



The Refrain and the Rise of the Vernacular in Medieval French Music and Poetry (Gallica)

Jennifer Saltzstein

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The relationship between song quotation and the elevation of French as a literary language that could challenge the cultural authority of Latin is the focus of this book. It approaches this phenomenon through a close examination of the refrain, a short phrase of music and text quoted intertextually across thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century musical and poetic genres. The author draws on a wide range of case studies, from motets, trouvère song, plays, romance, vernacular translations, and proverb collections, to show that medieval composers quoted refrains as vernacular auctoritates/; she argues that their appropriation of scholastic, Latinate writing techniques worked to authorize Old French music and poetry as media suitable for the transmission of knowledge. Beginning with an exploration of the quasi-scholastic usage of refrains in anonymous and less familiar clerical contexts, the book goes on to articulate a new framework for understanding the emergence of the first two named authors of vernacular polyphonic music, the cleric-trouvères Adam de la Halle and Guillaume de Machaut. It shows how, by blending their craft with the writing practices of the universities, composers could use refrain quotation to assert their status as authors with a new self-consciousness, and to position works in the vernacular as worthy of study and interpretation. Jennifer Saltzstein is Assistant Professor of Musicology at the University of Oklahoma.

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