

O'Neill, Mary. 2006. *Courtly Love Songs of Medieval France: Transmission and Style in the Trouvère Repertoire*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

**Reviewed by Susan Boynton**

Mary O'Neill's book makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of an important monophonic repertory that has received relatively little attention from musicologists, despite its preservation in numerous manuscripts. The reasons for this neglect are well known: scholarship on the music of the trouvères has generally addressed their songs alongside or in relation to those of the troubadours. Consequently, the trouvère corpus is often viewed through the lens of a historiography that typically privileges the troubadours because of their chronological priority, casting the trouvères as derivative imitators. O'Neill seeks to understand the trouvères on their own terms. Given the wealth of melodies in medieval manuscripts of trouvère poetry (many in multiple versions), a monograph in English devoted entirely to the music of the trouvères is long overdue, particularly when considering that many of the new perspectives on genre, voice, orality, gender, sexuality, and performance in Old French lyric poetry have come from scholars of literature. O'Neill's study may not satisfy all expectations—at 226 pages including bibliography and indices, it is a slim volume for such a vast subject—but the analyses in *Courtly Love Songs* offer many insights into the structures and forms of trouvère song and provide ample material for further reflection.

In the chapter entitled “The *grand chant* of the Trouvères: An Introduction,” O'Neill surveys the genre characteristics of trouvère song using a representative example by Gace Brulé (a trouvère active at several French courts in the decades around 1200): “N'est pas a soi qui aime coralement.” In “The Manuscript Tradition: Sources and Notation,” O'Neill divides the manuscripts into two chronological phases based on a taxonomy of their notation, while acknowledging that the “phase two sources do not form a single cohesive group” (38)—the periodization being necessarily loose because the individual manuscripts are difficult to date with precision (29). For the most part, O'Neill's classification does not take into account the later additions to the manuscripts, although she does address questions of rhythmic interpretation that are raised by the use of mensural notation in the additions to the “*Chansonnier du Roi*” (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fonds français 844). These additions also bear witness to intriguing developments in musical form and genre, and it would have been pertinent

for O'Neill to acknowledge the treatment of this repertoire in Judith Peraino's (1995) dissertation. O'Neill's typology of notational forms, as well as her account of orality and literacy in the music of Adam de la Halle, confirms some conclusions in Dorothy Keyser's (1993) study of Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fonds français 25566.

O'Neill devotes considerable attention to the respective roles of oral and written transmission. A chapter entitled "The Melodic Art of the Trouvères: Orality and the Question of Melodic Variants" introduces the broader context of orality in medieval song while focusing primarily on variants in the songs of Audefroï le Bastard, who flourished at the end of the twelfth century. In "The Interaction of Oral, Written, and Literate Processes," O'Neill illustrates the final stage of trouvère song with an organicist stylistic analysis of the songs of Adam de la Halle, suggesting that his "compositional process, involving the generation of a melody from a nucleus of a few short melodic ideas, here, as in the chansons of Gautier de Dargies . . . arguably reflects the origins of the genre in an oral tradition" (194). Although the connection is not made directly, this discussion of generative process sheds some light on the subject of melodic variants addressed earlier in the book. More cogent is O'Neill's treatment of literate processes of composition, which presents the production of *contrafacta* as a form of writerly intertextuality based on the written transmission of songs in the context of the increasing use of written records in the thirteenth century.

It is not clear why O'Neill separates closely related discussions of orality and literacy into two different chapters (3 and 6), and she never does define the two central terms explicitly—a lack of precision that tends to weaken her arguments concerning these categories. O'Neill describes orality, for example, as "a rather vague term but one which embraces aspects of the generative process, of performance, and of transmission" (53). Here the reader would have benefited from an overview considering transmission in relation to the roles of composers, singers, and scribes (as in Aubrey 1993 and 1996).

O'Neill's account of oral traditions in relation to generative-grammar models recalls the scholarship of the 1980s, just as the title of one chapter, "The Interaction of Oral, Written, and Literate Processes," echoes that of an article by Leo Treitler (1981) albeit without reference to recent reassessments of his approach to structure in medieval music.<sup>1</sup> She takes some of the textual allusions to performance and oral composition that appear in the poems of the troubadours and trouvères as transparent "evidence of orality in the poetic texts" (56), citing statements in the poems that refer to live performance. As Simon Gaunt has pointed out (most recently in 2005), such textual gestures are usefully interpreted as a self-conscious discourse of an oral poetics so deeply embedded in the Romance lyric tradition that

it may be inextricable from the textuality of the corpus itself. O'Neill acknowledges that even poetry evidently created in a context of predominant orality evinces an awareness of the written transmission of the texts, but she also seems to imply that the movement from an oral to a written state was fairly unidirectional. Incorporating more of the non-lyric literary evidence could have strengthened the account of the relationship between oral and written traditions in *Courtly Love Songs*. Citations or interpolations of lyric in narrative romances of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are often accompanied by depictions of performance and composition; they are also sources of information about the transmission of lyric poetry, and can productively be considered alongside the chansonniers as witnesses to the tradition and its reception, as Ardis Butterfield (2002) has demonstrated.

In several chapters, the oeuvre of an individual trouvère serves to represent broader phenomena in the repertory. The courtly songs of Gautier de Dargies (an early trouvère) form the basis for the discussion of manuscript transmission, meter, melody, and syntax, where O'Neill convincingly demonstrates the role of rhetorical structure in shaping the songs. Moniot de Paris provides the focus for the chapter on continuity and change in the later trouvère tradition. O'Neill shows the intersection of melody and versification in Moniot's *pastourelles* and illustrates the variety of structures they represent. On the basis of this analysis, O'Neill concludes that Moniot's oeuvre is representative of larger stylistic developments in the middle of the thirteenth century.

The book's origins in O'Neill's 1992 doctoral dissertation may account for the contrast between the broad themes suggested by the titles of the chapters and the more limited scope of the examples chosen for detailed analysis. Besides the courtly love songs that are the focus of O'Neill's book, the northern French repertory includes a wide range of genres and subgenres so numerous that even the designations continuously invented by modern scholars are insufficient. Laments and encomia, songs of religious polemic or devotion, dance songs, debate poems, and songs in a woman's voice cover a spectrum from comedy to despair. More difficult to categorize are songs such as the *chansons de toile* with their sometimes enigmatic blend of lyric and narrative. Even though it was not O'Neill's goal to survey the repertory as a whole, more examples taken from genres besides the courtly chanson would have provided support for some of her arguments regarding change of style and structure over time. In particular, more references to the intriguing connections between the chanson and the French motet in the thirteenth century would have enriched the considerations of genre.

O'Neill does allude to the urbanization of the trouvères in the second half of the thirteenth century and the concomitant proliferation of new

genres, but presents few concrete instances of these developments, except for some discussion of Adam de la Halle. Instead, *Courtly Love Songs* emphasizes the varieties of the *pastourelle* in contrast to the conventions of the *chanson*, reinforcing the binary opposition of aristocratic and popular registers conceptualized as high and low styles. As a general framework, this dichotomy can be limiting. Although O'Neill relies upon the notion of a consistent "High Style" for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, scholars have become increasingly aware that it was studies such as John Stevens's *Words and Music in the Middle Ages* (1986) and Christopher Page's *Voices and Instruments of the Middle Ages* (1987) that established the notion of a set of specific conventions dubbed the "High Style." Page used later treatises to extrapolate performance practices for the secular music of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, projecting backward the genre designation of *grand chant* that was first attested in the fourteenth.<sup>2</sup> O'Neill does not problematize the idea of the High Style established by Page, even though it is a complex aesthetic construct, as is the very notion of courtliness itself.

In the first full-length study of the *trouvères* in English, one would have hoped to see a full account of the scholarship to date, but many pertinent studies are not cited here. John Haines's work on the manuscript transmission and rhythmic interpretation of the repertory would have been particularly relevant (Haines 1997; 2004). Although O'Neill states clearly that rhythm is not a central concern in this book, she could have dispensed with the question more effectively by referring the reader to the most recent treatments of the subject. In footnotes summarizing the existing scholarship on the notation of individual manuscripts, O'Neill omits Robert Lug's studies of chansonnier U (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fonds français 20050); Lug's 1995 article would be particularly relevant here. Also puzzling is her use of a nineteenth-century edition of the poetic repertory from thirteenth-century Arras rather than the more recent one by Roger Berger (1981), although she does cite Berger's edition of the Artesian confraternities' necrologies. References to recent melodic editions of individual *trouvères* apart from Tischler (1997) would have acknowledged the existing range of approaches and thereby highlighted the number of songs available in modern transcriptions. Indeed, some of the editions O'Neill does not cite are particularly excellent resources for musicologists, such as Maria Sofia Lannutti's (1999) critical edition of the songs of Guiot de Dijon.

While the material is for the most part clearly presented and readable, some infelicities suggest less than perfect editing. For instance, in the lists of manuscript sigla on pages xiv and 14, the manuscript Paris, BNF fr. 1591 is listed as manuscript T, which is actually the siglum normally used for a different chansonnier: Paris, BNF fr. 12615. The customary siglum for fr.

1591, R, is entirely absent, as is the shelfmark of fr. 12615. Compounding this mistake, the shelfmark of fr. 1591 is identified in this list as the “chansonnier de Noailles,” the name commonly associated with fr. 12615. As many of O’Neill’s transcriptions employ chansonnier T or R, one would have expected a page of corrigenda to be inserted in the book; in fact, the only accurate reference to chansonnier R that I was able to find is buried in a footnote on page 27, in which a book is cited whose title happens to include both the manuscript’s correct siglum and its shelfmark.

Other problems may be more the fault of the publisher than of the author: there is no index of manuscripts, and the general index includes only one manuscript shelfmark. Several typographical errors that appear more than once should have been corrected (Bazzolo for Bozzolo, *confrère* for *confrérie*, Ramon de Miraval for Raimon de Miraval). The ordering and arrangement of photographic plates, moreover, is unsatisfactory, and several are of rather poor quality (presumably because of inferior originals provided by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France). Even though the format of the black-and-white photographic signature readily fits two photographs shown side by side, reproductions of a song from various manuscripts are placed on different pages (except for plates 13 and 14). Plates 1 and 3 are even printed on the front and back of the same page, which is frustrating to anyone who might wish to view both images at once.

Nevertheless, the book largely accomplishes what O’Neill set out to do, namely to illuminate the melodic transmission and style of courtly songs in a vast corpus that remains all too little studied. The musical examples are ample, accurate, and well chosen, and the many synoptic transcriptions of melodies from two or three manuscripts illustrate important aspects of the songs’ structures and manuscript traditions. This first book-length account of the *trouvère* chanson as music will provide a useful foundation for the many future studies that this extensive repertory so clearly deserves.

#### Notes

1. A useful complement would have been Peter Jeffery’s (1992) reading of the generative-grammar theory.
2. See, for instance, the response to Page’s ethos of the “High Style” in Aubrey (1996:257–61), who challenges the applicability of this model to troubadour song.

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