



Aristocratic Life in Medieval France: The Romances of Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil, 1190-1230

Professor John W. Baldwin

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Modern historians have generally approached the study of medieval society through chronicles, charters, and other documents composed in Latin by members of the clergy. Although these records may be satisfactory for studying the affairs of ecclesiastics, kings, and high barons, they are inadequate for assessing the major preoccupations of the aristocracy -- living extravagantly, fighting, making love, entertaining, eating and dressing ostentatiously, and, generally, earning the disapproval of the clergy. In *Aristocratic Life in Medieval France*, the respected medieval scholar John Baldwin undertakes a study of this segment of society using, for the first time in nearly a century, the vernacular romances written exclusively for the amusement of aristocratic audiences.

Rather than attempting to encompass all of Middle Age Europe, this study selects two writers, Jean Renart and Gerbert de Montreuil, and their four romances. It focuses with depth and specificity on the discrete area of northern France during a precise period, 1190--1230. Since Jean and Gerbert framed their fictional stories with contemporary and realistic features that could be recognized by their audiences, their works provide a wealth of detail on aristocratic living. Employing such literary techniques as "reality effects" and "horizons of expectations," Baldwin successfully discerns the historical content in these romance narratives.

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