

# French Romance in Late Medieval Poetry: From Chansons de Geste to the French Revolution

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## ABSTRACT

The formation of a new political system and the establishment of a new regime in a country cannot be separated from the joint efforts of the masses of different classes. For example, the French Revolution in 1788 is a typical example. As an important milestone in the history of the French revolution, this revolution overthrew the rule of the Bourbon Dynasty, promoted the transformation of France from the feudal autocratic monarchy system to the emerging capitalist system, and formally embarked on the journey of developing modern France. But it was not for nothing that the revolution was able to take shape, develop and eventually flourish in France, and exert an indispensable influence on the world. On the surface, the emergence of this revolution is to meet the French people's dissatisfaction with the corrupt rule of the feudal dynasty and the cruel oppression of people and hope to change all this through violent means, as well as conform to the trend of The Times that the capitalist system has developed in the global scope. However, at a deeper level, the French Revolution was based on certain ideas. The author finds that romanticism, which arose in France in the late Middle Ages, played an important role in its development. This paper will make an in-depth analysis of the full display of this kind of thoughts in the poetry texts of different themes of the period and the dissemination process with the help of different media, to explore the relationship between the two and the role of the romantic thoughts reflected in the poetry of this period in the formation of the French Revolution.

**Keywords:** French Romance, Chansons de Geste, Floire et Blancheflor.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Romanticism, as a trend of thought originating in the Middle Ages in Europe, advocates more freedom to express personal feelings within a certain limit and opposes the oppression imposed on people of different classes by strict feudal ethics, court discipline, and religious bondage. This was in line with the ideological characteristics of the development of Europe at that time. It as a new asset class to overthrow the feudal monarchy and encourage people through resistance were built to meet the requirements of the interests of the people's demand and time development of democratic regime, the bourgeois regime of powerful tools, is often through the different form, using different media expression comes out and can spread around the world. As mentioned later, whether in Britain, France, Germany, or a wider region, the emergence and dissemination of this idea had an indelible impact on the political changes in various countries and fields and became one of the most distinctive features of this period. France, as the main region where romanticism was prevalent, was widely

influenced in literature, ideology, and other fields in the late Middle Ages. This article on the French romantic poetry of different types and themes, by discussing the idea in the form of poetry and the main characteristics and its a kind of nationalism, the manifestation of a culture, such as several different aspects to analyze late medieval France's romantic poetry, in the process, the embodiment of French nationalism and capitalism, and they played an irreplaceable role in the promotion of the French Revolution and the establishment of the stable political power of the emerging bourgeoisie, thus revealing the closer and deeper connection between French romanticism and the French Revolution, namely the development of nationalism.

Specifically, the formation of romance, especially in poetry, in late Medieval France can be analyzed in three ways. First of all, romanticism in French poetry did not appear out of thin air. For centuries, France has been home to all kinds of fantastical, audacious personal literature, such as poetry. However short or long they may be, what they have in common is that they all

suggest a desire to express one's feelings without being bound by strict dogma. Among them, court love and heroes are the two most typical poetic themes of this period [1]. As mentioned earlier, French romanticism expresses itself in written form through various poetic themes. However, when they are written by poets, they are static, and they are not printed as a dynamic idea among many different kinds of people, gradually evolving into an action that has a more profound impact on society in this country, and even on a larger scale among different people. It wasn't what the creators wanted, so it needed to spread, and it relied on two kinds of people, the troubadours, and the early bourgeoisie. After the formal formation of French romanticism, the understanding of its poetic characteristics can be divided into two stages. First of all, in the early period of French Romanticism, the narrative poem *chanson*, which embodies romanticism, gradually developed and flourished. One of the most famous poems is Roland's *Chanson* [1]. First of all, the main content of this kind of poetry is to describe the legendary events in French history from the 8th century to the 10th century, and the people involved are also the so-called heroes. "Grays" was written in the golden age of French romanticism. This is another kind of love poem, mostly from the late 12th century. It also emphasizes romantic love, in addition to the romantic elements necessary in early heroic stories and romantic poetry. As mentioned earlier, these romantic ideas emerging bourgeoisie in France pushed continuously combined with politics, formed a new ideological trend, namely after the French revolution, the birth of their people is a kind of nationalism, in pursuit of a free democratic society, the longing for a stable new government and the establishment of national sovereignty consciousness. In this case, despite the political overtones attached to romanticism, its essence as romanticism, a longing for an ideal state of life, remains. This is what the French people have been insisting on for many years after romanticism rose in France.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the different themes, media, and other factors in the formation and development of French romantic poetry. To delve into the thoughts and literary form in the rise of the French revolution, formed in the revolution and the later gradually rooted in people of different classes of nationalism thought with the French romanticism characteristics play a specific role and the relationship between the formation of the influence of France for later generations. To clarify this topic, the author will use references to primary and secondary sources to provide strong arguments for the argument to enrich the content of the article and better highlight the topic of the article. First of all, courtly love and heroes are two of the most common themes in French romantic poetry. By analyzing

the background and process of the formation of these two kinds of poetry themes in France at that time, the main characteristics of poetry in this period have formed a general understanding. Then, by comparing the general characteristics of French romanticism mentioned in the introduction at the beginning of the article with those contained in the themes of these two poems, it is concluded that the Romanticism in French poetry arose from this period and formed its embryonic form. Thus, this paper lays a foundation for more dynamic analysis of the influence of this idea on various fields and strata in France. While analyzing the theme of the poetry text, the author finds that the poetry text alone can not make the deep romantic thoughts contained in it fully exposed and effectively utilized in French social life, they must rely on certain media. Therefore, on this basis, the author analyzes the different types, processes, and purposes of poetry spread by the two different media: the bard and the bourgeoisie. In terms of the formation and development of French romanticism in poetry, which combines both dynamic and static forms, its role in the French Revolution, the establishment of a more democratic and stable new regime, is self-evident. To elaborate the characteristics of French Romanticism more specifically and reveal its political significance during the French Revolution, the author further strengthens the thesis by introducing *Chansons de Geste* and *Floire et Blanceflor*, two kinds of poetry and characteristics developed in the early and golden period of French Romanticism respectively [1, 2]. Specifically, the author cites *Floire et Blanceflor* and *The Song of Roland*, two poems belonging to different poetry types, and discusses and analyzes them in combination with related secondary sources. Thus, the romanticism in poetry gradually evolved into French nationalism under the influence of capitalism and other media and became an important form of expression of French culture in the political field. Finally, after completing the understanding and analysis of the deep thoughts of a series of texts, it can be concluded that the romanticism embodied in French poetry is of great significance to the development of French capitalism, the formation of nationalism, and the promotion of the French Revolution.

## 3. REASONS FOR THE FORMING OF ROMANCE

### 3.1. Various subjects

The formation of romance, especially in poetry, in late Medieval France can be analyzed from the following three aspects. First of all, Romanticism in French poetry did not appear in a vacuum. For centuries, there had been a wide range of fantastical, boldly personal works of literature, such as poetry, all over France. No matter how short or long they are, what they all have in common is a hint of a desire to express one's feelings without being constrained by strict dogma. Among them, courtly love

and the legend of heroes are the two most typical poetry themes of this period.

Courtly love emerged in the Middle Ages, and the theme emphasized the combination of idealized love and courtly etiquette. Since the subject was originally created for aristocratic entertainment, its form and content may be more casual and bold without losing the elegance of aristocrats. It describes what is a bold act made by a heartfelt emotion that may not conform to traditional morality, especially in a place like the palace where the structure of etiquette is very strict. But this does not mean that the subject matter described is less moral or other types of transgressive behavior. Its purpose is to break out of rigid dogma and allow yourself to express your true feelings. Courtly love, a constrained emotion, often the subject of poets' lyrics, can be considered one of the earliest manifestations of French romanticism.

In addition to courtly love, there was another theme, the heroic romance, which often appeared as an important theme in early French poetry of romanticism. As the name implies, it is usually led by a powerful fictional character, who has noble moral character, and his behavior is often to defend the home, save others, or do other things unrelated to personal interests. The subject matter is often reflected in the novel, rather than completely true. Finally, those who are called heroes will achieve the desired results after experiencing countless difficulties, and these achievements will be written into poems and sung by poets. Compared with poems with realistic themes, it describes an ideal social reality and life. So, from this point of view, the theme also advocates a kind of freedom and romance and involves a deeper level of society. It not only reflects the formation of a kind of literary romanticism but also has a significant influence on the dissemination of such ideas in the social and political fields.

### **3.2. Diversification of media**

As mentioned earlier, French romanticism expressed itself in written form through various poetic themes. However, when they are created by poets, they are static, and they are not imprinted as a dynamic idea in the minds of many different kinds of people and gradually evolve into an action that has a more profound impact on society, the country, and even on a larger range of different people. It's not what the creators wanted it to be, so it needs to be spread, and it relies on two kinds of people, the minstrel, and the early bourgeoisie.

One of the most important media of French romantic poetry, the troubadours, a group of composers and performers sponsored by aristocratic women who existed in the Middle Ages, initially composed mainly of the chivalric class and then turned to the plebeian. They are not entirely poets but merely serve as a medium for the dissemination of poetry, especially romantic poetry,

which focuses on courtly love. They were responsible for singing this kind of textual poetry in musical form for the amusement of the nobles. And after the patronage of the nobles of one region had been ended, they would continue to roam the country and beyond and make a living in poetry and singing or other forms until they could find another patron. In France, where romanticism was prevalent, the form and media of artificial poetry enabled not only many people with such artistic talent to appreciate and earn a living, but also enabled romantic ideas to spread in a broader range.

If the troubadours were more likely to deliver romantic poetry on the subject of courtly love, and the impact of this mode of transmission was more apparent in thought than in reality, the bourgeoisie was quite different. The purpose of the bourgeoisie is not only to liberate people's mind but also to use it as a tool to meet their own needs and benefit from more productive practices. Such as mentioned above with the legend of heroes as the theme of romantic poetry, it was more in the darkness of the reality, irony, increasingly corrupt nobility still only know addicted pleasures, and to shape a person or specific group as the image of Christ, to create an ideal can be achieved through efforts of social reality. This is undoubtedly in the interest of the emerging French bourgeoisie. With the spread of the theme of poetry, they can be the feudal monarchy rule is no longer suitable for the development of the society gradually this fact people heart to sow the seeds and suggested as an emerging asset class they will lead the French people to overthrow the feudal decadent royal rule and establish a more accord with the interests of the people's government and the country is better for residents. This is undoubtedly in line with the course of historical development. The emerging bourgeoisie and the feudal class are tantamount to two completely contradictory political forces. And "the state in Europe evolved as a result of the confrontation of divergent but equally strong social and political factors", in which case it is perfectly reasonable for the bourgeoisie to want to establish a completely new regime in France [3]. From this point of view, as a media, this group did play a role in spreading romantic ideas, but its more important role is reflected in the deeper political field. The outbreak of the French Revolution was an opportunity for romanticism to change again.

### **3.3. Solid social foundation**

At a deeper level, the emerging bourgeoisie secretly promoted the process of the collapse of The Bourbon Dynasty in France through the dissemination of romantic poems themed on heroic legends, which led to the French Revolution. The French Revolution took place at "the moment when contemporary ideas of Europe were first crystallized out of an enormously complex historical inheritance" [3]. Therefore, from this point of view, the political or ideological changes that took place during

this period were of great significance to the formation of French Romantic ideas in poetry. During the French Revolution, romanticism, which mainly existed in poetry in the general sense, as one of the important tools of the bourgeoisie, was endowed with a distinct political color and completed its new transformation. And after the French revolution, a new, led by the bourgeoisie, relatively conformed to the interests of the people of strong power, a more idealized was born in France, more let the emotions of the romantic thoughts in bold at the same time, inspiring the French people to pursue deeper political in the sense of democracy and freedom.

#### **4. THE TRANSITION FROM MEDIEVAL FRENCH POETRY TO FRENCH ROMANTICISM**

##### ***4.1. Cohesiveness and coherence in French Romantic poetry***

From the middle ages to the first half of the 19th century, romanticism emerged in French poetry, took shape, and finally flourished. During the development of romantic poetry as an integral and important symbol of French romantic literature, there have been some differences, especially in the understanding of cohesiveness and coherence. Some people think that in medieval French romantic poetry, although the poems are generally long, there seems to be no necessary temporal or spatial connection between each of the smaller sections, or chapters, to connect the whole poem into a relatively complete whole. As a result, the integrity of the story told in the poem, the emotional depth depicted, and even the underlying theme connotation of the poem, as well as the romantic thoughts that the poet hopes to express through a particular theme of the poem, are all negatively affected to varying degrees. But, after some subsequent scholars conducted in-depth studies and analyses of French romantic poetry of the same period, Before the discovery, scholars seem to have misunderstood this, they mistakenly conflated cohesiveness with coherence and allowed this erroneous conclusion to permeate many medieval French literary analyses based on this theory.

There are two main reasons for this misunderstanding. This in-depth study on the root of misunderstanding will also help us to better understand and form our cognition of the difference between the transition and development of French medieval literature to the real French Romanticism in poetry. First, in a broad sense, the two words can indeed be cognitively treated as the same category. But when they are applied to a particular field, generalizations no longer apply. For example, in the analysis of the development of French romantic poetry combined with specific historical background, it is necessary to make a more specific distinction between them. There is a huge difference in the literal meaning

and focus of these words' cohesiveness and coherence. Both terms connote coherence and consistency in time, space, or more generally. However, what the former emphasizes is a kind of mental consistency, namely cohesion. When it is applied to French romantic poetry, it can be understood as the same idea and theme running through the story scenes described throughout the poem, whether it is the aforementioned court romance or the heroic legend. This basic nature of cohesiveness is evident in the poetry.

Specifically, taking the first stanza of the famous heroic epic *Chanson de Roland* as an example, the heroism with the nature of romantic thoughts that he hoped to demonstrate through poetry is a manifestation of the powerful power of courage and justice. Every part of the poem has such thoughts. "The king our Emperor Charlemaine" in the first bar reveals the leader of the war, The leader of The poet's side of justice. In the second stanza, the poet picks up where the poem started, where the mood is supposed to be pessimistic as the beloved king announces to his people that the war is lost. But at the end of the stanza, this person is mentioned: "But of all the heathens none spake word. Save Blancandrin, Val Fonde's lord" (*The Song of Roland*), which foils The twist to come in The next section. After mentioning such a misfit, the poet explains the man's thoughts about the war in the next section, and also defines the character's justice or not. "Knightly and valiant of enterprise, Sage in counsel his lord to aid" (*The Song of Roland*) shows The man's wisdom. After offering his perspective, he gained approval, saying that if The war were lost, "And our lives be laden with shame and woe" (*The Song of Roland*). So, from this point of view, even if the war was costly, France could not be easily lost, at least not to the king's people. Because of this, at the end of the section, the king decides to ask for help, This can be seen in "And they ride with olive boughs in hand, To seek the Lord of the Frankish land" (*The Song of Roland*). In the above poems, we can see that each section of the poem contains the same theme, namely war, suffering, indomitable spirit, and the hidden hero who can save the nation from danger. This generalization of the theme just reflects a close relationship between words, that is, the cohesion mentioned above.

In the above poems, we can see that each section of the poem contains the same theme, namely war, suffering, indomitable spirit, and the hidden hero who can save the nation from danger. This generalization of the theme just reflects a close relationship between words, that is, the cohesion mentioned above. In simple terms, it is whether the content of the story described in the poem can be properly connected according to certain factors. Some scholars consider these episodes to be completely independent and unrelated, presumably because they limit the coherence they attach to temporal or spatial variations and shifts, ignoring the fact that other factors, not just these, determine story integrity. Moreover, in this

type of poetry, poets rarely directly embed the words representing the specific time and place in the poem text but tend to be more obscure romantic thoughts, which need to be carefully studied. If these scholars skim through the text without careful study, the incoherence bias may be justified. However, a closer look at medieval poetry reveals that in addition to cohesiveness, coherence is also extremely evident in French romantic poetry. This kind of expression is not limited to each stanza, the plot of the poem will likely change significantly in time or place after several stanzas. The more subtle variations, however, are logical and apply to every stanza in the poem.

#### **4.2. Identity in French Romantic poetry with different themes**

According to Norris J. Lacy, when he talks about the concept of space in medieval Romantic works, he discusses from various aspects a concept common in medieval literature known as spatial form. Some of the ideas raised in this discussion can be applied to the analysis of French romantic poetry of this period. For example, with the development of The Times, in fact, romantic literature, especially poetry, there are still close connections between time and space in the plots of poetry, but gradually become more obscure, Some aspect of the form, theme, Or imagery reflects that of other episodes and relates one scene to another "[4]. As shown in The previous analysis of the text in the first section of The Song of Roland, its connection lies in The similar heroism spirit from beginning to end in other French romantic poems with The theme of heroic legends, rather than The use of a specific word representing time or space. This apparent interconnectedness is subtle, but it does not mean looseness. On the contrary, extremely tight. To some extent, this kind of poetic theme runs through the plot, and the establishment and promotion of this obscure connection are often more flexible. In addition to the hero legend poetry theme, this is more conducive to the development of the plot of the poem and the expression of some deep ideas. As Lacy says, "Good medieval works are not less unified than good works of later periods; They simply seek to achieve a different kind of unity "[5]. This feature is not only found in French poetry in the early days of romanticism but also later, during the French Revolution and in the Romanticism of its heyday, in various forms. Thus, this period can also be considered a key period in the transition from Medieval literature to French Romanticism.

### **5. CHARACTERISTICS OF FRENCH ROMANCE**

After the formal formation of French romanticism, its characteristics in poetry can be divided into two stages of understanding. First of all, in the early period of French

romanticism, a narrative poem named Chansons de Geste that embodied romanticism gradually developed and flourished [1]. One of the most famous poems is Chanson de Roland. First of all, in this kind of poetry, the main content describes is the legendary events in French history from the 8th century to the 10th century, and the figures involved are also the so-called heroes. For example, the main character of the sentence that "Carlou the King, our Emperor Charlemayn", is one of the heroes mentioned in history.

Secondly, the poetry is often overtly fantastical but not realistic. For example, the wand mentioned in the sentence, "Pray you then, Sire, Give Wand and Glove to me" obviously doesn't exist in reality. However, by adding imagery that does not exist in the real world and thus adding more fantasy to the poem, there is no doubt that the characters in the poem are deified and contribute to a deeper meaning.

Finally, this type of poetry often describes an ideal state. "In all the city no paynim now appears Who is not burning or turned to Christian Fear" also shows this. In fact, throughout history, no war has ever been won without casualties, no matter how powerful a nation is. The absence of casualties described here is virtually impossible to achieve in reality, but it is desirable. The description of this idealized state is based on the further development of the former and is the result of the further development of this type of romantic poetry. To sum up, early French romantic poetry can be regarded as a kind of poetry with heroic legends as its theme.

Floris et Blanchefleur was created during the Golden Age of French romanticism. It was another kind of poetry that depicted love, mainly in the late 12th century. It also emphasizes romantic love, in addition to the necessary romantic elements in the early tales of heroes and romantic poetry, "as a proverbial example of faithful and intense love" [6]. In this poem, from "Ful wel she lovyd hem both twoo" (Floire et Blancheflor) at the beginning, to the sentence in the following parts of the poem, " The king seide to his soon: She shal lerne for thy love "(Floire et Blancheflor), and then to the last part of the poem, " For hire love thider come, To fonden with som gin, that Faire maiden For Win", Almost every section of the poem repeats love, in which the author constantly mentions love and the huge price people are willing to pay for it, which can be regarded as a kind of pursuit for the supremacy of emotion of people at that time, which is mainly advocated by romanticism [7]. In short, love is the most prominent feature of romantic poetry in this period.

### **6. ROMANCE AS FRENCH CULTURE**

From the field of literature to the field of politics, and then to the field of ideology and culture, the ideological and cultural connotation contained in French romantic

poetry is gradually advancing with the development of The Times. In the discussion of this point, Ben Mercer's point of view in his work is of great significance for the study of its transformation. The first is the connection between such literature and the political realm. It is not to be overlooked that "All romanticism is conditioned by the Revolution" [8]. So the two must be inseparable. As early as the feudal monarchy, some people have realized the importance of language in literary works for people's struggle for political democracy and freedom. Later, it was realized through the student movement and the expansion of the publication and distribution of paperback books. In other words, "The arrival of the paperback unleashed a set of utopian and dystopian fantasies, images of revolution and crisis" [9]. In literature, even the romantic poetry that prevailed in France, the scenes depicted, true or false, were different reflections of social reality, especially social discontent. In the early years of the French Revolution, the rapid spread of romantic poetry among different classes of people actually reflected this. This idea ferments and intensifies in the minds of the people, which leads to the French Revolution. Secondly, from the political field to the ideological field is a transformation of romantic thought. Romantic thought in this period took on political color, but at the same time, this color also led to the development of ideology and culture. Although French poetry at this time, especially French romantic poetry, was considered "in the throes of an irreversible decline", it did not mean that romantic literary works had completely lost their role in France [10]. On the contrary, the establishment of a new regime and other factors allowed it to flourish. It is mainly reflected in the further popularization of paperback books and the promotion of cultural education. People begin to realize the importance of reading, and the formation of reading habits can affect the transformation of one's cognition and thought [10]. This law is applicable in any era, even in the French Revolution.

In a word, these romantic thoughts under the emerging bourgeoisie in France to promote continuously combined with politics formed a new ideological trend, namely, after the French revolution, the birth of their own people is a kind of nationalism, namely for the pursuit of a free democratic society, the longing for a stable new government. And the establishment of a sense of national sovereignty. In this case, although romanticism is given a political overtone, its essence as romanticism, a longing for an idealized state of life, remains. This is what the French people have been insisting on for several years after romanticism was developed in France.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Based on the formation of romantic poetry in France in the late middle ages, the background and process of development, and further spread of the thorough analysis,

it is clear whether court love or the theme of the legend of heroes, development of the early romanticism poetry category types, or the golden age of poetry has a considerable amount of commonality between them. From these commonalities, a deeper analysis will find that this literary form played an extremely important role in the French Revolution. French romantic poetry enlightens people of different classes in France. It is an important theoretical basis for the revolution and a powerful tool for the bourgeoisie to overthrow the feudal dynasty. When romanticism began to flourish in the late Middle Ages, when romantic poetry was passed on by word of mouth among the French, the nationalism behind it began to take root as a national culture. No one will forget the price behind it, and no one will forget the most important qualities of being French: always free, always romantic, never forgetting your country. This is advocated in French romantic poetry, but also based on the formation of this poem is different from the feudal period of the French Revolution in the call for nationalism.

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