

WHY MATERIAL PHILOLOGY?

Some Thoughts by Stephen G. Nichols, Baltimore

Introduction

Medieval French studies have never been livelier nor more varied as witnessed by an astonishing spate of studies that have appeared in the last decade. Beginning with the basic tools, medievalists have at their disposal an ever-increasing number of literary and historical texts in bilingual editions thanks to the growth of series like Michel Zink's prolific *Lettres Gothiques* published by Livres de Poche, while in the United States and England important scholarly editions of literary works appear with gratifying regularity. With the posthumous publication of Greimas's: *Dictionnaire du moyen français*, we now have contemporary linguistic tools to complement traditional resources like Godefroy and the: FEW. Geneviève Hasenohr and Michel Zink's: *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen Age* offers a handbook of medieval French literature as versatile and broad as it is informative.

But the energy of medieval studies goes beyond basic tools to a spirit of theoretical and methodological questing, almost in the sense of the aventure so beloved of Arthurian romance. Recent colloquia, for example, have sought to define new meanings for theatricality in the Middle Ages, or probed the practice and theory of annotation, or text editing.¹ In the wake of the New Philology issue of: *Speculum* (January 1990), colloquia and a variety of publications have staked out new dimensions for material philology – which I use in preference to the term „new“ philology. Material philology takes as its point of departure the premise that one should study or theorize medieval literature by reinserting it directly into the *vif* of its his-

¹ Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, for example, has organized a series of international colloquia – at Stanford, Penn, at the Reimer Stiftung in Bad Homburg, at Yale – around the question of medieval theatricality. Following a study group and colloquium at the University of California Research Institute at Irvine in 1990, Lee Paterson and I edited a special issue of: *South Atlantic Quarterly* on the theory and practice of annotation and commentary in medieval literature, Old French, Middle English, and Italian: *Commentary as Cultural Artifact*, special issue of: *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 91, Fall 1992. Siegfried Wenzel arranged a colloquium at Penn in 1993 on the taxonomy and nature of miscellaneous manuscripts whose papers will be published at the University of Michigan Press as: *The Whole Book: The Medieval Miscellany in Cultural Context*. The Center for Medieval Studies at Notre Dame has held conferences on new trends in text editing as well as new directions in medieval studies; one could also cite such Cérisy colloquia as Howard Bloch's recent *décade* „Gaston Paris et la naissance des Études médiévales“ (August, 1994); or the Bozeman, Montana, colloquium in September, 1994, entitled „Medievalisms.“ The list could go on to include dozens of other recent conferences, not to mention the provocative sessions on philology, criticism, and theory held at recent meetings of the MLA, of the Medieval Academy, at Kalamazoo, and elsewhere.

torical context by privileging the material artifact(s) that convey this literature to us: the manuscript. This view sees the manuscript not as a passive record, but as an historical document thrusting itself into history and whose very materiality makes it a medieval event, a cultural drama. After all, manuscripts are so often the only surviving witnesses – or the most reliable guides – to the historical moments that produced and then reproduced the literary text often in bewildering forms.

1. Philological Skepticism

Indeed, one might say that the face-to-face confrontation with the medieval manuscript as a rich vein of study the important work of text-editing has provided medieval studies with a shock of recognition. A new sense of excitement has swept through the field in the last decade as scholars have recognized that medieval studies possess a whole range of problems unavailable to modernism, indeed quite foreign to modernist scholarship. That domain of medieval studies is, of course, the manuscript as a principle of expression as well as the principal means for transmitting visual and verbal thought.

This is not to say that original manuscripts in the sense of authors' copies do not play an integral role in modernist literary study. They do, of course, and schools of genetic criticism in France and bibliographic criticism in America foreground the problems posed by the relation of an author's manuscript to the various forms of its printed texts. Trends in genetic and bibliographic criticism in modernist studies underline the materialist problematic of printed texts with fascinating results. But that is rather different from medieval material philology.

For the generalization of the printed text in the sixteenth century meant that it was the published book that would occupy and preoccupy textual and literary criticism. This was natural to the extent that the published book purported to provide a universal representation of the work, rather than one discrete textual form among many. Literary history then gradually reinforced the sense of the printed work as a definitive representation while authors themselves strove either to produce a fixed text, or one in whose elaboration the reader could participate.² The author's notes or holograph manuscript, while of crucial interest to the literary historian, do not constitute the form in which the text was originally or currently conveyed to the public. In medieval studies, on the other hand, each manuscript represented exactly how a text, or part of a text, or a rewritten or truncated text, would have reached a particular and quite specialized audience often in forms quite dissimilar to how another public might receive the „same“ work.

² On the range of efforts by Renaissance authors to negotiate between constraint and participation in printed texts, see Michel Jeanneret: *Perpetuum Mobile. Matières flexibles et structures mobiles à la Renaissance*, Paris: Editions Macula, 1996. Also the special issue of *Littérature* he edited under the title *L'Oeuvre Mobile*, N° 99, Octobre 1995.

The modifications performed on the text by a particular manuscript not only constitute a crucial history of reception of that text, but they also can help to inform how we may choose to theorize and historicize it. Furthermore, each manuscript, particularly in the case of illuminated manuscripts, represented a production site on which a variety of specialists, each capable of changing the text or accompanying matter in different ways, worked independently.

This is by way of saying that medieval studies, while reinforcing the importance of textual criticism and text editing with new approaches and critical debate, have discovered the excitement and richness of material philology grounded in the direct study of literary works or texts of all kinds considered directly in their historical condition, as medieval artifacts unmediated by modern editions.

The medieval manuscript is necessarily a collaborative effort bespeaking the social, commercial, and intellectual organization of a specific moment in time, on the one hand, and a recognizable set of practices over time, on the other. Both of these facts make the medieval manuscript a work (and an effect) of production that tells us not simply about the reception of and public for the representation it contains, but more importantly contextualizes those works in material culture. It also seeks to explore ways of looking at medieval artifacts and culture that escape the imperatives of the medievalisms that arose in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to aspects of the founding of „scientific“ disciplines based on methodologies developed as part of the agenda of modernism in the nineteenth century.³

Our needs have changed over the last quarter-century to where it may well be useful to study medieval literature not as a continuity with modernist literary perspectives. We also need to break with the medievalizing viewpoint and disciplinary shibboleths of the founders of our discipline and their continuators. Those views manifested themselves by a preoccupation with origins, analogues, nationalist philology, the celebration of poetic genius incarnated in a given poet or text (e. g., Bédier's „la précellence du manuscrit d'Oxford“ of the ‚Chanson de Roland‘), genre and thematic criticism. Postulating a notion of literary universals, continuity of forms, rhythms, or lexical codes over time, these methods recommended themselves for tracking the kind of degenerative change that allowed

³ On the role of modernism in setting the agenda for nineteenth-century medievalist disciplines and some consequences of this fact on medieval studies, see my articles: „Modernism and the Politics of Medieval Studies,“ in *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper: On the Discipline of Medieval Studies*, ed. by R. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996; „Le Livre Tuera l'Édifice: Resignifying Gothic Architecture,“ *Autobiography, History, Rhetoric: A Festschrift in Honor of Frank P. Bowman*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994, p. 131–59; „Philology and its Discontents,“ in: *The Future of the Middle Ages: Medieval Literature in the 1990's*, ed. by William Paden, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994, P. 113–141.

scholars to confirm the ever-pressing need to search for origins. It was, as Michel Zink argues, a way of substituting a poetics for an authentic historical viewpoint.⁴

Such a universalizing perspective assumes the centrality of a literary culture as a preeminent fact of history by interpreting a given historical period from the perspective of its literature. Esthetics or poetics can thus establish artistic periodization while asserting firm continuities between periods. Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France*, in volume two, chapter eight, where he develops a theory of medieval history based on Gothic architecture (which he derived from Victor Hugo), offers a striking example of this tendency. But the same impulse survived long into the twentieth century, and, indeed, continues in one form or another. Alternatives to literary universals, such as fragmentation, particularization, anthropology, or pluri-disciplinary approaches, all of which seek to view the Middle Ages not as a totality, still less as a continuity, but rather as a diverse, complex, and contradictory world in itself, may seem unpalatable. The more so if, as they must, such approaches suppose a break with the discipline of medieval studies as traditionally practiced.

Material philology seeks both a particularizing and an anthropological turn in moving away from the linguistic emphasis on textual study – itself a kind of literary universal that argues the historical superiority of the edited text over a given manuscript version. This involves discovering how surviving documents of all kinds insert themselves into their context, culture, and language practices.

Viewed in this light, material philology is not simply or primarily a method for approaching the medieval text. Instead, it announces an ensemble of practices and methods for the study of medieval culture broadly conceived. It recognizes the essential truth of the philosopher Alain de Libera's remark in his recent book: *Penser au moyen âge* that philosophy must urge an initiative that can be expressed „in a single word: philology. What do we mean by ‚philology‘? basically a means of reading,“ of reading contextually against a broad horizon of cultural givens.⁵ For de Libera, the history of philosophy must cultivate a pluri-disciplinary view, must

⁴ Michel Zink expressed this phenomenon succinctly (and elegantly) in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France on March 24, 1995: „On se surprend à regretter de ne pouvoir adhérer à la vision romantique du Moyen Age, pourtant erronée à peu près en tout point. Car l'intérêt que cette forme de pensée porte au passé médiéval est bien historique, puisque ce qui est en cause, c'est l'interprétation de l'histoire des peuples, mais la théorie historique se fonde ici sur le poétique. En un sens, c'est lui qui éclaire l'histoire, et non l'inverse. L'intelligence de l'histoire passe par la philologie, par l'attention prêtée à la formation de la langue et à la naissance de la littérature, par la réflexion sur le langage et sur l'esthétique.“ „Leçon inaugurale,“ *Le Moyen Age et ses chansons: ou un Passé en trompe l'oeil*, Paris: Editions de Fallois, 1996, p. 28.

⁵ Alain de Libera: *Penser au moyen âge*, *Chemins de pensée*, Paris: Seuil, 1991, p. 73.

practice what he calls „desectorizing“ by recognizing that the discipline lies at the crossroads of different domains.

Concretely, that means that the medievalist deals with manuscripts, that he must seek out and read the thousands of codices lying in libraries waiting to be studied. Studying manuscripts „is the principal rule of discourse of the historical method: one must let the texts speak on their own . . . for the Middle Ages, all historical practice grounds itself in texts.“ (de Libera: 73-4) This does not mean isolating textual study from the ensemble of historical questions raised by a given text or series of texts. But it is only through reading, copying, editing, analyzing, for example, disputationes transmitted in manuscripts that we can begin to grasp the agonistic, social, professional, ritual, anthropological, or political dimensions of a medieval dispute. (de Libera: 74)

That perspective requires our construing the manuscript critically as a crossroads for a variety of social and professional expertise. Constituted at every stage by collective activity, whether it were in a monastic scriptorium in the early Middle Ages, or the complex productions of *pecia* and imposition used by later medieval commercial stationers, the manuscript was a representational space that bespoke its historical trajectory in a variety of idiosyncratic ways. This means in practice considering the manuscript as a multi-dimensional space.

To begin with one should see it as the locus of representation for and of the literary work, two conditions that may but do not always coincide. „Representation for“ implies a dynamic of interaction between scribe and the space of writing; „representation of“ suggests reproduction, a more or less straightforward process of transcription. In practice the two diverge, sometimes dramatically. Not surprisingly. A space for representation invites one not simply to copy a text, but to alter it, to embroider it, to comment it. So the very space that makes possible the reproduction or representation of the text, also enables its depiction, that is, the active intervention in the textualization process of an intellect other than the author's.

Beyond that, the manuscript space evokes a variety of historical issues, such as the relationship between picture and text, context and rubric, text and commentary, patronage, literacy, a variety of technical matters related to codicology or script, but also broader questions having to do with the representation of a given work or set of works in a particular place and moment. In all these, a given literary work is purely secondary, or even irrelevant. The question becomes „for whom is there representation?“ For the manuscript is not simply, or not at all a vehicle for conveying a literary work; rather it represents a culture in which the literary work is one among many components, *primus inter pares*, perhaps, but not pre-eminent. As such, it is susceptible to influences, to alteration from different components of the culture conveyed through and in the manuscript space.

In fact, a manuscript may offer a presentation of texts, such as lyric poems in a *chansonniere* (manuscript song-book), that demonstrates how, for a given place and moment, a sequence of songs enjoyed a very different reception from that proposed by modern medieval canons. For all these reasons, the manuscript offers an ideal focal point for a kind of medieval studies that avoids the romantic tendency of making literature the fulcrum for historical interpretation, while similarly side-stepping questions of literary universals. From the perspective of the manuscript space, the literary text takes its place as simply one of many kinds of cultural activities, all the authentic products of a specific historical place and moment – which might be very different from a corresponding production of the same period in another place.

Put another way, the manuscript may be seen as a key symbol of its context, a sign of what is particular to the culture of the Middle Ages. It can be said to stand as an agent of what Spengler, in 'The Decline of the West,' called the drama of culture. Rejecting what he called „that empty figment of one linear history,“ Spengler understood culture as discrete and multiple:

... the drama of a number of mighty Cultures, each springing with primitive strength from the soil of a mother-region to which it remains firmly bound throughout its own life-cycle; each stamping its material, its mankind, in its own image; each having its own idea, its own passions, its own life, will and feeling, its own death . . . every Culture has its own Civilization . . . The Civilization is the inevitable destiny of the Culture.⁶

One may share Spengler's vision of discrete and unique historical periods without espousing his whole philosophical agenda. Indeed, Stanley Cavell has shown how Spengler's conception of the forms of life as central to an image of a unique historical culture inflected Wittgenstein's thinking in his later work, particularly *Philosophical Investigations*. Wittgenstein, Cavell argues, shared a modified version of „Spengler's Vision of Culture as a kind of Nature (as opposed, let us say, to a set of conventions).“ (Cavell: 54)

This perspective permitted Wittgenstein, like Spengler – or like Alain de Lille for that matter – to view language and its constructs not as controlled by convention, but as an imperfect natural language inevitably prone to all the griefs that haunt the natural world. What Cavell calls Wittgenstein's „Spenglerian valence“ determines that:

[. . .] the griefs to which language comes in the *Investigations* should be seen as normal to it, as natural to human natural language as skepticism is. . . . The philosophically per-

⁶ Oswald Spengler: *The Decline of the West*, translated by Charles Atkinson; ed. by Arthur Helps, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 17, 24. Quoted by Stanley Cavell: *This New Yet Unapproachable America: Lectures after Emerson after Wittgenstein*, The 1987 Frederick Ives Carpenter Lectures, Living Batch Press: Albuquerque, N.M., 1989, p. 53.

inent griefs to which language comes are not disorders, if that means they hinder its working; but are essential to what we know as the learning or sharing of language, to our attachment to our language; they are functions of its order. (Cavell: 54)

This passage resonates for the medieval manuscript as a sign of its culture: language griefs have in common with the griefs of manuscripts the innate skepticism which makes natural language, or a reproduction technology that manually inscribes natural language, a prime target for meaning disorders. „Griefs“ or „disorders“ signify the difficulty of natural language to overcome the vicissitudes of the language game where even the word „reading“ poses obstacles for a thorough understanding (or explanation).⁷

Philological skepticism tracks the desire for expression „running out of control,“ which is one way of naming the penchant for manuscript variants to modify texts in such a way that the sum of manuscript versions of a given work attests the creative insertion of multiple scribal subjectivities into the reproductive process.⁸ That plethora of variants represents manuscript „disorder“ from the viewpoint of textual criticism for which the modern edition is always an attempt to combat the skepticism implied by multiple typification; for variants are simply different ways of representing, and thus interpreting, a given thought. Material philology, which takes manuscript skepticism seriously, operates very differently from textual criticism's idealism inherent in its quest to reconstitute a lost. The difference in appro-

⁷ The use of this word [„reading“] in the ordinary circumstances of our life is of course extremely familiar to us. But the part the word plays in our life, and therewith the language-game in which we employ it, would be difficult to describe even in rough outline.“ Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations*, English Text of the Third Edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe, 19th Printing, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1989, 156, p. 61 e. Wittgenstein's attempt to explore the senses of the activity of reading continues for a good many sections, leading eventually into reflections on the ambiguities inherent even in the idea of following steps in a sequence and of obeying a rule.

⁸ Like Alain de Libera, I equate here philosophy and philology, or at least subscribe to his postulation of the service philology may render to philosophy. I am here adapting Cavell's commentary on Wittgenstein's aphorism that „philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language“ (*Philosophical Investigations* 109, p. 47 e). Language, Cavell argues, is not the „efficient cause of philosophical grief, but the means of its dispelling.“ Philosophy is what allows us to turn reflections on language as the best means of dispelling misunderstandings (disorders) caused by linguistic misuse. Language, like a weapon, can be positive or negative. Philosophy defined as „the desire for thought running out of control“ causes us to focus the weapon on our own linguistic usage. (Cavell, 54) In the same way, material philology can provide the tools for dispelling the sense of variants as disorder, a language grief inherent in the imperfect technology of manuscript reproduction. It can do so by demonstrating that variants are, rather than manifestations of linguistic unruliness, rather the natural consequence of philological skepticism, the difficulty of containing or curbing thought in expression. Or, put differently, the difficulty for language to allow itself to be copied word-for-word by a thinking subject who enters into the argument.

aches, of course, stems from the post-modern orientation of material philology that holds any medieval text to be fundamentally unfixed, always open to new inflection, legitimately so.

Philological skepticism privileges the manuscript as a primary locus of meaning production; it may be likened to an asymptotic curve whereby medieval texts constantly approach but never reach definitive expression. This does not mean that they are necessarily incomplete, incapable of clear meanings, or condemned to undecidability. Far from it. It does mean that as „living forms,“ versions produced in a particular „culture“ by one or more individuals, no one version, no matter how complete, may be viewed as authoritative. More importantly, the whole concept of „authority“ when applied to secular literature can be seen as a chimera, an ideal sought for by some authors, though perhaps fewer than one might think.

2. Philological Skepticism: The „Pride“ of a Chansonnier

As one moves from discussing the concepts of philological skepticism to demonstrating its effects, it might be appropriate to isolate the force field of the manuscript matrix responsible for the „griefs“ or „disorders“ traditionally associated with variants, misreading, scribal errors. We might want to identify that force with the concept of „orgueil“ or pride which makes poetry sufficient unto itself and independent in its perfection. Besides the common meaning of „pride“, *orgueil* is an agency of self-sufficiency, a motivation to see and to represent from a firmly-centered viewpoint, be it an individual ego or a culture in the sense Spengler intends.

For the medievalist, the *orgueil* of our literature lies in part in its enigmatic ability to assert itself in bold configurations which are both more mobile and less determinate than they appear. It is this ability to be both concrete and enigmatic, fixed and labile, that makes medieval representation a perfect candidate for hermeneutic elaboration, inviting the sophisticated reader to solve the enigmas proposed by literary configurations which would reconfigure themselves in new forms almost before the old ones had been resolved. It is the mark of the proud independence of literary language that it consistently transforms negation, *l'échec herméneutique*, into the affirmation of new and more complex configurations by which to figure the text.

More than fifteen years ago, Roger Dragonetti remarked on the particular contribution of the scribe or copyist to the status of the fugitive text. As he observed:

A part le fait que le scribe, tout comme le jongleur, peut (mais pas nécessairement) faire oeuvre d'auteur, même en tant que copiste, le scribe ne laisse pas inchangé le texte qu'il transcrit, du seul fait que la transcription est livrée indéfiniment à la force trans-

formationnelle de l'acte d'écriture. D'où il résulte qu'il peut y avoir autant de versions différentes de *l'original* qu'il y a de copies.⁹

[Aside from the fact that the scribe, in the same way as the Jongleur, can (but is not obliged to do so) substitute himself for the author, even as simple copyist, he does not leave the text he's transcribing unchanged, from the very fact of the transcription's undergoing the transformational force of the act of writing. Whence it happens that there can be as many different versions of the *original* as there are copies.]

The motivation for such changes is what I am calling „orgueil, and we locate the source of the energy for such change in the way in which the scribe or copyist engages the „culture“ the manuscript documents. Another way of putting this is to argue that the motivation for this phenomenon resides in the process itself, in the manuscript matrix, the space of writing. After all, both the scribe and the jongleur – one, the voice, the other, the pen – have the opportunity and the motivation to supplant the original poet. But the scale differs enormously between the jongleur, limited to the interpretation of an individual song, and the scribe, the virtual master of a universe of representation. Before the latter stretches an infinity of blank folios waiting to be constructed as he ordains.

Between the voice and the written word lies a world of change. Poetry alters radically when consigned to writing. Socrates made this point on behalf of philosophy in the *Phaedrus* when he proposed the myth of Theuth's invention of writing as a parable for condemning the written as opposed to the spoken word. Writing, he argued would release the power of the word to make new and varied meanings independent of the intentions of the author. Theuth himself praised his invention as a multiplier of knowledge, a stimulator of interpretations, or, in his own words, „Here is an accomplishment . . . which will improve both the wisdom and the memory of the Egyptians. I have discovered a sure receipt for memory and wisdom.“¹⁰

But King Thamus, to whom Theuth had proudly presented his invention, rejected it precisely on those grounds, that it would empower those with lesser skill than the author or philosopher to alter through writing what they could not alter so long as the work remained speech, pronounced by the poet or philosopher. „Those who [learn to write] will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of on their own internal resources.“ (§ 275 a). Socrates glosses King Thamus's condemnation by arguing that not thought, but only undigested repetition of what has been written will emerge, „What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory.“

⁹ Roger Dragonetti: *La vie de la lettre au moyen âge*, Paris: Seuil, 1980, p. 48.

¹⁰ Plato: *Phaedrus*, Translated with Introductions by Walter Hamilton, London: Penguin Books, 1973, § 274 e, p. 96.

Plato was pointing to writing's inevitable tendency to encourage decontextualization, even to foster estrangement from the intentions of the person who first spoke or wrote the words. Plato looked to the author's control of the context of the performance of the word to control that intention, to keep it consonant with the author's purpose. The issue was less writing versus voice, than the context of verbal representation. One can alter some words in a song that one sings without changing the song's meaning or general implication nearly so much as by presenting it in an altered context. By writing it down amidst other songs with which it will be immediately compared, one may radically change many aspects of how we understand the song, even without changing its lyrics.

The logic of the manuscript space dictates that it find a principle of organization to actuate the materials it records. It must do so, in part, to compensate for the loss of the performative voice, the performative body which – at least in the case of lyric poetry – had been the site of representation. The performative body provided its own representative context; it was a poetic agency in its own right whose immediacy and dramatic talents shrunk the distance between performer and audience. With the disappearance of the performative body, the manuscript matrix had to provide what print culture has come to take for granted: the order of the book.

Not coincidentally, about the same time that secular poetry began to be recorded in manuscripts in the early thirteenth century, Geoffrey of Vinsauf wrote his 'Poetria nova' c. 1210 which became one of the most popular and influential poetic treatises of the high Middle Ages. Geoffrey's treatise departs radically from classical *artes poeticae* which had been concerned primarily with oratory, that is the oral delivery of poetry and argument. His *Poetria nova* reveals the new concerns with ordering narrative for written presentation. In essence, we can seize the excitement of coming to grips with a new technology, and Geoffrey's awareness of the need to create a new poetics for dealing with the innovation. He makes us sense that writing was not simply a tool for remembering, as Socrates and King Thamus had argued, but a new technique for thinking, exactly as Theuth had said.

Whereas classical rhetoric was concerned almost exclusively with the immediate rhetorical effects of oral delivery – argument, deliberation, and panegyric – Geoffrey's *Poetria nova* stressed techniques for organizing and presenting the narrative of writing.¹¹ Consequently, for Geoffrey, the order of the book as arrangement or *dispositio* becomes paramount. The poet has two choices: to follow the natural sequence of events, the historic order, or to invent a synthetic order based on esthetic or other principles. Geoffrey calls the latter „striving on the footpath of art“ (*tum limite nititur artis*), while the former is „to follow the high-

¹¹ James J. Murphy: *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971, p. 35, n. 11.

way of Nature“ (*tum sequitur stratam naturae*).¹² Typical of Geoffrey’s style, where the rhetoric invariably illustrates his thesis, the construction of each of these phrases figures the esthetic effect of the two kinds of *dispositio*. Natural order renders an unimaginative sequence rescued from terminal dullness only by its brevity: *tum sequitur stratum naturae*. The same brief space may be made at least pleasing and perhaps even interesting by a synthetic style: *tum limite nititur artis*. Writing, for Geoffrey, demands art, not nature, the *dispositio difficilior*, as well as the *lectio difficilior*. Nature’s way effaced the enigma of the sign, pretending to a straightforward account of intention. Between sign and referent, there would be no inconvenient spaces, no wrong turnings: *stratum* as opposed to *limes*. But it is *limes* that invokes the enigmatic, for *limes* signifies the path that connects fields, the path taken from one site of cultivation to another, paths to crops, paths to vineyards, paths to the places where Virgil’s *Georgics* and *Bucolics* bespeak the close kinship between man’s struggle with nature and his struggle with poetic language. It is in the fields and the vines, we recall, that Virgil revealed the presence of those most enigmatic of mythic figures, Apollo and Dionysos, and with them, the high literary genres of tragedy and comedy.¹³ These connections were already well-established by the end of the twelfth century for had not Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s predecessor, Hugh of Saint-Victor, among others, spoken of laboring in „the vineyard of the text?“

Art, then, is a labor of transposition, or rearrangement. Far from humility, the artist exercises the pride of his skill in altering natural order: „ . . . skillful art so inverts the material that it does not pervert it; art transposes, in order that it may make the arrangement of the material better. More sophisticated than natural order is artistic order, and far preferable, however much permuted the arrangement be.“¹⁴

It cannot escape us that Geoffrey speaks about arranging or transposing existing materials. The artist or poet „finds“ in the medieval sense of *trobar*, *trouver* his material already in the world and makes his poetry as a construction, a reconstruction. And that is exactly what the manuscript matrix invited the scribe to do with the material he sought to include in his *recueil*. Roger Dragonetti was quite

¹² *Poetria Nova*, ll. 87–88, ed. by Edmond Faral: *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1923): 200.

¹³ Cf. *Georgics* 2, 371–396, & specifically, ll. 380–84: „*non aliam ob culpam Baccho caper omnibus aris/ caeditur, et veteres ineunt proscaenia ludi/ praemiaque ingeniis pagos et com-pita circum/ Thesidae posuere, atque inter pocula laeti,/ mollibus in pratis unctos saluere per utres.*“

¹⁴ Murphy, p. 36. „*Ars callida res ita vetit,/ Ut non pervertat; transponit ut hoc tamen ipso/ Rem melis ponat. Civilior ordine recto/ Et longe prior est, quamvis praeposterus ordo.*“ ll. 97–100, p. 200.

right to place the scribe on the same footing as the poet, for we find that the art of the manuscript is the art of *dispositio*, artistic arrangement.

Following Geoffrey's injunction to rearrange material chronologically and by order of importance, or by practicing other kinds of artistic dispositions, the scribe has full license to „invent“ a performative presentation for the composite „text“ he constructs. *Poetria nova*, in short, is as enabling for the scribe as for the poet.

All this permits us to think of the manuscript matrix not as a haphazard affair, but as a space that could be planned as carefully as a poetic composition – which, in the case of the chansonnier to a certain extent – it was. The orgueil of the manuscript resides exactly in the logic of its poetic intent. We should be able to speak of a center of intelligence for manuscripts just as we speak of the center of gravity of objects. The center of intelligence defines its role as *metteur en scène* for a whole collection of disparate poems which the chansonnier serves to gather and to assign an identity to according to its own conception of what this poetry will be, that is, what the intelligence of the manuscript recueil decides to make it.

Given license for artistic arrangement by contemporary esthetic doctrines, scribes could devise dispositions of historically disparate materials that enabled poets from differing times and places to be placed in dialogue with one another by the artifice of clever juxtaposition. By the time some of the most important troubadour chansonniers came to be compiled in the latter part of the thirteenth century, troubadours had been active for almost two hundred years and the tradition was, in fact, flourishing well beyond its original home.

So the recueil constitutes something of an historical paradox. On the one hand, it is itself an historical artifact of undoubted importance, testifying to poetic practices and the reception of troubadour poetry in a specific place at a specific moment. On the other hand, the recueil eschews chronology in its presentation of songs and by so doing abolishes historical differentiation prior to its own presentation. All poets preserved in the recueil play in the performative space of the manuscript if not as contemporaries than certainly as part of the contemporary poetic scene where some poets appear as more pleasing, more accomplished than others.

Poets known to date from an earlier period and to exhibit poetic forms less sophisticated than contemporary taste called for might be placed further back in the recueil. But even here chronologies did not constitute the principle of order. A desire to produce a confrontation, to „invent“ a *debat*, or, equally, to force recognition of harmony between complementary voices seems to have determined manuscript groupings in many cases. In this way the manuscript valorizes pluralism, a new sense of the beauty of a diversity of voices, polyphony of a sort, over and in place of the solitary subject agency – the lyric „I“ – that reigned when the song had been performed by poet or jongleur before a live audience.

The pluralism of voices harnessed in new ways by the *recueil* encouraged a variety of performative modes. Especially promising was the possibility of enhancing the *tenso* or debate, a genre that had always been prominent in troubadour poetry, but heretofore only in individual poems purporting to stage a debate between two troubadours on a set topic. Such debates were stylized and controlled by the dominant voice, the poet presumably writing as himself, while satirically imitating the voice of his interlocutor.

By his placement of poets in the manuscript, the scribe could create a dialogue, or at least the appearance of dialogue, between poets who could not have known each other, but whose works strike sparks, laughter, contention, wonder, beauty, and awe, in short the whole range of responses, when placed in close proximity. In such cases, we recognize the manuscript's „center of intelligence“ in provoking readings of poems that readers might never have achieved without such deliberately-contrived contiguity.

A little-known, but truly amazing example of „tenso disposition“ occurs rather far back in a *chansonniere* produced in Padua towards 1275, now owned by the Morgan Library in New York (MS. M819) and known generally as *Chansonniere N*. Over a space of eight or nine folios, the scribe responsible for this *chansonniere* juxtaposes five songs of the first troubadour, William IX, with six songs by *trobairitz*, female troubadours who lived long after William's death in 1127. Several unusual circumstances signal the intentionality of the scribe to set off these songs as debates, as contrasting – often startlingly so – world-views; so contrasting, indeed, as to point to a serious *faillie* in the principles, or the pretensions, of *fin'amors*.

The juxtaposition of William with the *trobairitz* cannot be accidental; this is the only place in the *chansonniere* where *trobairitz* songs appear, and it is also the only place where a corpus of songs is repeated integrally: the same five songs of William's which precede the *trobairitz* corpus are repeated immediately afterwards in a semi chiasitic order. The same hand has copied all of the songs so we cannot suppose that two copyists working independently accidentally copied the same songs. We must also reject the thought that folios have been bound inadvertently to give the appearance of a confrontation between William and the *trobairitz*, for the poems are disposed in such a way as to make the sequence a continuous one, i. e., the first and last *trobairitz* poems begin and end on „William“ folios.

Moreover, the first song in the initial William section (fol. 228 a–c), and the last song in the repeated section (235 b–236 a) are the famous, or infamous *fabliau*-like *Un uers farai poi me semeil*. Sometimes referred to as the „red-cat“ song, this bawdy lyric purports to recount the poet's amorous exploits during a week spent at an inn with two wives of friends. Since this is one of the most explicitly sexual troubadour songs to have come down to us, the scribe or copyist is unlikely to have „forgotten“ that he had copied it only eight folios earlier; not to mention

that the order of the same songs in the two sections, folios 228 a–230 b and 233 c–236 a, has been planned so that the whole sequence of William/trobairitz/William lyrics begins and ends with the same ribald song.¹⁵ We have the unmistakable spectacle then, of a *dispositio* in which the women troubadours have been „sandwiched“ between a repeated selection of William’s songs that seems deliberately to have placed his most ribald song in the first and last position. The intent can only have been satirical, at the very least provocative.

But it also suggests that the manuscript ordering has presented us with a „reading lesson“ in the manner of the kind of philosophical gloss posed by Marie de France in the *Prologue* to her *Lais*, or by Hugh of Saint Victor in his *Didascalicon*. The text has become an object to be moved about and represented in a variety of forms and formats. It is, in a sense, being treated as a portable object whose importance, and even new meanings, come from the new contiguities with other texts made possible by the book as pandecht. In this sense, the manuscript facilitates the advent of what Ivan Illich calls, in his commentary on Hugh’s *Didascalicon*, „the bookish text,“ a product of the thirteenth century and of the kind of *lectio scholastica* encouraged by the university. The bookish text casts itself adrift from a particular historical moment to make its way among other texts, from other periods, to which it contributes new meanings and from whose association it derives new senses. As Ivan Illich remarks,

the text maintains its port in the book. The book, in turn, metaphorically stands as the harbor for the text where it unloads sense and reveals its treasures . . . the university came into existence as the institutional framework and symbolic tutor for the new bookish text.¹⁶

William’s poems, surrounding the selection of trobairitz poems by Na Castelloza (3, or possibly 4), the Comtessa de Dia (1), Na Azalaïs de Porcairagues (1), might possibly be seen as a cynical provocation, a means of responding to the women by subjecting them to a foundational male corpus.¹⁷ But such a proposition would

¹⁵ The songs in question by William are, in the sequence of the first section (folios 228 a–230 b), *Un uers farai poi me semeil*, *Ab la dolchor del temps nouel*, *Ben uoill que sapcho li pluisor*, *Compagno non pus mudar qu’eo nom effrei*, *Pos de chantar m’es pris talenz*. The order of this sequence (1–5) is inverted in the repetition (fols. 133 c–236 a): 3,4,5,2,1.

¹⁶ Ivan Illich: *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh’s Didascalicon*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, 118.

¹⁷ The fourth poem of this group offers yet another example of how the „pandecht principle“ affects the literary corpus: for only the siting of the poem in the midst of recognizable lyrics by known poets, and more specifically, at the end of three lyrics by one of them, has led scholars to try to attribute it to Na Castelloza. In his edition of the poems of Na Castelloza, William Paden presents the evidence pro and con that the fourth poem in the trobairitz grouping (*[P]er ioi d’amor m’auegna*) should also be attributed to Na Castelloza and concludes, temperately. „We include the poem, anonymous though it can only remain, because its attribution to Na Castelloza seems to us not unreasonable.“ „The Poems of the Trobairitz Na Castelloza,“ *Romance Philology* 35 (1981): 158–182.

presuppose passivity on the part of the women poets' texts which are, on the contrary, among the strongest lyrics in the troubairitz corpus.¹⁸ I believe that we can conjecture an explanation for the startling confrontation of William IX with the troubairitz based on a version of the *lectio scholastica* inherent in the bookish text. First, however, we need to know a few more things about Morgan 819 as a whole.

Elsewhere, I have shown that the ordering principle of this recueil, as exemplified by the opening section of fifty-odd folios, is the exemplum, the *ensenhamen* or teaching in Provençal. Surprisingly, this recueil does not begin with the master genre of the troubadours, the *canço*, but with fifty-two folios devoted to didactic genres, or to didactic sections from romances. The lyric section proper begins finally on folio 55, and features eighteen songs by the thirteenth-century Bishop of Toulouse, Folquet de Marselha. Since this section also happens to be one of the most lavishly (and inventively) illuminated, besides having been chosen as the figurative frontispiece of troubadour song, one has to assume that it thematizes to some extent, like the opening section, the views on poetry held by the maker or patron of the recueil.

As it happens, we know that this manuscript was produced in the atelier of the Canon of Padua cathedral, Giovanni Gaibana, whose self-portrait as scribe/poet/singer appears in a bas-de-page miniature on folio 63. The illuminations to the Folquet section happen to follow the principle of „key-word-illustration“ often found in illuminated Bibles or pandechts of the Carolingian period as I pointed out in an earlier paper.¹⁹ A feature of this technique has the illuminator „gloss“ key words in the text by bas-de-page miniatures representing the textual action keyed to the glossed word.

What is rare in troubadour manuscripts, but not in religious works descending from the Carolingian pandechts, is the use of paired *sigla* or graphic signs rather like footnote markers, where one *siglum* appears next to the word glossed by the painting, while the corresponding marker stands next to the miniature itself. One has only to match the *sigla* of the miniatures – sometimes there may be two or three on a folio – against the same marker in the text to see which textual passage the picture represents. In effect, we have a kind of *tenso* or representational confrontation between the picture and the poetic text on the space of the manuscript

¹⁸ The songs are: Na Castelloza: [A]mics s'ie.us trobes auinen (f. 230 c–231 a), [I]a de chantar non degr'auer talan (f. 231 a–c), [M]out auez fag lonc estage (231 c–232 a), [P]er ioi d'amor m'auagna (232 a–c); La Comtessa de Dia: [A] chantar m'er de cho qu'eu non uolria (f. 232 c–233 a); Azalais de Porcairaues: [A]r e.m al freit tems uengut (f. 233 a–c).

¹⁹ See my essay, „Art' and ,Nature:' Looking for (Medieval) Principles of Order in Provençal Chansonnier N (Morgan 819),“ in: *The Whole Book: The Medieval Miscellany in Cultural Context*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols and Siegfried Wenzel, Ann Arbor University of Michigan Press, 1996.

folio. This unusual *dispositio* of visual marginalia suggests just how deeply ingrained in M 819 is the concept of intellectual confrontation.

In the Folquet section, these paintings use symbols that can have multi-textual referents. So for instance, to take but one example commented at length in my previous paper, paintings of seraphim appear five times in the Folquet section on folios 56 (twice), f 58v, f 61v, f 64. They can be linked to the book of Joshua (Folquet, like Joshua was a warrior-priest), to Isaiah 6:1-3, and elucidated (retrospectively) by a long passage in Book 9 of Dante's *Paradiso*. We could hardly have more striking confirmation from both text and image of the principle of *lectio scholastica* encouraged by the „center of intelligence“ of our manuscript.

With this in mind, we might at least entertain the conjecture that the six trobairitz songs sandwiched between the five repeated songs of William IX play a less passive role than might be supposed (although, surprisingly, no one as yet has ventured to comment on this curious configuration).²⁰ In particular, one might envisage a doubly specular colloquy where the trobairitz songs would be read as responses to William's five songs, the extra trobairitz lyric serving to counterbalance the repetition of the William corpus. Having read the responses of the women to the archetypal male poet, the manuscript then invites a re-reading of William's songs, „turned inside out“ as it were by the altered order which makes the original middle lyric the beginning and the original beginning song, the finale.

The debate genre was a flourishing one in Provençal poetry and, as a matter of fact, Morgan 819 closes with a section of thirty-four *jocs partitz* or *tensos*, folios 275–292. Rather than a repetition of the William corpus, then, we would be faced with a performative reconsideration of it in light of the female responses to love. The whole section would be in the nature of a quodlibetal debate raising the age-old question of the male and female response to love, the latter having formed the basis for Ovid's *Heroides* which Marianne Shapiro has argued provides an important subtext for the agonistic stance adopted by Na Castelloza, Azalaïs de Porcarragues, and the Comtessa de Dia towards their lovers.²¹

Shapiro remarks on the function of poetry as a form of „energy release“ typified by the traditional linking of poetry and warfare, harmony and violence. „Classical and medieval psychological theory,“ as she notes, linked „*ira* and *concupiscentia* two allied categories of the appetite“ (560). She argues that the Provençal lyric ac-

²⁰ So far as I know, only Michel-André Bossy at Brown University besides myself has remarked that by positioning the trobairitz between the repetition of William's poems the manuscript might be making a statement. Those who have noted the repetitions of William's songs have not commented on the presence of the only instance of trobairitz songs in the MS coming just here. Paden, who edited Na Castelloza from N, did not remark William's embracing presence.

²¹ Marianne Shapiro: „The Provençal *Trobairitz* and the Limits of Courtly Love“, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, 1978, 560–571, v. pp. 563–64.

holds a prominent position to „polemicizing aggression . . . within an encompassing aesthetics of antithesis and internal contradiction“ (560). So much so, she asserts, that:

The *canço* („song,“ secondarily „love song“) shows that the initial violence of erotic experience has been sublimated only to be projected into further realms of language. Its behavioral model of eroticism displaces another dominant model in medieval poetry: that of adversaries locked in mortal combat. (560)

Women were at a disadvantage in this system, Shapiro claims, for their problematic relation to the societal norms of chivalric combat and violence tended to hold no place for them but that of onlooker or victim. The *trobairitz* of necessity must

feel called upon to deploy linguistic strategies that describe them simultaneously as composers and as creatures overcome by a greater force. The expressive strategies of the *trobairitz* include defense by axiom of *sententia*, which foregrounds the didactic function of the poem on a par with the dramatic one . . . Against the background of the dazzling variety of Provençal love topics, the *trobairitz* narrow their choices to those which emanate from an agonistic stance. (565)

Now this perception of the whole system of Provençal lyric, and the agonistic role played by the *trobairitz* within it, could provide a rationale for the male-female confrontation we find in our section of M 819. The Provençal *vida* of William IX that circulated in the thirteenth century portrayed him as

*uns dels majors cortes del mon e dels majors trichadors de dompnas, e bons cavalliers d'armas e larcs de domnejar; e saup ben trobar e cantar. Et anet lonc temps per lo mon per enganar las domnas*²².

[one of the greatest courtiers in the world as well as one of the greatest deceivers of ladies, although a good knight in arms and a generous wooer; and he knew very well how to compose and to sing poetry. He went through the land for many years beguiling ladies.]

This portrait would certainly qualify for the violence, negation, and asymmetry of power that Shapiro perceived as the fate of the *trobairitz*. It invests William with the negative and erotic quality requisite for mythic heroes as described by Roberto Calasso when he observes that „The slaying of monsters and woman's betrayal are two ways in which negation can operate.“ Negation, particularly as expressed in betrayal of women, Calasso holds, are requisite to the mythical hero, and, „With the heroes, man takes his first step beyond the necessary: into the realm of risk, defiance, shrewdness, deceit, art. And with the heroes, a new world of love is disclosed.“²³ That world might very well be the one portrayed in the

²² *The Poetry of William VII, Count of Poitiers, IX Duke of Aquitaine*, ed. by Gerald A. Bond, New York: Garland Publishing Co., 1982, 136 & 138. My translation.

²³ Roberto Calasso: *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, tr. from the Italian by Tim Parks, New York: Vintage Books, 3rd edition, 1993, 70.

most openly violent and brutal of the troubadour's verses, *Un uers farai poi me se-meil*, that begins and ends our enigmatic sequence.

And yet, even as that sequence might seem to clarify itself in the light of Shapiro's analysis of the context of violence, negation, and confrontation underlying the troubadour system in general, the manuscript puts the male-female configuration into a context not examined by Marianne Shapiro. Tempting as it might be to view the *trobairitz* as the equivalent of „colonized subjects“ forced to respond to the power of their oppressors, the context of Morgan 819 belies the explanation.

It does so, in part, because the manuscript order creates a new kind of poetic agency, indeed a new kind of poetry transformed from the theatricalization of individual subjectivity fostered by an oral performative mode. That former poetic mode may best be visualized by reference to Ovid's ‚*Heroides*‘, which was Marianne Shapiro's point of reference for the female troubadour taken as an individual voice. In the ‚*Heroides*‘, Ovid masterfully evokes painterly images of abandoned mistresses in wild, romantic settings; once encountered, they do not easily fade. The force of scenes like Oenone's lament for Paris – Oenone wailing on a craggy headland dashed by a sea from which the gale whips hair and words of reproach vainly away from the one they target – dramatizes isolate subjectivity. At the same time, the lonely woman's furious lament set against a hostile nature symbolizing the absent lover's vanished ardor drives home to the reader Oenone's helplessness before the awful rivalry of Helen.²⁴

Against that tragic performative, M 819 proposes a different scenario, a scenario not based on highlighting the individual female subject against a plethora of forces conspiring against her. Instead, we find a collective feminine voice pitted against an archetypal male seducer whom we read on two very different occasions: once in the flush of his pride of conquest, then, a second time, after a sequence of female songs has made a collective response to the primal scene of male seduction, abandonment, and boasting.

William's poems appear in a very different light the second time around when confronted with so vigorous a response. Response, rather than rebuttal, I think, for the confrontation staged by M 819 avoids the trap of female lament, of pathos, fury, and reproach so forcefully evoked in the ‚*Heroides*‘. Ovid represents not feminine poetic agency, but a masochistic image of the shards of love, to evoke an image from a recent book title.²⁵ That image only serves to reinforce the sense of gender imbalance: of feminine passivity in the face of an inexorable fate. One might well argue, I suppose, that the image also serves, incidentally, to gratify a feeling of the power of males as affective predators.

²⁴ Ovid: *Heroides* 5, „Oenone Paridi,“ vv. 61-77.

²⁵ Maria Rosa Menocal: *Shards of Love*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994. Menocal's book looks at the troubadour lyric from a performative viewpoint.

The *disputatio* staged by Morgan 819 accepts the dichotomies of gender while proposing a reading of the trobairitz songs that points to a poetic agency grounded in strength, not passivity, an affirmative grasp of one's fate that makes lyric lament an example of philosophical initiation. In short, the power revealed by the redeployment of the trobairitz songs propounds a cognitive poetic agency that transforms the women from victim to *magister*. Rather than ironic and passive *domna*, the object of a male gaze and action, the female troubadour reclaims the Latin root of *domna* to become *domina*, or ruler, by recasting the love lyric as a witness to the speaker's evolution into philosophical consciousness. In one reflective move, the female lyric breaks the recursive mold of the seducer's continual return to the body, to the site of the seduction.

Indeed, we only become aware of how obsessively William returns to the body and to the lyric as witness to what he calls the *juec d'amor*, when we read the trobairitz poems. It is not that they eschew sensuality or even sexuality; far from it. But they do so in a manner I have shown elsewhere to be characteristic of the poetic reorientation of troubadour poetry effected by the ordering and emphasis of this manuscript as a whole. In long sequences of poems and pictures in the Folquet de Marselha and Arnaut de Mirueil opening sections, the manuscript emphasizes sensuality balanced, if not offset, by spirituality.

The trobairitz poems contribute in a novel way to this larger schema by insistently distinguishing between desire or sensuality tout court – William's specialty – and the longing for one human being in particular. Love refines the spiritual component of desire to the point of assisting in choosing the one among the many and then of defining the uniqueness and sufficiency of that one. As Na Castelloza understands, seeing and speaking through eyes and mouth made acute by love precipitates a subjectivity attuned not to satiation, nor even satisfaction, but to contemplating one's longing for a unique being, someone who may not even exist outside the lover's *imaginaire*.

This almost classical definition of *fin 'amors* would not of course distinguish the trobairitz poems per se, though they do evoke it more consistently and with more urgency, perhaps. No, it is the *dispositif* by which they frame this viewpoint that sets them apart, while arming them formidably to counter William's seduction. Quite simply, the trobairitz contemplate rather than gaze. The gaze concentrates on the body as an erotic or esthetic object; the gaze beholds the other as an object of desire, a projection of the gazing subject's desire. Contemplation, on the other hand, beholds the situation, the context in which a body or esthetic object appears; it can perceive and feel the sensuality of a given context as well as the gaze, but to different ends. Contemplation produces self-knowledge, consciousness of the viewer's status and role in the action. The gaze, on the contrary, serves as an instrument of seduction, affirming a desire to appropriate and thus to dominate the other. The gaze seeks to exercise power, not mediate self-knowledge.

The trobairitz use their eyes for seeing as a prelude to understanding: *los uels ab qu'ieu vos vic* [„the eyes with which I see you“]. The women poets, at least in the context of this confrontational configuration, perceive in order to confirm and meditate their situation. Perception of the beloved's behavior becomes a guide to their own inner life, and this knowledge then governs their comportment. The Trobairitz in this manuscript propound a speculative poetry that uses the mind to create lyric as *exemplum*, a self-taught lesson in the art of living with and surviving the tearing trauma of desire.

Were one to seek a philosophical corollary for their poetry, it would certainly have to be in the realm of ethical stoicism, especially as expressed by the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius – it is not without pertinence to our inquiry that the Greek title of the *Meditations* is *To Himself*. As though in keeping with his injunction to fortify the intelligence against adversity –

Suppose that men kill you, cut you in pieces, curse you. What then can these things do to prevent your mind from remaining pure, wise, sober, just? (§ 51) –

the Trobairitz of Morgan 819, in different ways, meditate on their inner resources in the face of obdurate lovers. Most consonant with stoic thought is their evident impulse to understand the order of love as part of a higher system, and then to meditate on how to accept the inevitable for themselves, while behaving with understanding and integrity towards their lover. This is far from a passive doctrine, nor is it, finally, a gendered one. It is rather a program valid for male and female alike for ruling oneself and one's fate.

Collectively, their poetry seeks to understand their own position in the world, a world defined by a single object of longing who is unlikely to reciprocate proffered affection but whose rejection they accept as a condition of their freedom to love. That freedom means recognizing in their innermost being that they love someone unworthy of them, and yet, nevertheless, to continue steadfast in their affection; this courage looks at the world without illusion as a necessary condition for knowing oneself. No wonder that, with Marcus Aurelius, they can say:

§ 52 He who does not know what the world is, does not know where he is. And he who does not know for what purpose the world exists, does not know who he is, nor what the world is. But he who has failed in any one of these things could not even say for what purpose he exists himself. What they do you think of him who seeks the praise of those who applaud, of men who know not either where they are or who they are?²⁶

²⁶ Marcus Aurelius: *Meditations*, Translated by George Long, New York: Avon Books, 1993.

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Morgan 819 makes sure that we understand that the Trobairitz did not neglect these questions. In keeping with the new conception of poetry offered by this chansonnier, the pride of the Trobairitz stems from their understanding that they could not escape desire, but that they might dare to contemplate it, move beyond it, and thus survive their own complicity with it.

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