

## **Songs of the Women *Trouvères***

*Locating the  
Women Trouvères*



# Songs of the Women *Trouvères*

*Edited, Translated, and Introduced by*

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*& London*

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*To Samuel Rosenberg and William Paden, for their vision, encouragement, and support*



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1985. Song no. 37 is reprinted by permission of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres from Långfors 1932. Manuscript facsimiles are reproduced by permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, and the Burgerbibliothek Bern.

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# *Abbreviations*

## **BIBLIOGRAPHIC DATA**

B	Boogaard 1969 (refrain)
B rond.	Boogaard 1969 (rondeau)
G rond.	Gennrich 1921-27
L	Linker 1979
M	Mass (motet tenor)
MW	Mölk and Wolfzettel 1972
O	Office (motet tenor)
PC	Pillet and Carstens 1933
RS	Spanke 1955

## **MANUSCRIPTS**

fol.	folio
r	recto
v	verso
♪	music

## **CRITICAL APPARATUS**

DF	Dialectal Features
MC	Musical Commentary
ME	Musical Emendations
MV	Musical Variants
RR	Rejected Readings
TN	Textual Notes
TV	Textual Variants
cond.	conditional
conj.	conjunction
em.	emendation
fut.	future
imp.	imperfect
ind.	indicative

xvi ABBREVIATIONS

inf.	infinitive
nom.	nominative
part.	participle
pers.	person
pl.	plural
pres.	present
pret.	preterit
rel.	relative
sing.	singular
subj.	subjunctive

**MOTET VOICES**

Mot	Motetus
Q	Quadruplum
T	Tenor
Tr	Triplum

**MUSICAL TERMINOLOGY**

B	<i>brevis</i>
L	<i>longa</i>
N	<i>nota simplex</i> without rhythmic distinction
R	rest
S	<i>semibrevis</i>
2li	two-note neume or ligature
3li	three-note neume or ligature
4li	four-note neume or ligature
c.o.p.	ligature <i>cum opposita proprietate</i>
c.perf.	ligature <i>cum perfectio</i>
s.perf.	ligature <i>sine perfectio</i>
<sup>p</sup> following a note	ascending plica
<sub>p</sub> following a note	descending plica

# *Manuscripts Consulted*

The manuscripts listed below are those to which reference is made in abbreviated form in this book. A complete listing and a bibliography may be found in Linker 1979: 23–69. See also Jeanroy 1918, Spanke 1955, and Aubrey 2000. For sources that preserve polyphonic music, see Ludwig 1910, Gennrich 1958a, Everist 1989, and van der Werf 1989.

- A* Arras, Bibliothèque Municipale, 657  
*Ba* Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, Lit. 115 (olim Ed. IV. 6)  
*C* Bern, Burgerbibliothek, 389  
*Cl* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, n. a. fr. 13521  
*E<sup>m</sup>* Einsiedeln, Biblioteca Monasterii, 364 (385)  
*H* Modena, Biblioteca Estense, R4, 4  
*Her* Leuven, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Herentals fragment  
(Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek,  
Ludwig Nachlass, IX, 14)  
*I* Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 308  
*K* Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 5198  
*M* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 844  
*Mo* Montpellier, Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire, Section Médecine,  
H 196  
*M<sup>f</sup>* Insertion in M (fols. 13r–v and 59r–77r)  
*N* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 845  
*O* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 846  
*P* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 847  
*S* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12581  
*StV* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 15139  
*T* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12615  
*Tu* Turin, Biblioteca Reale, vari 42  
*U* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 20050  
*V* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 24406  
*W2* Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Helmstedt 1099  
(Heinemann 1206)

xviii MANUSCRIPTS CONSULTED

- X* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, n. a. fr. 1050  
*a* Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Regina 1490  
*b* Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Regina 1522  
*c* Bern, Burgerbibliothek, A. 95  
*f* Montpellier, Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire, Section Médecine, 236  
*i* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12483  
*j* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, n. a. fr. 21677  
*k* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fr. 12786  
*Ψ* Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 11266

# *Introduction*

## *The Case for the Women Trouvères*

We bring together here the songs of all medieval women whose names are recorded in the rubrics or tables of contents of various Old French manuscripts as composers of songs or as participants in *jeux-partis* and *tensons* (debate poems). The songs by women whose names are known are relatively few in number, but there were undoubtedly many more women composers, and whereas their names are lost to us, some of their songs are probably still extant, though bereft of proper attribution. Accordingly, we have chosen to include a generous sampling of anonymous works—*chansons de femme* (women's songs), *rondeaux*, and motets—both because they offer a wide variety of female voices and because some of these pieces may well have been composed by women. We hope in this way to rectify a situation that for many years has denied women their rightful place in the pantheon of Old French medieval lyric poets.

For, as surprising as it may seem, the very title of our anthology, *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, makes a bold, even controversial, statement. Although nearly all scholars now acknowledge the existence of medieval women who composed poetry in other romance languages (Occitan, Spanish, Italian, Galician-Portuguese), most have accepted without question Pierre Bec's contention that none of the songs composed in northern France in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries are the product of a woman *trouvère* (Bec 1979: 236). A number of Old French songs feature women's voices (*féminité textuelle*), particularly in the lyric type known as the *chanson de femme*. However, *féminité textuelle* does not necessarily imply female authorship (*féminité génétique*), to use a distinction introduced by Bec himself (1979: 235–36). The majority of these songs are anonymous, but because most of the ones that are attributed in the manuscripts are credited to a male author, Bec has concluded that no Old French songs of the period in question were composed by women.<sup>1</sup> Although many have agreed with Bec, the literary history of the past 125 years includes a few dissenters who base their opinion on evidence that until recently was either ignored or not seriously considered. A brief summary of that history is instructive, as it highlights the major arguments for and against the historical existence of the women *trouvères*.

One of the first scholars to enter the fray was Alfred Jeanroy (1889). Stat-

ing that medieval sources mention French women *trouvères* only infrequently, he went on to express his conviction that none had actually existed. Citing the unreliability of manuscript rubrics and the probability of false attribution, he found it implausible, moreover, that a woman should have surrendered so wholeheartedly her traditional role by deciding to compose poetry. Why should she have wished to step down from the pedestal to which the male courtly poets had raised her? In any case, he thought, women poets would have infused their poems with more tenderness, emotion, and especially discretion.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, Jeanroy's refusal to acknowledge the existence of women poets reflected an attitude he owed to his time—the Victorian conception of a woman's place in society.<sup>3</sup> Joseph Bédier apparently shared that attitude: he offered specious arguments similar to Jeanroy's to deny the existence of women *trouvères*, and he worked hard to explain away certain manuscript attributions to women (Bédier 1910: 912–15).<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars have simply abstained from debating the issue, seeing no reason to question the validity of manuscript attributions. As early as 1581, the humanist Claude Fauchet entered “Doete de Troies chanteresse & Trouverre” and “*Damoiselle Sainte des Prez*” in his repertory of French poets living before 1300 (Fauchet 158, 192). In 1780, Jean-Benjamin de Laborde listed “Dregna, de Lille, (Marotte ou Marie)” among the known *trouvères*. He presented the text of “Mout m’abelist quant je voi revenir” (our song no. 15) by matter-of-factly noting: “Il nous reste une seule chanson d’elle, que l’on trouve dans le manuscrit du Roi & dans celui de Noailles” (Only a single song of hers has come down to us; it is found in the manuscrit du Roi and that of Noailles) (Laborde 1780, 2: 185). In 1839, Arthur Dinaux was pleased to include in his anthology of *trouvères* from Flanders and Tournai “Marie Dregna” (Maroie de Diergnau), whom he characterized as one of the few women who had been willing to take up “the bards’ lyre.” Although he regretted that only one piece had been preserved (song no. 15), he was convinced that Marie must have composed several others.<sup>5</sup> Arthur Långfors, who published his edition of *jeux-partis* in 1926, expressed even greater confidence in the existence of women poets, for he believed that all the parts in *jeux-partis* giving voice to both sexes had been composed by actual male and female poets alternating as speakers and interlocutors.<sup>6</sup>

Manuscript rubrics and tables of contents indicating female authorship have seemed credible as well to a few scholars publishing in the late twentieth century. In his study devoted to the lyric death-lament, Samuel Rosenberg (1983) included an analysis of a *plainte* attributed to the Duchesse de Lorraine (song no. 18); the piece appears in all three of his anthologies (Rosenberg and Tischler

1981; Rosenberg, Tischler, and Grossel 1995; Rosenberg, Switten, and Le Vot 1998). The first two also incorporate two *jeux-partis* featuring three named women participants: the Dame de la Chaucie and Sainte des Prez (song no. 3), and the Dame de Gosnai (song no. 4).

Musicologist Maria Coldwell (1986), secure in her knowledge of documentary evidence attesting to the existence of female musicians in France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, accepts as a natural corollary that there were women who composed songs, and she sees no reason to question the manuscript attributions of various songs and *jeux-partis* to women *trouvères*.<sup>7</sup> Because her focus is primarily on music, she highlights the songs for which music is extant and publishes transcriptions of the melodies of a love lyric by Maroie de Diergnau (song no. 15), a prayer to the Virgin by Blanche de Castille (song no. 36), and a *jeu-parti* between Dame Margot and Dame Maroie (song no. 1).

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, in the midst of the debate regarding the existence of the *trobairitz* (women troubadours in Occitania), a new wave of predominantly French critics challenged the validity of female authorship in medieval France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and endeavored to prove not only that there had been no women *trouvères* but even that all female voices in the lyric poetry of northern France during that period were constructs by male poets.<sup>8</sup> In a highly influential article on the *trobairitz*, Pierre Bec formulated two apparent paradoxes: first, that women wrote “troubadour” songs (that is, songs in conformity with a male-dominated lyric system) while men wrote women’s songs (*chansons de femme*); and second, that there were in Occitania several women poets but very few *chansons de femme*, while in northern France there were a number of *chansons de femme* but no women poets (Bec 1979: 236). Bec’s argument aimed not only to erase the women *trouvères* but also to diminish the accomplishment of the women troubadours, because he sought to prove that the *trobairitz*’ originality resided almost exclusively in their exploitation of themes from *chansons de femme*—and all these pieces, according to Bec, were composed by men. Although Bec cited isolated cases of women who composed poetry in other Romance languages, he was adamant about the absence (or at least silence) of women *trouvères* in northern France; indeed, he did not so much as allude to the cases where a few songs and *jeux-partis* are attributed to women, nor did he mention the anonymous women partners and named judges in several *jeux-partis*. In his anthology of the lyric poetry of northern France, which he had published a year earlier, not only did he not attribute a single song to a woman, he failed to mention in his notes cases where the various manuscripts containing a particular song offered contradictory attributions. For example, if a song was attributed to a

woman in one manuscript, to a man in another, and remained anonymous in a third, he routinely chose to attribute it to the male poet and did not mention the other manuscripts.

Like Bec, Peter Dronke states in his *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984: 97) that there are no extant poems by women from northern France, England, Spain, or Portugal. (As he does not mention the manuscript attributions to women, it is not clear whether he finds this evidence unconvincing or is simply ignorant of it.) Nevertheless, he asserts that because there were *jograresas* in the Iberian peninsula, there must have been women who composed poems, adding that if these pieces were not chosen for preservation, it is because “we are much at the mercy of the selectors—the predominantly male world of chroniclers and copyists” (98). Apparently, he did not know about the French *jouglereses* discussed in Coldwell’s essay (which postdates his book by two years), but if he had, presumably he would have had to posit the existence of women *trouvères* in northern France. For although he notes that the extant *cantigas de amigo* from Spain and Portugal were composed by male *trovadores*, he is convinced that such pieces were often performed by women (*jograresas*), adding that “it seems wholly unlikely that the *jograresas* did not compose as well: nowhere in Europe do we know of any hard and fast demarcation between composing and performing” (98). Indeed, Dronke believes that women of all classes composed poetry, and he laments that the “love-poetry that women of the people composed” is lost to us: “Yet it is certain that they too composed, as well as recited and sang” (105). Nevertheless, he hesitates to attribute to women poets the female voices of the Occitan debate poems (*tensos*) that alternate male and female voices or feature only female voices, because “it is hard to identify characteristic women’s thoughts and feelings or to distinguish these from the rôle-playing which is inseparable from genres of poetic debate” (98). He does not mention the northern French *jeux-partis* featuring women’s voices, but if he had known of them, he would presumably have had the same hesitation about attributing those voices to women *trouvères*.

For some reason, the rôle-playing to which Dronke alludes seems in the minds of most scholars to be the province of male poets only, as Carol Nappholz and Simon Gaunt point out. Nappholz argues that the anonymous female voice in troubadour poetry was often the product of unacknowledged women poets (the “unsung women” of her book’s title); she builds on Gaunt’s observation that critics display little objectivity when assessing the status of anonymous voices in male–female *tensos*: male voices are considered to be real, while female voices are dismissed as fictional (Nappholz 1994: 7–8; Gaunt 1988: 302). Yet if men were able to invent women’s voices, it stands to reason that women

were just as capable of doing so (Bruckner et al. 1995: xli). After all, the *trobairitz*, according to Bec (1979, 1995), drew on themes they found in the *chansons de femme*—a natural choice, as these songs evoked situations of women in love. Most critics, even those who believe that the *chansons de femme* were all composed by men, concede that these songs were originally inspired by more archaic forms composed by women (Jeanroy 1889: 445; Dronke 1984: 98) and that women must have played an important role in the preservation and propagation of songs in which they were the central figure.<sup>9</sup>

Although Bec's 1979 article on the *trobairitz* and the *chansons de femme* has attracted much attention over the past twenty years, it has been cited mostly by *trobairitz* scholars. Not until the 1990s did scholars begin to challenge Bec's contention that there were no women *trouvères*.<sup>10</sup> This initiative was fueled in part by the appearance of a number of studies and critical editions devoted to the *trobairitz*. Indeed, it was in an article entitled "Some Recent Studies of Women in the Middle Ages, Especially in Southern France" that William Paden issued his plaintive challenge: "Who will provide us with a monograph on the women *trouvères*, including a study, all the texts (edited from the manuscripts), and the music?" (Paden 1992: 117 n. 24). In an article published that same year, Madeleine Tyssens made a major step in that direction. Noting the remarkable resurgence of interest in the women troubadours, she turned her attention to the women *trouvères*, whom she, too, felt had been unjustly neglected. Specifically, she objected to Bec's reduction of the Old French corpus of women's voices to the category of *féminité textuelle*, with utter disregard for the information furnished by the texts and the manuscript rubrics and indices that point occasionally to a female author (Tyssens 1992: 377). After analyzing this evidence, she came up with a corpus of twenty-five texts (thirteen *chansons d'amour* and *chansons de départie* and twelve *jeux-partis* and *tensons*).<sup>11</sup> It is curious that while protesting Bec's reduction of historical women to the abstraction of *féminité textuelle*, she chose to exclude from her corpus any texts that feature a male narrator or that do not include linguistic evidence (for example, inflections) of female authorship.<sup>12</sup>

Another promising sign that the women *trouvères* are gaining recognition is that although they were not included in the twenty-volume *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (Sadie 1980), the more recent *Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* devotes separate entries to five of them (all contributed by Maria Coldwell), namely, Blanche de Castille, the Duchesse de Lorraine (identified by Coldwell as Gertrude, wife of Thibaut I, Duke of Lorraine),<sup>13</sup> Dame Margot and Dame Maroie (localized as "*trouvères* from Arras"), and Maroie de Dregneu de Lille (Sadie and Samuel 1994: 66, 289, 313, 315).

Our anthology, *Songs of the Women Trouvères*, which is at least a partial response to William Paden's challenge, is the latest contribution to the modest corpus of studies devoted to the women trouvères. Although this brief history has identified only a few scholars who have affirmed the existence of women poet-composers in northern France, a number of studies published in the past few decades on behalf of their counterparts in Occitania have prepared the way. Indeed, many of the arguments advanced to prove or disprove the existence of the trobairitz or to calculate their number are pertinent as well to a discussion of the women trouvères.

There are several criteria for arguing female authorship (*féminité génétique*) of a medieval work: (1) a woman is named within the poem as the author (signature); (2) a woman is referred to, by name or not, as the interlocutor in a debate poem with another woman or a man; (3) a woman is named in the rubric or table of contents of a manuscript; (4) a woman is the speaking subject—the lyric “I”—of the poem (*féminité textuelle*).<sup>14</sup> In the case of the women trouvères, the first criterion is inapplicable, because there are no extant songs from the period in question in which a woman explicitly claims authorship by naming herself.<sup>15</sup> In this anthology, all of the songs for which we have identified a female author meet the second or third criterion, or both, and all but two also meet the last criterion. This last criterion is the only one that justifies our inclusion of all the songs listed as anonymous.—*JTG*

#### THE FEMALE VOICE IN THE OLD FRENCH LYRIC

Although the songs known to have been composed by women in the Middle Ages are not numerous, there is a large body of lyrics that give voice to women and explore the whole spectrum of feelings and behavior said to be characteristic of them. The great majority of these pieces fall into the group known as “women’s songs,” which were produced all over medieval Europe. In the Middle Ages there was no precise term to distinguish these songs from other types, but since the nineteenth century they have been known generally as *chansons de femme* or *Frauenlieder*, and sometimes as *cantigas de amigo*. Remarkably varied, they include the Germanic *winileodas* attested in a tenth-century manuscript, the Romance *kharjas* appended to Arabic *muwashshaḥāt* composed between 1000 and 1150, the Latin songs of the Cambridge manuscript, the Spanish *villancicos*, and especially the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo*, of which more than five hundred are extant. The considerable place accorded the woman’s voice in these songs could alone justify our decision to include a number of Old French *chansons de femme* in our collection. But our initiative is fueled as well by the desire to challenge two assumptions that

have become commonplace: the first is that these songs were all composed by men; the other is that they belong in the “popular” or “popularizing” register, which is often opposed to the aristocratic register.<sup>16</sup> In the following discussion, centered on the *chanson de femme*, we shall explore these two widespread assumptions, particularly as they are applied to Old French lyric.

### **Féminité textuelle**

The *chanson de femme* is not a genre, but rather “a conceptual set” (Rosenberg 1995b: 987) or “lyric type” (Bec 1977: 57) that includes several more or less clearly defined genres, such as *chanson d’ami*, *chanson de malmariée*, *aube*, *chanson de croisade*, and *chanson de toile*. The *chanson de femme* has been variously defined. Doris Earnshaw’s definition (1988: 3) is no doubt the most all-inclusive: “a song with the woman’s voice in all or in part of its lines.” Although all critics agree that the female voice is the *sine qua non*, most nuance Earnshaw’s definition by specifying that this voice constitutes the lyric subject (“I”) of the song. Pierre Bec states that the dominant theme is love in all its emotional manifestations and most diverse situations,<sup>17</sup> and he specifies that the songs are mournful in tone; accordingly, he defines the *chanson de femme* as “a lyric monologue in a woman’s voice with a sorrowful undertone.”<sup>18</sup> Rosenberg’s definition complements Bec’s: “Love here tends to be forthright, sensual, shadowed by pain, and unencumbered with the artifices of *fin’amors*; its basic vehicle is the monologue.” But he cautions that “these characteristics are all subject . . . to considerable modification” (Rosenberg 1995b: 987), an assertion that is amply borne out by the variety of *chansons de femme* represented in our collection. Ingrid Kasten, who defines *Frauenlieder* simply as “songs whose lyric subject is a woman,”<sup>19</sup> observes nonetheless that the songs present the same basic situation, that of a loving woman separated from the man she loves. The tension between the yearning for love and the pain of separation is explored in various ways: “laments about the pain of separation, assurances of love and faithfulness, expressions of yearning for the man, promises of steadfastness in the face of separation, complaints about exterior obstacles that hinder the relationship, recollections of past happiness in love, and finally the worry that the man will turn to another woman, a rival.”<sup>20</sup>

Many scholars—indeed most—see the *chanson de femme* in opposition to the courtly love lyric, the *canso*. Pilar Lorenzo Gradín, at the end of her study exploring the various manifestations of the *canción de mujer* in medieval lyric, concludes that this *código*, or poetic scheme, was part of the competence of every medieval *trovador*; it is “a stylistic alternative in which are introduced particular themes and motifs always from a particular narrative focus, that of

the woman, which causes this type to be differentiated from the rest of medieval lyric production and to present itself as the reverse of the *canço*.”<sup>21</sup> Implicit in this opposition between the *chanson de femme* and the *canço* is the pervasive belief that women’s songs belong to the lower—noncourtly or “popular”—register. The first scholars who studied the medieval *Frauenlieder* believed they contained palpable traces of the *älteste Volkspoesie*, of ancient songs spontaneously composed in a popular milieu; emanating from the soul of the people, they were “the grandiose expression of its deepest and most ardent feelings.”<sup>22</sup> Although, as Jeanroy (1889) demonstrated, the extant medieval *chansons de femme* were generally composed by court poets who drew inspiration from preliterate female-voiced songs, these earlier pieces—of which no examples remain—were assigned to a register (*populaire*) at the opposite end of the spectrum from the aristocratic or cultivated register (*savant*), which included predominantly male-voiced pieces associated with the *grand chant courtois* or the *troubadoursque* *canço*. Consequently, the *chanson de femme*, in its medieval as well as its earlier forms, has remained associated with the “popular” register, despite widespread recognition that the extant songs display many traits associated with the courtly register.

Doubtless the term “popular” still retained some of its Romantic cachet in 1889, when Jeanroy proposed his celebrated theory that European popular lyric had originated in preliterate French dance songs, remnants of which he believed could be found in the extant *chansons de femme*. In 1969, and then again in 1977, when Bec undertook his analysis of medieval French lyric, he was careful to reject the stark opposition (*populaire-savant*) that had taken hold. In its place, he has proposed a new terminology—*aristocratisant-popularisant*—designed to blur the distinction, as the suffix *-isant* indicates a tendency rather than a clear-cut category. Yet Bec’s discussion of the various genres covered by the *chanson de femme* uncovers a remarkably high incidence of what he calls *interférences registrales* (borrowing between registers) (Bec 1977: 57-119). His analysis shows, in fact, that the songs preserved in thirteenth-century manuscripts are so replete with elements borrowed from the courtly register that it is really only with reference to their *origins* that these songs can be considered “popular” or even “popularizing.” Indeed, in order to justify assigning the *chanson de femme* to the noncourtly register, Bec is obliged to devote an inordinate amount of space to the “prehistory” of each of the different genres related to that lyric type, even though he specifically states that his analysis is grounded in the formal characteristics of the songs rather than in their origins. (The subtitle of his 1977 study promises a “contribution to a typology of medieval poetic genres.”)

Medieval poets had no terminology to discriminate between learned (aristocratisant or troubadouresque) and unlearned (popularisant or *jongleuresque*) registers, although they were aware of levels of style, a notion they inherited from Antiquity. Classical and medieval theoreticians distinguished three levels, high (*grandiloquus*), middle (*mediocris*), and low (*humilis*), differentiated on the basis of language, poetic voice, and the social status of the speaker, subject, and audience.<sup>23</sup> Medieval poets were familiar with these recommendations, but they had no compunction about mixing various levels of style within a single composition, whether they were composing epic, romance, or lyric; indeed, they seemed to delight in doing so. Consequently, such notions as register and genre are relatively fluid and likely to lead to erroneous perceptions when rigidly defined and applied. Nevertheless, modern scholars often find such distinctions useful tools for analysis.<sup>24</sup> Roger Dragonetti (1960) was the first to identify the courtly love lyric (which he called the *grand chant courtois*) with the “high” style (15–20), and both literary critics and musicologists have found it helpful to differentiate between at least two levels of style or registers, such as those defined by Bec. Christopher Page (1986), for example, distinguishes between the “High Style,” associated with troubadouresque qualities, and the “Low Style,” a *jongleuresque* category that includes more popular forms such as dance songs, *pastourelles*, and songs with refrains; according to Page, each of these “styles” implies whether or not musical instruments were used as accompaniment to the singers. (See the discussion and critique of this theory in “Introduction to the Music,” later in this introduction.)

However useful the registral dichotomy may appear to be, when it is applied to medieval lyric, and specifically to the *chanson de femme*, it often seems to constitute more of a hindrance than a help. Bec, for example, claims support for his registral distinction by pointing out that manuscript *I*, one of the few Old French *chansonniers* that classify their contents by genre, sets the troubadouresque *grans chans* (cansos) apart from the other genres: *estampies*, *pastourelles*, *ballettes*, *sottes chansons*, most of which belong to the *registre popularisant* (Bec 1977: 34 n. 39). However, the third section of the manuscript comprises nearly forty *jeux-partis*, and this section—of eminently courtly pieces—follows the *estampies*, not the *cansos*, where one might expect to find it if the scribe-compiler of the manuscript had thought the registral distinction was meaningful. Paul Zumthor (1972) clearly felt uneasy about certain distinctions invented by modern critics. Although he believed that the courtly register, which he called the *requête d’amour*, could be defined on the basis of the characteristics specific to the *grand chant courtois* or *canso*, he admitted that his other register (the *bonne vie*) was by the thirteenth century composed of so

many heterogeneous elements that it had lost its expressive coherence (251, 254). He articulated even more clearly his discomfort with a scheme based on register alone by proposing to classify the extant lyrics in a way that cut across registral boundaries: thus, he distinguished three groups of texts according to whether they present (1) *chanson* form with the register of the *bonne vie*; (2) a form other than that of the *chanson* with the register of the *requête d'amour*; and (3) *chanson* form with indeterminate nonregistral content (for example, *chansons bachiques*) (255–56).

As every anthology of medieval women's songs makes clear, the distinction between the two registers is difficult to defend on the basis of the extant *chansons de femme* of the high Middle Ages. Indeed, although Ulrich Mölk calls for a redefinition of the *Frauenlied* based exclusively on formal criteria, he contradicts his own definition ("a love song in the popular register in which the woman's perspective is realized as a monologue, dialogue, or reported speech")<sup>25</sup> by including in his 1989 anthology songs that do not correspond to any but the broadest concept of the *Frauenlied* (that is, *féminité textuelle*). In fact, Bec reproaches him for including certain pieces composed in the "elevated" style, such as *trobairitz* lyrics and even sonnets (Bec 1995: 46 n. 3). Similarly, Kasten's anthology (1990) embraces songs clearly composed in the courtly mode, including all four of the *Comtessa de Dia's* *cansos*. She explains that this choice is dictated by the desire to trace and document the impact of the *Frauenlied* on the German love lyric and the main stages of its development, especially its central place in the songs of the first *Minnesänger* (ca. 1160) and its transformation under the influence of the Occitan *troubadours* (23–25). Although the concept of the indifferent and aloof Lady found in *troubadour* lyric clashed with the *Frauenlied* concept of a loving woman filled with yearning for a man, the *Minnesänger* drew on both images in composing their lyrics (18). Thus, Kasten states that the clear-cut registral distinction on which Bec insists in his analysis of the Old French *chanson de femme* does not really apply to German lyric, for even the earliest *Frauenlieder* allude in their stylistic conception to the knightly-courtly world and are integral components of the courtly lyric throughout the Middle Ages (21). As we have just seen, Bec's registral scheme is ill-suited to a discussion even of the *chansons de femme* preserved in Old French.

Because the *chanson de femme* focuses generally on love and most often involves yearning for a love past, present, or future, it echoes many of the themes characteristic of the register of the *requête d'amour*. Indeed, most scholars accept Bec's theory that when the *trobairitz* adapted the *troubadour cansos* to the female voice, they drew on themes they found in the *chansons de femme* (Bec

1979; Blakeslee 1989; Bruckner et al. 1995). Antoine Tavera (1978: 142) has remarked that many of the trobairitz lyrics echo the troubadour theme of the *mal aimé*, and Kasten (1990: 21), in speculating on the function that the Frauenlied fulfilled in the range of lyric genres, observes that it poeticizes a basic human experience in love, that of separation. Moreover, as Cynthia Bagley (1966) has demonstrated, very little distinguishes the female-voiced *cantiga de amigo* from its male-voiced counterpart, the *cantiga de amor*. Given these similarities between the *canso* and the *chanson de femme* in all the medieval languages of Western Europe, one might well wonder if the registral distinction is not frankly meaningless with respect to theme. Rather than assigning the *canso* to the registre aristocratisant and relegating the *chanson de femme* to the registre popularisant, as Bec does, it might be more logical to envisage a register of the lyric “I” encompassing love lyrics with both male and female voices and subdivide it by genre such as the *canso*, *chanson de malmariée*, *aube*, and so on. If this idea seems counterintuitive, it may be because critics are so used to defining *fin’amors* from the male perspective that the female viewpoint tends to be seen as derivative and somehow inferior. But if it is true, as the evidence suggests, that the *chanson de femme* existed before and simultaneously with the troubadour *canso*, would it not be fairer to consider the woman’s voice as an equal and active partner in the creation as well as the development of the game of courtly love? Perhaps then we could redefine *fin’amors* according to whether the lyric “I” is masculine or feminine.

### **Féminité génétique**

Whereas all the current definitions of the *chanson de femme* specify *féminité textuelle*, they steer clear of postulating female authorship (*féminité génétique*). As Kasten (1990: 13) points out, “women’s songs” are not necessarily songs by women, adding that, on the contrary, most were composed by men, who in the Middle Ages were the major transmitters of culture.<sup>26</sup> But there is no reason to conclude that women were excluded from composing and performing either in the courts or in the marketplace. Kasten cites the case of the trobairitz who clearly performed in a court setting (13),<sup>27</sup> and she mentions that there were also women—the *spilwîp*—among the itinerant musicians who performed in more public places (16). It is likely that such women, like the *jouglers* discussed by Coldwell and the *jograresas* mentioned by Dronke, composed as well as performed. If most scholars firmly believe that all the *chansons de femme* preserved in Old French were composed by men, it may be owing in part to the existence of the large corpus of Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de amigo*, which contains a number of songs attributed to the same male court

poets who composed the *cantigas de amor*. However, the situation is quite different for northern France, where the overwhelming majority of *chansons de femme* are anonymous, and this very anonymity might well indicate female authorship (see the section “Manuscripts and Transmission,” later in this introduction). But because all the Old French *chansons de femme* that are ascribed are attributed to male *trouvères*,<sup>28</sup> many critics assume (with Bec) that “anonymous” was a man, and some have speculated as to why male *trouvères* might have wanted to appropriate female discourse. For example, Kasten (1990: 22) has suggested that male poets who composed *Frauenlieder* may have been projecting their own wish or angst onto the female figure and thus using the songs as a means of self-portrayal. More than a century ago, Jeanroy (1889: 96–100) speculated that they sought a kind of poetic justice, compensating for the suffering inflicted by a cruel or indifferent mistress by portraying a woman who had to beg mercy from an insensitive lover. More recently, Michel Zink (1996: 142–43) has postulated that since adherence to *fin’amors* was an experience of frustrated desire, male poets were pleased to create *chansons de femme* in which guileless women responded eagerly and passionately to sexual desire. The title of Zink’s book, *Le moyen âge et ses chansons, ou Un passé en trompe-l’œil*, encapsulates his theory that the archaic quality of the extant Old French *chansons de femme* is simply an illusion created by twelfth- and thirteenth-century male *trouvères* who exploited this “simpler” register to construct a different kind of female persona from the indifferent, haughty “Dame” of the grand chant courtois. According to this theory, the *chansons de femme* that have been preserved were invented as a contrast to the courtly lyric, and the “popularizing” tone exists only by opposition to the “*poésie savante*” (146–47).

In spite of the prevailing view that all the extant Old French *chansons de femme* were composed by men, it is generally assumed that their distant origins are to be found in preliterate songs composed by women. Jeanroy traced the roots of the noncourtly genres back to dance songs, no doubt composed during the *maieroles* or *fêtes de mai*, as described in the *Carmina Burana*, the *Roman de la Rose* ou de *Guillaume de Dole*, and *Flamenca*. Because in the Middle Ages dance was primarily a feminine pastime, Jeanroy theorized that young women composed songs for their own use, giving voice to their own feelings.<sup>29</sup> He claimed further that the earliest songs were essentially *chansons de mal-mariée*. Indeed, the *maieroles*, whose roots could be found in pagan celebrations of Venus’ domination, often featured a May Queen who led the dance with her female companions, excluding the *gelos*—the husband and all those who did not love (Paris 1892: 416). This festival encouraged exuberant role

reversal, giving women the initiative in love, which would account for the passionate, sensual, outspoken, often obscene nature of the discourse.<sup>30</sup>

The theory positing the existence of a preliterate traditional poetry received new impetus in 1948, following Samuel Stern's spectacular "discovery"—or, more precisely, his deciphering and identification—of the Mozarabic *kharjas*, the earliest surviving secular lyrics in a Romance vernacular. These texts, which appear as the refrain or final strophe of the *muwashshaḥa*, give voice to women expressing frank and passionate yearnings. Although they offer a stunning contrast to the refined language and imagery of the preceding (male-voiced) strophes, there is internal unity in that both parts of the poem are an expression of unrequited love; together they embody the different poetic traditions that had come together in al-Andalus (see Menocal 1987: 83–113). But the *kharjas* are important not simply for what they reveal about the poetic traditions of Moslem Spain, for they offer tangible proof that the *chanson de femme* as it appears in thirteenth-century *chansonniers* has deep roots in the past. They attest to the existence of an oral vernacular lyric tradition south of the Pyrenees and perhaps in all of Romania as early as 1000 at least—a tradition vigorous enough to influence the poetry of the troubadours and subsequently to compete with it. Significantly, the earliest *kharjas* predate the first compositions of Guilhem IX, and they develop themes that were unknown to classical Arab poetry and are precisely those found in the extant *chansons de femme* (Le Gentil 1963: 216–17). It is also worth noting that although the earliest *muwashshaḥāt* preserving the *kharjas* were composed around 1000, the *muwashshaḥa* as a literary genre was introduced in Moslem Spain around 900, and there is no reason to believe that the Romance songs presumably known by the earliest practitioners of the *muwashshaḥa* were a novelty at that time (Dronke 1996: 89–90).

Indeed, there is documented evidence that women were composing even earlier in the Middle Ages: indecent women's songs were denounced by churchmen already in the fourth century. They were condemned by the Council of Châlons in 650 (Zink 1996: 143), and a capitulary of Charlemagne dating from 789 prevails on abbesses to prevent nuns in their charge from composing or sending *winileodas* from the convent (Dronke 1996: 91). Now, if women were capable of composing—and indeed *were* composing—*chansons de femme* from the earliest times, why should they have suddenly lost that ability and initiative in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries? Dronke believes that they were indeed composing at that time, even though in his opinion no songs have survived in Old French. He notes that themes found in the *kharjas* "can already