

4 Troubadours and Trouvères

A Paradoxical Appearance

Indirect evidence indicates that songs circulated in lay society well before the Romance languages were formed, especially love songs sung by women which particularly troubled the Church. But in creating a liturgical poetry the Church itself abandoned the traditional rhythm of alternating long and short syllables that formed the foundation of classical Latin versification and, taking its inspiration from these popular rhythms, based its meter instead on numbers of feet and rhyme. The first complete extant lyric poems in the vernacular language—in Provençal as it turns out—have nothing “popular” about them, however, regardless of the precise meaning one wishes to give to that word. They are complex, refined, deliberately obscure. They are desperately aristocratic and elitist, advertising with a provocative arrogance their contempt for such bumpkins as are unable to appreciate them and insensitive to elegance of manners and spirit. And the first poet whose work has come down to us was one of the most powerful princes of his time, William IX, count of Poitiers and duke of Aquitaine (1071–1127). Within a few years, his poetic successors and emulators, the troubadours, had multiplied in every southern French court and, in the second half of the twelfth century, they were imitated in the north of France by the trouvères. A court poetry: such was the origin of this *courtly* lyricism whose sudden appearance was as provocative as the conception of love it celebrated.

Courtliness and *fin'amor*

Courtliness and courtly love in no way constituted an autonomous doctrine, conceived and promulgated in a coherent and definitive way. They did indeed find a sort of theorist in the person of Andreas Capellanus (or Andreas the Chaplain), who wrote a *Tractatus de amore* (*Treatise on Love*) around 1184 at the

court of Champagne. But his work was a late codification of practices that had already existed for almost a century and it is difficult to interpret. In reality, all that one can do is to extract empirically from the works of the troubadours a common sensibility and an amorous, worldly ethical system, in full awareness of the fact that this sensibility and this system had no expression other than in the poetry that is their vehicle. It is thus rather artificial, albeit useful and necessary for what follows, to begin this discussion with an inevitably simplified outline of courtliness and courtly love.

The idea of courtliness involved a conception of both life and love. It demanded a nobility of heart (if not of birth), impartiality, liberality, and a good education in all its forms. In order to be courtly one had to know how things were done and how to conduct oneself in company with ease and distinction, to be skilled at hunting and fighting, and to have a spirit sufficiently lively to grasp the refinements of conversation and poetry. In order to be courtly one had to have both a taste for luxury and a detached familiarity with it, and a horror of, and disdain for, any hint of cupidity, avarice, or the desire for gain. Whoever was not courtly was a *vilain*, a word that originally meant “peasant,” but quickly took on a moral signification. The *vilain* was greedy, voracious, vulgar. He thought only of amassing and hoarding. He was jealous of everything he possessed or thought he possessed, of his goods, of his wife.

But no one could be perfectly courtly unless he loved, for love multiplied the lover’s good qualities and even endowed him with those he lacked. The originality of courtliness lay in the essential role it gave to women and to love. It was original with respect to both the teachings of the Church and the customs of the day. The courtly lover’s lady was his *dame*, his *domna* (from the Latin *domina*), which is to say his feudal sovereign. He would do anything she wished; his only desire was to merit the favors she could always freely grant or refuse.

Courtly love, or *fin'amor* (refined love), was founded on the idea that love and desire are the same thing. Desire, by definition, is the desire to be satisfied, but when it is satisfied, of course, it disappears. This is why love simultaneously seeks and dreads the satisfaction that will put an end to desire. Love thus entails a perpetually unresolvable conflict between desire and

the desire to desire, between love and the love of love. This is the explanation for the complex emotion unique to love, a mixture of suffering and pleasure, anguish and exaltation. The troubadours had a word for this complex emotion: they called it *joi*, which is not the same as the feminine noun *joya*, the medieval Provençal equivalent of the modern French *joie* or "joy" by which it is usually translated for lack of anything better. Jaufré Rudel, for example, wrote:

D'aquest amor suy cossiros
Vellan e pueys somphnan dormen,
Quar lai ay joy meravelhos.

(I am tormented by this love when I am awake and when, sleeping, I dream: then I have marvelous *joi*.)

This fundamental insight leads to the belief that love should not be satisfied rapidly or easily, that it must first deserve to be satisfied, and that one should multiply the obstacles that will exacerbate the desire before satisfying it. Whence a certain number of requirements all proceeding from the principle that the lady must be, not inaccessible, for courtly love was not Platonic, but difficult of access. This is why, theoretically, love could not exist within marriage, where desire faded because it could always be satisfied, and where the man's right to the woman's body prevented him from thinking of her as his *mistress* in the true sense of the word, whose freely given favors he had to earn. In principle, therefore, one had to love another man's wife. It is thus not surprising that the first quality required of a lover was discretion and that his worst enemies were the *lauzengiers*, the jealous slanderers who spied on him in order to denounce him to the lady's husband. The lady, moreover, was supposed to be of a higher social rank than her suitor so that their amorous relations could be modeled on feudal relations and so that the two partners would not be tempted; she, to grant her favors out of self interest, he, to use his authority over her to force her to give in to him.

One should not exaggerate the importance of these rules, however, which come to the fore only in a specialized genre of love casuistry like the *jeu-parti* (a poetic debate), where they must be taken with a grain of salt, and are ultimately less prom-

inent in the works of the poets themselves than they are in the works of their commentators. They were the most visible consequence of the equation of love with desire, but they were not the essential one. The essential consequence was the peculiar turn this equation gave to the troubadours' eroticism. In their work, there is a mixture of respectful fear and bold sensuality in the presence of the beloved lady that gives their love its adolescent traits: a deliberate tendency towards voyeurism, a taste for erotic dreams, which exhaust desire without satisfying it, a feverish and detailed imagining of the female body and the caresses it invites, along with a refusal to imagine the most intimate part of that body and a repugnance to envisage the consummation of the sexual act. This body, which "will kill [the poet] if he cannot touch it naked," this body "white as the snow of Christmas," "white like the snow after a frost" (these are all Bernard de Ventadour's words), this body is, like snow, burning and icy, or chilling.

The Poetry of the Troubadours

Before they were celebrated in a slightly different spirit by the romances, courtliness and *fin'amor* were promulgated only in the lyric poetry of the troubadours in the language of *oc* and, later, in that of the trouvères in the language of *oïl*, that is, in the work of those who "find" (in Provençal *trobar* means "to find"), or invent, poems. It was a lyric poetry in the true sense of the word, a sung, monodic poetry. Every poet composed, as one of them says, "los moz e'l so" ("the words and the music").

The essential genre of this poetry was the *canço* (song), a term that quickly took over from the earlier *vers* (verse) used by the first troubadours. The *canço*, or *grand chant courtois* (great courtly song) as modern scholars have called it, was a poem of approximately forty to sixty lines divided into stanzas of six to ten lines. It usually ended with a *tornada*, an envoi or short concluding stanza, repeating the melody and the rhymes of the end of the last regular stanza. The metric pattern and the rhyme scheme were often complex and, in principle, original, as was the melody which, beneath a fairly simple melodic line, played intensely with the expressive possibilities of the melismata, the vocal passages sung to single syllables of the text. The rhymes

could remain the same from stanza to stanza throughout the entire poem (*coblas unisonans*); they could change every two stanzas (*coblas doblas*); or they could change every stanza (*coblas singulars*). The poets also used *estramp* rhyme, where isolated rhyming words were placed in the same position in two succeeding stanzas. They could rhyme entire words, and use the same rhyme word in the same place in every stanza. The last line of a stanza could be repeated at the beginning of the next stanza. This was a favorite technique of Galician-Portuguese poetry; but the troubadours preferred the technique of identical stanza endings.

But the style and the tone of this poetry are even more striking than its prosodic games. The language is taut, the expression is often willfully complicated, more often elliptic or rocky, with a preference, even in the choice of sounds sometimes, for ruggedness over fluidity. Around the 1170s, certain troubadours cultivated a deliberately hermetic style, or *trobar clus*, a "closed," obscure poetic creation. Raimbaud d'Orange, one of these poets, described his poetic activity in this way:

Cars, bruns et teinz mots entrebesc,
Pensius pensanz.

(Precious, dull and brightly colored words, I interlace,
thoughtfully thinking.)

Other poets preferred the more accessible "light" or "easy" style of the *trobar leu*. In a debate with Raimbaud d'Orange, for example, Guiraut de Bornelh rejoiced that his songs could be understood by the simple folk at the spring. The *trobar ric*, or "rich" style, finally, was a development of the *trobar clus* whose best representative was Arnaud Daniel. It preferred to play with the sumptuousness of language and words, with virtuosity of versification.

This poetry, so attentive to refined expression, did not seek to be at all original in content. It had no fear of repetition and never tired of saying, song after song, that spring makes one want to sing of love, but that this song is sad in the mouth of one whose love is unrequited. For the troubadours, poetic creation aimed at conforming as closely as possible to an ideal model, while simultaneously introducing tiny transformations

and innovations, and rhetorical and metrical subtleties, and playing on the infinite number of ways of combining the conventional motifs. But this "formal" poetics did not constitute, as has sometimes been suggested, a turning inwards upon language itself and an indifference towards the world to which language refers. On the contrary, its monotony and the tautness of its expression seem to have been the consequence of a demand for sincerity that was part of its rules. It presumed that there was an equivalence between the propositions "I love" and "I sing," and from this it deduced that the poet's poem should, in some way, resemble his love, that the characteristics and the perfection of his poem should reflect the characteristics and perfection of his love. As Bernard de Ventadour remarked, he who loved best was also the best poet:

Non es maravilha s'eu chan
Melhs de nul autre chantador,
Que plus me tra'l cors va amor
E melhs sui failhz a so coman.

(It is no wonder if I sing better than any other singer, for
my heart draws me more towards love and I am more
obedient to its commands.)

The tensions of the style reflect those of love—of *joi*—and Arnaud Daniel defines himself as both lover and poet in three famous enigmatic lines:

Eu son Arnauz qu'amas l'aura
Et chatz la lebre ab lo bou
E nadi contra suberna.

(I am Arnaud who gathers the wind and hunts the hare
with the ox and swims against the tide.)

In general, just as love was supposed to tend towards an ideal perfection without being affected by circumstances and contingencies, so the song that expressed and reflected it was supposed to tend towards an abstract perfection that leaves no room for the anecdotal. It is for this reason that the convention of starting every song with an evocation of spring—a custom that undoubtedly went back to the very roots of Romance lyricism and that produced the brief descriptions of nature that

we find so charming—fell out of fashion and was ridiculed in the thirteenth century: the true lover, the trouvères explained again and again, loves in all seasons, not only in the spring.

The Origins

Like that of the *chansons de geste*, albeit for different reasons, the birth of courtly lyricism has received much, sometimes too much, scholarly attention. The characteristics of courtliness and of *fin'amor* and the sophistication of this poetry make it impossible to see it as the simple emergence in writing of a pre-existing popular poetry. The fundamental masculinity of the courtly attitude towards love and the submission of the lover to his *dame* are almost sufficient in and of themselves to exclude this possibility. In most civilizations, and, in any event, all around the Mediterranean basin, the oldest love lyrics are attributed to women and look at love from a feminine point of view. As we will see later, all that we can know about the earliest Romance lyricism confirms this general tendency.

Some scholars have suggested that courtly lyricism was simply a transposition into the vernacular language of the courtly Latin poetry that had been practiced in the sixth century by Venantius Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers, when he praised the noble wives of princes, or, in the eleventh century, by Strabo, Hildebert of Lavardin, and Baudri of Bourgueil—a type of poetry that was also cultivated, at about the same time, by the clerks of the schools of Chartres who sometimes wrote in praise of the townswomen. According to these scholars, those aspects of the troubadours' poetry that go beyond this Platonic exaltation of ladies, and in particular the rather racy songs of the first troubadour, William IX, were the products of the Ovidian inspiration of the goliards, or wandering clerks. It is indeed true that one finds a medieval Latin rhetorical influence and Ovidian echoes in the works of the troubadours. But one has only to read them to understand how much their tone differs from that of Latin poetry, where one finds little of their passionate seriousness that makes love the sum of moral life and, indeed, of life itself. The intellectual centers of Chartres and Angers, moreover, were rather too northern to have played a determining role in the birth of a poetry in the language of *oc*. Apart from the songs of the goliards, furthermore, Latin poetry

was read, not sung. Save for certain rare exceptions, finally, the troubadours were far from being well enough versed in Latin culture to carry through this kind of adaptation successfully.

It has been asserted often and for a long time, albeit not without challenges, that courtly poetry and *fin'amor* were of Hispano-Arab origin. Already at the beginning of the tenth century, an Arab poet in Spain like Ibn Da'ud in his *Kitab az-zahrah* (*Book of the Flower*) or, at the beginning of the eleventh century, other Arab poets like Ibn Ḥazm, who wrote his *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma* (*The Dove's Necklace*) around 1020, celebrated an idealized love, called *odhrīte* love, that was not altogether unlike *fin'amor*. Beautiful, capricious, and tyrannical women, lovers whose sufferings took the form of true physical illness that could lead to death, confidants, messengers, the threat of guardians and jealous spies, discretion and secrecy, an air of spring: the whole amorous and poetic universe of the troubadours may be found in this literature even though the effects of the differences between the two civilizations are considerable. But the strongest argument in favor of this hypothesis, perhaps rests on the similarity between stanzaic forms in the two poetic traditions. It is not historically impossible that the one influenced the other. The two civilizations were in contact in Spain. The *reconquista* (the reconquest of Moslem Spain by Christian forces) actually encouraged exchanges between the two and we know quite precisely that captive female singers were much appreciated in both camps.

But then why did the poetry of the troubadours flourish to the north and not the south of the Pyrenees? The stanza of the Andalusian *muwashshah* and *zajal*, which the troubadours used later, was unknown to the Arabs until they arrived in Spain. From this, certain scholars concluded that the Arabs borrowed the stanza from the Christian Mozarabs and that the Arab stanza actually imitated an ancient form of Romance lyricism that was later taken up independently by the troubadours. These scholars had two further arguments to support this hypothesis. First, the *kharija*, or ending, of the *muwashshah* is often in the Romance language—and it is thus by the detour of Arab poetry that the oldest fragments of Romance lyricism are known to us. If the Arabs borrowed these citations from the indigenous poetic tradition, they could very well have borrowed

its stanzaic forms as well. Second, this type of stanza may be found in Latin liturgical poetry, like the *tropes* of Saint-Martial of Limoges, which was written well before the appearance of the troubadours and had no reason to take its inspiration from erotic Arab poetry.

In truth, neither hypothesis can be proved. Neither, moreover, excludes the other: the play of influences was undoubtedly complicated. Of course, other factors must also be taken into account, like the socio-historical conditions within which this poetry emerged. These include the particular nature of the castle life in which the young nobles did their military and worldly apprenticeship; the hopes and demands of this group of "youths" who, as Georges Duby has pointed out, were excluded for a long time, and sometimes forever, from marriage and its attendant responsibilities (the word "youth" is indeed used with a particular insistence in the poetry of the troubadours);¹ the cultural consequences of the rivalry and mutual imitation between the higher and lower nobility noted by Erich Köhler (although his analysis is more appropriate to the courtly romance than to lyric poetry).² All these elements should be considered, so long as they do not become the sources of a simplifying determinism.

From the Troubadours to the Trouvères

Who were the troubadours? Some of them were great lords, like William IX, Dauphin d'Auvergne, Raimbaud d'Orange, or even Jaufré Rudel, "prince of Blaye." Others were petty rural nobles, like Bertrand de Born, Guillaume de Saint-Didier, Raymond de Miraval, or the four castellans of Ussel. Others were poor devils like Cercamon, the second oldest known troubadour, whose nickname means "he who travels the world over," or his disciple Marcabru, a foundling who was first named "Lost Bread,"

¹ G. Duby, "Youth in Aristocratic Society," in *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. C. Postan (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 112-22.

² E. Köhler, *Ideal und Wirklichkeit in der höfischen Epik: Studien zur Form der frühen Artus- und Graldichtung*, 2d ed. (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1970). French trans., E. Kaufholz, *L'aventure chevaleresque: Idéal et réalité dans le roman courtois* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974).

or simply the children of castle servants, like Bernard de Ventadour. Others were clerks. Some of them were unfrocked, like Peire Cardenal who, when he reached his majority, left the "canonry" where he had been sent as a small child in order to become a troubadour; but others were not, like the Monk of Montaudon who supported his monastery on the gifts he received in return for his songs. Others were merchants, like Foulquet de Marseille, who, repenting because he had sung of love, entered a monastery, became abbot of Le Thoronet, then bishop of Toulouse. Others, like Gaucelm Faiditz, were former jongleurs, while others, inversely, were impoverished nobles who became jongleurs like, apparently, Arnaud Daniel. From castle to castle, at this court, around that lady or patron, all these people met one another, exchanged songs, cited and answered one another, argued questions of love and poetry in the poetic dialogues called *jeux-partis*, or abused one another in polemical *sirventès* (satirical or moralizing poems).

How do we know anything about the lives and the characters of the troubadours? The manuscripts that have preserved their songs for us—the *chansonniers*—are one source of information. These are anthologies in which the works of each troubadour are often preceded by a *vida*, or short history of his life, while some songs are accompanied by a *razo*, or commentary, claiming to relate the circumstances of the poem's composition and explain its allusions. Some *vidas* are almost accurate. Others are almost entirely fictitious and based on hints found in the songs themselves. These latter are interesting for what they tell us about the spirit in which the works of the troubadours were read when they were collected, edited, and copied into manuscripts during, or at the end of, the thirteenth century. This thirteenth-century spirit of autobiographical anecdote seems very distant from the generalizing idealization to which the poetry of the troubadours aspired.

Times had changed. Courtliness itself had changed as it had passed to northern France and, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the northern French imposed this change roughly on the southern courts in the course of the Albigensian crusade.

Courtly lyricism developed in northern France towards the middle of the twelfth century. The symbol, if not the cause, of

this expansion was the marriage in 1137 of Eleanor of Aquitaine, the granddaughter of the first troubadour, first, to the king of France, Louis VII the Young, then, after her repudiation in 1152, to the king of England, Henry II Plantagenet. One of the two daughters born of her first marriage, Marie, became the countess of Champagne and the patroness of Andreas Capellanus and, most importantly, of Chrétien de Troyes. The courtly spirit thus reached all the great Francophone courts.

Emulators of the troubadours, the trouvères nonetheless differed from their models in several ways. In the case of the "great courtly song," they were generally more reserved, more prudish even. They used all the resources of versification and rhetoric with deliberate skill, as Roger Dragonetti has shown;¹ but they softened their effects more than the troubadours did and seldom resorted to the harsh, flamboyant, paradoxical, taut style so dear to the southerners. The *trobar clus* style, which even in the south had been no more than a passing fad, was unknown to them. On the other hand, their melodies have survived more often than those of the troubadours, and the last trouvères, like Adam de la Halle in the 1280s, made decisive progress towards polyphony—thus bringing about the ineluctable disintegration of the synthesis of text and music on which courtly lyricism had been founded.

Even the conditions of literary life were different for the trouvères. To be sure, one finds the same social spectrum among the trouvères as among the troubadours. They included princes, like the subtle and fertile Count Thibaud IV de Champagne, king of Navarre; or Jean de Brienne, king of Jerusalem, of whose work only a single *pastourelle* (a song relating an encounter with a shepherdess) survives; and other great lords, or at least eminent figures, like Conon de Béthune or Gace Brulé. But the proportion of noble dilettantes, each writing a few songs because it was part of the social game, was smaller in the north than it was in the south. One sign of this is that even though the overall poetic production of the troubadours and the trouvères was roughly equal, we know the names of about 450

¹ R. Dragonetti, *La Technique poétique des trouvères dans la chanson courtoise: Contribution à l'étude de la rhétorique médiévale* (Bruges: De Tempel, 1960).

troubadours but only about 200 trouvères. The greatest difference is that, regardless of the importance of the great literary courts like that of Champagne, most trouvères belonged to the literary milieux of the rich commercial towns of the north of France, especially Arras, from the end of the twelfth century on.

Literary societies that organized poetry competitions appeared in several of these towns in the course of the thirteenth century. The most illustrious, the *Puy* (poets' association) of Arras, was associated with a brotherhood named, significantly, the *Confrérie des jongleurs et bourgeois d'Arras* (Brotherhood of Jongleurs and Burgers of Arras), and dominated by the greatest commercial families of the town. These urban poets, who were as likely to be burghers as clerks, continued to compose "great courtly songs." But, even without falling into the old error of trying to define a "bourgeois" literature in the thirteenth century, one has to recognize that they had a pronounced taste almost unknown among the troubadours for those lyric genres that formed a sort of racy, comic counterpoint to courtliness or seemed to be the heirs of an even older tradition.

This is why I have waited until now to discuss the non-courtly lyric genres, even though some of them seem to have descended from the primitive forms of Romance poetry.

The Chansons de femme and Non-Courtly Lyricism

There are two sorts of non-courtly genres. One brings us immediately face-to-face with the enigma of a popular poetry, whose echo these genres preserved or created artificially. These are the *aubes* (dawn songs) and the *chansons de toile* (sewing songs). Elements of popular origin may sometimes be found in the other genres, and may even play a fundamental role in them, but these other genres formed, as was said above, the underside of courtliness and, at least in the state in which they come down to us, existed only in relation to it: they are the *reverdies* (spring songs), the *chansons de malmariée* (songs of the mismarried woman), and the *pastourelles* (songs relating an encounter with a shepherdess). The *chansons à danser* (dance songs), defined by their sometimes ancient form, borrowed their themes from all the other genres, and furnished them in return with refrains and, occasionally, melodies.

As was mentioned above, the primitive form of amorous lyricism was generally the *chanson de femme*, or "woman's song." Although this primitive poetry is obscured in French literature by the sudden appearance of courtly lyricism, a number of indications testify to its existence: the Church's very early condemnation of lascivious women's songs; the few amorous episodes found in the first *chansons de geste*, like the death of "la belle Aude" ("beautiful Aude") in the *Chanson de Roland*, which seem to reserve for women the elegiac expression of love; and the fact that all the *kharjas* borrowed from Mozarab poetry are taken from women's songs where the singer's love is generally expressed with a passionate and sensual seriousness. The same tone is occasionally recognizable in the poetry of the small number of women troubadours, the *trobairitz*, who usually limited themselves to creating feminine versions of the stereotypes of the "great courtly song."

But above all, there existed in the language of *oil* an altogether unusual genre, the *chanson de toile* (sewing song), which seems to be related to the tradition of the woman's song, even though the twenty surviving *chansons* were composed long after the development of courtly poetry and have been influenced by it. The form of the *chansons de toile* makes them analogous to little *chansons de geste*. They are almost all in decasyllables. Their stanzas, sometimes rhymed but often assonant, distinguish themselves from epic *laissez* only by their relative brevity, their regularity, and the presence of a refrain. They are narrative songs in the third person. Their style, like that of the *chansons de geste*, is stiff, their syntax avoids subordination, and it is rare that a sentence is longer than a line. They represent young women who are sensually and painfully in love with indolent seducers or distant lovers for whom they wait, seated at a window, busy with their needlework: whence their name. Some of them were inserted in a romance from the beginning of the thirteenth century, Jean Renart's *Roman de la Rose ou de Guillaume de Dole*. This subtle and malicious author, who boasted that he was the first to think of citing lyric pieces in a romance, had the aged widow of a castellan say that "in the old days ladies and queens sang historical songs while making tapestries."

On the basis of this testimony and the existence of the *chansons de toile*, scholars have for a long time accepted without question that these songs were very old. But some of their traits are hard to reconcile with their apparent archaism, which should be interpreted, rather, as either a survival from an earlier stage of the songs, which were otherwise modified, or the product of a conscious effort. What is certain is that the songs we have were written by men. One of them says so, others are the work of a known trouvère, Audefroy le Bastard. It seems that they were fashionable in the refined literary circles of Picardy, Wallonie, and Lorraine during the first third of the thirteenth century, whose members, bored with the sophistication of the "great courtly song," found their simplicity charming. There is thus an element of artifice in their success and, indeed, in their composition; but it is hard to believe that they were entirely made up in these circumstances, and not based on an older tradition.

Other lyric types were more easily bent to the conventions of courtliness. The *chanson d'aube* (dawn song), for example, exists in almost all the poetic traditions of the world, from China to ancient Egypt to Greece. In medieval western Europe, the *aube* was not always a woman's song, but it often was, especially its oldest specimens. Its subject is the painful separation of the lovers the morning after a night of love. It could be integrated easily into the courtly universe since it presupposed clandestine love affairs. In fact, it is the only non-courtly lyric genre whose success was as great, or even greater, among the troubadours as among the trouvères.

Although the remaining non-courtly genres—the *reverdie* (spring song), the *chanson de malmariée* (song of the mismarried woman), the *pastourelle* (song relating an encounter with a shepherdess), and the *rondeau* (round)—were even more clearly adapted to the prevailing poetic fashions, they have sometimes been thought to reveal folkloric sources of French lyricism.

The *reverdie*, as its name suggests (*re* = again, *verdoier* = become green), extended the evocation of spring often found in the initial stanza of the works of the troubadours and trouvères to an entire poem. The few surviving examples thus form a courtly sub-genre. It has been suggested, however, that the

reverdies surviving residually in the initial spring stanza may echo the celebrations of springtime renewal that, going back to paganism, have persisted in attenuated forms up until almost the present day. These festivals were characterized by a certain license, and during them women could, it is said, take the initiative in love. A charming poem known by the title of the *Ballade de la reine d'avril* (*Ballad of the Queen of April*) has been seen by some as offering explicit testimony that this was the case. But it doesn't appear to be as old as it might at first seem, and it is curiously composed in an artificial language (the language of *oïl* disguised as the language of *oc*), of which, however, it is not the only example.

After the courtly song and the *jeu-parti*, the *trouvères*' next most favorite genre was the narrative, dialogic song relating an amorous encounter. In it the poet tells how, and with what success, he has tried to seduce a young woman, usually a lady who is unhappy with her husband (the song of the *malmariée* or mismarried woman) or a shepherdess (the *pastourelle*). In these poems, the husband is a *vilain* whose inability to perform his conjugal duties justifies his misfortune, while the surface elegance of the poet's amorous request offers a piquant contrast with both the brutality of his desire and the rusticity of the shepherdess. The whole encounter is thus a pretext for a burlesque and often obscene distortion of the rules of courtliness. To this is added, in the case of the *pastourelles*, the attraction exerted by the shepherdess herself, loaded with all the diffuse eroticism of the reviving nature at whose heart she lives and of which she seems to be an emanation. The phantasms of these songs thus organize themselves around rustic and spring motifs in a sort of spirit of sexual revenge: the revenge of the mismarried woman on her husband, of the young woman on her mother who keeps her from loving, of the knightly skirtlifter on the courtly lady for whom he languishes.

The strength of these phantasms appears in a particularly striking way in the short *rondeaux* (rounds) for dancing deriving, it seems, from a very old stanza form. Pell-mell within the three lines of the stanza and the two lines of the refrain, the authors of these *rondeaux* evoke all the lyric themes in an allusive, fragmentary, dismembered way, knowing full well what secret ties bind their apparent incongruity—the meadow and its new

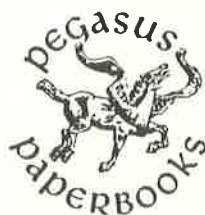
flowers, the young woman at the spring, the shepherdess and her flock, the mismarried woman and her jealous husband, the pain of love and the movements of the dance. Each *rondeau* condenses into five lines this poetry's thin, troubling perfume.

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