

H-France Review Vol. 7 (June 2007), No. 70

**Mary O'Neill**, *Courtly Love Songs of Medieval France: Transmission and Style in the Trouvère Repertoire*. Oxford Monographs on Music. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. xv + 226 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$75.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 0-19-816547-1.

Review by Catherine Léglu, University of Bristol.

This is a detailed musicological study of a particular repertoire within the *trouvère* lyric tradition, which flourished in northern France and southern Flanders from the late twelfth to the late thirteenth centuries. Despite its size (some 1500 *trouvère* poems are preserved with melodies in over twenty manuscripts), and despite its significance for the development of French secular poetry and music, the *trouvère* lyric has attracted less critical attention than its predecessor and contemporary, the troubadour tradition. The most important studies of the *trouvère* poetic style date back to the 1960s, when both Roger Dragonetti and Paul Zumthor used the repertoire to argue for a poetic style predicated on standardized formal and semantic features.[1] Subsequent studies have been mostly concerned with the poems as texts rather than songs.

Similarly, although all the existing *trouvère* melodies have been edited to a high standard, their study has repeatedly been dominated by disagreements between editors as well as performers concerning the question of the absence of rhythm notations. Mary O'Neill privileges a serious musicological, rather than textual, approach, but she moves away from the issue of rhythm. Nevertheless, she does venture some compelling opinions on the presence of rhythm in specific groups of songs throughout the book. Her approach reflects her studies and exchanges with the late John Stevens and with Christopher Page, who have both made important contributions to an appreciation of the importance of music and performance in this Old French lyric tradition.[2]

O'Neill tackles a particular victim of neglect, the *trouvère* tradition of monophonic love poetry, known as the *chanson d'amour* or the *grande chanson courtoise*, which has often been viewed as an imitation of the troubadour *canço*. Chapter one defines this genre through the works of Gace Brulé, who was possibly the earliest *trouvère*, and is certainly an example of how the *trouvère* lyric started as an imaginative adaptation of troubadour poetry to suit the language and tastes of northern French courts. Her book then moves on to its main concerns. First (chapter two), she sub-divides the existing *chansonniers* with melodies into a "first" and "second" phase, corresponding to a development in notational methods from c. 1275 to c. 1320, although the evidence points to "a substantial number of lost sources" from an earlier date that have an impact on how the melodies are presented (p. 14). This allows O'Neill to propose that *trouvère* songs should not be viewed as a monolithic, standardized corpus. Rather, she suggests that notational variations may be traced in terms of chronological and geographical processes, as scribes strove to keep up with changing performance styles. As O'Neill has proposed that melodies were "frequently the vehicle for the greatest degree of individuality and originality in the art form," the emphasis falls on how music, rather than texts, distinguished one *trouvère* from another (p. 9). She finds little support for the claims that have been made about *trouvères'* use of mensural notation, and suggests later that it appears to develop in genres that are separate from the *grand chant courtois* (Adam de la Halle uses mensural notation for his *rondeaux* and *motets*, but not for his *chansons*). Rather, what emerges is that flexibility was a criterion both in notation and presumably in performance—something that would preclude precise rhythmical notation, too.

Flexibility and temporal processes are both crucial to O'Neill's second main concern, that of orality, which she takes up in chapter three. She wisely declines to establish whether or not *trouvère* songs were composed orally, as by the mid to late thirteenth century writing was a major part of the culture, but she demonstrates convincingly that patterns of melodic variation point to a "base melody" that was altered with every performance, as well as within each performed song. She insists on the basis of textual evidence related, for example, to self-reflexivity, confessional address to the audience, strophic permutation, and the unstable manuscript transmission of the envoi, that a *trouvère chanson* was above all a "live event," adding that "to base judgements on the written text alone is, in effect, to comment only on a shell of the whole" (p. 58). This chapter includes a study of melodic variants in the *chansons d'amour* of a relatively minor *trouvère*, Audefroï li Bastars (his name according to his editor, rather than O'Neill's puzzling choice of "le Bastard," which should perhaps have been "le Bâtard"? pp. 66-75). This example provides a convincing demonstration of O'Neill's definition of orality, although Audefroï's melodies are mostly preserved in only two sources, and scribal error may have played a part in a few instances. Accordingly, O'Neill devotes her fourth chapter to a far more challenging case, that of Audefroï's predecessor Gautier de Dargies, whose music is preserved in thirteen manuscripts (pp. 93-132). She concludes that despite his far more sophisticated and innovative style, one that led him to claim that others found his works hard to memorize, Gautier's melodies show the same pattern of variation as Audefroï's.

The *trouvère* tradition poses another difficulty in that it is dominated by so-called "low-style" compositions from the mid-thirteenth century onwards. By "low-style"—a term she borrows from Dante in preference to others coined by modern scholars such as Pierre Bec's "popularisant"—O'Neill means a preference for simple forms, refrain songs, narrative verse, and a certain earthiness in subject matter. [3] She addresses the issue in her fifth chapter by examining the works of Moniot de Paris, whose melodies turn out to resemble his texts in espousing a style more in keeping with the *pastourelle* than the *chanson*, as if genres were being merged to produce a "new lighter, simpler, and more direct style" (p. 152). One problem is that Moniot's contemporary Adam de la Halle, the subject of the sixth chapter, takes a completely different approach. A *trouvère* who definitely used written transmission and who also composed polyphony as well as "low-style" works, Adam's poetic and melodic style in his *chansons* is startlingly conservative if poems such as those of Moniot de Paris are to be viewed as fashionable. O'Neill traces an approach to composition rather than transmission that points to orality, suggesting that Adam drew on the already substantial repertoire of melodic sources at his disposal (p. 196). She is forced to conclude that Adam de la Halle may simply have adopted a different, rather than an obsolete, style in his *chansons*, though this of course also hints at orality in the endurance and co-existence of several styles of composition, each with its own ground rules.

Overall, this is a very welcome and satisfying study of the *trouvère chanson* in that it restores the genre to its significant position in the musical as well as the poetic cultures of northern France at a crucial point of innovation in other repertoires. This study is meticulously presented, with tables setting out the songs and manuscripts under consideration, ample and very well-described edited musical examples, and a selection of photographic reproductions from manuscripts. There are a very few, negligible typographical errors, such as "Lothringian" rather than Lotharingian (p. 30). The only problematic footnote occurs on p. 3 n. 7, where the reference to *trobairitz* scholarship yields only a recent edition of the women *trouvères*. In terms of her arguments, O'Neill is forced to refer repeatedly to scholarship on the troubadour lyric, and it is evident that similar issues are reflected in both repertoires. One very minor quibble (as we are dealing here with a different field as well as a different discipline) would be that she has missed some potentially useful leads by not engaging with such studies as Amelia E. Van Vleck's *Memory and Recreation in Troubadour Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), or Maria Luisa Meneghetti's *Il Pubblico dei trovatori* (Modena: STEM Mucchi, 1984), both of which make some compelling suggestions about transmission, audience, and orality.

## NOTES

[1] Roger Dragonetti, *La technique poétique des trouvères dans la chanson courtoise : Contribution à l'étude de la rhétorique médiévale*. Rijksuniversiteit te Gent, Werken uitgegeven door de Faculteit van de Letteren en Wijsbegeerte 127 (Bruges, Belgium: De Tempel, 1960) ; Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

[2] John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages: Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama* (Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Christopher Page, *Discarding Images: Reflections on Music and Culture in Medieval France* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and *The Owl and the Nightingale: Musical Life and Ideas in France, 1100-1300* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

[3] Pierre Bec, *La Lyrique française au Moyen Âge ; Contribution à une typologie des genres poétiques médiévaux*, 2 vols (Paris: Picard, 1978).

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ISSN 1553-9172