

The Church and Vernacular Literature in Medieval France

EDITED BY DOROTHEA KULLMANN

The rapid rise of vernacular literature in medieval France, within a culture which continued to acknowledge Latin as its vehicular language, is a fact that literary historians tend too easily to take for granted. Within a relatively short period, stretching roughly from the end of the eleventh century to the thirteenth century, French and Occitan literatures acquired an output and a level of sophistication that made them the leading models for other European literatures. New genres and new subject matters appear one after the other; new ideologies (such as the concept of love developed by the troubadours) are first expressed in vernacular creations; and even learned Latin authors soon feel obliged to take notice of these developments.

Should we describe this astonishing chapter of cultural history as the development of a “lay”, or “profane”, literature alongside a Church-dominated learned and religious one, or as the emancipation of vernacular literature from the tutorship of the Church? Is the borderline between “lay” and “religious” texts and genres really as clear-cut as some literary histories would make us believe? How then did these new genres of written literature come into being in a culture in which the Church held the monopoly on education, including training in writing? Did the Church as an institution play any role in the birth and expansion of vernacular literature?

In the present volume, specialists from the disciplines of linguistics, literature, history and musicology address the various aspects of this complex of questions. The examples studied here are witnesses not only to a constant interaction between lay and religious cultures but also to the productive tension that resulted from the particular situation of the Church in medieval France.

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*The Church and
Vernacular Literature
in Medieval France*

Edited by

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D.K.
Toronto, June 2009

Abbreviations

- IS Barbara Frank and Jörg Hartmann, eds., *Inventaire systématique des premiers documents des langues romanes*, 5 vols., ScriptOralia 100 (Tübingen: Narr, 1997)
- MGH SS Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina, ed. J.-P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris: Migne and Garnier, 1844–1880; reissued by Garnier to 1905)

DOROTHEA KULLMANN
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Introduction

The rapid rise of vernacular literature in medieval France, within a culture which continued to acknowledge Latin as its vehicular language, is a fact that literary historians tend too easily to take for granted. After the first, more or less isolated, appearances in writing of the vernacular in the ninth, tenth, and the first half of the eleventh century, French and Occitan literatures acquired within a relatively short time an output and a level of sophistication that made them the leading models for other European literatures.¹ During a period that roughly stretches from the end of the eleventh century to the thirteenth century (the first quarter of the century in Occitania), the literary production in both languages experiences an astonishing acceleration and a huge diversification, as well as a considerable geographical expansion. New genres and new subject matters appear one after the other; new ideologies (the concept of love developed by the troubadours being the best-known example) are first expressed in vernacular creations; ideological debates take place within the domain of the vernacular; and even learned Latin authors soon feel obliged to take notice of these developments.

While the first written witnesses of the vernacular belong (almost without exception) to religious contexts and respond to clerical concerns (most of them are paraliturgical, homiletic, or hagiographic texts), the great expansion of vernacular literature in France that sets in at the end of the eleventh century is traditionally described as the development of a “lay”, or “profane”, literature alongside a Church-dominated learned and religious one, or as the emancipation of vernacular literature from the tutorship of the Church. It can hardly be denied that *chansons de geste* and romances as well as the various lyrical genres deal with themes, such as war and love, which are not usually connected with the Church, and that in doing so they uphold ideological positions some of which directly counter those of the Church (praising, for instance, the proud king or warrior or the adulterous

1 I thank my colleague Frank Collins, Toronto, as well as Thomas Kullmann, Osna-brück, who have looked over my English manuscript of this introduction. All remaining errors are of course my own.

lover). Several of the texts belonging to these new genres, *chansons de geste* as well as lyric poems, go as far as to explicitly criticize or ridicule both monks and members of the secular clergy. It seems equally certain that most examples of these “profane” genres were conceived for performances outside the ecclesiastical context, be it at court or in the marketplace.

However, this account of the evolution of vernacular literature raises several questions. How did these new genres of written literature come into being in a culture in which the Church held the monopoly on education, including training in writing? Until the end of the twelfth century it seemed inconceivable, at least in Northern France, that anybody should learn to read and to write without undergoing an ecclesiastical education. Even the most biting satire directed against members of the Church was presumably written by a cleric. Who then were these clerics, and how did they come to be involved in writing “lay” literature in the vernacular, making all sorts of accommodations toward the interests of a lay public and even criticizing the institution to which they owed their education? Considering the number of vernacular productions even in this period, one cannot but wonder if the Church as an institution played any role in the birth and expansion of vernacular literature and of specific vernacular genres.

The ecclesiastical strictures directed at certain vernacular genres (in particular at Arthurian romance) are well known. Nevertheless, “profane” genres and motifs, as well as the melodies of successful profane songs, could also be used for religious purposes. New religious genres emerged alongside, or soon after, the “profane” ones, and they often adopted their formal or musical elements. On the other hand, traces of a more or less pronounced religiosity or faith may be found in most vernacular texts. Is the borderline between “lay” and “religious” texts and genres really as clear-cut as some literary histories would make us believe? Or, in other words, what was the attitude of the Church toward the new genres once they had established themselves?

The participants in a workshop held in Toronto in March 2007 were invited to address this complex of questions. Specialists from different disciplines analyzed various aspects, based on different texts or groups of texts, concentrating largely, but not exclusively, on Northern France. The present volume contains the revised versions of the papers presented at this workshop.

The first part of the volume is dedicated to the appearance of the vernacular language in writing within a culture in which writing meant writing in Latin.

Maria Selig analyzes previous theoretical approaches to the first appearances of the written vernacular in Northern France in the ninth century (in the *Serments de Strasbourg* and the *Séquence de sainte Eulalie*),

in particular the theories proposed by Bernard Cerquiglini and Michel Banniard. Both these linguists reject the traditional version of the history of French language, which was based on a concept of French language as a defined entity which is thus considered to preexist its first appearances, insisting on regional differences and cultural influences instead. They see the first written witnesses of the vernacular in Northern France as the product of a conscious and concerted attempt of Carolingian clerics to elevate the vernacular of the Romance region of the empire to the dignity of a written language, capable of competing with the Germanic vernacular. Contrary to other regions of the Romania, the first written instances of the vernacular of Northern France present indeed an uncommonly elaborate character, “language of distance” rather than “language of proximity”, and they first appear in a linguistic border region and in direct contact with the German language. However, Selig reaches the conclusion that one should neither assume these texts to be the product of a radical break (a general decision of Carolingian clerics to confer the honours of elaborate writing upon the vernacular), nor the inevitable outcome of a continuous evolution. On a micro-structural level, these texts are the product of individual initiatives, within the context of the Latin culture of the Church, while the institutional changes on a macro-structural level which those theories imply, needed in fact more time and many such initiatives to come to pass.

Barbara Frank-Job further pursues the history of the written vernacular, in particular its use in paraliturgical texts, up to the beginning of the eleventh century. In this period, she distinguishes between two phases, one of innovation, in which examples of written vernacular are extremely scarce, each of them being a new experiment for the writer, and one in which discursive traditions begin to establish themselves. She observes that the early instances of the written vernacular in France all belong to the great centres of the Carolingian reform, to those scriptoria that were most productive and most modern in Latin writing, and also produced new “discursive traditions” in the form of Latin paraliturgical texts. She then proceeds to establish the particular contexts of communication and purposes of the texts containing vernacular sections (*Sermon de Valenciennes*, *Laudes regiae*, the Augsburg *Chanson de la Passion*, the *Passion du Christ* and *saint Léger*, the *Aube bilingue* of Fleury, the *Chanson de sainte Foy* and finally the tropes, verses and dramas of Saint-Martial de Limoges), basing her analysis on the *mise en page* of these texts in the manuscripts and showing how the vernacular, at first, remains completely subordinated to the structures of the Latin but subsequently gains in autonomy.

The second and main part of the volume is dedicated to literature, and in particular to vernacular literary genres. Chronologically, we are now in that period, reaching from the end of the eleventh century to the thirteenth, when vernacular writing is well established, new genres, traditionally con-

sidered to be “profane”, are emerging one after the other, and the written vernacular literature as a whole is experiencing rapid growth and expansion. The question of the role of the Church now takes on different aspects: What is the attitude of the Church toward the new, so-called profane genres? Does the Church play any role in the expansion of vernacular literature in general, and of the more profane genres in particular? How do the more “religious” genres react to this evolution?

The first “profane” genre to appear is the *chanson de geste*, the Old French epic. Dorothea Kullmann points out the many points of contact between this genre and “religious” ones (in particular with hagiography) or with the Church in general, as well as the difficulties previous scholars have experienced when actually trying to connect the epic genre with the Church. She then attempts to study the question from a different angle, analyzing more closely those cases which appear most influenced by ecclesiastical or religious opinions, *Girart de Roussillon* and the core of the First Crusade Cycle, and trying to define their attitude toward the epic genre. The poets of these texts, while trying to use the epic genre for homiletic purposes, are still very conscious of the fact that their works are contrary to the expectations connected with the epic genre, which remains “other” with regard to the Church. Both poets admit to re-writing pre-existing songs, which had been unsatisfying in some way. On the other hand, both also affect a certain independence with regard to official ecclesiastical teaching, thereby highlighting even more the experimental character of those texts.

Guy Lobrighon then studies the development of the genre of biblical paraphrases. On the basis of four examples, ranging from the middle of the eleventh to the end of the twelfth century, he describes the evolution of an explanatory genre for laymen, from the traditional commentary to those great narrative works which mix the Bible with world history, classical and Arthurian material, popular storytelling, and courtly ideology. He identifies the main changes (involvement of the lay patron or addressee, updating of sources, contemporary examples, introduction of material from those other areas, etc.), setting this evolution into the greater historical context of the social changes which mark the twelfth century. Citing the example of Lambert of Ardres, the author of the *Historia comitum Ghisnensium*, and that of the counts of Guines whose story Lambert wrote, he answers the question about the existence of two separate cultures in the negative, insisting instead on the constant transaction between the clerical and the lay universes.

Maureen Boulton follows up with a textual comparison of Herman de Valenciennes’ *Roman de Dieu et de sa mère*, the last of Lobrighon’s examples, and Wace’s *Conception Notre Dame*. Observing that there exist “religious” counterparts for almost every “profane” genre, she studies the differences between these two works that recount the same story, but are

couched in different genres, with different narrative techniques by which to capture a lay audience. While Wace indulges in descriptions, dialogues and other rhetorical devices foreshadowing the development of romance, Herman de Valenciennes tries to imitate epic techniques, although in a very self-conscious way which remains conditioned by Latin rhetorical practice. Boulton relates the different choices of the two authors to different audiences, but also points out the adequacy of the *chanson de geste*, which traditionally claims to report historical truth, to the recounting of the central truths of Christianity.

Hagiography in a narrower sense is studied by Pierre Kunstmann, who concentrates on the sub-genre of Marian miracles. He points out the discrepancy between the relatively small number of vernacular miracles in comparison to the infinitely greater number of miracles written in Latin, and then proceeds to analyze the vernacular collections of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, compiled by Adgar, Gautier de Coinci and Jean le Marchant. While all three authors stress their edifying purpose, they use their Latin sources in quite different ways. Kunstmann highlights the originality of Gautier who introduces himself as a character into the miracle stories, adds songs after the manner of the troubadours and quotes Chrétien de Troyes.

In the last article of this part we turn again to a “profane” genre, this time to romance, and the attitude of the Church toward this genre, so often rejected as “vain” and “fabulous”. Observing that romances are rarely associated with religious texts in the manuscripts, Francis Gingras studies more closely the few manuscripts in which they are. The three cases illustrate different possible attitudes: while one compiler, associating two Grail stories with a collection of religious texts, clearly attempts to spiritualize romance, another one includes only parts of romances, cutting out in particular all Arthurian episodes and explicitly advising against reading Arthurian stories, which does not prevent a scribe from drawing Arthur’s head in the margin. Robert de Blois, finally, uses an Arthurian story as a framework into which he inserts his various didactic works alongside a *conte* in which the dangers of reading romances are explicitly highlighted. The three manuscripts studied thus demonstrate both the attraction exercised by romance and the struggle of the Church against its influence, by either rejecting it or attempting to turn some of its constitutive elements to edifying or didactic purposes.

The third part contains two contributions which centre around institutions, albeit in different ways. John Haines calls our attention to the vernacular chants appearing within the liturgy on specific feast days, in particular on St Stephen’s Day. He reminds us that medieval liturgy often contained playful and amusing parts and that there was a whole series of particular holidays which allowed for greater licence in this respect. As a

part of this, the reading of the epistle, generally done by subdeacons, could be amplified by additional passages either in Latin or in the vernacular. Haines analyzes the different versions both of the text and of the music of the French additions to the epistle of St Stephen's Day, pointing out similarities in wording and music with Old French *chansons de geste*.

Carol Symes, on the other hand, presents a more unusual case, the symbiotic relationship between an association of jongleurs and the Church in the town of Arras. She shows how the rivalry between a wealthy Benedictine abbey and a newly re-founded diocese in Arras brought about, on the one hand, the creation of the confraternity *Carité de Notre-Dame des Ardents*, which granted a group of jongleurs an unusual status as guardians of a holy relic, and, on the other, led this confraternity to produce, under the authority of the bishop, not only a written record (in Latin, but quickly translated into the vernacular) of the Marian miracle which the relic recalled, but also a regular documentation (written in the vernacular) of the confraternity's activities and members, and a rich vernacular theatrical and literary production, of which Jehan Bodel and Adam de la Halle are only the best-known representatives. Regular feasts and ceremonies came to be established and soon acquired supraregional reputation, and the Arras confraternity became a model for similar institutions elsewhere.

The final group of contributions deals with the expression of emotions. Evelyn Birge Vitz explores the ways in which emotions are represented and performed in medieval saints' lives, based on the categories of the dramatist Richard Schechner. Beginning with examples illustrating the relative passionlessness of the saints in the earlier vernacular saints' lives, which contrasted with the strong emotions of their antagonists, she then shows how later lives tend to attribute more emotions to the saint protagonists themselves. She insists on the importance of emotions in a genre that was not only read out aloud, but often to some extent enacted.

Chantal Phan analyzes the relationship of text and music in two lyrical *contrafacta*, imitations of metric structures and melodies. In one case, a vernacular Occitan song used a well-known Latin hymn, in the other a famous Occitan song is imitated both in Latin and in French. Phan shows how in all these cases melodic elements are used to stress important key words and to recall content elements of the model works.

Finally Susan Boynton studies in detail the expression of lament in Latin and vernacular songs as well as dramatic works. She stresses the development of ritualized elements, musical "emblems" accompanying typical phrasing and specific gestures, which appear in very similar form in both Latin and vernacular texts.

At first glance, the common denominator of the various contributions to this volume seems clear enough: the traditional concepts of the history of

language and literature are inappropriate to describe, or explain, the examples of interaction between languages, genres, performances and contexts presented here. French as a standardized, national language is a pre-conceived entity which as such will only come into being much later. The traditional binary oppositions of learned vs. popular culture, or of the Church vs. lay people, simply do not reflect historical reality. As several contributors explicitly point out, there is no absolute divide between a clerical and a lay culture in medieval France.

The extent to which authors belonging to the Church and other representatives of the Church adopted lay vernacular culture, and the great variety of the cases in which this happened, are astonishing. While the inherent religiosity of the so-called lay literature is not really surprising in a society whose Christian foundations are not challenged by any of its members, and in which basic religious ideas formed part of everybody's image of the world, the cases studied here show that there is a comparable dynamism going on in the opposite direction: authors may adopt "profane" genres for homiletic purposes; religious texts may integrate profane elements for pleasure and amusement; ecclesiastical institutions may favour lay initiatives and vernacular productions for political purposes. The "interaction" worked both ways and was as intense in one direction as in the other. Composers of profane songs imitated Latin hymns, while Latin religious songs used well-known troubadour melodies. The idea of a "continuum", as described with reference to linguistic phenomena by Maria Selig, can easily be transferred to the realm of literature or culture.

However, this is only the easiest reading of the studies assembled in this volume, the first level of interpretation they allow for. On a second level, their results converge in quite a different and perhaps less anticipated way.

There is in fact a striking similarity in the way many of the phenomena, or texts, studied are described. Terms used include (we translate the French ones): initiative, conscious effort, innovation (Selig, Frank-Job, Symes), experiment (Kullmann), constant transaction between two worlds (Lobrichon), originality (Kunstmann). The first attempts at vernacular writing are innovations, highly individual products of scriptoria which were generally inclined to be innovative; they are conscious attempts to engage the lay audience in the reformed Latin liturgy of Carolingian times. The adoption of the popular epic genre by poets who wish to transmit a religious message is perceived by the poets themselves as something of an experiment. Gautier de Coinci's inclusion of courtly elements in his Marian miracles appears as a highly original creation. Many of the examples studied prove indeed to be conscious attempts by individual authors to create something new. All these authors seem well aware that they are somehow crossing borders, combining material from different areas, negat-

ing genre conventions or adopting genres for different purposes. They clearly mean to achieve particular effects by making unusual choices; their works have a certain experimental character about them. We cannot but conclude that, while there certainly is no absolute divide between a lay and a clerical culture, there still seems to be a perceived relative divide, which the authors studied in this volume endeavour to bridge in various ways. The historical examples described in the third part show that special circumstances favour the mixing of the domains of Latin and the vernacular, of the Church and the lay public. Vernacular inserts may have been more common in medieval liturgy than is generally acknowledged, but they were written down for the liturgy of special feast days, set aside for a more popular, and entertaining, version of the divine service. Particular political circumstances, namely the need to acquire popular support, led the bishop of Arras to encourage and endorse the founding of a confraternity of lay jongleurs. In short, while interaction between lay and ecclesiastical culture was widespread and common, a certain awareness of its being in fact interaction still seems to be present in most or all of the examples studied.

We willingly concede that the traditional concept of two cultures, one of them popular, expressing itself in the vernacular and fighting for its emancipation from the dominance of the learned, Latin one, cannot be maintained. On the other hand, the idea of a mere continuum of literary expressions which just happen to be more or less religious, more or less beholden to the teaching of the Church, does not seem altogether satisfactory either. Nor does the mixture of ecclesiastical doctrines, Christian piety, chivalric values and courtly love which we observe in some texts, or the combination of religious and profane texts which we find in some manuscripts, ever seem to be taken entirely for granted. In fact, by refusing to accept a binary opposition which we perceive as simplistic, the opposition of learned vs. lay culture, we risk being drawn into another binary opposition: war of two cultures vs. cultural continuum. We should endeavour to find more relative categories.

Sociology tends to describe societies as perfect systems working according to certain rules that assure their continued existence. Perhaps more attention should be given to the shortcomings, or mis-functionings, of systems, to their imperfections, to inherent contradictions or tensions, which may lead to attempts to break out, to change something, to create something new. We should like to put this idea of “tension” at the centre of our reflection.

From the studies assembled here, a few points of tension, related to the position of the Church in society, emerge clearly. There is an inherent contradiction in the concept of a Church whose members are required to undergo a high-level education, but are in contact with, or (in the case of the priests and prelates) even in charge of, people who have not done so.

To the uneducated or less educated belong not only simple people, but often also the powerful, whose goodwill members of the Church will have to negotiate. This description applies of course to any society which has a separate body of learned priests. However, the Carolingian reforms accentuated this phenomenon in Gaul. The fact remains that the first literary attestations of the written vernacular are due to the attempts to make lay people participate in a reformed Latin liturgy, in other words, to individual efforts to bridge a deepened divide between lay people and clerics. Later on, we find specific religious vernacular creations, such as biblical paraphrases in French, in the surroundings of princes and nobles, for whom clerics would make accommodations which reduced in fact their own privilege of biblical interpretation.

There is another source of “tension” that seems to be particularly characteristic of the situation in Northern France. Here the Church held a monopoly on education, which was certainly more complete than in other regions of Europe, such as Northern Italy, where lay traditions of writing subsisted and some schools, for example for notaries, were founded by lay, communal initiatives. Northern France possessed seats of learning of European reputation even before the creation of the University of Paris. Students were attracted from all over Europe to the schools of Saint-Victor, Sainte-Geneviève, the cathedral schools of Paris, Chartres, or Laon, and later to the University, created out of the Paris cathedral school. The output of these schools must always have been greater than the immediate need of the Church. In other words, not every former student could become a bishop or even a priest; many of them never went beyond the minor orders (up to subdeacon). There was therefore a large population of “clerics”, former students, who were in principle constrained to ecclesiastic life and banned from certain profane activities (including, for instance, secular administration),² but who, out of necessity or inclination, nevertheless ended up in positions and careers in some lay administration or in other positions at court or in a nobleman’s service.

It is perhaps not astonishing that many of the vernacular authors in France explicitly declare that they belong to this group: Wace (who recounts his career in the *Roman de Rou*), the poet of *Girart de Roussillon* (who mentions his status in the prologue of his epic), or Guillaume le Clerc, the author of the *Bestiaire divin*, are only a few representative examples that turn up in this volume. Carol Symes hypothesizes a similar background for the first members of the Carité de Notre-Dame des Ardents in

2 Cf., for instance, Odette Pontal, *Clercs et laïcs au Moyen Âge d’après les statuts synodaux*, Bibliothèque d’histoire du christianisme 24 (Paris: Desclée / Proost, 1990), pp. 50–55.

Arras. John Haines mentions the role of the subdeacons as performers of the vernacular parts of the liturgy.

In an article published in 1995, Jeanne-Marie Boivin described the paradoxical attitude of several *clerici* at the court of Henry II of England, who all complained about the vain and time-consuming obligations of court life, which allegedly made it difficult for them to dedicate themselves to learned literary work.³ She shows that the very precariousness of the position of these men, torn between learned aspirations and the more worldly and practical interests of their lay patron, and their ensuing discontent (they all seem to have harboured ambitions with regard to an ecclesiastical career that were never satisfied) were seminal for the creation of their most important, revolutionary, works, for which they are still known. In the case of her main examples, Giraud de Barri (Geraldus Cambrensis) and Walter Map, these were Latin works. But Wace, whom she also mentions, who introduced the Arthurian subject matter into French literature in the *Roman de Brut*, and who lived in Normandy, expresses a similar discontent in his later *Roman de Rou*. Giraud de Barri had been a student in Paris, and of Wace we know at least that he went to “France”, to some school in the Ile-de-France, to complete his studies. The situation of many a cleric in continental France would have been analogous to theirs, even if he was in the employment of a lesser court or patron.

In his book *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, Jacques Le Goff gives a vivid picture of the intellectual life of the twelfth century, insisting on the role of Paris and of towns in general, as opposed to the more traditional monasteries.⁴ According to him, the figure of the “intellectual” as a person of some reputation in society is a product of the emerging cities. Apart from this new professional group, he mentions the group of goliardic poets, whom he describes as some sort of *Bohême avant la lettre*, mentioning nevertheless the aspirations of some of the members of this group to obtain safe positions at the court of some prince.⁵ But why should we assume that there were only these extreme cases: the urban intellectual and the goliardic vagabond? Certainly, most schools would be established in or near the big urban centres, if only for practical reasons; a relationship between clerical education and the city is therefore self-evident. Nevertheless, clerics who left school might end up anywhere, employed at any secular or even ecclesiastical court. The chronicle of Lambert of Ardres allows us a glimpse at

3 Jeanne-Marie Boivin, “Les paradoxes des *clerici regis*: l'exemple, à la cour d'Henri II Plantagenêt, de Giraud de Barri”, in *Le Clerc au Moyen Âge*, Senefiance 37 (Aix-en-Provence: CUERMA, 1995), pp. 47–61.

4 Jacques Le Goff, *Les intellectuels au Moyen Âge*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Seuil, 1985), pp. 9–69.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 29–40.

the intellectual life that was possible even in the entourage of a count of average importance. In our view, the type of a cleric who has finished his studies, lacks any reasonable prospect of a career in the Church and is looking for employment elsewhere must have been more widespread than has hitherto been acknowledged. Discontented and hankering after glory, while trying to reconcile the requirements of his ecclesiastical status and his learned aspirations with the more practical or frivolous interests of lay patrons, or even with the down-to-earth pastoral concerns of provincial ecclesiastical or monastic employers, such a cleric would easily be tempted to conceive new types of texts (texts that were not only adapted to his surroundings, but also apt to impress them) and ensure their survival in writing.

We would like to contend that these factors, rooted in the very structure and function of the Church, but also in the particular situation of the Church in medieval France, favoured innovation and conscious experiments, in a field of tension between lay and ecclesiastical concerns that was perceived as such. This may apply to some extent to all areas of cultural expression, but holds true in particular for the area of literature, which was most directly related to the contents of the average ecclesiastical education. Many of the innovations and experiments then turned out to be successful and gave rise to flourishing traditions. In this way, vernacular writing first came into being, and written literary genres or sub-genres were first created.

The very essence of the institution of the Church as well as the monopoly it held in the domain of education seem therefore to be at least partially responsible for the richness, variety and sophistication of vernacular literary production in France, not directly through any decision taken by ecclesiastical authorities on political or ideological grounds, but indirectly, out of the tensions which were the natural consequence of the position of the Church in society.

