Literature and Society in Medieval France
The Mirror and the Image 1100–1500

Literature and Society in Medieval France

The Mirror and the Image 1100–1500

Lynette R. Muir

Macmillan Education

ISBN 978-0-333-32558-2 ISBN 978-1-349-18029-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-18029-5

© Lynette R. Muir 1985

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1985

All rights reserved. For information, write:

St. Martin's Press, Inc., 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010

Published in the United Kingdom by Macmillan Education Ltd
First published in the United States of America in 1985

ISBN 978-0-312-48748-5

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Muir, Lynette R.

Literature and society in medieval France.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. French literature—To 1500—History and criticism.
2. France—History—Medieval period, 987–1515.
3. Literature and society—France. I. Title.

PQ151.M84 1985 840'.9'001 85–10901

ISBN 978-0-312-48748-5

Contents

<i>List of Plates</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Guide to the Presentation of the Texts</i>	x
1 INTRODUCTION: THE MIRROR AND THE IMAGE	1
The French Reflection	3
Rose-tinted Spectacles and Burning-glass	6
2 THE FIGHTING COMMUNITY	10
Christendom vs The Rest	11
Lord and Vassal	20
The Feud and the Family	23
(a) <i>Raoul de Cambrai</i>	23
(b) <i>Renaud de Montauban</i>	25
(c) The Romantic Epic: <i>Ogier the Dane</i> and <i>Huon of Bordeaux</i>	26
Non-combatants in the Fighting Community	27
Fact and Fantasy in the Epics: Charlemagne's Visit to Jerusalem	32
The Flawed Ideal: the Matter of Britain	35
Pagans and Aliens	40
3 THE QUEST OF THE SELF	47
Springtime of Love: Chrétien de Troyes	49
Courtship and Marriage	52
Faith Unfaithful: Studies in Adultery	57
A Woman's View-point: Marie de France	64
The Quest as Adventure: the Stories of the Grail	68
The Language of Love	72
The Allegory of Love: the <i>Romance of the Rose</i>	79
Miracles and Marvels	81
4 THE WORLD UPSIDE-DOWN	86
Hero and Anti-hero: the Knight and the <i>Vilain</i>	87

	Man and Beast: <i>Renart the Fox</i>	90
	The Wheel of Fortune: Drama and the Town of Arras	94
	A Looking-glass World: <i>Aucassin and Nicolette</i>	100
	Disguise and Delusion	103
5	MACROCOSM AND MICROCOSM	109
	The Image of the World	111
	Travellers' Tales	115
	Man the Microcosm	119
	The Mirror of History	129
	Man in Society	133
	(a) The Allegory of Life	134
	(b) The Three Estates	135
	(c) Arts and Sciences	136
	(d) The Mirror of Charity	138
	Words and Pictures	143
6	THE CITY AND THE PILGRIM	149
	The Literature of Edification: Exemplary Lives of Christ and the Saints	149
	(a) The Vernacular Bible	149
	(b) Mother and Maiden	154
	(c) Lives and Miracles of the Saints	158
	Literature of Repentance	160
	Literature of Piety and Devotion	166
	Allegories of Salvation: Guillaume de Deguilleville	172
	Heaven and Hell	176
7	A STAGE IS ALL THE WORLD	184
	Staging the Past: Biblical and Saints' Plays	184
	(a) Guilds and Fraternities: the Brotherhood of the Passion	186
	(b) 'To comb and mirror, 18d.': the Civic Plays	189
	Staging the Present: Moralities, Farces and <i>Sotties</i>	192
	(a) The King of the <i>Basoche</i> and the Prince of Fools	193

CONTENTS	vii
(b) The Mirror of Folly	198
(c) Back to these Sheep: the <i>Farce of Pathelin</i>	202
Reality and Illusion	204
8 INSIDE, OUTSIDE: MAN IN SOCIETY	209
Mirror of France: the Hundred Years War	210
Allegories of State: the <i>Old Pilgrim's Dream</i>	219
One and All Alone: Christine de Pisan	224
Mirror of Women	227
The Poet as Outsider	235
(a) Charles d'Orléans	235
(b) François Villon	239
Conclusion: the End and the Beginning	242
<i>Appendix I: Genealogical Tables</i>	245
<i>Appendix II: Suggestions for Further Reading and Notes</i>	247
<i>Appendix III: List of Modern English Translations</i>	253
<i>Appendix IV: Bibliographical Index</i>	256

List of Plates

1. William prepares to capture Nîmes with barrel-loads of armed knights. © British Library.
2. Lancelot forces his way into Guinevere's bed-chamber – with her permission. © British Library.
3. The secular clergy were often on very friendly terms with their parishioners. © Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris.
4. The world is round, like an apple, with all matter falling towards the centre. © Bibliothèque de la Ville de Rennes.
5. Even at the bottom of the sea, Alexander discovers the strong preying on the weak. © British Library.
6. Alexander is raised to new heights by a team of gryphons. © British Library.
7. This mirror offers the ladies a warning image of what they will one day become. © Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany.
8. The Pilgrim nearly falls into the clutches of Avarice. © British Library.
9. The *sots* construct their ideal world on very insecure foundations. © Helen Taylor. Based on photographs of the Liège production.
10. With his wife's help, Pathelin makes delirious fun of his creditor, the gullible draper. © The Medieval Players.

Acknowledgements

This book grew out of a discussion with the late Denis Bethell on the relationship between literature and history and the benefits that might accrue from more wide-ranging and general exchanges of ideas and information between scholars working in the two disciplines.

The preparation of such a book would have been impossible without the help and advice of many people. First and foremost I would like to recall with gratitude the contribution of Denis Bethell himself; his breadth of interest, love of literature and ability to cite the most recondite texts was a constant stimulus and joy to his friends in other fields of study.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to his successor as General Editor of the series, Dr Maurice Keen, who has been most helpful in presenting the historian's view-point and most patient with my many questions; and to Sarah Mahaffy, Vanessa Peerless and Valery Rose of Macmillan for their assistance and interest.

Many of my colleagues at Leeds and elsewhere have made suggestions, answered questions or provided references; Elizabeth Williams and Gwilym Rees have been most helpful in checking the typescript and the proofs; Barbara Gill typed the Genealogical Tables, Jenifer Fairpo compiled the Bibliographical Index. The Medieval Players provided me with the photograph of the *Farce of Pathelin* and Madame Jeanne Wathelet-Willem of the University of Liège went to considerable trouble to make available to me photographs of the *sottie*; I am most grateful to all of them.

But for the help of so many people, there would be many more errors of omission and commission in this book. For those that remain the fault and the responsibility are mine. *Mea culpa*.

Guide to the Presentation of the Texts

All the works referred to in this volume are identified by English titles with the original French given, once only, in parentheses. Quotations have a reference title in parentheses after them, either the author or, where appropriate, a short form of the title, normally the English one. Sometimes, however, the French version is used to avoid confusion between, for example, the many *Mirrors*, or to facilitate reference to the entries in Appendix IV.

No secondary literature is quoted but suggestions for further reading are given with the notes to each chapter (Appendix II). Appendix III is a list of modern English translations of medieval French texts and Appendix IV comprises an alphabetically arranged Bibliographical Index of all the medieval French texts cited, with a selection of other topics and references. Bibliographical sources for the editions used are also included.

As many of the works discussed in the book are not available in English, all quotations have been translated direct from the original French and the volume, page and line references are to the French editions. With very few exceptions the translations are in prose. In addition to the normal abbreviations, the letter 'S' indicates a paragraph, section, *laisse* or chapter. Verse references are given without any preceding letter, for example (567–8). Biblical quotations are translated from the Vulgate.