Prologue

Vernacular song in medieval France was one of the greatest cultural achievements of the Middle Ages. The art of the troubadours in the early twelfth century created a movement that spread into all the major European languages and has absorbed readers and singers in every subsequent period of history, including our own. Not only the art of medieval song but all kinds of literary and musical production throughout the European medieval period found focus in France.

This book starts with the story of how French vernacular song was first recorded in writing. The surviving evidence points to a romance author, Jean Renart, who, in the early decades of the thirteenth century, seems to have given crucial impetus to a process of gathering together and writing down secular French and Occitan songs that continued throughout that century and into the next. Renart gains the credit partly because he claimed it at the start of his romance: in fact, several figures, including Gautier de Coinci, were working in the early part of the thirteenth century towards similar aims. The consequences of this activity were enormous. From this point on, song became an increasingly literate art. This is not to say that the words necessarily gained a more privileged position than the music, for music itself became an increasingly literate art. Changes in music arose directly out of the way it was written down. What may seem to have been a simple process of copying down the words and music of a song, worked subtly to change the nature of song.

Song survives in Renart as a written object, not on its own terms, but in the context of a romance narrative. Songs were collected together, as a separate genre, or set of genres, only later in the thirteenth century. The status of these early song transcriptions thus prompts various questions. Understanding song requires understanding song in romance: we are

forced to put together two genres we normally keep separate. The context of narrative also provides special circumstances for interpreting the form in which the songs have been transcribed: poetry and music, words and notes, song and narrative are presented together, each influencing and shaping the other. Such considerations set up the parameters of this study. How do we understand the written character of secular song in this century? How does it relate to the changing character of narrative? What broader connections can we perceive between the different types of written context for song?

Material for this book has been selected rather differently from previous studies. My aim is to include the kinds of genre where poetry and music meet most creatively: these often include works, especially from the thirteenth century, which are little discussed, such as *Le Tournoi de Chauvency* and *L'Estoire de Joseph*. Others, though well known to modern scholars, including the trouvère chanson and motet, Jean Renart's *Roman de la rose*, *Aucassin et Nicolette*, Adam de la Halle's *Le Jeu de Robin et de Marion*, and Guillaume de Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*, have hardly been discussed in relation to one another. The reason for this variety and novelty of juxtaposition is partly a deliberate attempt to raise questions about how such works are most illuminatingly viewed. The argument of the early chapters of this book is that the generic contexts for song in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries are much more varied, heterogeneous and hybrid than we have come to expect. The modern history of song forms has largely been made possible by taking the songs out of the contexts in which they were produced and received. In parallel with more recent work which has sought to deepen our understanding of the social, intellectual and spiritual attitudes towards secular song in this period, the aim of my study is to put the songs back into their formal and generic contexts.[1] The results often disturb the categories we have subsequently assigned to them.

Song emerges not as a single, hermetically sealed genre, but as one that is infiltrated and extended by all sorts of other elements, or else itself abbreviated and inserted into seemingly extraneous settings. I am interested in the way in which poetry and music do not turn out to exist in separate worlds, but constantly intermingle in surprising juxtapositions. The same is true of song and narrative. Our modern determination

to see the poetic as somehow divorced from the musical is constantly confounded in this period. Finding the terms to describe the fluctuations and subtleties of their relationship is not easy. A common language often divides musicologists and literary scholars. The term 'source', for example, means 'manuscript' to the former, and 'textual origin'[2] to the latter. I use it largely to mean 'manuscript', but with the added implication (conflated with the literary usage) that a manuscript is an important primary representation of the material it contains. I have tried to create fresh juxtapositions of material – and terminology – in order to suggest new ways of writing musical and literary history. This partly arises because some of the most famous works, such as *Aucassin et Nicolette*, *Robin et Marion* and *Le Roman de Fauvel* each seem *sui generis*: they make us rethink history because they do not seem to fit in to received notions of either musical or literary tradition.

No history of medieval French vernacular song has yet been written. In the current state of research, this is unsurprising: vernacular song intersects with so many other areas of writing and composition that the topic becomes very hard to delimit and to master from the necessary range of perspectives. Some issues remain unresolved, such as the complex interrelations between Latin and vernacular writing, or the interpretation of rhythm in musical notation. Perhaps most challenging of all is the way that song form changes between 1100 and 1350. In a radical shift, the formerly dominant monophonic (single-voiced) trouvère chanson gives ground to the polyphonic (multi-voiced) rondeau and ballade: simultaneously (is it a cause or a symptom?) musical notation becomes far more visually detailed and rhythmically communicative, and narrative takes on a new flexibility and authorial confidence in its use of the first person. The change in song is so radical that it is hard to characterise without taking into account a vast range of factors involving music and words, several of which have yet to be properly isolated. Research on individual genres is still in its early stages: it is only very recently, for example, that the repertory of motets has started to receive general discussion. Assessments are still needed of how different groups of motets relate to one another and to other instances of early polyphony, such as the polyphonic *formes fixes* (rondeau, ballade and virelai), as well as to monophonic song. The evidence for the earliest stages of polyphony

in the important collection of songs in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 308 and *Le Roman de Fauvel* needs reviewing. Work on the large body of refrain material is recent and growing.

This book focuses selectively within two broad areas: the written contexts for secular song in the thirteenth century, and the nature of change in song and narrative between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The (manuscript) sources for vernacular song in medieval France are numerous. The most familiar (at least to music scholars) are the great song books (chansonniers) of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The less familiar (at least to music scholars) include a wide range of writings that might loosely be called 'narrative', such as romances, sermons, *jeux*, *dits*, treatises and translations. In some compilations, one repertory of song will be cited within another: this is true, for example, of *motets*, *pastourelles* and *saluts d'amour* in which occur refrains and rondeaux. Some songs are included in proverb collections. Of all these contexts, romances and first-person narratives on love are the most substantial in length and number, and comprise upwards of seventy works between the thirteenth and early fifteenth century. Several previous studies, in recent years, have concentrated on narratives containing songs.[3] They have largely been written from a literary perspective, and have tended to take narrative as their reference point. Song in narrative thus looks like an oddity, or at any rate something which needs explanation. I have increasingly come to think that this view should be reversed. Narrative is only one of the many contexts for song in the medieval period, and it makes better sense of both narrative and song to broaden the terms of comparison.

For example, Jean Renart, as the author of the first French narrative to cite songs, needs to be compared not only with other romance authors, but also to be viewed as a song compiler and editor in his own right. Until his role in the transmission of song is put in a wider perspective, the significance of his work is hard to assess. Literary scholars are unanimous in acclaiming *Le Roman de la rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun as the most seminal vernacular narrative of the thirteenth century. Yet, notwithstanding Zink's brilliant (but localised) study of the two *Roses*, we need a more inclusive sense of how Renart's influence on the form of later love narratives compares with that of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun.[4]

Prologue

'Form' is perhaps a key word. The 'formalism' of the 1950s and 1960s has had a well-documented (and, in part, well-justified) period of decline in favour of new research into social history, the composition of audiences, manuscripts as evidence of contemporary reading practices, feminism and psychoanalysis. It may be appropriate now to reassess its importance. Considerations of form have been so successfully superseded that we have few means left of distinguishing different types of 'lyric' writing from 'narrative' writing, or from writing that combines the two. This book tries to put form back on the agenda, not least because it is a main distinguishing characteristic of the two *Roses*, and uses it as a starting point for thinking about all the different ways we might try to approach thirteenth-century writing.

Yet this is not a formalist study. If a single word could sum it up it would be 'contextual'. What I have tried to do is develop, cumulatively, ways of understanding song by showing how far its different contexts shape and transform it. I include in 'context' recognising where song is part of some larger whole, of a 'source' in all senses of the word: another song, a sermon, a narrative or a compilation, a manuscript page, a performance, an intellectual tradition, a social environment, a set of generic assumptions. It has not, of course, been possible to look at every kind of context with every example. Beginning with the context of narrative, I try to gain a sense of how novel Renart really is, how novel his methods are for transmitting song, and how far the newly transcribed song genres in his *Roman de la rose* have been subjected to change within their romance setting.

Having taken account of the large differences of style between the various song genres cited by Renart, I turn to the most commonly cited genre of song: the refrain. In the usual dictionary definition a refrain is 'a phrase or verse occurring at intervals, especially at the end of each stanza of a poem or song'.[5] Yet in thirteenth-century and much fourteenth-century composition, refrains – short phrases of text or melody or both – have a far more flexible formal role. Most distinctively, they are cited not just within works, but across them, the same refrain appearing in as many as six or seven contexts from a variety of genres. Some two thousand refrain texts and around five hundred melodies have been collected from the thirteenth to the early fourteenth century, from widely diverse genres and contexts. Refrains are constantly fascinating. They throw

up fundamental questions about French vernacular production, and in the process question our ways of categorising what we read from this period. For example, the division of works as either 'musical' or 'literary' looks particularly uneasy with respect to refrains: they infiltrate both descriptions equally, but inhabit neither exclusively. They raise questions about genre – how they function generically, and how they affect other kinds of writing and our classifications of them. They are so pervasive a feature of vernacular writing that they prompt us to ask why they are there, what medieval authors found interesting about them, and what they tell us about patterns of creativity more generally. More than this, they are the fundamental building block of medieval song forms: the use of the refrain is largely what distinguishes one kind of song from another. It has been said that when the history of vernacular song comes to be written it will have to take due account of the refrain.[6] This book is not claiming to be that history but it does try to show how central refrains are to the writing of that history. To trace the branching pathways of refrain-citation is to discover a new perspective on genre. One particular aim is to use this perspective to open our eyes to parallel compositional activities in both musical and poetic contexts.

The structure of the book is broadly chronological, but not rigidly so. It is also designed to allow certain issues to develop from more than one perspective. For instance, much recent work on medieval French song has circled around the opposing terms 'courtly' and 'popular'. Included in these terms is both a sense of the specific social circumstances of an author and his audience, and a reference to style and register. The *grant chant courtois*, as troubadour and trouvère song is often called, encapsulates both meanings of courtly, in that it is produced for and within an aristocratic society, and is also a complex, highly wrought musical and poetic construct. Dance-song, on the other hand, has a more nebulous definition, since it survives largely in aristocratic productions, yet in forms which are simple, brief and minimally structured. If we are to learn anything of genuinely popular poetic or musical culture in the Middle Ages, then dance-song would seem to gesture towards it in its simplicity, lack of innate rhetorical pretension, and public function. Yet the transmission of dance-song in genres and settings that allude to sophisticated and wealthy social practices heavily qualifies any description of it as 'popular', and has given rise to John Stevens's usefully

compromising term 'courtly-popular'.[7] Several chapters, notably from Sections I–III, explore the limits of these terms in an attempt to trace as closely as possible the cultural associations that govern song citation and shape its form and meaning.

Such an enquiry is pursued in Section III in an attempt to consider the 'culture' of song in more specifically social terms. The pun in the title of the section ('The Location of Culture'), borrowed from Homi Bhabha, draws attention to the way that culture is ambiguously, yet powerfully related to place.[8] Arras, through its *confrérie* and *puy*, stands out as an area of exceptional importance in the production of later thirteenth-century writing, and the invaluable work of Ungureanu and Berger lays the groundwork for realising how Arras functioned as a literary and musical centre. Much work remains to be done, especially on manuscript provenance, but I hope, nevertheless, that my selection of Arras as a type or model of the importance and interest of social context to these hybrid works will serve to indicate ways in which further research on this and other geographical centres might develop. For the first time, to my knowledge, an attempt is made to link a group of hybrid works geographically, and think through the aesthetic consequences of this association.

The second half of the book turns to the question of how to characterise the change between late thirteenth-century and mid-fourteenth-century writing. I have concentrated on three areas: the manuscript presentation of a wide range of works that transmit song, the changing formal distinctions between song and narrative, and the curious way a developing polemic about authorship arises out of material that is powerful through being both anonymous and public. The argument in each of these sections goes back to the early thirteenth century in order to locate the connections between thirteenth- and fourteenth-century writing as firmly as possible. A key motif of these chapters is the idea of a boundary: I explore the ways in which the differences between genres are articulated through *mise-en-page*, through form, register, social and sexual difference, words and music, the private and the public, the authored and the anonymous. The section finishes with some reflections on the practice of citation. Song very often has the function of a citation. Yet this can cause confusion. How do we know – amidst a patchy manuscript record – whether a chanson or a refrain is newly composed for its context, or already well known? I look at the ways refrain-citations

border on cliché, on common, proverbial forms of speech and contrast this with various seemingly contradictory strategies in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century writing for using refrains and other song genres to bolster a notion of *auctoritas*.

The greatest poet-composer of either century, Guillaume de Machaut, provides a final point of reference for the book. All three topics in the second half – manuscript layout, the relations between song and narrative, and the nature of authorship – are crucially developed by Machaut to an outstanding extent. Machaut currently enjoys a renaissance of interest amongst literary scholars (his importance having been long recognised by musicologists): yet apart from some major fourteenth-century studies he still tends to be approached through an interest in narrative stimulated by the *Roman de la rose* of Lorris and Jean de Meun, or else through Chaucer. The aim here, by contrast, has been to situate him from both a literary and musical perspective within the context of such gifted practitioners in the art of writing music and poetry as Gautier de Coinci and the author(s) of *Le Roman de Fauvel*.

The book begins and ends with discussion of texts and performance. In common with many other scholars from the past two decades, my work has sought to reconstitute the page of the scribal manuscript as an authentic object in its own right.[9] There has been and continues to be much to learn from the manuscript page about the cultural perceptions of those who produced it. My particular effort here is to try to connect this approach to textual history with material that involves music as well as words. Thinking about song stimulates us to think about the way in which medieval writing relates to an event, and not merely to an original form of writing. What we are trying to deduce from the physical marks on the page is not only what someone, perhaps the author or a scribe under his supervision, originally wrote, but also what a work was like in performance. This question is familiar to those who try to decipher musical notation, it is less frequently asked of words. Literary scholars tend to think of transmission as a matter of relaying, more or less accurately, a form of words; in the case of song it is more a matter of relaying a living context.

A manuscript's written transmission of a work is a highly elusive form of evidence. We need to be aware of its partiality. As *written* evidence, it presents to us only one version of the complex negotiations

in these works between their production and reception. For instance, songs are often copied in ways that obscure our sense of how they might have been received by a medieval audience. Jean Renart's *Le Roman de la rose* contains the claim that it can be both read and sung, yet the single surviving manuscript makes no provision for music. By its nature, any manuscript is (in some form) a rewriting of its own 'evidence', and we need to be sensitive to the shifting relations between the 'oral' and the 'literal' that each one presents.[10] It seems likely that medieval manuscripts present something more intangible than an 'ur-text', that is, a range of kinds of writing that at one extreme may represent literate communication at its furthest from an oral event, and at the other may approximate to an oral event with uncanny closeness.

Works that mix song and narrative are of peculiar interest because of the way in which they internalise the conditions of performance. By enclosing performances of songs within the performing context of the *roman* as a whole, they could be said to inscribe oral events, not just forms of language. In this way they illustrate in microcosm some of the complexities of the process by which live performances of medieval works were transliterated, and transformed. The mixed nature of the media – song and text – provides a constant juxtaposition, if we could only learn to observe it, between different forms of orality, or (equally) of literacy. When we have words and music together as in song per se, and as in song cut into narrative, writing functions as more than one medium, representing more than one kind of sound. The author who explores this rich potential of writing more sophisticatedly than any other in either century is Guillaume de Machaut, whose works provide a glittering display of literary and musical collaboration. His *Remede de Fortune* and *Le Voir Dit* are examples of writing where poetry and music forge together the sound of the page and the silence of the imagination. This partnership, as I shall argue in the first chapter, is already presaged in the early decades of the thirteenth century with some of the first surviving records of vernacular song.