

Jean Nicolas De Surmont. *Chanson: son histoire et sa famille dans les dictionnaires de langue française.* 2010, IX + 248 pp. ISBN 978-3-484-52353-1 (Hardback). Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter. Price: €49.95

The fundamental aim of the study of the *chansonnier* vocabulary in French is to highlight the existence of a literary genre, namely the *chanson*. The author states that the *chanson* genre, as referred to in the Middle Ages, is characteristically French in view of the prestige of the French language and culture over centuries and the study thus comprises an analysis of the term *chanson* and its lexical family from its origins in old French to today's modern French.

The author begins with a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of the terminology of various song genres, with reference to works and dictionaries on lexicography, emphasizing that the term *chanson* assumes different sung or written forms. The aim is to carry out a semasiological and lexical study based on a linguistic corpus as well as a study of *chansonnier* phenomena, using works on the history of French and Quebec literature as the main field of reference. In the case of Quebec culture, the study is limited to the historiography of the last forty years. The range of the corpus is discussed and the corpus chosen to represent elements relating to the song phenomenon is defined as being part of a group of essays on the *chanson*, alphabetic dictionaries, glossaries or vocabularies relating to terminology or specialised dictionaries of sayings or idiomatic expressions. Extensive use is made of dictionaries in French from the 15th century onwards in a thorough investigation of the term *chanson*.

The author then proceeds to explain the way in which the corpus is analysed. This metalinguistic corpus consists of printed and electronic elements as well as a series of essays alluding directly or indirectly to the definition of song genres. Discussions centre on the type of vocabulary used and the metalinguistic terms describing it and the range of vocabulary to be studied is situated somewhere between general and specialised language. Operating concepts are suggested within the song vocabulary and are defined as a *phénomène chansonnier*. This phenomenon encompasses all the practices, manifestations or traditions relating to the song-object as well as research and publications on the song. This comprehensive term refers to all social, historical and historiographical facets of *chanson*. This first theoretical section concludes with a brief discussion of various types of poetry, such as sung or vocal poetry (which the author prefers to the term oral poetry) as well as the difference between a signed *chanson* (of unknown origin) and a song from oral tradition. The concept of lexical engineering is introduced as part of an operating vocabulary to be used in analysing different aspects of word groupings, idiomatic expressions and collocations in the ensuing chapter.

Having established a theoretical background, the next section deals with an analysis of the lexical family of the song with its double linear components of music and text. At this point the author introduces the concept of referential

contamination which revolves around the double origin of the *chanson* and refers back to 16th century poets like Du Bellay who were conscious of the interplay between music and poetry. The troubadours and trouvères are cited as examples. Reference is also made to modern artists like Brassens who sings poems by Villon and Hugo which gives rise to the question what is the dominant linearity in song: the text or the music? There are further references to the 19th century French poets who debated the effects of poetry and musicality. In an effort to define the nature of the song, the author postulates that the term *chanson* can only be justified by the context. According to the numerous sources referred to, *chanson* can be a volume of poetry, melodies, operettas, poems, choirs, romances set to music as well as a wide range of different musical works. A further differentiation is made between oral and sung poetry. In a synchronic analysis of the lexicographical and encyclopaedic corpus the same definitions are suggested where the changing nature of song activity is emphasized from French texts drawn from the 17th century to the present. Various types of *chansons* are analysed in the light of musical dictionaries including the continuous interrelationship between text and music. The author concludes that both text and music are equally significant components of the song.

The study continues with a diachronic analysis of the *chanson* family and begins with a history of the meanings of the term from Latin through to the present day, taking into consideration numerous literary traditions. As a result of the lack of grammatical rules and the influence of orality, a large number of lexical forms appear, such as *chanchon*, *cançon* and *chanson* in the 14th century. The author then establishes a semantic cartography of the *chanson* such as *chanson* and *canso* as used in the Middle Ages, together with variations attested in lexicographical sources. Similar analyses are carried out during the period from the 12th to the 20th century. There follows a detailed and interesting exploration of the lexical field in terms of *chanson*. The list begins with diminutive forms such as *chansonnette* which itself also covers a wide semantic spectrum, including pejorative forms such as can be seen in Boileau's *Art poétique*. *Chan-telette* and the noun form *chansonnier* are also derived from *chanson*, meaning a volume of secular songs in the Middle Ages as well as a writer or composer of songs as referred to by various 18th and 19th century authors. Writers and composers of satirical songs and spiritual songs are alluded to (Calvin refers to *chansons spirituelles*). From the 16th to the 19th century *chansonnier* also takes on a political connotation. Modern dictionaries refer to variations in the use of the term *chansonnier* and in Quebec *chansonnier* assumes divergent forms from traditional French interpretations. Feminised derivatives like *chansonnière*, verb forms *chansonner*, *se chansonner*, and noun forms *chansonneur* are discussed.

An analysis follows of the meaning of the *chanson* lexeme according to a metalinguistic corpus. The large number of dictionaries consulted result in a dynamic vision of the language. Both the strict meaning and the figurative sense are presented, with *chanson*, for example, taking on the meaning of a harmonious noise. Examples are also given from the 14th century onwards of

pejorative or familiar meanings, metaphorical variations as well as related terms resulting from metonymy. For example lexical co-existents of *chanson* such as *air*, *romance*, and *rengaine* are discussed. Similarly, idiomatic units are analysed following a definition of an idiomatic expression as a group of words used in a fixed sense which does not correspond with the full sense of the individual words and is governed by semantic rules. This includes proverbs. A detailed enumeration follows, drawn from a linguistic and metalinguistic corpus, of expressions derived from *chanson* such as *J'ai en ça pour une chanson* with direct English equivalent of 'I got it for a song.' Again, examples are drawn from the 14th century to the present, including Quebec sources. The author then discusses collocations, defined as such in 1951, where it is the expression that carries the meaning and not the individual words. Examples are given such as *chanson populaire* and *chanson de toile*. Similar occurrences are referred to in English and Hungarian where the extension of a word in one language is sometimes wider than in another such as the deeper meaning of *chanson* in comparison to song. Over the centuries numerous phrases have been used by French authors to describe the song phenomenon such as *chanson galante*, *chanson bachique* and more specifically in the oral tradition, *chanson d'eau* and *chanson enfantine* amongst many others. The syntagms derived as above are clearly descriptive of specific activities whether drinking, dancing, heroic exploits (the well-known *chanson de geste* as found in Chrétien de Troyes as well as variants *chanson de bonne geste*), singing ballads, playing the lute, reference to a hero (*La chanson de Roland*) or royalty (*chanson royale*).

In conclusion, in the author's words, linguistic exchanges, borrowings and calques have enriched the semantic field of *chanson*. The need is expressed of a close relationship between literary history and the history of lexicography when the latter is perceived as a number of text fragments. Critics have pointed out that dictionaries consist of fragments of texts and should therefore take into consideration linguistic, literary and sociological methods. This work is an important step in elucidating the *chanson* phenomenon and the enrichment of its vocabulary and further areas of research are suggested along the lines of recent critical studies.

The author provides an extensive bibliography consisting of scientific studies on song, music and poetry, the sociology of culture and philosophy, linguistic and literary theory. A comprehensive bibliography of literary works referred to is provided as well as a section consisting of a list of dictionaries relating to musical and literary vocabulary. Ample footnotes are given, inviting further elucidation and study. This publication is not only a valuable contribution to an analysis of the *chanson*, but contains material which could be put to excellent use by future researchers.

François Jaques
Emeritus Professor of French
Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa
(f.jaques@ru.ac.za)