

Robert Guiette

FORMAL POETRY IN FRANCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES [1946]¹

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This is the first ever English-language translation of a lecture delivered by the Belgian medievalist Robert Guiette, then working at the University of Ghent, at the beginning of 1946. Entitled “D’une poésie formelle en France au Moyen Age”, this was one of Guiette’s most influential pieces, and presented his ideas – that announced Zumthor’s some decades later – about a medieval poetry based on a formal esthetic.

It would be easy to assemble the corpus of all the courtly songs that have made their way to us from the northern French Middle Ages. But reading this collection would necessarily be a highly disappointing experience. Modern readers of “love poems” expect to discover the passionate things that lovers sang to their beloveds on every lyric page. Used to their own habits, they expect passionate cries, confessions, confidences of a moving sincerity, all sorts of revelations and indiscretions expressed in original and picturesque terms, accented by a thoroughly personal pathos, spontaneous words, surprisingly inventive images, in a word the freshness and naiveté that are so easily attributed to “primitives.”

And what do they encounter? Nothing, so to speak, but traditions and conventions in all two thousand songs.

They worry; they look for help from scholars, and preferably from Alfred Jeanroy, the most conscientious historian of this poetry, and the most clear-

seeing (1925 [1889]; 1896, I, 344-404; 1922, 310ff; 1934). Here is what they read in Jeanroy's studies:

There is nothing in our [northern French] songbooks that was not already in the work of the [southern French] troubadours: the same thoughts, which are almost all commonplaces, the same images, the same metaphors, the same style. The lover languishes and wastes away at the feet of the most beautiful, the noblest – and the most inexorable – of all ladies; but he will not renounce his love because his suffering is dear to him, and he knows that his torment increases his worth and his courtliness. This is what dozens of poets will repeat with relish for five hundred years, whether they are nobles or commoners, princes or minstrels. (1922, 311)

Nothing could be easier than to explain this tradition's rigor: the courtly spirit – as is well known – come from elsewhere, spread throughout the French world. The courtly song is an emanation of this spirit; it is its most perfect expression.

The courtly song was part and parcel of the set of social conventions, it was part of the worldly ritual that, born in the south of France, took all of Europe by storm with the tyrannical power that belongs to all fashions; it would have seemed as bizarre, as ridiculous to innovate in this matter as in the cut of clothing or the ceremony of feasts. (1922, 310)

A gathering could not be brilliant unless a singer sang a song in gracious and gallant homage to a Lady. His song, as everyone understood, had to be about love without, nonetheless, his having to represent recognizably either real and authentic affairs or any particular circumstances. The social conditions in which the work was presented required a certain impersonality. Just in case the song did express an authentic love, however, and the lady of whom it spoke or to whom it was addressed might be present and in the company of her husband, her family and the people with whom they socialized, one avoided as best one could the indelicacy of indiscretions or the impropriety of too personal traces of passion. One insisted on the importance of secrecy. One insisted on the poet's need to confess the love that possessed him, perhaps the better to distract attention, even when everything he confessed was traditional. A well-wrought fiction, therefore, and not an analysis of the heart.

Readers must thus give up hope of discovering elements of the authors' biographies in courtly songs.² The very purpose for which they were intended leads courtly songs to eliminate everything but the anticipated theme. Someone

may – perhaps involuntarily – have happened to be himself or to seem so, but Alfred Jeanroy has most justly pointed out that the works in which this occurs are not those which were most admired at the time.

It seems that the Middle Ages did not much appreciate these simple and touching effusions: the works they considered classics are precisely those in which the emotion is almost completely smothered by the argument [...]

The small number of copies in which these works have been transmitted to us, he adds, prove it (1896, I, 378).³

Or, more probably, suggests that they were intended for private use rather than public recitation.

All the tradition's elements are borrowed from the poetry of the South. At that time, however, one was careful not to translate the Provençal models. No northern French poet ever thought of presenting us with "the equivalent of Bernard de Ventadour's passionate naiveté, or Rambaut d'Orange's impertinent fantasy, or Guiraut de Borneil's sententious gravity" (1922, XII, 311). They clung to the most conventional aspects. The weariness that we experience when we skim through the songbooks was foreign to them.⁴ Is it not incredible that, for a century and a half, the same song was unendingly refashioned, rewritten, renewed in writing so that it could be sung again? It would have been so easy to reuse some existing version of it. So they were not attached to a poem, but to a theme, to a series of formulas.⁵

The song composed in this way seemed to contemporaries to belong to the lyric genre par excellence: the Oxford manuscript calls it the "great song" and Dante held it in the highest esteem (*Vulg. eloq.* II,3). Is this not because the qualities of the song – a conventional, which is to say artificial, work – were first and foremost esthetic? The artist put his talent on display rather than his passion. As Denis de Rougemont says, "Europe never knew a more profoundly rhetorical poetry: not only in its verbal and musical forms but even, however paradoxical it may seem, in its inspiration" (Rougemont 69).⁶

I will not speak about musical rhetoric here. I will simply remind the reader that one must take the importance of the melody into account in the case of works made to be sung.

The relation between each text and its melody – or its *melodies* since it is not rare for us to know of several melodies for the same poem – should be examined. The melody is in harmony with the general tone of the poem and with

the theme. With certain exceptions, the words do not force it to be picturesque or drag it into dramatic pathos. But there is an interpenetration of all the work's elements, even when one of these elements existed before another, even when they did not have the same author. One may, however, ask if the term "rhetoric" is applicable to music that is less psychological than formal or normative, to a music that is less concerned with drama – there is none, properly speaking, in the song's argument – than with its own voice: the expressive phenomenon takes place on a plane that has nothing romantic about it. By using the term rhetoric to qualify this music, one may seem to want to depreciate it, when in fact it is simply a matter of identifying its character.

Critics of the last century paid close attention to the role of the melody in courtly songs.⁷ They were prepared to attribute to the musical element the interest in sincerity from which they could not manage to shake themselves free and which they presumed indispensable for all forms of art. But A. Jeanroy, whom one can never tire of citing on these subjects, already pointed out the extreme monotony and uniformity of the melodies of the northern French poets a long time ago (1896, I, 397).

The most meticulous studies have shown that the musical structure did not determine the structure of the stanzas, but was in harmony with it (Errante 315).⁸ The stanza has likewise been the object of scholarly research, which is justified by the great care which the old French poets, disciples of the troubadours, lavished on it. The stanza is governed by conventional laws (Jeanroy 1925).

The courtly song is a genre that willfully excludes originality from musical thought just as it excludes originality or sincerity from poetic thought (Jeanroy 1922, 311).⁹ Of the courtly northern French poets it has been said:

Their highest goal was not to escape from the restricted circle of their art, in either poetry or music, but rather to shine among those who shut themselves within it with religious scrupulousness. (Jeanroy 1896, I, 397)

For the northern French poets, the courtly song was an artistic creation, a rhetorical creation. They applied themselves to making, to constructing an "object," a new reality, out of the given elements. They were not intent on a confession, but on a song. The game that drew them in was "composition": the arrangement of known elements, the elaboration of a definitive verbal set, of a text to be sung, of a sung text.

How did the northern French poet sing his work? Did he stress its emotional development as he did so? That would have required that a confidence expressed in music accompany an impersonal and formal poem. Pathos is foreign to this song: neither its jubilation nor its nostalgia, neither its melancholy nor its harshness seems to me to be tied to an action, but only to a state, to a mode of feeling, whose authenticity lies in the feeling's existence outside the life of the artist who sings, a complex feeling whose tension is purely musical. I imagine that his singing, while imbued with the general feeling of the work, emphasized the organic structure of the melody and of each of its parts. In his singing, he gave free reign to what drove him to sing his joy or his pain, to something Dionysian. He thought only his singing, so to speak, did not imitate, or set forth, or translate, or represent: he sang. What he sang was the need, the desire to sing.¹⁰ Starting from a melodic phrase – or a melodic proposition or cell – he composed a succession of sounds that he asked to manifest his being and his life; but he didn't do so in a "primitive" way, instinctively: he showed himself to be – as he was in reality – a traditional being. His means were drawn from tradition, chosen in advance by an established convention. As Th. Gérold has said: "This music was perhaps also a pre-established language that used clichés." The personal touch the musician added was precisely the use he made of them: the unity and the refinement that he added, insofar as he was able, that was proper to courtly milieus.

It was a game, in the strict sense of the word. Just as the variation on a known theme, the verbal and stanzaic structure, was a game.

We are aware what a game – and, preferably, the most pointless – reveals about the secret and perhaps inexpressible depths of being, about the unconscious, about the individual. These poets who sang thus told – not only by words, nor by words coupled with the melody, but by the poetical-musical complex – not the love they were living "in reality" or that they had lived, but the ideal love that they might live and how they might live it according to courtly convention. From which I would conclude, somewhat paradoxically, that they offered us the most profound confessions about life and about themselves without confiding to us the slightest confidence about anything that had actually taken place. It is through such sincerity that they are still able to move us; it is through it that they endow this "sort of technical exercise" – as Gaston Paris put it (1912, 53) – with an emotional value.

In these conditions, the composition of a text (thanks to the primacy of the

esthetic order) does not have to take into account rational, or even emotional or psychological, logic: the esthetic order is what is most important. The subject of the work cannot be confused with what it relates. The theme is only a pretext. It is the formal work itself that is the subject.

Language must be used for its incantatory value. This value comes not from the word, which is chosen ahead of time, so to speak, by tradition, but from its position and the use that is made of it.

Do not think, however, that the word is thus entirely freed and that we are dealing here with a technique like that of “free words” advocated formerly by Marinetti, or like that of automatic writing. In the courtly song, a word is chosen for its sound value; but it does not for that reason lose its discursive or dialectical value. In order for us to perceive its meaning, however, this double value has to be evaluated in the context of the sentence, in the stanza, in the whole in which it is found. This phenomenon is analogous, although more limited, to that by which each note in a melody receives its meaning as a function of the whole, of the musical context. From all the words that have in a way been foreseen by the commonplaces and the habitual clichés of the genre, the poet draws an accent that can move. As Joubert remarked: “the words light up when the poet’s finger applies his phosphorous to them.”

If these poets seem conscious of the value, the charm of words, of verbal magic, one should not conclude that they are led by reverie or by a pure aural sensitivity. On the contrary, no poetry was ever more rigorous, more completely and more consciously calculation, mathematics and harmony. This is what I mean by the term “formal poetry.” Its subject is not supple, pliable, pulpy; it does not renew itself and cannot seduce by means of its variety. But its form is varied, sensitive, sensual: it is made up of melody, verses, of the entanglement of the one with the other. It can be full of metaphysical, mystical meanings, of anything at all. The poet plays. His work is an abstraction, a figure which has a meaning at the level of the vocal music of the spoken and sung word. A kind of poetry emanates from this figure, and it is essential.

Gennrich said about this:

The medieval man’s universe was invincibly fixed. The fundamental idea behind the gothic cathedral was always the same. Hagiography provided the design for the facades of these cathedrals. But the execution was extremely varied. The subject of the songs was likewise always and incredibly the same, the ideas were identical, but the clothing changed: individuality bursts out in the creation of

forms, not in the ideological content.¹¹

It is nonetheless clear that the ideas are there, that the cathedral or the song cannot do without them, and that the idea flowers thanks to the invention and perfection of the finished work, which magnify it, render it moving and supremely human.

A few lines from another critic and musician, Boris de Schloezer, make things clearer for us:

It is impossible to extract the content from the form without denaturing it. This abstraction is possible in everyday language thanks only to the fact that the relation between the content and the form is in this case a relation of transcendence, whereas in music the content or sense is immanent in the form (*Mesures*, 1937, no. I).

Do we dare push these considerations a bit further? It is impossible to extract the form from the content without denaturing it . . . Courtly convention makes the incarnation of the form possible. Courtly songs were made to succeed rather than to express.¹² Let me emphasize this: the poetry of the courtly songs resides entirely in their form, in the finished, existing object, whose use is known. The style is everything and the ideological argument is simply “raw material.” This argument is indispensable as raw material. It is one with the other elements. Thanks to the whole, this argument shines like a living thing, whatever the conventions from which it springs. We perceive this when one or another of the best songs that have been preserved is sung to us. At that moment, we are so in the grip of its reality, of its warmth, that we do not see that it is only a game, a felicitous technical exercise. It is only when we read or hear a certain number of them that the repetition overwhelms us. We no longer see the interest of the poem because the differences in the realization from one poem to the next no longer strike us vividly enough. We are not sufficiently sensitive to the style and the suppleness, to the subtle varieties of execution, to the value of form.

Listeners heard this style perfectly in the past. They belonged to a highly refined society that was able to savor the traditional character of these songs. It was part of one’s initiation into good manners and courtliness. They knew the esthetic norms of this tradition. They were what we might call connoisseurs by habit and by education. Living in this tradition, at least as far as worldly ritual was concerned, they could decipher without difficulty all the elements of the form. This turn of mind is not unrelated to an intellectual attitude that is

characteristic of the Middle Ages: the work became a sort of problem to be solved and deciphered to which the public's mind was accustomed. This sort of formal game was read then, I believe, with the greatest interest and with a pleasure that we could call esthetic. Were there not in Scholasticism itself problems of pure dialectical virtuosity that were considered important, regardless of their subject matter? Were there not problems of symbolism, in architecture and romances and science, that demonstrate a marked taste for puzzles? And what about the science of numbers, whose traces can be found in all medieval works? When one listened to a courtly song, one followed the whole progress of a living organism in the process of developing, organizing and creating itself, its very goal being this creation. A formal problem worked itself out in front of one's eyes; an architecture built itself in time; a movement continued until it came to rest; a melody, a song was born, lived, and died. This suggests that the poet possessed both a formal instinct and formal knowledge. The genre's popularity suggests that the listener possessed a corresponding formal understanding. The public of the time does not seem to have worried about the martyr-for-love or the unyielding lady (or whatever might be glimpsed through this love symbol) until the work that evoked them had succeeded in organizing the elements of the problem in a form in which the whole came to life. In this living whole, the martyr-for-love's lament or his joy acquired a depth that the ideological argument was unable to suggest and that the little true incidents of the amorous adventure could not reduce. The complexity of the esthetic problem was such that the solutions were innumerable even though the premises remained the same.

There was also the combination of verbal rhythms, the melody and its rhythms, the organization of the cells of the melody and its successive movements (parallel, inverse, intertwining, etc.): all the secrets of composition that are studied by someone like Gennrich or Sesini. None of these elements achieved its true form except in relation to the others. In order to explain what was translated into esthetic joy in the listener who possessed a feeling for the formal, it is likewise necessary to analyze the text, its vocabulary, its metaphors, its style: the text itself is constructed by means of a poetic game of the commonplace, of conventional language, of clichés: a poetry whose freedom was constituted by a rhetoric and a technique adjusted to the chosen possibilities.

The poetry of the courtly songs can exist only on a plane opposed to that on which romantic poetry is located. One has to read these songs like one reads

counterpoint, by following its movements, its relations and its combinations, but without neglecting to feel the value of the theme and the expressive quality of the playing and the combinations. One must take into account the figure or the formula in the song, while perceiving at the same time the incantatory power and the life, without which we would have only school exercises.

Our weariness as we skim through the repertory of courtly songs comes from the fact that, as more-or-less willing disciples of the Romantics and their successors, we are unable to rediscover the sensitivity to form that would permit us to experience the poetry of the living work in the process of creating itself, rich with a human voice, with an authentic accent, with the warmth of being, as well as a most sophisticated art. This sensitivity alone would permit us to distinguish one courtly song from another in a way that could not fail to be quite different from that which our modern habits impose on us. Perhaps we no longer know what a tradition of this kind is, or how the formal poetry it makes possible could move us. Perhaps we lack an entire apprenticeship for which instinct alone can only imperfectly compensate.¹³

NOTE I

The program of research and analysis that one might propose to undertake on the subject of the courtly lyric is quite distant from the one that was undertaken in the last century. Then, works were classified according to their subject. This classification concentrated on what distinguished them the least from one another. One drew up as best one could a series of what one might term hackneyed themes. This could have been of interest only if it were a question of historical novelty, originality and sincerity. But the authors were not interested in provoking surprise through the theme. Their art itself wanted to be the source of poetry. Meaning was supposed to emanate from the form (understood in its profound rather than academic sense). This was the event: the work itself rather than what was told.

It is the style of the recognized and classified thematic clichés – love psychology, descriptions of the heroine, psychological terminology, physical, ornamental or stylistic images (metaphors, etc.) – that matters, and the constant renewal of their formulaic use. In other words, once all the analyses have been made, one should aim at studying the whole: each one in itself, each one in its series (resemblances serving as the basis for groupings), the song as a simultaneously verbal and musical form.

It is only at the end of these studies that we will realize that the material

text was indispensable. “The best raw material at a poet’s disposal is not mental material, but verbal material,” said Thierry Maulnier, repeating in his manner Stephane Mallarmé’s assertion that “one does not make a poem with an idea – or several ideas – but with words.” The critic was right to say: “The poet assembles words in such a way as to endow them with an inexhaustible incantatory power” (21). No single one of these words taken in isolation possesses this power. But in its poetic structure, the word radiates. The more traditional the givens – as in the courtly song – the more they are commonplaces, the more the structure becomes apparent. One can sculpt this structure, adapt it, reinvent it almost infinitely. The basic raw material undergoes a “thing-like” organization, as E. Souriau would, I believe, say (58).

If one pays particular attention to the formula of each of the songs and appreciates its values as one can when one compares a set of variations, one discovers what the initiated listener – which the courtly or simply medieval listener to courtly songs was – must have recognized more-or-less consciously in them: a mind at work. And this is undoubtedly what the courtly poets’ contemporaries wanted from these works, what the poets had as their goal, what each form revealed about humankind. What I mean is that it was in the very confrontation of songs whose forms were so diverse that this repertory, which seems so monotonous at first, provided the pleasure of distinguishing them according to their workmanship.

We could, on the other hand, say the same thing about the courtly song that has been said about music in the Middle Ages: it was conceived from the point of view of the performer, not from that of the listener. It spread the joy of productive action (ποιητόν). It was by recognizing the work in and of itself and the mode of the action accomplished that the listener, in turn, was satisfied with it. The artifex [artist], in his separate, closed, limited, absolute world, put his human strength at the service of a thing he was making (Maritain 9). He left his impression on it in an immanent way. The formal element appears in the work, “that which identifies its species and makes it what it is, is its intelligent regulation” which stands out all the more clearly because its better known matter no longer captures the listener’s attention. The singer of love’s joy stands out clearly.¹⁴

NOTE II

It cannot be repeated often enough: if the attentive examination of the

courtly song leads to the perception of a formal poetry, it is because a rather particular poetic practice manifests itself there: it involves an art and a rhetoric that are all the more apparent because the subjects of the songs are fixed, are commonplaces, so small in number that any impression of new matter is out of the question, and all the attraction comes, not, as some have suggested with respect to the rhythm, from the regularity of the form or the verse, but from formal invention, as much in the thematic organization as in the singing. Making use of traditional materials and commonplaces, the poet gives language the power to transform itself by the power of renovation: thanks to the form, the commonplace acquires a unique accent. The love that the poet takes pleasure in singing thus takes on a particular authenticity to which the listener cannot remain indifferent: the game thanks to which this love expresses itself gives it its worth as a sentiment and life, without which it would be simply a school exercise.

The modern reader is thus faced – in a singularly urgent way – with the problem of interpreting not this or that song, but the whole genre.¹⁵ The principle of this genre of works seems to me to be a particular poetic situation.

Can this situation be found outside of courtly ritual?¹⁶

We cannot hope to exhaust this subject, but I do think there is reason to extend our investigations, to see whether the singular situation of poetry is also found in other genres. But one should not rush to conclude that one is faced with a formal poetry every time a few traditional or “stylistic” elements, as they are termed, appear. The repetition of a theme does not at all mean that the poetry in question is founded esthetically on truly formal values. All that is proven, in such a case, is the existence of a tradition. When I speak of a formal poetry, I am trying to draw attention to the function that makes use of the traditional element to constitute the work, the esthetic pleasure that comes from the structure alone (this does not exclude by any means the emotional value of the texts, but situates the work on a different plane) (Schloezer, 1947, 211ff.).

I will give one example. I take it from the *pastourelle* or motet whose traditional beginning was pointed out by Maurice Wilmotte (79ff, 145):

Au matin	[One morning
Truis sèant	I found seated
En un jardin	In a garden
Pastourelle au cœur fin.	A shepherdess with a tender heart.]

A beginning which is found in so many poems (cf. Delbouille). Maurice Wilmotte long ago, Ernst Robert Curtius more recently – and they are not the only ones – set out to identify several of these traditions in various genres. The question they asked did not in general go beyond the problem, so easy for them to resolve, of the canons, the commonplaces, the clichés which make up the most mechanical part of tradition (cf. Curtius).¹⁷ They do not seem to have looked for their meaning anywhere other than in the haste or the creative negligence of authors little concerned with originality, but intent on success. They offered their readers their scholarly observations very wisely, without worrying at all about finding their esthetic meaning. This is because it is impossible, in the absence of a public made up of initiates, to appeal to a spirit of variation or of competition which can be found only where the listener can at least remember a certain number of parallel works, so to speak. The feeling for formality can develop only from this sort of relatively conscious confrontation. The perception of formality stands out from a background of tradition.

In the case of the courtly song, furthermore, it seems clear that there must have been a perceptible value on the esthetic plane, on the formal plane, that might, alone, have justified the interest provoked by the genre. I conclude that an act of esthetic logic must have existed. One could and undoubtedly still can talk about this poetry as if it were a musical structure, even though it is not entirely music. Language becomes incantation in it, without losing its signifying value. One needs to be sensitive to formal organization in order to truly appreciate it. Making use of the resources of an entirely traditional evocative rhetoric, this poetry almost paradoxically holds a surprise for us: the surprise of an order perceived by someone who is thoroughly familiar with the rules of the game.

Notes

1. This is the text of a paper read in 1946. I have limited myself to cutting out some examples and digressions. I added some bibliography to it and some references to a few more or less recent publications.
2. A biography based on the songs would usually do no more than exploit the stylistic traces found in them.
3. There are almost no examples of a song written by a husband for his wife, by a suitor for the woman he hopes to marry. A couple of exceptions: Jacques d'Ostun speaking to his wife (R. 351; *Lånfors, Mél. lyr.*, V, CVII); a suitor's song (R. 1645).
4. I am, of course, aware that the circumstances then were far different from those today. It is

nonetheless true that, even at that time, the repetitions could not have gone unnoticed.

5. Valéry Larbaud has written some nice pages about lyric themes in *Technique*, 79ff., “Trois Belles Mendiants.”

6. These remarks are more applicable to the works in northern French than to those of the troubadours.

7. “A song without music, said Folquet de Marseille, is like a mill without water.”

8. See the works of Gennrich, Gérold, Sesini, etc.

9. On the ideas of originality and sincerity in literature, I invite the reader to look at Cailliois, 1946, 36ff. and 49ff. If one wishes to draw attention to the numerous protestations of sincerity contained in the songs, one should not forget that they may also be pure rhetoric. A poet sometimes expresses his contempt for those who sing of love without experiencing it or without having experienced it. This is because he is concerned with the essential truthfulness of what is said, and one might think here of the verses of *La Poire* by Thibaut (v. 352, Steblich):

Molt pert son travail et sa peine	[Whoever struggles to write poetry about love
Qui d’Amors rimoier se peine,	Works and struggles to no avail
Se il ne sent ou sentu n’a	If he does not feel or has not felt
Icelui mal qu’il i metra.	The hurt he will put in his poem.]

Despite the commonplaces, the poem’s meaning comes from the poem itself and not from the truth of the facts it represents. Sincerity has little to do with the facts and everything to do with the poet (I mean the poetic action).

10. Quand vient en mai qu’erbe va verdoyant,	[When the grass grows green in May,
que tuit amant doivent d’amours chanter,	when all lovers must sing of love,]
	(<i>Motet, Bamberg 42a</i>)

En non dieu, que que nus die,	[In God’s name, whatever anyone says,
Quant voi l’erbe vert et le tens cler	When I see green grass and good weather
Et le roussignol chanter,	And hear the nightingale sing,
Adonc fine amour me prie	Then tender love asks me
Doucement d’une jolieté chanter . . .	Sweetly to sing something pretty . . .]
(<i>Motet, Bamberg 48a</i>)	

11. No reference is given in the original text.

12. The opposition “succeed-express” has been used in the realm of esthetics by André Malraux.

13. This text is the argument of a presentation given on February 7, 1946 at the Institut des Hautes Etudes in Brussels, then in the main amphitheater of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lille on March 13, 1947. It was published in the *Revue des Sciences Humaines* (April-May 1949), n. s., fasc. 54, 61-69.

14. By the time the preceding article reappears, accompanied by these previously unpublished notes, a very important work by Roger Dragonetti will have been published, in which, at my suggestion, he reworks everything that has been said up to now, basing it on an attentive examination of the northern French poets’ means of expression and rhetoric in all the surviving songs: *La Technique poétique des trouvères*.

15. Let there be no mistake: if I propose to interpret texts that does not mean that I am ignoring the historical context of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. On the contrary, as one can see, I

start from the very practice and use of courtly poetry. It is not a question of an impressionistic interpretation. It is a way of pointing out the importance in my eyes of historical conditions. I pay particular attention to the function of these songs: to the necessities and needs to which they respond.

16. It should be relatively clear that the specific meaning of this ritual of courtly love is not important here and my remarks are not aimed in any way at the explanations and hypotheses that have been developed with respect to the origin of this lyrical poetry in the South.

17. On the basis of similar observations, Jean Rychner undertook a new interpretation of the clichés of the *chanson de geste*. His study resulted in a new examination of all the data and the renewal of many points of view. Cf. Lejeune. See also *La technique littéraire des Chansons de geste*, Colloque de l'Université de Liège, 1959.

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