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Emmanuelle Dantan. Vulnerability of Female Voices in Trouveres' French Songs of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries: Myth or Reality?. *Voice and Vulnerability - 4th annual Graduate Conference of Oxford University's Medieval & Modern Languages, Medieval & Modern Languages Graduate Network Committee Oxford University, Feb 2021, Oxford (online), United Kingdom.* hal-04237951

HAL Id: hal-04237951

<https://hal.science/hal-04237951>

Submitted on 12 Oct 2023

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Vulnerability of Female Voices in *Trouveres'* French Songs of the 12th and 13th Centuries: Myth or Reality?

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Abstract

In the French songs of the 12th and 13th centuries, the female voice, often considered inexistent, appears vulnerable and subjugated to the male voice. As it happens, about 65 percent of all *trouveres'* songs are what is called *chansons courtoises*, in which a man is speaking about a woman, who is usually silent. Her silence, moreover, is stressed by the male voice in these songs. We might thus think that women's voices are intentionally ignored by the dominant voice, and are therefore vulnerable.

However, other songs stage female characters speaking in many different situations. A shepherdess or a noblewoman in discussion with a knight, women speaking together about love, a nun yearning for her freedom, a woman weeping alone about the bleakness of her situation... The female voice is not totally absent from medieval lyric. In about 15 percent of all French songs of the 12th and 13th centuries that we can access today, women's voices are audible to a significant degree.

We may in turn may ask ourselves the following questions. Are these female voices an opposition to the dominant voice of men through a discursive strategy of "enunciative deletion"?¹ Are they merely a vulnerable object "allowing poets to express their naughty thoughts" within their own writing?² Or, is making feminine characters speak a way to artistically create an audible female voice, one that is therefore no longer vulnerable?³

We will first examine the silent voices that comprise the majority of this type of literature. We will then analyse the female voices in dialogue with male ones, in which the former sometimes appear to be alternately strong or vulnerable. Finally, we will see texts where female voices take up all the situation of enunciation, in dialogue or in monologue.

¹ LÓPEZ MUÑOZ (2014).

² ZINK (1972), p. 74.

³ MÉEGENS (2011), p. 2.

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Introduction

Context

<i>Fille, ne soiez mie</i>	Daughter, do not
<i>Ne trop parlant ne trop nonciere,</i>	Speak or name too much
<i>Ne de parler trop coustumiere</i>	And do not get used to speaking
<i>Quar a mal puet l'en atorner</i>	Because it could bring sorrow
<i>Fame quant l'en l'ot trop parler</i>	To a woman who speaks too much,
<i>Autrement que ele ne doit.[...]⁴</i>	More than she should.

Controlling women's speech seems to have been the rule in the Middle Ages, as this extract of the fabliau named "De l'escureul", copied in the 13th century in the manuscript 837 of the BNF, shows us.⁵ It was frequent, in educational books for girls, to read that they must at the very least be reserved, if not entirely silent.⁶ They were enjoined to keep their speech within the limits of what was considered acceptable for a woman in their society. This idea is illustrated by the term of *taciturnitas*: "virtuous behaviour that imposes little talk, with measure and only when necessary."⁷

This tendency also appears in the Old French medieval lyric, which presents many *chansons courtoises*, in which a man is speaking about a woman, who is usually silenced. Her silence, moreover, is stressed by the male voice in these songs, who notices and emphasizes this silence. We could thus think that women's voices are intentionally ignored by the dominant voice. This situation could lead us to think that the female voice is especially vulnerable in this type of literature, to the point of subjugation.

Definitions

Vulnerability

The concept of vulnerability is broad and has been defined in several ways. In its general meaning, the vulnerability of somebody or something is "the fact of being weak and easily hurt physically or emotionally."⁸

This is a complex concept because "it involves many characteristics of people and groups that expose them to harm and limit their ability to anticipate, cope with, and recover from the harm."⁹ This notion is broadly studied today along with other concepts such as risk, hazard and resilience, especially in the fields of environmental studies or economics. Following these approaches, vulnerability can also be defined as "the degree to which a system, or part of it, may react adversely during the occurrence of a hazardous

⁴ *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, 1872-1890, p. 101-102.

⁵ *Manuscript BnF fr. 837*, f. 333.

⁶ Geoffroy de LA TOUR-LANDRY, *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles du Chevalier de La Tour Landry*, edited by Anatole de MONTAIGLON, 1854, p. 27.

⁷ CASAGRANDE (1991), p. 113.

⁸ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/vulnerability?q=vulnerability>, accessed January 20, 2021.

⁹ WISNER (2016), p. 1.

event."¹⁰ This would mean that resilience is the ability for a system or a group to cope with an unexpected situation, and then, to reduce its vulnerability accordingly.

Yet vulnerability can also be considered as a natural dimension of human life. "To be vulnerable is to be fragile, to be susceptible to wounding and to suffering; this susceptibility is an ontological condition of our humanity, 'a universal, inevitable, enduring aspect of the human condition' (Fineman, 2008: 8)."¹¹ This is what these authors call *inherent vulnerability*.¹² From this point of view, everybody is vulnerable, to disease, to the natural environment, to society and social relations.

"Vulnerability as a phenomenon is related to individual human beings, but also to the social systems and the systemic interconnections between politics, law and medicine."¹³ In this way, vulnerability implies the concepts of dependency, dignity and personhood.¹⁴ This dependence, on others and their care, entails a variation in the dignity and freedom that the person in question enjoys. It can produce unbalanced situations in which "vulnerable persons are those with reduced capacity, power, or control to protect their interests relative to other agents" and these "inequalities of power, dependency, capacity, or need render some agents vulnerable to harm or exploitation by others."¹⁵ Given that this vulnerability is linked to a specific context, it may be called *situational vulnerability*.¹⁶

In the context of Old French medieval songs, the question of the vulnerability of female voices might be linked to the degree of dependence or independence of their speech relative to that of male voices.

My Case Study: the Trouveres' French Songs

The medieval literature of the Northern part of France, written in vernacular language (namely Old French), is composed of various genres. There are hagiographic texts, *romans*, *fabliaux*, plays, religious tales, *chansons de geste* and lyric poems. These poems were sung in noble courts or in more popular locations such as marketplaces.

They were composed from the end of the 11th century to the end of the 13th century and copied in manuscripts during the period from the 12th to the 14th centuries. Today, 50 manuscripts are considered to be major (according to Linker's bibliography), from which more than 2990 songs can still be accessed.¹⁷

These main manuscripts are not all framed the same way. Firstly, some of them (17 pieces) only contain songs, and they are thus called "chansonniers." Seven of these actually present more than 400 songs. On average, however, the *chansonniers* include 340 songs. Secondly, the majority of the important manuscripts (22 manuscripts) have a mixed content, containing songs (from 1 to 500 pieces and on average 50 songs) and other types of works such as *romans*, *chansons de geste*, religious or juridical texts... Thirdly,

¹⁰ PROAG (2014), p. 369.

¹¹ MACKENZIE C., ROGERS W., DODDS S. (2014), p. 4.

¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹³ SPRINGHART H., GÜNTER T. (2017), p. 7.

¹⁴ NUSSBAUM (2009).

¹⁵ MACKENZIE, ROGERS, DODDS (2014), p. 6.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ LINKER (1979), p. 25.

11 pieces are fragments, which is to say that they are incomplete and that we do not know in which type of manuscript they were included.

A large number of manuscripts were copied in Northern France, either in the Arras area, or in Paris or Lorraine, essentially during the 13th century.

The major manuscripts of Linker's bibliography are:

Chansonniers	Mixed	Fragment
Vatican 1490 (a)	Arras 139 (A)	Bern 231 (B)
Bamberg 115 (Ba)	Vatican 1522 (b)	Bern 95.1 (c) (mixte)
Bern 389 (C)	Cambridge 450 (d)	Francfort 7 (D)
Modena 45 (H) <i>oc+oil</i>	Egerton 274 (F)	La Haye (E) <i>unaccessible</i>
Arsenal 5198 (K)	Montpellier 236 (f)	Metz (e) <i>unaccessible</i>
BnF 844 (M) <i>oil+oc</i>	BnF 1593 (g)	Lambeth 1435 (G)
Montpellier H136 (Mo)	Oxford 308 (I)	BnF Naf 21677 (j)
BnF 845 (N)	BnF 12483 (i)	BnF 765 (L)
BnF 846 (O)	BnF 12786 (k)	BnF 25566 (W1)
BnF 847 (P)	BnF 22495 (L)	Lepingard (Y) <i>lost</i>
BnF 1591 (R)	BnF Naf 13521 (La)	Troyes 3712
BnF 12615 (T)	BnF lat. 11412 (m) <i>lat+oil</i>	
BnF 20050 (U) <i>oil+oc</i>	BnF lat. 11724 (n) <i>lat</i>	
BnF 24406 (V1)	London Harley 1717 (o)	
Wolfenbüttel 1099 (Wo)	Pavia CXXX E5 (p)	
BnF Naf 1050 (X)	BnF 1109 (Q)	
Sienne 36 (Z)	BnF 12581 (S)	
	Vatican 1725 (u)	
	Four manuscripts (v)	
	BnF 24406 (V2) 1 <i>oc</i>	
	BnF 25566 (W2) <i>oil+lat</i>	
	Zagreb 95 (za)	

Figure 1: Main manuscripts of trouveres' songs, according to Linker's Bibliography

Female Voices

The Old French medieval lyric principally presents songs where the lyrical subject is a man (first-person male persona) but the *chansons courtoises* are not the only kind of song that we can find in this type of literature. Even if they represent 65% among those, we also find a significant number of songs (more than 450 pieces, that is to say 15% of all songs) where female characters clearly speak in various situations. For example, we can find a shepherdess or a noblewoman conferring with a knight, women discussing love, a nun yearning for her freedom, a woman weeping alone about the bleakness of her situation... Thus, several feminine characters appear in these songs, making other voices audible to us than those of the courtly man waiting for the gratitude of the mysterious woman to whom he devotes his life.

For years, the researchers who worked on these songs (Alfred Jeanroy,¹⁸ Joseph Bédier,¹⁹ or Pierre Bec²⁰) rejected the hypothesis that they could have been written by women. According to them, female voices were fictional only. According to Pierre Bec, these women's voices were the expression of a textual femininity (*féminité textuelle*) that "does not necessarily imply female authorship (*féminité génétique*)."²¹ He based his theory around the fact that the majority of these songs were anonymous or attributed to a male author.²² "But there is no reason to conclude that women were excluded from composing and performing either in the courts or in the marketplace."²³ Following the work of the authors of the anthology *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'*, we now know that "women were capable of composing, but also – and more important – that for a woman to compose a song was perfectly natural and commonplace."²⁴

These songs may thus be seen as a medium for feminine expression, holding a mirror up to medieval society, regardless of the author's gender. In any event, "all social hierarchies are the results of historical processes, which the literary and cultural works mirror in a highly complex manner. There are no simple fantasy products, and the less a poet seems to write about concrete conditions concerning the gender relationship, the more his or her text provides access to the audience expectations and projections, and also to the writer's mentality."²⁵

Statement of the Problem

In one way or another, the songs of the 12th and 13th centuries reveal issues about medieval society, and perhaps even about the relationship between men and women.

In her study of the female voice in medieval romance lyric, Doris Earnshaw concludes that "the female speaker in medieval lyric is seen to be [...] an embodiment of cultural inferiority in class status, social attitude, and language use." She considers that "the vital role of the female voice is to remind us of the other side of things, the *eccentric* places in the social fabric. [...] Representative of both the juvenile

¹⁸ JEANROY (1969), p. 96.

¹⁹ BÉDIER (1972), p. 912-915.

²⁰ BEC (1979), p. 235-262.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 235-236.

²² DOSS-QUINBY, TASKER GRIMBERT, PFEFFER, AUBREY (2001), p. 1.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

²⁵ CLASSEN A. (2012), p. 8-9.

and archaic values, her voice is the foil against which the centrist male voice is created and recognized."²⁶ For Doris Earnshaw, the female voice is dominated and controlled by the male poet and is thus completely dependent on them. According to the critic, "borrowed speech" is "a carrier of undercurrents of social values not generally permitted or approved" by society.²⁷

Michel Zink comes to a similar conclusion, perceiving the female character of the shepherdess in *pastourelle* as "a pure erotic object"²⁸ which allows male poets to express their "naughty thoughts"²⁹ in a "pure function of release."³⁰ There is clearly some truth in these hypotheses (in some songs, women are neglected and treated with contempt by male poets), but they deny the possibility of female poets composing some of these songs. These points of view seem categorical and stereotyped, and should be balanced with other studies. Furthermore, the dialectical view of women against men is also historically and culturally determined, related to our conception of society and gender relationships. As noted by Carolyne Larrington, "the concept of 'Woman' [...] exists for the male medieval writer as a sign, bearing meanings which have little to do with the actual social roles of individual women."³¹ When studying female voice, we must also be aware of medieval society's conceptions and pay attention not to transpose our contemporary visions on this culture.

Rachel Méegens, in a work about female voices in the motets (songs consisting of a superposition of music and texts), considers that "the motet appears such as a form of stylization of love speech, the one that men address to women, and the one that they place in their mouth, contributing to the development of a feminine imaginary." It allows the "artistic creation of the female voice,"³² that can thus become audible.

For Juan Manuel López Muñoz, the predominance of anonymous songs with a female voice amounts to a discursive strategy of "enunciative deletion" to create an opposition "to the voice legitimated by the institutions, which is [...] masculine and educated, even aristocratic and Christian."³³ He bases his theory on three criteria: (i) the anonymity of the characters and the author of the song, (ii) the femininity of the voice speaking in the song, and (iii) the appearance of popularity of the subject or of the poem. However, not all the songs including a female voice follow this system. We can for example find *chansons courtoises* with a feminine lyric "I" or other courtly genres with a feminine voice (as *jeux-partis*). Furthermore, a number of songs with a female voice have been attributed to either a male or female author.

Based on the different hypotheses and the existing literature that we have previously mentioned, the following research questions arise:

Are the female voices in the Old French medieval songs vulnerable, that is to say forced to hide, in order to exist and challenge the male dominant voice? Are they only a vulnerable object for writers to play

²⁶ EARNSHAW (1988), p. 121.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁸ ZINK (1972), p. 117.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 74.

³⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 117.

³¹ LARRINGTON (1995), p. 2.

³² MÉEGENS (2011), p. 2.

³³ LÓPEZ MUÑOZ (2014), p. 156.

with, "allowing poets to express their naughty thoughts?"³⁴ Or are these female voices actually independent, assertive and audible - a specifically feminine mode of expression?³⁵

Methodology

Traces of Female Voice

Pursuing a different goal than the researchers who have explored the "songs of women"³⁶ in the medieval lyric,³⁷ I have chosen to investigate clues of the representation of female voice in all the available Old French medieval songs. I did not limit my corpus to the songs that have been identified as *chansons de femmes*, rather I looked for traces and clues of female speech in all types of songs.

In order to do this, I studied nouns (*ami, Robert, mari...*), pronouns (*ele, cele, je...*), adjectives (*jonete, lasse, amiete...*), and past participles (*espoantee, blasmee, remplie, nee...*) confirming that a woman character is speaking.³⁸

Discursive Approach

To conduct my study, I followed a discursive approach and looked at the different *represented speeches* of female characters.³⁹ As Authier-Revuz explains, the term "represented speech" is broader than "reported speech". All traces of speech are indeed not always a report of speech. For instance, "narrated speech," which mentions a speech act without providing its content, is an interesting element that I included in my research.⁴⁰

The aim of my research is to identify all signs of female speech or what I will call non-speech (since silence may be seen as voluntary or forced, and therefore as an attitude towards speech worth including). I have observed different types of represented speech that I organised as follows:

- *Non-speech act* evoking a silent woman who keeps quiet,
- *Narrated discourse*, "a reference to an enunciative event, without mention of its precise content by way of a completive or an infinitival clause,"⁴¹
- *Indirect discourse* in which "the inset is grammatically subordinated to the framing utterance, with person, tense, and deixis adjusted to conform to those of the frame,"
- *Direct discourse* in which the speech is reported as it has been said by the character, "preserving (for instance) expressive elements of the original utterance," introduced by

³⁴ ZINK (1972), p. 74.

³⁵ MÉEGENS (2011), p. 2.

³⁶ Also named *chansons de femme*, or *Frauenlieder*.

³⁷ BEC (1979), EARNSHAW (1988), LORENZO GRADÍN (1990), TYSENS (1992), DOSS-QUINBY, TASKER GRIMBERT, PFEFFER, AUBREY (2001).

³⁸ We sometimes find a voice gendered as female but that represents the speech of an allegory (Love), an animal (nightingale) or ideas (reason, courtesy, sense). These voices deserve particular attention and are worth studying. However, I chose in this study to focus on women's voices and not all "female" voices.

³⁹ AUTHIER-REVUZ (2020), p. 65.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 220.

⁴¹ MARNETTE (2005), p. 85.

another character, or in a situation of dialogue or monologue, openly taken on by the character.⁴²

Corpus

In order for my research to have as broad a perspective on the Old French lyric as possible, I have read and compiled all the songs that were copied in the 50 aforementioned main manuscripts, and completed it with Raynaud's, Spanke's and Linker's bibliographies. I have thus inventoried 2990 songs and have systematically identified in each of them whether or not a female voice was represented.

In the following section, I present some samples of each type of speech representation in different songs to analyse the vulnerability of the female voices in the French medieval lyric.

Results

We observe in *trouveres'* songs various situations of represented speech of female voices. I decided to classify them into three categories, according to the place of the female voice in the situation of enunciation. I consider the situation of enunciation in the diegesis of the poem.⁴³ Dominique Maingueneau defines three personal positions in a situation of enunciation:

The **enunciator** is identified by the pronoun I, the **co-enunciator** is the 'character-addressee'⁴⁴ of the enunciator and the **non-person** who is not there in the situation.⁴⁵ Using those terms, I classified female voices from the songs in these three categories:

1. **Women as non-person**
2. **Women as co-enunciator**
3. **Women as enunciator**

1. Women as Non-Person

In the cases of women represented as *non-persons*, that is to say that they are not in the situation of enunciation but the enunciator makes a mention of the character in their speech, we observe two situations in a discursive perspective:

1. The female character is mentioned as silent,
2. The female character is represented through discourse and thus becomes audible.

1.1 Women as Non-Person and Silent

A typical characteristic of courtly songs is the silence of the *lady* to whom the speaker is dedicated. This particularity is stressed in several songs, portraying the women as indifferent and ungrateful.

⁴² McHALE (2012), p. 387-388.

⁴³ GENETTE (1972), p. 280.

⁴⁴ MARNETTE (2005), p. 29.

⁴⁵ MAINGUENEAU (2015), p. 13-14.

This idea is clearly expressed in the song RS 1076 (Linker 9.2) between Andriu Douche and Jehan. In this text, the poet asks his co-enunciator what to do with a woman who stays silent towards him despite all the devotion he displays:

*Ne volt a moi nes .i. seul mot parler*⁴⁶ (She does not want to say a word to me)

In a number of courtly songs, the poet highlights the woman's silence, with different expressions:

*Nule merci ne puis en li trouver*⁴⁷ (RS 1827 / Linker 7.1) (I cannot receive any mercy from her)

*Por .i. soul mot ke de vos ne puis traire*⁴⁸ (RS 1432 / Linker 265.375) (For only one word that I could not obtain from you)

*Quant ne me veut regarder na parler*⁴⁹ (Linker 265.242) (When she does not want to look at me or speak to me)

*Quant je de vos confort ne puis oir*⁵⁰ (RS 1429/ Linker 207.1) (When I hear nothing comforting from you)

*Por la meillor dont ja nus parler oie*⁵¹ (RS 1766 / Linker 190.2) (For the best one from whom I never hear).

One can note that all these non-speech facts appear within narrated discourse, to the point of illustrating Sophie Marnette's term 'Narrated Attitude'.⁵²

The woman in these courtly songs is thus especially characterized by her silence and incapacity to speak. However, is this silence a mark of vulnerability or is it a sign of the woman's power who has the opportunity to remain quiet if she so wishes? In these poems, the speaker seems to be particularly troubled by this silence, saying that it "could kill him", or that the "woman wants his death". This silence seems to be powerful and shows an interesting ability of the woman to have authority over the man. In the absence of the woman's verbal input, the man is lost and does not know what the lady thinks about him. He is then more vulnerable than the woman is.

1.2 Women as *Non-Person* but Audible

In the songs, we also find women as *non-persons*, that is to say that they are not in the situation of enunciation, but they are audible by virtue of being quoted by male speakers in the poems.

There are represented in narrated discourse, indirect discourse or direct discourse.

⁴⁶ Manuscript BnF fr. 1591, f. 24.

⁴⁷ Manuscript BnF fr. 12615, f. 138.

⁴⁸ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 59.

⁴⁹ Manuscript Vaticano Reg. 1490, f. 117.

⁵⁰ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 42.

⁵¹ Manuscript BnF fr. 845, f. 111.

⁵² MARNETTE (2005), p. 85.

In Narrated Discourse

Poets often use narrated discourse to evoke some of the ladies' qualities or how they relate to one another:

*Puis k'ele m'a .ii. fois ou trois menti*⁵³ (RS 1608 / Linker 117.6). (Since she lied to me twice or three times.)

*Et les douz mos ke vuelt a moy pairleir*⁵⁴ (RS 679 / Linker 38.1) (The sweet words that she wants to tell me.)

*Cortoise et sage et bien parlant*⁵⁵ (RS 74 / Linker 44.3) (Courtly, wise and well speaking.)

*Quant ma dame le plait a comander*⁵⁶ (RS 787 / Linker 65.51) (When my lady wants to order.)

*Quant cele dont j'esperoie / weredon m'a refusé*⁵⁷ (RS 1736 / Linker 101.4). (When the one from whom I hoped, has refused to gratify me.)

*Quant cele me het et mesprise*⁵⁸ (RS 1627 / Linker 154.12) (When she hates and despises me.)

In many of the songs seen before, the woman is unknown and unnamed; she is called *dame*. Nevertheless, in one type of song, the woman is clearly identified: these are the pious songs devoted to the Virgin Mary. It is worth noting that sometimes poets allude to the Virgin's speech or prayers:

*Se la dame plaine de grant bonté / qui est lez lui por nos ne li prioit / si tres douz moz plaisant et savoré / les granz corroz dou grant seignour rapaie*⁵⁹ (RS 1843 / Linker 240.17). (If the lady filled with great goodness, who lies near him, does not pray to him, her pleasant and savoury words ease God's ire.)

The speaker, who must leave to go on a crusade, is sad to part with his *amie* and record her qualities:

*Et quant recort sa simple cortoisie / et les douz moz dont suet a moi parler / comment me puet li cuer ou cors durer*⁶⁰ (RS 679 / Linker 38.1). (When I remember her simple courtesy and the sweet words that she used to say to me, how could I bear my heart and my body?)

Frequently, the narrated speech found in what I call 'meeting songs' occurs in the act of singing rather than in the act of speaking. The narrator hears a woman singing:

*L'oi chanteir en un vergier*⁶¹ (RS 48 / Linker 44.16) (I heard her singing in an orchard.)

⁵³ Manuscript BnF fr. 12615, f. 104.

⁵⁴ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 17.

⁵⁵ Manuscript BnF fr. 845, f. 161.

⁵⁶ Manuscript BnF fr. 846, f. 86.

⁵⁷ Manuscript Vaticano Reg. 1490, f. 87.

⁵⁸ Manuscript Vaticano Reg. 1490, f. 103.

⁵⁹ Manuscript BnF fr. 846, f. 36.

⁶⁰ Manuscript BnF fr. 846, f. 5.

⁶¹ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 247.

*Je l'oï au la praielle chanter an la fontenelle par desor une codroie*⁶² (RS 2079 / Linker 44.11) (I heard her singing in the field near a source under a hazel tree.)

*La bele Amelinete / cui je vi gardeir moutons / chantoit une chansonnete / dont moult me plaissoit li sons*⁶³ (RS 968 / Linker 166.2) (The beautiful Amelinete who I see tending sheep sang a *chansonnette* whose music I enjoyed.)

Usually, in meeting songs, the man greets the woman first, but in the following song, the woman initiates the conversation:

*El m'a premiers salué*⁶⁴ (RS 606 / Linker 154.15) (She greeted me first.)

In some more unusual songs, the narrator meets a shepherd (and not a shepherdess) and talks with him about his heartache. In the following example, his beloved's mother has prohibited the girl from seeing him:

*Or s'en vait aperchevant sa mere lui li deffant / si l'en a mis a raison*⁶⁵ (RS 293 / Linker 255.8). (However, her mother noticed it, she bans her from seeing me, and she reasoned with her.)

In Indirect Discourse

In several texts, the poet says that he writes a song because a woman (or "Love") has asked him to do it:

*Ai faite cançon / si n'en ai autre ocoison / fors c'une dame m'en prie*⁶⁶ (RS 2038 / Linker 2.35). (I composed a song, I have no other occasion, because a lady requested it.)

In the following extract, we can see a rare case of a woman with a name in a courtly song who gives orders to the poet:

*Maix la contesse de Brie [...] m'ait comandeit a chanteir*⁶⁷ (RS 1232 / Linker 65.11) (But the Countess of Brie ordered me to sing.)

In the following *jeu-parti*, the poet wonders whether he should continue to bestow his love on a woman who has not reciprocated his feelings so far, or whether he should accept the love offered him by another woman:

*Or ai trouvé .i. autre ki me prie de s'amour avoir*⁶⁸ (RS 862 / Linker 133.30). (However, I find another who requests my love.)

⁶² Manuscript BnF fr. 20050, f. 104.

⁶³ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 195.

⁶⁴ Manuscript BnF fr. 844, f. 101.

⁶⁵ Manuscript BnF fr. 12615, f. 108.

⁶⁶ Manuscript Vaticano Reg. 1490, f. 54.

⁶⁷ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 26.

⁶⁸ Manuscript Vaticano Reg. 1522, f. 152.

In the following example, a man loves a woman sincerely, she asks that they meet in secret, but he knows that slanderers will find them out:

*Sa dame li conmande et li prie / qu'il voist a li parler priveement / en secré lieu*⁶⁹ (RS 1674 / Linker 170.12) (His lady orders him and prays of him that he would come to her to talk privately in a secret place).

Here is another case of a woman giving orders to the poet, this time demanding that he should be happy:

*Cele qui a povoir / de moi conforter / dit que de desesperer ne mi doit chaloir*⁷⁰ (RS 1786 / Linker 192.11). (The one who has the power to comfort me says that I need not worry about despair).

It is worth noting that there are variations to this song, of which we find copies in several manuscripts, in this particular sentence. In some manuscripts, *cele* becomes *mes amours*, which changes the interpretation of the line: it is no longer the woman, but love, which has power over the man. It would be interesting to compare these different manuscripts in relation to their representations of female voices.

The role of the woman can also be reversed - she can bar the man from singing, stop his advances or will his death, as seen in these examples:

*El dit que trop sui hastis*⁷¹ (RS 1104 / Linker 265.501). (She says that I am too much in a hurry.)

*Elle m'en heit et dist k'elle voldroit / je fuisse mort*⁷² (RS 201 / Linker 265.1218). (She hates me and says that she wishes [that] I would be dead.)

She sometimes doubts the man's sincerity:

*Ele tient mes diz a controvaille / et dit touz jors que je la vuil trahir*⁷³ (RS 1727 / Linker 240.13). (She takes my words as lies and says always that I want to betray her.)

In the following song, one shepherdess (Marot) has lied to another (Perrin), the latter of whom is the shepherd's beloved, resulting in Perrin refusing to talk to him:

*Maix s'est fait Marot / ke dist k'en cest boix l'autrier la baixai*⁷⁴ (RS 2008 / Linker 256.1). (Marot is the one who said that I embraced her the other day in this wood.)

Most frequently, the knight-narrator meets a shepherdess in nature. In a short song (*motet*), the narrator explains that he has talked with a shepherdess who has asked him why he was joyful:

*Tantost m'ait araisonner / por coi j'astoie jolis / s'avoie par amors amei*⁷⁵ (Linker 265.135). (She asked me why I was joyful and if I was in love.)

⁶⁹ Manuscript Arras 139, f. 161.

⁷⁰ Manuscript BnF fr. 845, f. 48.

⁷¹ Manuscript BnF NAF 1050, f. 226.

⁷² Manuscript Bern 389, f. 246.

⁷³ Manuscript BnF fr. 846, f. 35.

⁷⁴ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 16.

⁷⁵ Manuscript Oxford Douce 308, f. 244.

In the next song, also a *motet*, the knight-narrator meets a shepherdess who is complaining of her beloved, Robin, who has left her:

*Tant erroi c'oïe touse souz un pin qi se plaingnoit de Robin qi tant ot amé de cuer fin*⁷⁶ (Linker 265.168).
(I roamed so much that I heard a young woman under a pine who was complaining of Robin who used to love her with a fine heart.)

The *sottes chansons* are satirical songs mocking love, courtesy and, often, women. The tone is frequently ribald. Sometimes, the speaker uses a woman's discourse to ridicule her or himself:

*Ancor ai pis c'est ceu ke je cloche / dont ma dame m'ait souvent irascu / car tot ades el me lou reproche / cant nos gisons ensamble nut et nut*⁷⁷ (RS 1656 / Linker 265.658). (Another defect of mine is that there is something wrong with me and my lady is often upset and she blames me when we lay naked together.)

In Direct Discourse

Often the speaker uses direct discourse to portray painful moments with his lady, as we can see in these extracts:

*Quant je suis reventus / ele moi dist "leveis sus" / ains ke je puisse pairleir*⁷⁸ (RS 1661 / Linker 2.32).
(When I came back she said to me "stand up" before I could speak.)

*Quant je la prie ele me dit vie "fui de ci gars je ne t'aime mie"*⁷⁹ (RS 1506 / Linker 265.1638). (When I expressed my devotion, she told me "go away boy, I do not love you!").

In the aforementioned song with the Countess of Brie, another instance of represented speech can be found, this time in direct discourse:

*Lors me dist per contralie "quant ireis vous outre meir?"*⁸⁰ (RS 1232 / Linker 65.11). (Then she says to spite me: "When will you go overseas?")

In the following extract, a lover remembers past times, when the woman reciprocated his feelings:

*Douce dame bien me membre del jor / ke vos premiers m'apallaistes "amin"*⁸¹ (RS 1849 / Linker 262.4).
(Sweet lady, I remember well the day that you first called me "Ami".)

*Ki tous jors dist par samblant "baisiés, baisiés moi amis"*⁸² (Linker 265.525). (Who always says untruelly "give me a kiss, ami".)

In Old French lyric, we find songs which are strongly critical of women. Sometimes, the poet uses female direct discourse to give weight to his argument.

⁷⁶ Manuscript Wolfenbüttel 1099, f. 248.

⁷⁷ Manuscript Oxford Douce 308, f. 242.

⁷⁸ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 181.

⁷⁹ Manuscript BnF NAF 1050, f. 208.

⁸⁰ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 26.

⁸¹ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 55.

⁸² Manuscript Vaticano Reg. 1490, f. 114.

For example, in these songs, the speaker has been deceived by a woman and concludes that women in general are only attentive to rich men, and are compulsive liars:

*Fame est ace menea / qu'ele dit a chacun "je vos aim meuz que nul" / por decevoir fu nee*⁸³ (RS 922 / Linker 125.1). (Woman is such as she says to anyone "I love you better than anyone else"; she is born to deceive.)

*Kant veux voir m'amie / et je n'ai point d'argent / moult iriement me dit "vai tant / je ne te conois mie"*⁸⁴ (RS 1155 / Linker 265.284). (When I want to see my dear, and I have no money, with anger she says "go away ! I do not know you!")

Poets also use direct female speech in *sottes chansons*, rendering the story with greater humour and liveliness:

*Et elle dit "j'ain moult millor de vous / nostre bergier c'ait la teste plume / ke l'autre soir m'estordit ma buee"*⁸⁵ (RS 717 / Linker 265.61). (And she told me "I like our shepherd better than you, he who has the plucked head, who last evening wrung my laundry dry".)

These sporadic highlights of female speech thus emerge in male discourse. They can express a variety of views on women's discourse, be they negative, neutral, or positive. In this configuration, however, the female voice appears to be highly dependent on the male voice and as such vulnerable.

2. Women as Co-Enunciators

The lyric literature in vernacular language also includes a number of songs with dialogue between a male voice and a female one. The majority of the speeches are represented in direct discourse, but sometimes also in indirect or narrated discourse. The woman may talk or sing. These texts stage different kinds of female characters:

- Shepherdesses, who make up the majority of the female characters, sparring verbally with a knight or another peasant;
- Noblewomen in songs staging debates or in narrative songs;
- The Virgin Mary in discussion with the Angel Gabriel;
- Nuns talking about love with monks;
- Women who regret marrying;
- ...

The power dynamic between the female and the male voices varies. Some rhetorical, linguistic and semantic marks show that one enunciator has more power than the other does. For instance, I have observed discussions in which the woman is ridiculed and her speech does not have any weight. I have also noted debates where the speakers are on an equal footing, the two co-enunciators quietly discussing

⁸³ Manuscript BnF fr. 845, f. 117.

⁸⁴ Manuscript Oxford Douce 308, f. 174.

⁸⁵ Manuscript Oxford Douce 308, f. 239b.

different subjects. In addition, I have observed discussions in which the woman seems to have the upper hand over the man, or at least is attempting to.

2.1 Women as Co-Enunciators in Unequal Talk, Unfavourable for the Woman

A number of *pastourelle*, songs in which a knight meets a shepherdess and tries to have some pleasure with her, present a dialogue between the two protagonists. In most of them, the knight has the power over the young woman and her speech has no effect on him.

In the following song (RS 1698a / Linker 265.1037), the shepherdess starts by saying that she will accept his love only if they marry, but ultimately she accepts unconditionally:

"Sire vostre biau senblant va mon cuer si destraignant / Vostres sui que que nus die / des cestui jour en avant"⁸⁶ (My lord, your beautiful look troubles me so much that I am yours whatever one might say, as of now.)

In a song attributed to Conon de Bethune, a knight has a discussion with the woman he loves. She has refused his love several times before and she now changes her mind:

Ce li ait dit "Amins par parolles vos ai meneit tous jors"⁸⁷ (RS 1574 / Linker 50.6) (She tells him: "My friend, I have always played you with my words").

This sentence likely illustrates a widespread notion in medieval society that women would manipulate men with words. A debate between the two characters follows and the knight makes her understand that she is too proud and that she should learn from her mistakes:

<i>Dame fait il ce vous a molt grevé</i>	Lady, he says, it has really hurt you
<i>Que vous fiez en vostre seignorage</i>	To believe in your power.
[...]	
<i>On n'aimme paz dame pour parenté</i>	We do not love a woman for her lineage
<i>Maiz quant ele est bele et cortoise et sage</i>	but because she is beautiful, courtly and wise
<i>Vous en savroiz par tanz la verité⁸⁸</i>	You will yet feel of it the truth.

2.2 Women as Co-Enunciators in Equal Talk

Many *jeux-partis*, texts in which two or more poets discuss life, love dilemmas or male-female relationships, stage a man and a woman debating together.

For example, this diverting song portrays a man and a woman discussing sexual pleasure (RS 365 / Linker 265.52):

<i>Amis ki est li muelz vaillans</i>	My friend, which one has more value:
<i>Ou cil ki gist toute la nuit</i>	The one who lies all night
<i>Avec s'amie a grant desduit</i>	With his beloved taking great pleasure
<i>Et sans faire a tot son talent</i>	But without fully consuming,

⁸⁶ Manuscript Arsenal 5198, f. 376.

⁸⁷ Manuscript Oxford Douce 308, f. 147.

⁸⁸ Manuscript BnF fr. 844, f. 45.

*Ou cil kit tost vient et tost prent
Et quant il ait fait si s'en fuit ?⁸⁹*

Or the one who hastily consumes and fast takes
And after he obtained what he wants, escapes?

In a pious song, this time, the poet imagines the dialogue between the Madonna and the Angel Gabriel, of which we find various iterations in this body of texts. The subject is essentially the same, but the tone is different:

*La virge dit "coment estre porra / quant onc ne fui de nul hom atouchié"⁹⁰ (RS 1315 / Linker 265.332).
(The Virgin said "how could it occur when I have not been touched by a man?")*

In this song, a man is getting ready to go on a crusade and he converses with his beloved (RS 1659 / Linker 265.545):

*Biaus dous amis
Certes se poise moi
[...]*

My sweet dear
It grieves me

*C'oultre la meir vos en irois sens moi
[...]*

That across the seas you will go without me

*Maix pues kil veult a Deu & a vos plaire
Je ne veul pais kil remaigne por moi
A mains jointes a la Meire Deu proi*

But if it pleases God and you
I do not want that he stay for me

Ke vos ramoinst & vos laist grant bien faire⁹¹ That you may come back and do much good.

2.3 Women as Co-Enunciators in Unequal talk, Favourable for the Woman

The shepherdess in discussion with the knight can sometimes have the last word and gain the upper hand thanks to her rhetoric (RS 292 / Linker 265.781):

*Chevalier se Deus vos voie
Puis que prendre voulez proie
En plus haut lieu la pernez que ne seroie
Petit gaaigneriez et g'y perdroie⁹²*

Knight, may God lead your way
Since you are looking for a prey
Capture her higher than I could ever find myself
You would not profit much here and I would lose a lot

The following extracts further exemplify the shepherdess's rhetorical power over the knight:

*El me dist : biau sire par saint Denis
j'aim plus biau de vos et mult meuz apris⁹³
(RS 1583)*

She said to me: "My Lord, by Saint Denis
I love a man more beautiful and more educated than you".

Ele me dist : Sire alez vostre voie!⁹⁴

She said to me: "Lord, go away!" (RS 527)

⁸⁹ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 2.

⁹⁰ Manuscript BnF NAF 1050, f. 272.

⁹¹ Manuscript Bern 389, f. 58.

⁹² Manuscript Arsenal 5198, f. 308.

⁹³ Manuscript BnF fr. 845, f. 81.

⁹⁴ Manuscript BnF fr. 847, f. 97.

In these examples, we can see that the female voice sometimes is more powerful than the male voice. This is particularly evident in the *pastourelle* where a true argumentative discussion takes place between two characters of different social statuses. While we might think that the knight always gets what he wants, the shepherdess's rhetoric from time to time turns out to be more powerful.

3. Women as Enunciators

To finish, we will look at songs in which the female voice makes up the entirety of the situation of enunciation. This can take place in a dialogue between two or more women or in monologues where only the female voice is present.

3.1 In Dialogue

The *jeux-partis* are again a good example of women as enunciators in dialogue. Three of them remain accessible today. They are very similar to those which include male speakers and also evoke love dilemmas. In the following example, Sainte des Prez asks Dame de la Chaucie how to react to someone who seeks her love (RS 1112 / Linker 246.1):

<i>Que ferai je Dame de la Chaucie</i>	<i>What shall I do, Lady of Chaucie,</i>
<i>S'il est ensi c'on me requiert m'amour ?</i>	<i>If someone should seek my love?</i>
<i>Conseilliez moi par vostre courtoisie</i>	<i>Do advise me, most courteously,</i>
<i>El quel des deus j'avrai plus grant honnour</i>	<i>In which of these I will reap greater honor:</i>
<i>Ou ce que je lesse a celui tout dire</i>	<i>Should I let him declare</i>
<i>Sa volenté ou ançois l'escondire ?</i>	<i>His desire or instead refuse?</i>
<i>Par fine amour lôez m'ent le meillour</i>	<i>In the name of true love, recommend the better</i>
	<i>choice to me.⁹⁵</i>

The other instances of dialogue between women are introduced in a narration by a first-person male speaker (*intra-diegetic narrator*⁹⁶), who relates a conversation he has witnessed while riding on his horse. The dialogue in itself only stages female characters (RS 368 / Linker 213.2):

<i>Delez un pré verdoiant</i>	Near a green field
<i>Trovaï deux dames seant</i>	I found two women sitting
<i>"Que ferai dist l'une a l'autre</i>	"What will I do, asked one to the other
<i>De mon ort vilain puant</i>	Of my disgusting and dirty man
<i>Qui pour mon ami le cointe</i>	Who beats me all day
<i>Me va tout jour batant ?"⁹⁷</i>	Because of my dearly beloved".

This motif of the unhappy, frustrated wife is frequent in the Old French medieval lyric and offers a number of songs with female voices. They always debase the husband who is portrayed as a jealous, stupid and disgusting man.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001), p 81.

⁹⁶ *Ib.*

⁹⁷ Manuscript Arsenal 5198, f. 208.

⁹⁸ *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001,) p. 151.

3.2 In Monologue

We find more than 90 songs with a female monologue in the *trouveres'* songs (about 3% of all the songs). These poems present a variety of tones and female characters. Among them are courtly songs that follow the style and the rhetoric of the male-voiced *chansons courtoises* (RS 100 / Linker 265.990):

<i>Lasse pour quoi refusai</i>	<i>Unhappy that I am, why did I refuse</i>
<i>Celui qui tant m'a amee</i>	<i>The one who loved me so?</i>
<i>Lonc tens a a moi musé</i>	<i>He whiled away much time with me</i>
<i>Et n'i a merci trouvee</i>	<i>And found no mercy there.⁹⁹</i>

We also find crusade songs in which the woman is mourning her dearly departed (RS 21 / Linker 106.4):

<i>Deus quant crieront "Outree"</i>	<i>God when they shout "Charge!"</i>
<i>Sire aidiez au pelerine</i>	<i>Lord please help the pilgrim:</i>
<i>por qui sui espoentee</i>	<i>I am terrified for him,</i>
<i>Car felon sunt Sarrazin</i>	<i>For ruthless are the Saracens.¹⁰⁰</i>

Some are pious songs devoted to the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ (RS 1646 / Linker 265.1746):

<i>Li debonnaires Dieus m'a mis en sa prison (Ref.)</i>	<i>The gracious Lord has put me in His prison</i>
<i>Vous ne savez que me fist</i>	<i>You do not know what Jesus Christ,</i>
<i>Jhesucrist li miens amis</i>	<i>My beloved, did to me,</i>
<i>Quant jacobine me fist</i>	<i>When He made me a Jacobin</i>
<i>Par grant amours</i>	<i>Through His great love.</i>
<i>Il m'a si navré d'un dart</i>	<i>He has struck me with His arrow,</i>
<i>Mais que la plaie n'i pert.</i>	<i>Though the wound cannot be seen.¹⁰¹</i>

Others stage unhappy brides criticising their husbands (RS 1564 / Linker 265.1346):

<i>Por coi me bait mes maris ?</i>	<i>Why does my husband beat me?</i>
<i>Laisette ! (Ref.)</i>	<i>Poor wretch! (Ref.)</i>
<i>Or sai bien que je ferai</i>	<i>Now I know what I'll do,</i>
<i>Et coment m'an vangerai</i>	<i>How I'll get my revenge :</i>
<i>Avec mon amin geiraoi</i>	<i>I'll lie with my lover</i>
<i>Nuete.</i>	<i>All naked.¹⁰²</i>

We also find a nun bemoaning her situation (Linker 265.949):

<i>Je suis joliete</i>	<i>I am a merry</i>
<i>Sadete pleisans</i>	<i>Gracious, charming</i>
<i>Joine pucelete :</i>	<i>Young girl,</i>

⁹⁹ *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001), p. 131.

¹⁰⁰ *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001), p. 143.

¹⁰¹ *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001), p. 173.

¹⁰² *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001), p. 154.

<i>N'ai pas quinze ans</i>	<i>Not yet fifteen.</i>
<i>point ma mamelete</i>	<i>My little breasts are swelling</i>
<i>Selonc le tans [...]</i>	<i>With time.</i>
<i>Je sent les doz maus desoz ma ceinturete</i>	<i>I feel the sweet pangs beneath my little girdle:</i>
<i>Honnis soit de Diu qui me fist nonnete ! (Ref.)</i>	<i>May God curse the one who made me a nun!¹⁰³</i>

Another very interesting song is the *Tornois des dames* (RS 1024 / Linker 114.1), which narrates a possibly historical event that may have occurred circa 1180 in Lagny. It would seem that a group of noblewomen decided to organise a female tournament to experience what knights suffered for them. The poem almost exclusively consists of narrative mode, but we find occurrences of direct discourse, which increase the vivid nature of the narration, all told in the female voice:

<i>Quand Marguerite se voit rauser</i>	When Marguerite sees she is followed
<i>Cambrai ! crie, son frein prend a tirer [...]</i>	"Cambrai !" she shouts and spins her horse
<i>Adeluye, ri nantuel vait criant</i>	Elise of Nanteuil goes shouting
<i>Avec la senescaussesse Yolent</i>	With the seneschal Yolande
<i>Aeliz en vait devant.</i>	Elise goes ahead
<i>De Trie aiguillon criant [...]</i>	Shouting "De Trie Aiguillon!"
<i>Aeliz, montfort criant [...]¹⁰⁴</i>	Elise shouting "Montfort!"

Even though this song does not include long female speeches, it presents a narration about women, who are the protagonists of the song. It also gives us a surprising and instructive vision of noblewomen from the 12th century through their speeches.

Discussion and Conclusions

Conclusions

This panorama of female voices represented in the Old French lyric shows us that the vulnerability of these voices is not as evident as one may have thought. Female discourse is indeed actualised in characters from various social statuses, and shows itself not to be exclusively dependent on male voices. We have studied a number of texts in which the female voice depends on the male voice such as *non-person* situations and women as co-enunciators in an unequal talk unfavourable to the woman, as well as poems where there is no represented discourse or attitude of a female character. Concerning the representation of the silence of the lady, the case is slightly different. The silent voices, that we might consider as particularly vulnerable because inaudible, actually display the power that the woman has in not responding to the declarations of love coming from the man who courts her. Her voice, because she keeps silent, is no longer vulnerable.

¹⁰³ *Songs of the Women 'trouvères'* (2001), p. 246-247.

¹⁰⁴ Manuscript BnF fr. 12615, f. 53v.

Moreover, several songs shape the female voice in a way that allows her to transcend her situation of vulnerability. When the female character is co-enunciator in an equal talk or an unequal talk favourable to her, her voice acquires legitimacy and respect, and does not seem to be dependent on the man.

Lastly, all the songs representing a female monologue, even if some of them were written by a male author, express a clearly feminine voice, affirming its independence. Consequently, it can be argued that in these poems, the female voice is no longer vulnerable. The fact that these songs have reached us, that is to say that they have been copied, some of them in several manuscripts, by medieval copyists, is a sign that these voices had sufficient "strength" to eclipse the possible societal "pressure."¹⁰⁵

Difficulties and Limits

This study did not run without some obstacles and difficulties.

First of all, deciphering the different manuscripts and being able to transcribe and translate the texts constituted a big challenge. The various manuscripts have indeed several specific characteristics such as writing, organisation, decoration or regional language. Furthermore, some manuscripts are damaged and have become difficult to be read.

Next, Old French was not a unified language in the Middle Ages and was liable to change a lot from one manuscript to the other (even in the same manuscript), therefore understanding the songs can be problematic and translating them can lead to errors.

Lastly, the identification of female voices in the texts can be a problem, because some poems are not explicitly gendered, reported discourses are not characterized by punctuation, and we can easily mistake the speaker.

It would also be interesting to study the thoughts and attitudes (re)presented in the songs, following the works of Sophie Marnette.¹⁰⁶ I started doing this with the observation of women's silence in the songs, and the question would benefit from further research.

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¹⁰⁵ PROAG (2014), p. 369.

¹⁰⁶ MARNETTE (2005), p. 85.

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