau (round)

Ma fin est mon commencement
Et mon commencement ma fin

Est teneure vraiment
Ma fin est mon commencement.

Mes tiers chans trois fois seulement
Se retrograde et ainsi fin.
Ma fin est mon commencement
Et mon commencement ma fin.

My end is my beginning
And my beginning my end.

This is truly my tenor [or, that which I hold on to],
My end is my beginning.

My third line three times only
Goes back on itself and so finishes.
My end is my beginning
And my beginning my end.
Lori Laitman (b. 1955), song cycle Men with Small Heads (2000)

Men With Small Heads
and women with small heads
were everywhere
in my hometown when I was six.
Two men standing on the corner: small heads.
Small head: a woman leans to look in her mailbox.
Then there’d be some normal bodies, normal heads.
Not everyone,
in other words, in my hometown
had small heads
but many did, enough
that I’d say to my mother, father: why
does that man have a small head?
I was glad my parents' heads were normal-sized.
They were glad I (mostly) didn’t ask
why a person with a small head
had a small head
within earshot of that person. Apparently
these small heads
did not appear so small to them.
They had my eyes checked first.
They took some x-rays of my skull.
Did I have migraines?
Did have pinhead fears, dreams?
Perhaps it was the angle through the windshield glass?
The local Dr. leaning over me
with his penlight probing
my retina--his head was huge
and the hairs on the back of his hand
were crossed like swords. Nothing wrong
with my eyes or my brain
that he could tell
but the heads I swore were small
were not, they were just your average heads,
circa 1953,
just your average heads,
in America

Refrigerator, 1957
More like a vault -- you pull the handle out
and on the shelves: not a lot,
and what there is (a boiled potato
in a bag, a chicken carcass
under foil) looking dispirited,
drained, mugged. This is not
a place to go in hope or hunger.
But, just to the right of the middle
of the middle door shelf, on fire, a lit-from-within red,
heart red, sexual red, wet neon red,
shining red in their liquid, exotic,
aloof, slumming
in such company: a jar
of maraschino cherries. Three-quarters
full, fiery globes, like strippers
at a church social. Maraschino cherries, maraschino,
the only foreign word I knew. Not once
did I see these cherries employed: not
in a drink, nor on top
of a glob of ice cream,
or just pop one in your mouth. Not once.
The same jar there through an entire
childhood of dull dinners -- bald meat,
pocked peas and, see above,
boiled potatoes. Maybe
they came over from the old country,
family heirlooms, or were status symbols
bought with a piece of the first paycheck
from a sweatshop,
which beat the pig farm in Bohemia,
handed down from my grandparents

. to my parents
to be someday mine,
then my child’s?
They were beautiful
and, if I never ate one,
it was because I knew it might be missed
or because I knew it would not be replaced
and because you do not eat
that which rips your heart with joy.
A Small Tin Parrot Pin
Next to the tiny bladeless windmill
of the salt shaker
on the black tablecloth
is my small tin parrot pin,
bought from a bin,
75 cents, cheap, not pure tin--an alloy,
some plastic toy tin?
The actual pin, the pin that pins the pin,
will fall off soon
and thus the parrot,
if I wear it, which I will,
on my lapel. I'll look down
and it'll be gone.
Let it be found by a child,
or someone sad, eyes
on the sidewalk, or what a prize
it would be for a pack rat's nest.
My parrot's paint
is vivid: his head's red, bright yellow of breast,
and belly, a strip of green,
then purple, a soft
creamy purple, then bright--you know
the color--parrot green
wing feathers. Tomorrow I think
I'll wear it on my blue coat.
Tonight, someone whom I love
sleeps in the next room,
the room next to the room with the black tablecloth,
the salt shaker, the parrot pin.
She is very sleepy
and less impressed than I
with my parrot
with whom, with which I
am very pleased.

Snake Lake
My friends, I hope you will not swim here:
this lake isn't named for what it lacks.
This is not just another vacant scare.
They're in there--knotted, cruel, and thick
with poison, some of them. Others bite
you just for fun--they love that curve
along the white soft side of your foot,
or your lower calf, or to pierce the nerves
with their needles behind your knees.
Just born, the babies bite you all the same.
They don't care how big you are--please
do not swim here. There is no shame
in avoiding what will kill you: cool pleasure
of this water. Do not even dip your toes
in, because they'll hurt you, or worse,
carry you away on their backs--no,
not in homage, but to bite you as you sink.
Do not, my friends, swim here: I like you
living: this is what I believe, what I think.
Do not swim here--lest the many turn to few