

Apollinaire's "Chanson du Mal-Aimé": Medievalist Poetry as Medievophilic Commentary  
ABSTRACT

This article is a commentary on Guillaume Apollinaire's "Chanson du Mal-Aimé" (*Alcools*, 1903), read as a medievalist poem and as a commentary on medieval French and Occitan poetry and poetics. I read this poem as being itself at once a poem on love, a poetic commentary on love-poetry, and a text that is in love with love and with love-lyric.

The "Mal-Aimé" has generated a long and venerable tradition of commentaries attempting to make sense of it. My commentary will start, in time-honoured fashion, at the beginning: this reader's attention having been immediately attracted to a disjunction between the title---"la *chanson du mal-aimé*"---and the epigraph---"et je *chantais cette romance*"---which also then led me to scout out further medieval allusions. Now, Apollinaire was well-versed in medieval literature: besides the contemporary canon of the French school curriculum, he was exposed to richer and more varied fare through the Bibliothèque Nationale's medieval holdings.

The medieval French-language poetry of the *Trouvères* and the Occitan lyric of the *Troubadours* feature a key idea of *trobar*, "finding" (and name themselves accordingly). That is, the "finding" of composing or making poetry, that of "finding" love, and the "finding" of identity. This cardinal word is played with by *trobadors* in polysemic games; meanings are conflated and terms become interchangeable. A poem can be about love, and simultaneously about writing, about writing about love, and expressions of love for other love-poetry; *bref*: extended erotico-poetic entwinings of *trobar amor*---"finding love"---and *amor trobar*---"a love of finding."

Apollinaire's poem is a contribution to this medieval poetic corpus; just as Joseph Bédier's *Roman de Tristan* is part of the continuum of the Tristanian narrative family (perceived as such in Gaston Paris's introduction). The "Mal-Aimé" weaves a poetics of love, finding, and finding oneself; of poetic identity bound up with being a lover. An old poetry is refashioned for the dawn of the 20th century: a new era of speed, mass communications, and growing globalization--with what implications for Poetry and Love? Articulated through clever and subtle duplicities and fragmentations, with disseminations and dissemblances, hidden messages enclosed within the "Mal-Aimé" reveal the poet's discovery of identity as "Guillaume Apollinaire," bard of a new dawn, born phoenix-like from the dust of a national heritage.