

## CHAPTER XII

## Secular Monophonic Song, II: The Music of the Trouvères

It would be strange indeed had song in the vernacular remained the exclusive property of the troubadours. Yet we may feel some astonishment at the speed with which their poetry inspired imitation and emulation in other lands and languages. Several factors contributed to this rapid development. The cultural influence of the Crusades has perhaps been overemphasized, but they undoubtedly did bring the ruder men of England, northern France, and Germany into contact with the more civilized life and pleasures of the South. More important in the spreading abroad of troubadour poetry were the travels of the troubadours themselves. Many found patrons among the Christian kings in Spain, at various courts in northern Italy, and even to some extent in northern France. Others travelled from court to court, sometimes with jongleurs to perform their songs. The independent activities of jongleurs must also be counted among the most important factors in the rapid growth and dissemination of secular song. Constantly on the move, they kept the courts of western Europe abreast of both the latest news and the newest songs. It is impossible to measure the extent of their influence, but there is no reason to disagree with the statement that "the jongleurs were one of the earliest factors in bringing North and South together and promoting the social unity of France."<sup>1</sup>

At a higher level, marriages among the aristocracy promoted the social unity of France and contributed to the diffusion of troubadour song. Perhaps the most influential such marriage was that of Eleanor of Aquitaine (c. 1122–1204) to Louis VII of France (1120–80). Eleanor was the granddaughter of the first troubadour, William IX, Duke of Aquitaine. Her father, William X, was not himself a troubadour; but his support of others, including Marcabru, contributed to Eleanor's becoming a patroness of troubadours by both tradition and inclination. Eleanor and Louis were married in 1137, the year he became king of France. Louis was apparently not in sympathy with the game of l'amour courtois as it was played in the South. At any rate, "the flirtatious habits of his wife" ultimately led him to secure an annulment of their marriage in

1152. Eleanor promptly married Henry of Anjou, who was already Duke of Normandy and two years later was to become King Henry II of England. The famous troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn was at her court while she was Duchess of Normandy (1152–54) and may have gone to England with her for a short time. Bertran de Born also spent some time at the Court of Normandy, but his later relationships with the English kings seem to have been more political than poetic.<sup>2</sup>

Eleanor of Aquitaine passed her enthusiasm for secular song on to her children. Her most famous son, Richard the Lionhearted, has long been associated with its history. According to the romantic story, Blondel de Nesle discovered Richard's whereabouts by singing one of Richard's songs outside the castle where the king was imprisoned. The story has proved to be only a pretty legend, but Richard did write songs, if somewhat mediocre ones. Even more important were the activities of Eleanor's two daughters by Louis VII, Marie and Aelis, who became countesses of Champagne and Blois respectively. Aelis, it is said, inspired the poet Gautier d'Arras; but it was Marie who gave the court of Champagne its place in the early history of trouvère song. Chrétien de Troyes, Marie's favorite poet, was primarily an author of chivalric romances (*romans*) in verse, some of which were based on Arthurian legends. Perhaps at Marie's suggestion, Chrétien may have tried his hand at transferring the spirit and forms of troubadour poetry into *langue d'oïl*. Several collections of French songs—called *chansonniers*, from *chanson*, meaning "song"—attribute some half dozen courtly love songs to him, but their authenticity is doubted. Other poets to whom Marie gave encouragement and support were the young trouvères Conon de Béthune and Gace Brulé. The court of Champagne thus became the most flourishing center of poetic activity in northern France during the last third of the twelfth century. In the first half of the next century, that center was to produce one of the most prolific and best of the trouvères, Marie's grandson Thibaut, Count of Champagne and later King of Navarre.

After its first flowering in northeastern France, the art of the trouvères quickly found practitioners wherever *langue d'oïl* was spoken. With creative activity cut off in the South by the Albigensian Crusade, the trouvères took the lead in the development of secular song. As a result of different and changing social conditions, that development followed unexpected paths.

In the North, as in the South, lyric poetry and song began as an aristocratic art. It is true that many of the first trouvères, like some of their southern counterparts, were men of humble birth; but it was the courts of the nobility that provided these men with patronage and an audience

1. P. Aubry, *Trouvères and Troubadours*, trans. C. Aveling, p. 102.

2. For sowing discord between Henry II and his sons, Dante condemned Bertran to carry his severed head like a lantern in the eighth circle of Hell. *Inferno*, Canto XXVIII, lines 118–42.



The solemn ceremony of the investiture of a knight is depicted in a fourteenth-century miniature from the *Roman de Troie* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale).

for their songs. Early in the thirteenth century this situation began to change, as the growing prosperity and power of the cities produced new creators and consumers of secular song among the bourgeoisie. In the first half of the century, many trouvères were still members of the nobility: Hugues de Lusignan, Comte de la Marche (d. 1249); Jehan le Roux, Comte de Bretagne (d. 1250); and, most important of all, Thibaut de Champagne, Roi de Navarre (d. 1253). At the same time, however, a number of trouvères were university-bred and members of the clergy, such as Pierre de Corbie, Simon d'Autrie, Guillaume li Viniers, Gille li Viniers, Andrieu Contredit, and Richard de Fournival. Several of these men belonged to the diocese of Arras in northern France, a city that became a major center in the final period of trouvère activity (1250–1300).

The last half of the thirteenth century still produced a few aristocratic trouvères, but the great majority were members of the bourgeoisie who established guilds or “brotherhoods” of poets and singers in various towns and cities of northern France. These brotherhoods conducted assemblies known as *puy*s, in which a “prince” presided over contests to choose the best new songs. The Puy d'Arras was especially famous, and we know something about its operations from registers that list the members of the brotherhood and give the dates of their deaths.<sup>3</sup> Of the many trouvères whose names are thus made known to us, two are particularly important. Jehan Bretel (d. 1272), who was Prince of the Puy d'Arras, has left over forty songs. Adam de la Hale (d. 1288) was even more prolific and is better known because Edmond de Cousse-maker, a

pioneer in the study of medieval music, published his complete works in the latter part of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> The transfer of trouvère activity from aristocratic to bourgeois circles marks the final stage of secular monophonic song in France. Adam de la Hale, indeed, is often called the last of the trouvères. The further development of secular song belongs to the history of polyphonic music, and, as we shall see, Adam himself took the first step in that direction.

The total repertory of trouvère song has yet to receive the careful and complete study accorded the melodies of the troubadours. In part this situation results from the much greater amount of material that has been preserved. It is not possible to give exact figures, but numerous chansonniers contain approximately 2400 poems and 1700 melodies. Much of this material is available, but modern publications have tended to concentrate on special aspects of the repertory: facsimiles and transcriptions of individual manuscripts; songs of a particular type; or the works of a single trouvère. For this reason it is difficult to evaluate the relative importance of the various types and forms of songs. Generalizations as to musical style must also rest on an incomplete knowledge of the repertory as a whole. Much that has been said about troubadour music is equally applicable to the songs of the trouvères. Here, we need only note the somewhat different emphases that the northern composers placed on certain poetic types and musical forms.

## CHANSONS DE GESTE AND RELATED TYPES

Vernacular song in northern France did not suddenly appear with the trouvères as it had with the troubadours in the South. From the tenth century onward, writers in langue d'oïl had been producing poems known as *chansons de geste* (songs of deeds), of which the most famous and one of the best is the *Chanson de Roland*. The chansons de geste are epic rather than lyric poetry, but they were sung, apparently, with an accompanying harp or vièle. This tradition of combined poetry and song undoubtedly made it easier for the trouvères to adopt the forms and types of lyric poetry that were the special contribution of the troubadours. Northern poets did not forget the chanson de geste, however, and they cultivated several related poetic types to a much greater extent than their southern counterparts.

The chansons de geste normally consisted of ten-syllable lines grouped in stanzas, or *laises*, of irregular length. Each *laisse*, like a paragraph, concerned itself with a single thought or incident and achieved unity through the use of assonance or rhyme. In a very few poems, a shorter final line marks the close of each *laisse*. Poems constructed in this way, with hundreds or thousands of lines, obviously demanded

3. R. Berger, *Le Nécrologe de la confrérie des jongleurs et des bourgeois d'Arras (1194–1361)*, 2 vols., Mémoires de la Commission Départementale des Monuments Historiques du Pas-de-Calais, 11<sup>2</sup> and 13<sup>2</sup> (Arras, 1963 and 1970).

4. See Bibliography for the editions by Cousse-maker and N. Wilkins.

simple and adaptable musical material. The material appears to have been so simple, indeed, that no manuscripts preserve chansons de geste with their melodies. It is important to note, however, that recent opinions postulate a small number of melodic formulas or phrases—perhaps no more than three—which would have different functions and would be distributed according to the sense and sentence structure of the text.<sup>5</sup> The result, obviously, would be a highly repetitive form, but one that permitted the creation of musical units to correspond with the *laisses* into which the poems were divided. Significantly, the suggested musical scheme for the *chanson de geste* is in accord with later procedures in related types of poetry. The literary ancestry of these related types has long been recognized. Now we may include the *chanson de geste* in their musical ancestry as well.

## LAIS AND DESCORTS

Among the songs related to older forms of narrative poetry are the *lai* and *descort*, which were briefly considered in the previous chapter. The beginnings of the *lai* are obscure and have occasioned a good deal of controversy. Perhaps the most common theory holds that it is of Celtic origin, coming to France by way of Brittany or through Anglo-Norman contacts in the twelfth century. One of the first French poets to write *lais* was Marie de France, about whom little is known except that she belonged to the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine. The *lais* of Marie de France are narrative poems, or *romans*, some of which draw their material from the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Written in rhymed couplets, these poems were apparently not meant to be sung. With the advent of *lais* intended for singing, narrative texts began to give way to lyric effusions of considerable length on the inexhaustible subject of love. A few *lais* deal with religious subjects or are addressed to the Virgin Mary, but in most of the texts the poet has some cause for complaint about a harsh, disdainful, or simply unresponsive lady who leaves his love unrequited. It is this "sentimental disagreement" or discord that may account for the popularity of the name *descort* among the troubadours, who left twenty-eight pieces with that designation but only four *lais*. No more than four of these thirty-two poems, it will be remembered, survive with their music (Chapter XI, p. 276). Among the *trouvères* the situation is different. Here we find thirty melodies with French texts from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Only nine identify themselves as *descorts*, thirteen as *lais*. The others belong to the group because of their formal

5. See J. Chailley, "Études musicales sur la chanson de geste et ses origines," *Revue de musicologie*, 27 (1948), pp. 1-27. A more recent survey of the problems is J. Van der Veen, "Les Aspects musicaux des chansons de geste," *Neophilologus*, 41 (1957), pp. 82-100.

structure.<sup>6</sup> As has already been noted, it is the use of different stanzaic forms within a single poem that distinguishes *lais* and *descorts* from all other troubadour and *trouvère* songs. To simplify further discussion, therefore, the term *lai* may serve as a generic name for all of these pieces.

It is only to be expected that *lais* from the late twelfth through the thirteenth century should vary greatly in their overall structure. Neither the number of stanzas nor the number of lines within each stanza is fixed in any way. Stanzas range from four to fifty-six lines in length, with the average, according to Jeanroy, being twenty to twenty-five lines. Stanzas with eight to sixteen lines are also common, however. As in all types of lyric poetry at this time, lines of seven and eight syllables predominate, but a special characteristic of the *lai* is the frequent use of shorter lines with three to six syllables. Still another variable results from the degree of formal "discord" among the stanzas of a *lai*. In some poems, each stanza has a different poetic form. Others use the same form for two or more stanzas that may appear consecutively or be scattered throughout the poem. In the fourteenth century, the form of the *lai* became standardized to the extent that it usually consisted of twelve stanzas, of which the first and last are identical in structure and are sung to the same melody (see Chapter XVII). Some earlier *lais* foreshadow this development, but modern efforts to find twelve stanzas in the highly irregular poems of the thirteenth century are not always convincing.

The melodies of the *lais* naturally reflect the variability of their poetic structure. Nevertheless, common structural procedures relate the different stanzaic forms and give the *lais* their distinctive musical characteristics. As a starting point for examining those characteristics, let us observe the two ways in which the manuscripts preserve the melodies. As a general rule, the scribes copied the melody for the complete text. In a few cases, however, only scattered portions of the text appear with music. Apparently the notated phrases were meant to serve for all succeeding lines and stanzas with the same poetic structure. From the historical point of view, the incompletely notated *lais* are particularly interesting and instructive. Differences of opinion may arise as to the patterns of melodic repetition, but we can still tell a good deal about the musical origin of the *lai* and its relationship to other types of narrative song.

The most obvious characteristic of the partially notated *lais* is their use of a small number of melodic formulas for texts of considerable length. A simple, generally syllabic style and the recurrence of similar if not identical formulas in different *lais* further contribute to the family resemblance displayed by all members of the group. This recurrence of characteristic formulas suggests that the partially notated *lais* drew on an

6. The thirty pieces are published in A. Jeanroy, L. Brandin, and P. Aubry, *Lais et descorts français du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.

ancient fund of melody that could be adapted to various poetic forms and modified at the discretion of the composer or performer. Increasing the probability of this hypothesis is the fact that the partially notated lais belong among the oldest examples of the form and are anonymous except for two by Ernoul de Gastinois. Little is known about Ernoul, but he appears to have been active in the first half of the thirteenth century. Although the subject matter of Ernoul's two lais is pious rather than profane, they faithfully reflect the characteristic poetic and musical structures of the older secular form.<sup>7</sup>

The first stanza of the *Lai de Notre Dame* by Ernoul de Gastinois illustrates one method of singing a lengthy text to a minimum of musical material. Only two basic formulas serve twenty-six lines of text, but a slight elaboration of the second formula marks the division of the stanza into two not-quite-equal sections. The manuscript source does not provide the melody for the lines enclosed in brackets in Example XII-1. It is clear, nevertheless, that the musical form of the stanza is *ab ab ab bbbbbb' ab ab ab ab bbb'*.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between this form and the procedures postulated for the *chanson de geste* is self-evident.

Example XII-1: *The First Stanza of the Lai de Notre Dame by Ernoul de Gastinois*

1. En en-ten-te cu-ri-eu-se 2. De quer-re ma vi-e,  
 3. L'a-mor de la glo-ri-eu-se 4. Ne lai-se-rai mi-e,  
 5. [(Ka) la vir-ge pre-ci-eu-se 6. Ne re-querre a-i-e  
 7. Ki fu si tres sa-ve-reu-se 8. C'on-ques en sa vi-e]  
 9. Ne li prist en-vi-e  
 10. De car-nel fo-li-e  
 11. Or ne m'es-con-di-e  
 12. De rien ke je di-e  
 13. La do-ce, la pi-e 14. La vir-ge Ma-ri - e;  
 15. Vir-ge boine a-ven-tu-reu-se 16. Sain-te caste et pu-re  
 17. De tos les biens e-u-reu-se 18. Plai-ne de me-su-re  
 19. Sain-te virge a Dieu es-peu-se 20. Pu-celle a droi-tu-re  
 21. Do-ce ro-i-ne pi-teu-se 22. [(De) boi-ne na-tu-re  
 23. To-te cre-a-tu-re  
 24. S'en vos met sa cu-re  
 25. Puet es-tre se-u-re 26. De boine a-ven-tu - re.]

\* The note *f* appears only in the first statement of this phrase.

Eager to claim my (full) life, I shall never abandon the love of the glorious (Virgin); nor seek aid except from the precious Virgin who was so saintly that never in her life did carnal folly tempt her. Now may the tender, pious Virgin Mary not reject anything I say. Fortunate Virgin, holy, chaste, and pure, above all the saints full of measure, Holy Virgin, spouse of God, justly a maiden, tender queen, merciful and kind, every creature, if he puts his trust in you, can be sure of good fortune.

7. All that is known of the life and works of Ernoul is assembled in J. Maillard, "Lais et chansons d'Ernoul de Gastinois."  
 8. A facsimile of the original notation for the opening stanzas of Ernoul's *Lai de Notre Dame* follows the title page of Jeanroy, *et al.*, *Lais et descorts*.

In their efforts to discover the parentage of the lai, some scholars have claimed that it is the secular counterpart of the liturgical sequence. Certainly there is little evidence of any relationship between the variable poetic structures of the thirteenth-century lai and the almost hymnlike regularity of contemporary sequence texts. Even when the overall structure of the lai becomes standardized to some extent in the fourteenth century, the differences between the two types remain more striking than the similarities. Yet the older lais do use structural procedures encountered in the special form known as the sequence with double cursus (see Chapter VI). The most obvious and extensive application of the double-cursus principle is to be found in the *Lai de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament*, the second of the two lais by Ernoul de Gastinois.

A noticeable departure from the style of the older lais occurs in some pieces by thirteenth-century composers. Successive repetitions of one or two formulas disappear, and the melodic poverty gives way to more expansive and lyrical phrases. Both individual phrases and complete melodies cover a wider range and contain many more ornamental groups of two to four notes per syllable. With these developments, the lai loses its archaic and popular character and approaches the more sophisticated style of contemporary trouvère song.

## OTHER NARRATIVE SONGS

Perhaps under the continuing influence of the *chanson de geste*, northern poets cultivated narrative song much more than did the troubadours. The French *pastourelle* followed in the same tradition as the troubadour *pastorela*, but it often placed greater emphasis on the depiction of rustic manners and customs than on the attempted seduction. Indeed, in the *pastourelle* by Jehan Erars discussed below, the contest between knight and shepherdess is missing entirely. In another type of narrative-dramatic poem, the principal character is a lady with some cause for complaint: the absence of her lover, the presence of her husband, or the obstinacy of her parents in preventing her marriage to the man of her choice. Poems of this sort are known as *chansons de toile*, sometimes mis-translated as "spinning songs." It is true that the lady may voice her complaint while sewing or weaving, but she may also be reading a book or simply doing nothing. In the Middle Ages, as now, the word *toile* had several meanings. Used generically, it meant any woven fabric, but it could specifically denote a scene depicted in a tapestry. Today, among other things, *toile* can mean either the cloth on which a picture is painted or the painting itself, like the word *canvas* in English. A correct, if not particularly elegant, translation of *chansons de toile* would therefore seem to be "picture songs," which normally begin by describing the scene in which the lady finds herself. As a genre, the *chanson de toile* had be-

come extinct by the early thirteenth century. A lateral descendant may have been the songs of the *mal mariée* (ill-mated wife), in which a lady's woes arise from marriage to an old and justifiably jealous husband. Centuries later, incidentally, the *mal mariée* was still a favorite theme in French literature and song.

The *chanson de toile* is apparently one of the oldest forms of French lyric poetry, and analogies between it and the still older *chanson de geste* have often been noted. Each stanza of *En un vergier*, for example, has the same rhyme and uses the same melody for all four of its ten-syllable lines (Example XII-2). Only the cadence is altered in the fourth line to introduce the two-line refrain that concludes every stanza. The resulting musical form—*aaaa'BC*—seems primitive, but the melodic style is more elaborate than in other types of narrative song.

Example XII-2: *The First Stanza of an Anonymous Chanson de Toile in a Metrical Transcription*

1. En un ver - gier lez u - ne fon - te - ne - le,  
 2. Dont cleve est l'onde et blan - che la gra - ve - le,  
 3. Siet fille a roi, sa main a la ma - xe - le;  
 4. En sos - pi - rant son douz a - mi ra -  
 pe - le: 5. A - e, cuens Guis a - mis!  
 6. La vostre a - mors me tout so - laz et ris.

In an orchard beside a little spring with crystal water and white sand a king's daughter sat, her hand on her cheek. Sighing, she recalls her tender friend: Alas, Count Gui, my friend, your love takes away my solace and my laughter.

Another anonymous *chanson de toile*, *Bele Doette*, is even more ornately expressive (see AMM, No. 44). The refrain, in particular, seems to reflect the lady's personal grief. As if to offset the ornateness of its style, *Bele Doette* has a relatively simple form—*ababC*. This use of two phrases for the body of the stanza and a third, concluding phrase for the refrain recalls Ernoul's structural procedure in the first stanza of his *Lai de Notre Dame* (Example XII-1). Perhaps the distinctive phrase concluding each stanza or *laisse* suggested textual repetition and the introduction of refrains in narrative songs. Dance songs and other kinds of popular

and folk music may also have suggested the use of refrains and may even have provided some of those found in more literary forms.

Whatever the origin of refrains may have been, they also play a prominent role in the French *pastourelle*. Perhaps because of the subject matter, the *trouvères* usually wrote *pastourelles* in a simple style with highly repetitive forms. *Au tems pascor* (In paschal time), by Jehan Erars, provides a characteristic example (AMM, No. 45). Its poetic and musical forms may be outlined as follows:

Poetry:  $a_4 a_4 b_6, a_4 a_4 b_6, c_8 c_8, d_6, d_6, e_8 e_8, f_6, G_8 F_6,$   
 Music:  $a \quad a \quad b b \quad c \quad c \quad b b \quad d \quad A$

As is often the case, however, letters fail to indicate the homogeneous character of the melody as a whole. The opening phrase (*a*) is, in reality, the generating force of the entire song. It defines the range of a fifth within which all the phrases move; it provides the motives and melodic progressions that are fragmented and recombined to form the internal phrases (*b*, *c*, and *d*); and it returns intact for the refrain. Whether the simplicity of this and other *pastourelles* resulted from the use of folk melodies or from sophisticated parody remains an unanswered question. Certainly *pastourelles* were intended for aristocratic, or at least bourgeois, audiences who delighted in poking fun at rustic manners. For such audiences, composers may well have taken pride in skillful imitation, rather than direct quotation, of popular song. The melodic setting of *Au tems pascor*, at any rate, creates a fittingly popular tone for this charming description of a rural party that ends in a noisy row.

## REFRAINS

Although refrains are particularly common in narrative songs such as the *chanson de toile* and the *pastourelle*, they also appear in other poetic types in a great variety of stanzaic forms. It is textual repetition, of course, that creates a refrain; but for the musician it is the relationship between the refrain melody and the rest of the stanza that is of primary interest. In *Bele Doette* and *En un vergier*, the refrains have new melodies. The refrain of *Au tems pascor*, on the other hand, repeats the melody of the opening phrase. Such repetitions of material from the body of the stanza produce many forms that are impossible to classify. Some writers designate as *rotouenges* songs in which the melody for the final phrase or phrases of the stanza also serves for the refrain. This usage rests on somewhat shaky evidence, for the term seems to have originated as a loose designation for French songs not of courtly inspiration. Neither poetic nor musical procedures were uniform, and the most we can say is that *rotouenges* usually combined a refrain with a simplicity of poetic

structure that is either genuinely old or deliberately archaic. A late example that has been called a *rotrouenge* is *De moi dolereus vos chant* (Of my sad self I sing to you; AMM, No. 46) by Gillebert de Berneville, a member of the Puy d'Arras in the second half of the thirteenth century. The stanzaic form of this song, with its refrain, is  $a_7 a_7 a_7 b_3 B_8$ . The musical form is less easily described. An opening phrase is repeated for the second line, after which a new phrase (*b*) and a three-note motive (*c*) complete the stanza. The refrain takes as its melody the notes of the last eight syllables of the stanza but gives them a different phrase structure. Thus stated, the musical relationship between stanza and refrain sounds simpler than it actually is. Motive *c* is also the first three notes of phrase *b*, and it thus serves the double function of ending the melody of the stanza and beginning a repetition of *b* and *c* that continues as the melody of the refrain. The subtlety of this overlapping repetition belies the apparent simplicity with which Gillebert sings the blues.

It has sometimes been said that an audience would join in singing refrains, after a soloist had sung the body of the stanzas. Such audience participation may have been normal for dance songs, but it seems unlikely in the case of *chansons de toile*, where the refrain usually expresses a very personal emotion. It is even more unlikely in a type of song known as *chansons avec des refrains* (songs with refrains). These songs have no single refrain in the usual meaning of the term. Instead, each stanza ends with a different refrain taken from a well-known song. Composers evidently expected audiences to recognize the familiar quotations and to appreciate the ingenuity of their introduction. It does not seem probable that audiences were also expected to sing the refrains when they did not know in advance what those refrains would be.

The practice of quoting refrains was so widespread in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries that it almost seems a distinguishing characteristic of the period. Scholars of medieval literature have long recognized the existence of this practice, and in 1904 Alfred Jeanroy listed fifty-four *chansons* with "refrains foreign to the text."<sup>9</sup> Many of these pieces are *pastourelles*, but other types of songs, including *chansons d'amour*, are also represented. All of the songs apparently belong to the thirteenth century, and many were produced by later generations of *trouvères* in Arras and other cities of northern France. As a rule, composers adopted the same general procedure for introducing foreign refrains. All the stanzas of a song have the same poetic structure, except that each closes with an additional line to introduce the rhyme of the refrain. In some cases, the additional lines also have different melodies that lead into or even anticipate the melodies of the refrains.

*Penser ne doit vilenie* (One should not think evil; AMM, No. 47) pro-

vides a characteristic example of the ways in which foreign refrains might be related to the main body of a *chanson*.<sup>10</sup> All four stanzas of the poem have the same rhymes and the rhyme scheme *a'ba'bba'a'* for their first seven lines. The eighth line of each stanza then introduces the final rhyme of the refrain. Borrowing a device common in troubadour poetry, the poet further integrates the text of each refrain by using its final word to begin the following stanza. The musical setting of the poem is organized somewhat differently. Now the first eight lines constitute a unit with the form *aa' aa' bc aa'*. In addition, phrase *a'* reappears at the close of the first refrain and again, lacking its first two notes, at the close of the second. The melody of the third refrain seems unrelated to the rest of the *chanson*. Its opening phrase resembles the beginning of the first refrain, but it then turns to a surprise ending on *c'*, a fourth above the final that the *chanson* as a whole has led us to expect.

The fourth stanza of *Penser ne doit* presents a problem because it appears only in manuscripts that do not give the melody of its refrain. Three quotations of the same refrain in other contexts do have melodies, but they still leave unanswered questions. All three versions are included in AMM, No. 47. The first two closely resemble the melody of the third refrain, especially at the beginning and end. Either one would therefore produce a second pair of related refrain melodies to match the first two quoted in *Penser ne doit*. This seems to prove that we have discovered the right melody for the fourth refrain, although we still do not know which transposition should be used. The version ending on *c'* would confirm the surprise cadence of the third refrain and emphasize the relationship of the two melodies. On the other hand, the transposition down to *g* would bring back the expected final without destroying the melodic resemblances between the third and fourth refrains. Which of these solutions was intended will probably always remain unknown. We also cannot know whether the musical relationship between the *chanson* and the first two refrains results from modification of their original melodies or from a deliberate use of preexistent phrases in constructing the melody of the *chanson*. Other sources quote both refrains with completely different melodies, however, and we may therefore assume that the composer was responsible for relating them to his melody for *Penser ne doit*.

It must already be clear that the practice of quoting refrains spread beyond the limits of *trouvère* song. Indeed, all four of the refrains in *Penser ne doit* turn up in different motets (see Example XIV-2). As the predominant form of thirteenth-century polyphony, the motet and the frequent quotation of refrains within it will be discussed in Chapter XIV. Here we need only note that motets provide our chief source for

9. A. Jeanroy, *Les origines de la poésie lyrique en France* (Paris, 1904), p. 102 and fn. 1. Gennrich, who expanded the list to about eighty pieces, published all the refrain texts and any melodies that appear with them in RVB, 2, pp. 255-91.

10. Different manuscripts attribute *Penser ne doit* variously to Guiot de Dijon, Andrieu Contredit, and Jehan Erars. Two other examples of *chansons* with refrains may be found in Gennrich, *Grundriss einer Formenlehre*, pp. 55-59.

the melodies of refrains. To what extent they transmit the original form of these melodies must often remain in doubt.

Little is known about the texts from which thirteenth-century poets drew the refrains that they quoted so freely. Some may have come from narrative songs, especially the pastourelle, but most were apparently taken from dances or other songs of popular origin. Few of the complete texts from which these refrains came have been preserved. Those few suggest that perhaps we need not regret too much the loss of so many pieces from what must have been a much larger repertory. Neither the poetry nor the music of dance songs is particularly distinguished or distinctive. Conventional formulas and clichés abound in the texts, while the melodies tend to be simple, short, and highly repetitive. For many songs the refrain includes the entire melody to which the other lines of text were sung. Nevertheless, dance songs of the thirteenth century occupy an important historical position. From them came the more literary *formes fixes* (fixed forms) of later French poetry and song: the rondeau, the ballade, and the virelai. The early history of these forms and of their interrelationships presents a confused and confusing picture. They did not, in fact, become “fixed” until late in the thirteenth century, when the activity of the trouvères was drawing to a close. This establishment of the fixed forms coincides with their transformation from simple dance tunes into polyphonic songs. Once that transformation had been accomplished, the three distinctively different forms dominated French lyric poetry almost to the end of the fifteenth century.

## THE RONDEAU

In northern France, *carole* and *ronde*, together with various diminutives such as *rondet*, *rondel*, and *rondelet*, seem to have been more or less synonymous terms designating round dances in which group performance of refrains alternated with lines sung by the leader of the dance. In view of modern usage, this original meaning of the word *carol* is worth noting. Rather than the birth of Christ, many of the early dance songs celebrate the joys of returning spring, and May Day festivities may well have been the origin of the species. In any case, a thirteenth-century round dance might be called either a *carole* or, more commonly, one of the diminutives of *ronde* from which eventually came *rondeau*, the spelling we use today.

Many thirteenth-century rondeaux had only six lines with an internal and concluding refrain. In the simplest version of the later “fixed” form, the refrain also introduced the rondeau, which then became a poem of eight lines with only two rhymes. Lines 1 and 2 constitute the entire refrain, which returns as lines 7 and 8. Line 1 also returns as line 4.

The remaining lines have different texts but use the same rhymes as the refrain. (In later poetry, both French and English, this form is given the somewhat misleading designation *triolet*.) The musical setting of such a rondeau consists of only two phrases, and all lines with the same rhyme are sung to the same melody. We may therefore indicate both the poetic and musical form as *ABaAabAB*. (Capital letters indicate the refrain lines—repetitions of words and music. Lower-case letters indicate rhymes as well as melodic repetitions with different words.) A characteristic rondeau of the late thirteenth century is *De ma dame vient* by Guillaume d'Amiens (Example XII-3).<sup>11</sup> The numbering of the lines in this example indicates the order in which they are to be sung. The translation of *De ma dame vient* should make its poetic form even clearer.

### Example XII-3: *Rondeau of Guillaume d'Amiens*



1, 4, 7. De ma da - me vient 2, 8. La grant joi - e que j'ai;  
3. De lit me sou - vient;  
5. N'en par - ti - rai nient, 6. Mais tous jours l'a - mo - rai;

1. From my lady comes
2. The great joy that I have;
3. I remember her;
4. From my lady comes.
5. I shall never leave her
6. But shall always love her;
7. From my lady comes
8. The great joy that I have.

The artificial restrictions of the eight-line rondeau and the simplicity of its melodic style would seem to make it an unlikely candidate for further development. Nevertheless, composers managed to retain its basic structure, while at the same time they increased the length of the poems and provided them with elaborate musical settings. These developments occur, however, not in the songs of the trouvères but in the polyphonic songs of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>12</sup>

## THE BALLADE

As we saw in the preceding chapter, the troubadours generally called their dance songs *dansas* or *baladas*. The name *balada* passed into the musical terminology of both France and Italy, but it came to designate different forms in the two countries. The Italian *ballata* kept a refrain at

11. After Gennrich, *RVB*, 1, p. 36. For further examples see HAM, Nos. 19d and 19e, and Gleason, *EM*, pp. 10-11.
12. As a result of structural modifications in sixteenth-century rondeaux, modern descriptions of the form do not always agree with medieval practice.



the beginning of the poem and after each stanza and corresponds in form to the French *virelai* (see below). The French *ballade* apparently began with much the same form but developed in a different way. Under the influence of the *chanson*, the opening refrain disappeared, and the ballade adopted a fixed *aab* form. We have already encountered this form in some *cansos* of the troubadours, and it is even more common in *trouvère* *chansons*. The many *chansons* in *aab* form normally do not have refrains, however, and are clearly distinguishable from the few examples of contemporary dance songs. It is a mistake, therefore, to identify these *chansons* as ballades.<sup>13</sup> Not until the fourteenth century did the ballade take on the formal and stylistic characteristics of the more sophisticated *chanson*. Once the transformation had been completed, the ballade with refrain became the most common form of French secular song.

In contrast to the numerous stanzas of *cansos* and *chansons*, the "fixed" literary form of the ballade consisted of only three stanzas plus an envoy, which is almost always missing, however, in ballades provided with a musical setting. With the reduction in the number of stanzas went a corresponding increase in their length and the intricacy of their rhyme schemes. From the *chanson d'amour*, the ballade borrowed a characteristic arrangement of the first four lines as a pair of couplets, usually with alternating rhymes (*abab*). The rest of the stanza normally consisted of three or four lines, including the refrain, in which no consistent rhyme scheme prevailed. Most of the refrains consisted of a single line, but some were expanded to include the penultimate, as well as the final line. In some cases, the stanza itself was expanded to a total of ten lines. From these remarks it is obvious that the stanzaic form of the ballade was by no means as fixed as the form of the *rondeau*. Yet it is possible to show typical forms for stanzas of different lengths, with the warning that the rhyme schemes given for the final portions of the forms are common but not invariable:

7-line stanzas:	ab ab bc C
8-line stanzas:	ab ab ccd D
10-line stanzas:	aab aab becb C
Musical form:	a a b C

From these stanzaic patterns, it can be seen that any ballade text will fit a musical form divided into three sections, of which the first is repeated—usually with open and closed endings—and the third serves as a refrain. Again, and even more than with the *rondeau*, the emergence of the ballade as an important literary and musical form is a fourteenth-century phenomenon. Further discussion must therefore be reserved for later chapters (see especially Chapter XVII).

13. In HAM, for example, Nos. 19a and 36a are characteristic *chansons*, not ballades. The presence or absence of a refrain, of course, cannot be determined from a single stanza.

## THE VIRELAI

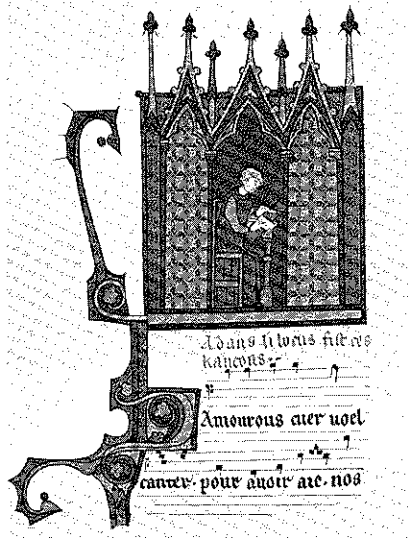
The third fixed form, the *virelai*, was the last to achieve recognition as a distinct poetic and musical genre, and the name did not come into general use until the fourteenth century. Both its derivation and original meaning remain obscure. Spelled *vireli* or *virenli*, the word appears in early poetic texts with reference to a dance or to some dance movement. Current opinion explains *vireli* as "turn her" and *virelai* (= *vireles*) as "turn them." The final spelling, *virelai*, may reflect the influence of the *lai*, but the two forms are otherwise unrelated. A fifteenth-century suggestion—sometimes repeated by modern writers—that a *virelai* is a *lai* turned (*viré*) on itself seems to be the kind of false etymology that appears when the original meaning and use of a word has been long forgotten.

In both poetic and musical structure, the *virelai* is obviously related to other dance songs with refrains. It begins with a refrain; but then, as in the ballade, the stanzas fall into three parts, of which the first two are sung to the same melody. In the *virelai*, however, the third part of the stanza repeats the melody of the refrain. The complete form of a *virelai* in several stanzas thus becomes *AbbaA bbaA bbaA* etc. If we regard the *virelai* as a kind of ballade that kept the refrain at the beginning of the first stanza, it becomes clear how the identical forms of the French *virelai* and the Italian ballata evolved out of the older French ballades or Provençal baladas and dansas. In its further evolution, the *virelai* followed the ballade in reducing the normal number of stanzas to three. It remained even more flexible, however, in the number of lines that might be included in each section of its stanzas. Sections sung to the same music naturally had to have the same poetic structure, but in other respects poets had considerable freedom. Only the formal pattern of the *virelai* as a whole was fixed.

The later predominance of fixed forms in polyphonic secular song should not lead us to overemphasize the importance of those forms in the repertory of the *trouvères*. By far the larger part of that repertory consists of the same kinds of song that we find in the work of the troubadours: love songs (*chansons*), debates (*jeux partis*), *lais* and *descorts*, *pastourelles*, and *aubes* (*albas*). French contributions include the *chanson de toile* and songs of the *mal mariée*. Even in the output of a composer as late as Adam de la Hale (d. 1288) these kinds of song still predominate. Adam's complete works include thirty-four *chansons*, seventeen *jeux partis*, sixteen "rondels," and five motets. In addition, his famous *Jeu de Robin et Marion* (Play of Robin and Marion) is a dramatized *pastourelle* with incidental music. Earlier composers showed even less interest in dance songs, which are conspicuously rare in the great manuscript collections of *trouvère* songs.<sup>14</sup> The *virelai* and ballade in

14. The *Manuscrit du Roy*, for example, contains only one dance song, the ballade *En tous tans*, in its original repertory. Thirteen pieces added on blank pages and in measured notation include four *rondeaux*. See Gennrich, *RVB*, 2, pp. 186–88 and 228.





The composer Adam de la Hale depicted in a miniature from the *Chansonnier d'Arras*.

particular did not develop into forms that we recognize as fixed until the fourteenth century. Even at the close of the previous century, the term *rondelet* covered a multitude of different forms. To cite Adam de la Hale again, the manuscript copy of his works gives the title *Li Rondelet Adan* to a group of sixteen pieces that are among the first polyphonic settings of dance songs. Most of these pieces are, in fact, *rondeaux*, although the forms and rhyme schemes are still not completely standardized. One of the pieces has the form of a *virelai*, however, and another is a *ballade* with an opening refrain.<sup>15</sup> Yet to come, evidently, was the separation of these forms into the three major types of polyphonic song.

#### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF TROUVÈRE SONG

Secular song in northern France received its chief impetus from the South, and the repertoires of the troubadours and trouvères naturally share many common characteristics. Yet the trouvères were not content merely to follow in the footsteps of the pioneers. Instead, they struck out on new paths and stamped their music with its own distinctive qualities. Many French songs, it is true, imitate the serious style and subtle refinement of the Provençal *canso*. But many display a spontaneous gaiety and an elegant frivolity that we think of as being typically French. Naturally most obvious in the texts, these traits also make themselves felt in the music.

Much more than the troubadours, the trouvères cultivated a simplicity and directness of melodic form and style that gave their songs an almost folklike character. The extent to which that character results from

the influence of folk song cannot be determined. We can see, however, that the popular kinds of song already discussed provided many traits characteristic of the trouvère repertory as a whole. From the *chanson de geste* and related narrative songs must have come the trouvères' preference for repetitive rather than continuous melodic structures. Reinforcing this preference was an obvious fondness for refrains. As a result, balance and clarity of formal design become a conspicuous characteristic of trouvère songs. Another characteristic that probably derives from the same sources is a preference for simple, essentially syllabic, melodies. In this respect, of course, the trouvère repertory as a whole displays considerable variety. The *chanson de toile* *Bele Doette* represents one extreme in its extensive ornamentation for expressive purposes. Normal *chansons*, especially of the earlier trouvères, tended to use vocal ornaments in the more restrained and abstract way characteristic of the troubadour *canso*. At the other extreme lie almost completely syllabic songs like *Au tems pascor* of Jehan Erars, in which repeated phrases, narrow in range but distinct in outline, produce a decidedly popular tone. The many melodies of this type are perhaps the most important and attractive contribution of the trouvères to the art of secular song.

The role of rhythm and meter in creating the popular tone of many trouvère songs again remains problematical. Some scholars accept without question the application of triple meter to all trouvère songs. The results, in many cases, are neither musically satisfactory nor historically justified. It is unlikely, for example, that the first generation of trouvères in the latter half of the twelfth century would have consistently followed the system of metrical organization being developed at that time in the field of sacred polyphony. A highly ornamented song such as *Bele Doette* illustrates the musical problems. Forced into the strait-jacket of triple meter, both melody and text become strained and unnatural.<sup>16</sup> The structure of the text, moreover, suggests the necessity of some freedom in performance. The poetic lines consist of ten syllables divided by a caesura into four plus six, but both the caesuras and the complete lines may have either masculine or feminine endings. As is customary, the manuscript source gives the melody for the first stanza only, and it provides variants for the feminine and masculine endings at the caesuras in lines 1 and 3 respectively (see AMM, No. 44). We do not know, however, how to handle masculine endings at caesuras in lines 2 and 4, or feminine rhymes at the close of complete lines. The underlaying of the text in AMM is merely a suggested solution to these problems.<sup>17</sup> It seems obvious that only a free rhythmic performance based

15. The two pieces, together with a *rondeau* of Adam, are published in Genrich, *Troubadours, Trouvères*, pp. 39-41; the *virelai* and another *rondeau*, in Gleason, EM, pp. 74 and 76; the *ballade* and still another *rondeau*, in HAM, Nos. 36b and 36c.

16. See, for example, the transcriptions of *Bele Doette* in Genrich, *Exempla*, p. 8, and J. Beck, *La musique des troubadours*, p. 103.

17. There is also no provision for the added refrain lines in the last three stanzas.

on the changing accents, structure, and meaning of the text can do justice to the expressive qualities of this song.

As the thirteenth century progressed, a number of developments made the use of triple meters in trouvère songs both more probable and more appropriate. Although for the most part only their refrains survive, the many dance songs that must have existed had of necessity to be metrical. Quotation of these refrains in chansons, therefore, may have led to metrical organization of the entire melody. Similarly, a regular triple meter seems called for in a song like *Au tems pascor*, in which the popular style of rustic dances is probably imitated. Yet even here textual and musical accents sometimes bump awkwardly together (see AMM, No. 45, lines 9 and 10 of the first stanza). Another development that may have led the trouvères to adopt triple meters was the quotation of refrains and the use of French secular texts in the thirteenth-century motet (see Chapter XIV). Here, at any rate, the fluctuating and fluid rhythms of the texts were subordinated to regular metrical patterns. We must remember, however, that trouvère songs continued to be written in unmeasured notation long after a precise means of indicating note values was available. It is surely significant that the manuscript collection of Adam de la Hale's complete works used unmeasured notation for the monophonic chansons and jeux partis but adopted the contemporary measured notation for the polyphonic "rondels" and motets. The conclusion seems inescapable that the trouvères still wanted freedom of performance and provided for it by the notation they chose for their melodies. Not until the fourteenth century do we finally encounter monophonic songs with clearly indicated note values and regular metrical patterns. By this time, however, the age of the trouvères had passed, and secular song had begun a new phase of its development.

Continuous development, indeed, is perhaps the most striking aspect of French secular song, which never ceased to play an important part in cultural and social life. Among the chief reasons for this prolonged vitality must be the continuing assimilation of influences from a wide variety of sources. Both musical and textual influences on trouvère song came from contemporary plainchant and polyphony, from Latin and vernacular poets, from churchmen and vagabonds, from aristocrats and country folk, from troubadours and Celtic bards. Musically, these influences are developed within the narrow limits of monophonic song. When those limits became too confining, composers opened up new possibilities by adopting the procedures of contemporary polyphony. More than anything else, perhaps, this crucial step assured the future life of French secular song. Of almost equal importance, however, was the diversity of its subject matter. As with the troubadours, the serious love song formed the core of the trouvère repertory. The spirit that produced the Albigensian Crusade, the Inquisition, and the piety of Saint

Louis (Louis IX, 1226–70) again resulted in numerous songs to the Virgin Mary and in the ideal of l'amour courtois as faithful servitude without thought of physical reward. But the trouvères found various ways to counteract the sterility of this concept. Spring songs celebrated the joys of love, and pastourelles created lively pictures of rustic pleasures. The manners and morals of society as a whole occasioned much wry humor, and neither churchmen nor lay officials were safe from satirical attack. On the completely frivolous side, jeux partis debated amorous dilemmas, and *sottes chansons* (foolish songs) imitated the serious chanson in parodies that were ribald when they were not obscene. The trouvères, in short, established both the persistent themes and the ready acceptance of stylistic innovations that characterized French secular song throughout the subsequent course of its uninterrupted history.