
Troubadour Lyric in a Global Poetics

Creating Worlds Through Desire

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The troubadours were poet-performers of varied social status active in aristocratic courts of southern France, northern Italy, and northern Spain during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Around 2500 songs of the troubadours exist, and we have the names of more than 400 troubadours. The lyric was refined entertainment for an elite audience during a time that Occitan – as opposed to the French language of the north – was a significant poetic language of Europe. Transmitted orally as a musical composition of isometric stanzas followed by an ending half-strophe called the *tornada*, the dominant lyric genre the *canso* repeats a melody to the metrical pattern of each strophe. Eventually the lyric texts were written down, in mid-thirteenth century songbooks (*chansonnières*; 95 extant, four with music) commissioned by aristocratic patrons seeking to confirm their cultural status.

The troubadours made vernacular poetry a true competitor of Latin, then the official language of the church and the medium of cultural knowledge. They created an art for discussing feudal service and status as matters for verbal and artistic negotiation. This poetic language articulated the desire for a precious good bestowed by an unnamed highborn lady. Through subtle combinations of meter, melody, and verbal play, troubadour lyric maintained the ambivalence, frustration, and worthiness of desire as a poetic discipline of self-improvement. In sum, the troubadours invented a poetry that celebrated illicit love, a desiring subject in a world where spiritualized love took priority over earthly, bodily pleasures, marriage was primarily an economic transaction, and courtly love a threat to familial alliances essential to the functioning of feudal society. Although the world in which this

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poetry was born would change, this language of illicit love serves as a touchstone of the European tradition of love poetry and beyond. While we can trace genealogies of influence in the Romance vernacular literary traditions, the manner in which the troubadours voice desire as a subtle art of joining words and melody resonates with other premodern traditions of lyric in which a cultural environment (often a courtly community in which service to a higher Good or person is valued, and where physical erotic love must be channeled to a ritual aesthetic form given social or religious constraints) fostered poetic competition and inventive virtuosity.

The Genesis of a Global Poetics: The Case of William IX

Troubadours are most known for composing love songs (*cansos*) in an elevated (as opposed to a popular) register, but they also composed political and moral poetry, such as *sirventes*. The first attested troubadour, William IX Count of Poitiers and Duke of Aquitaine (1071–1127), composed *cansos* as well as burlesque songs. In his works we can see what his possible influences were, but also the extent to which his compositions were new and deliberate provocations within the courtly, feudal, and religious milieu of his times. As Duke of Aquitaine, William would have been exposed to sophisticated liturgical verses in Latin and Occitan coming out of the vibrant monastic culture of Saint Martial, as well as to other forms of poetry in Latin that took up religious and secular themes of an Ovidian nature. We know that narrative epic poetry about Christian holy war against pagans, such as legends about Charlemagne and his vassals that would eventually form the *Chanson de Roland*, would have circulated orally. Finally, we know that he had contact with Muslim courts and was exposed to courtly Arabic poetry in northern Iberia: when William fought in the second crusade he was given a vase by Imad al-dawla abd al-malik ibn Hud, the last Muslim king of Saragossa (1110–1130), who after relinquishing his capital to the North African Almoravids remained in power for 20 more years by allying with the Christian Aragonese under Alfonso I. Although there is no direct quotation of Arabic and the courtly themes of William's verses are different in a Christian context, musically and metrically there are strong resonances between Arabic court poetry and William's Occitan lyric.

William would have been informed by these cultural and literary influences, but as an important feudal lord he was in constant tension with the church officials who criticized him for his urbane lifestyle of loose morals, especially after the Gregorian reform when the church sought to have greater control in the life of the laity. This refined courtly culture, which celebrated pleasure and love, was in tension with a clerical culture that increasingly preached asceticism and crusade that required moral reform. Other aspects of Occitania certainly exerted an influence on William's poetry: within the network of small autonomous courts of local lords, William was in competition with his lower vassals. From extant letters, it is clear that William cultivated a reputation as a *provocateur* whose poetry about love and sexual conquest asserts his power over local vassals and boasts of his independence from religious authorities. It is noteworthy that the 11 surviving lyrics of the first attested troubadour already exhibit a mastery of the forms and genres of troubadour lyric.

In one song, William boasts that he can create a song about “nothing”:

I'll do a song about nothing at all;
 It won't be about me nor about others,
 It won't be about love nor about happiness (or youthfulness)
 Nor about anything else,
 For it was composed earlier while (I was) sleeping
 On a horse.

(Bond 1982, 14–15)

How is this seemingly simple song in form and content a provocation? In this boasting song (*gap*), William explicitly rejects that a song should have a spiritual or moral meaning, or any subject matter at all. He also rejects that he should be a proper knight to advance Christian warfare: mocking the idea of chivalry, he composes this song “while he was sleeping on a horse,” and indeed it has a simple rhythm and meter as if on a horse. By evading the idea that a song should have a lofty or any subject at all, he asserts his power to create his own poetic identity against the idea of a fixed feudal identity. He deflates chivalric and religious values at a time when the church wanted a greater hold on secular affairs and was using the rhetoric of chivalric holy war to do so. William was one of the leaders of a failed expedition of 1101 of the successful first crusade begun in 1095 that resulted in the establishment of Latin principalities in the Latin East of the twelfth century. Upon his return to Poitiers, according to the chronicler Orderic Vitalis, he began writing his boasting and love songs. In his poetic production then we can see his response to his experience as a crusader and to the idea of being a proper holy warrior at a time when the church attributed crusading failures to sinful life and advocated the need for moral reform.

The song also does not embrace simple pleasures of springtime and youthful love as is the case in early Latin secular poetry (commonly known as Goliard poetry). By foregrounding the concepts of “amor” and “joven” (love and youthful spirit) shaped by his *vers*, William emphasizes the power that lyric poetry has to shape the lyrical “I” and courtly concepts through which this audience negotiates relations of status and power. In William’s case as a crusader, he deflects judgment of his actions abroad and at home through the creation of his own poetic world, one in which he measures his worth and status by his own linguistic play of material and erotic acquisitions of castles, ladies, and women.

The case of William IX indicates that at the dawn of this poetry, a convergence of influences produced something quite new. These early verses translate the aristocratic concern with status and identity, through seemingly simple boasts, into a launch point for cultural questioning. His lyrics represent a transformation in society and mentality, of ethical and aesthetic values, a change in attitude toward life and its pleasures. Instead of songs about God, the emperor, or the battlefield, songs were oriented toward the god of love and an earthly lady.

Further, William addresses his companions (*companho*) in his songs, making us aware of the intimacy of performance and song culture in which the lyric thrived. Despite its dependence on local idioms, a specific courtly culture of performance, and its relation to the dominant Latin and religious culture, troubadour lyric can be understood as world literature in that not only did it break with literary and moral conventions of its time but

also its poetics responded to the prosody and conventions present in various contiguous cultures (Christian, Latin, European, epic, martial, Arabic).

Fin'amor

The troubadours contributed refined or courtly love (*fin'amor*) to world poetry. Leaving aside whether or not these songs were dedicated to an actual unnamed high-born lady, or if they referred to physical contact, the troubadour invented a certain way of talking about desire that borrowed its linguistic structures from the rituals of etiquette and service operative in feudal society. Desiring constitutes a discipline: the troubadour devotes himself to a love object in order improve himself. This is the essential idea behind courtliness (*cortesia*): finding a song (*trobar*) or fitting words and melody perfectly is a performance of civilizing oneself through the difficult pursuit of the lady, in which the pursuit becomes the very being of the lyric subject – passion as an end in itself.

While William could assert a poetic identity in a fixed world of meaning and values through his verses, a troubadour such as Bernart de Ventadorn (fl. 1150–1180) converts service to an inaccessible lady into a song of self-empowerment:

Of course it's no wonder I sing
Better than any other troubadour;
my heart draws me toward love,
and I am better made for his command.
Heart body knowledge sense
Strength and energy—I have set all on love.
The rein draws me straight toward love,
And I cannot turn toward anything else.

(Goldin 1983, 126–127)

The ethic of being a troubadour or “chantador” appears in this strophe. First, one sees that the troubadour finds himself in a competitive performance environment in which he is judged on linguistic prowess. His complete dedication to his heart makes him the best troubadour, and the paratactical equivalence of “heart, body, knowledge, and sense” emphasizes that *trobar* emerges from a cross-sensory phenomenon of love. There is frequently a play between the homophones “cor” (heart) and “cors” (body) – here they are weighted horizontally. That is to say, the mind does not rule the heart, but rather embodied *trobar* implicates erotic love as a form of knowledge (*saber*). In this sense, troubadour lyric advances the wisdom of secular erotic love poetry that depends on the performance of song. The troubadours created a poetry in which they negotiated their status through the aesthetic and ethical codes of *fin'amor*.

Faraway Love as Global Poetics: A Language of Triangulation and Distance

The lyric of the troubadours replaced the epic duality of vassal and lord with courtly triangulation – the tension between the lover, the loved, and the enemies of lovers. Indeed, the

audience might also exert pressure on this dynamic – as these poems were meant to circulate and provoke imitation. The *canço* constitutes a performance of a public secret in which the unnamed, inaccessible lady becomes the lord: the *Domna* or Lady-Master replacing the *Dominus* or Lord-Master. As Lord, she can grant or deny her love, but the troubadour lover must freely submit to her. The lady becomes a pretext for transgression – in its celebration of an illicit sensual love – and for the quest for self-perfection: through her – in her rejection, in her position as sympathetic or malevolent – he creates an artistic “something” that proves his worthiness to this lady. *Trobar* is an exercise in the discipline of desire by staging the quest for an impossible love: the more one loves, the more one sings of oneself.

The dynamic of courtly triangulation is essential to understanding the embodiment of jealousy, suffering, joy, and longing in the lyrical form of the *canço*. Jaufrè Rudel (fl. mid-twelfth century) is famous for singing about faraway love (*amor de lonh*) for the Countess of Tripoli: “He speaks the truth who says I crave / and go desiring this love far away / for no other joy pleases me more / than the rich enjoyment of this love far away” (Goldin 1983, 107). He desires an inaccessible faraway love blocked not only through physical separation but also through the “godfather” (*pairis*): here it is a parental relation of authority, but in other songs the enemy of lovers can be an uncle or other slanderers (*lauzengiers*) who want to reveal the illicit love. The biography (*vida*) of Jaufrè Rudel was inspired by *amor de lonh* and his love for the Countess of Tripoli related in his song. It explains how out of a desire to see the countess, he took the cross and put out to sea. Though ill, he recovered enough to die in her arms.

The poetics of *fin’amor* – thwarted pursuit of the lady, the conversion of frustration into the pleasure of *amor de lonh* – becomes a node for an image of desire that traverses distant places (France and overseas, or *Outremer*), imagined and real. The fact that this image of Jaufrè dying in the arms of the countess has had quite an afterlife, appearing in the work of Petrarch, Heine, Browning, and others, and visually commemorated by the miniature in the songbook (*chansonnièr*) that transmits the *vida*, demonstrates how the language of desire could be adapted to different situations of physical and psychological separation. Just as troubadours send their songs to real places and people (by their code names or *senbals*) in the *tornadas*, just so evocations of courtly separation adapt the physical separation of crusade. Jaufrè carries *fin’amor* with him as he goes to the kingdom of the Saracens. This courtly language of triangulated desire accommodates religious ideals and symbolic spaces (*Outremer* and the Holy Land) all while maintaining the worthiness of poetic self-celebration as artistic creation and earthly desire. This collapsing of real and imagined topography through *amor de lonh* reflects the vibrancy of troubadour poetry during a short period and its afterlife.

Song as Insult: The Language of Desire as Instrument for Moral Criticism

However, not every troubadour poet accepted the passive position of either the lyrical subject as sufferer or *amor de lonh*. Troubadour poetry could be internally directed toward moral use of language and a critique of lust. As an early troubadour, Marcabru’s (c. 1130–1149) satirical and moral poems represent the depth and complexity of troubadour poetics. He

introduces an entirely new poetic language of criticism into the vernacular – an obsession with appearance as *semblansa* – in which he shows how without reflection, language can engender immoral action. For him, moral depravity nurtured by uncritical poetic language (lust posing as courtly love, *amars* as *fin'amor*) must be corrected by a different kind of sexual and vulgar language in order to reveal its depravity. He fights obscenity with obscenity, noise with noise.

Marcabru uses poetic language as a weapon against hypocrites and those who pretend to serve *fin'amor* but actually practice *fals'amor* or carnal, base love. He introduces neologisms and hermetic language in order to reveal the falsity and harmful nature of degenerate immoral language (“I’m not just making noise,” *e no·n fauc brug*; Gaunt, Harvey, and Patterson 2000, 212). In his emphasis on polysemy, he stresses how a true concept of love, ultimately a love devoted to spiritual matters, inquires into the relation between word and thing, the “meaning” (*significanza*) of Love for instance (ibid., 466). In Marcabru’s moralistic worldview, this relation between word and thing is one ultimately determined by God, the only true creator, and the troubadour takes on the task of revealing how the language of courtly love degrades this pure relation and causes social havoc. Linking poetic artistry and wisdom, Marcabru stresses that understanding his song depends upon knowing how polysemy functions in the discourse of courtly love, and “following how his theme unfolds” (*si com la razos despleia*; ibid., 466–467). Troubadours of bad morals play with truth through *trobar*, leading not to an improved self, as in Bernart’s example, but a situation in which it is difficult to discern false love from true. Marcabru presents his difficult rhymes as a different kind of exercise for the wise man: if you can understand my words you will avoid falling into the trap of siding with lust.

For this moralist, the relation between word and thing has far-reaching consequences for both the troubadour and society at large. First, he criticizes lyrical pomposity: the “thing” – Lust – can be beautified by the word, *Amars* as *fin'amor*. His obsession with cuckoldry and the mixed genealogies of bastard children born from the intermixing of social classes challenges other troubadours to consider how lustful language disguised as *fin'amor* can insinuate itself into society. He creates neologisms to demonstrate the corruption of language as a model for cuckoldry: “cornutz s’acornuda” (the horned man sets horns on his head; ibid., 90–91), the adulterer cuckolds and is also cuckolded. Second, he criticizes vulgarity; the pure unnamed “thing” – alternately Truth, Love – is vilified by the word. Marcabru creates a different kind of “noise” to combat and reveal the depravity of the “noise” of pseudo-lovers (*brug*; ibid., 212). These two critiques speak to the culture’s concern with family genealogies and the idea that a sexual act can affect the entire genealogical line. By translating this local and historical concern into a motive for redefining courtly language, Marcabru indicates how global concerns about the capacities of poetic language were born out of this specific feudal environment.

Lyrical Models for World Poetry: Dispossession, Self-Exile, and Poetic Craftsmanship

Maintaining a dynamic state of desire – of wanting and not wanting – through the creation of song entails the creation and transmission of a lyrical object to “someone out there” using

the secret code name of that person (*senbal*) located in a named place. These deictics of the ending strophe of the *canço* called the *tornada* remind us that troubadour lyrics are really traces of a performance situation among an initiated audience (like William's address to his "companho"). Moreover, it is worth thinking about how the *tornada* signifies that the troubadour sends out his song as a gesture of willful self-exile, expanding the world of his song even as he renounces singing, such as the *tornada* of Bernart's famous lark song, "When I see the lark moving":

Tristan, you will have nothing from me,
for I go away, a broken man, I know not where,
I shall withdraw from singing, I renounce it,
far from joy and love, I hide myself away.
(Goldin 1983, 148–149)

The paradox of both withdrawing from singing and sending out his song encapsulates the open-ended state of the *tornada*, even as it signifies closure through its repetition of the final rhymes. The *senbal* "Tristan" signifies his state of narcissistic withdrawal, his act of renouncement even as, again paradoxically, he reaches out to another. While Jaufré adapts self-exile into an affirmation for crusade and going *Outremer*, continuing his faraway love even as he is over there, here Bernart's *tornada* stages a conversion. He converts his dispossession into an ensuing epistemological mastery of all women: the singular lady (*domna*) becomes the rejection of all women (*femna*, l. 33–34). The creation of a poetic object, a "re" or thing (l. 15), resolves the ambivalence between the lady as benefactor or persecutor, as the production of song replaces the absence left from frustration, separation, longing, and dispossession.

This move of self-exile through the continuing song is different from later poetics of the sonnet or other fixed forms: it makes visible in a compact way how the troubadour's willful self-exile allows him to shape his world spatially and psychologically through the movement and repetition of a *canço*, its vacillation between here and there, its simultaneous openness and closure in a figure such as the *tornada*. The *tornada* signals not only a poetic mastery through the creation of song but also the performative continuation of song: Bernart sends out his song to the world, to "that person out there," who will commemorate this psychological movement of desire by performing it, or making a better song.

While Bernart shows us that through the art of *trobar* and discipline of desire, one can shape the terms of dispossession in a manner that results in artistic creation, the troubadour Arnaut Daniel (fl. 1180–1195) shows us another kind of poetic mastery: he shapes his lyrical world as a master craftsman:

To this sweet and pretty air
I set words that I plane and finish;
And every word will fit well,
Once I have passed the file there,
For at once Love polishes and aureates
My song, which proceeds from her,
Ruler and guardian of merit.
(1960, 271)

Admired by Dante and Petrarch, Arnaut was known for his elaborate rhyme structures and the use of rare words for their sound effects. He calls his lyrical object a little air or “sonet,” and by “fitting and passing the file” it will become a song (“chantar” – the verb as noun means the making of song as object) that incarnates Love in word and sound. For Arnaut, the world is a poetic material – morphemes, fricatives – that he shapes according to *fin’amor*: “my song, which proceeds from her.” However, he goes farther than Bernart in the creation of his “re” from dispossession. As Bernart sings “she left me nothing / but desire and a heart still wanting” (*no·m laisset re / mas dezirer e cor volon*; 1962, l. 15–16), Arnaut foregrounds poetic craftsmanship in the making of the thing.

Transcultural and Transhistorical Lyrical Itineraries

Troubadour poetry travels across time and space most resonantly not only when it explores lyric subjectivity, the global reach of desire, the moral probity of both writing and love, and poetic craft, but also when it engenders formal experimentation.

Literary Histories and Diffusion of Verse Forms: Sestina and Alba

The most complicated of verse forms initiated by the troubadours, the *sestina*, is usually attributed to Arnaut Daniel. The *sestina* is composed of six stanzas of six lines each, followed by a *tornada* of three lines, all of which are unrhymed. The same six end words occur in each stanza, but in a shifting order that follows a fixed pattern: the stanzas take their pattern from a reversed pairing of the preceding stanza (i.e. stanza 1: 123456; stanza 2: 615243). Ezra Pound reintroduced the *sestina* in his twentieth-century poems inspired by the troubadours (e.g. “Sestina: Altaforte”). Pound sought to reinvigorate English poetry through troubadour lyric and paved the way for the cultivation of the form by later poets (W.H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashbery).

Other forms first attributed to the troubadours are present in the vernaculars, even if their origins and diffusion remain less clear. For instance the *alba*, the dawn song about adulterous love in which the lovers part at dawn, is first attributed to the troubadour Giraut de Bornelh (fl. 1165–1211; “Glorious King,” *Reis Glorios*). The *alba* contains a dialogue between parting lovers (or sometimes mostly a monologue, as in the case of “Reis”), and often a third voice, the watchman who announces the dawn. “Glorious King” bears a melodic resemblance to earlier Latin and Occitan religious dawn songs, and certainly there is some kind of influence from the long tradition of Latin religious dawn hymns such as those by Prudentius (c. 348–405). The Occitan *alba* probably also developed in conjunction with the Mozarabic tradition of *zajals* and *kharjas*, songs about the parting of lovers that incorporate the word “alba,” and likewise with the popular pan-Romance lyric tradition that includes the Old French *chanson de femme* and the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas d’amigo*, songs in a female voice about separation containing natural elements that signal the arrival of dawn (light, bird song). As scholars such as Jonathan Saville (1972) have shown, the adulterous situation of the third person (the husband, the watchman who warns of the illicit and urgent situation) seems to have been an important development in the genre, and the troubadours captured in lyric the temporal and spatial tension of illicit

love in an enclosed space and between two symbolic worlds of night and day. The *alba* was cultivated in the English tradition into the twentieth century (Chaucer, Shakespeare, John Donne, Robert Browning, Pound, Auden, Philip Larkin, and Robert Creeley). The tradition of the *alba* shows just how decisive the poetic composition of the troubadours has been in a lyric genre that certainly reflects a primordial situation present in various vernaculars and through the ages (see the multilingual and transhistorical anthology of *albas* by Hatto [1965], *Eos*); they transformed the particulars of the dawn situation into a lyric genre that embodies a tension of impossible love joined in universal themes of time and space.

Whereas the imitation of the *sestina* is traceable by virtue of its demanding formal structure, the *alba* presents a case of a rhythmic literary tradition. Its accidental emergence across the ages and in different languages shows that a conscious knowledge of the Occitan version was not necessary. As the troubadour version has proven to be so decisive, it illuminates the fundamental nature of the *alba* that appears in other traditions and languages after the Middle Ages. While some modern adaptations of the *alba* are influenced by the troubadours (e.g. Pound's versions of the *alba*), other versions by poets such as Creeley and Auden do not imitate the Occitan model directly or explicitly. The troubadour *alba* crystallized a certain situation most likely because of the feudal and religious context of Occitania. Other historical periods translate the lyrical tension in other ways – echoing rather than imitating the tension otherwise for a different cultural context and worldview. While articulated differently and newly in each iteration in the new contexts, the troubadour situation of the *alba* offers a model for viewing anachronistic medievalisms of poetic form. Seen comparatively, the *alba* and *sestina* offer two cases for thinking about troubadour poetry as world poetry in terms of cultural history and the place of the “troubadour phenomenon” as, on the one hand, conscious craft or invention, or on the other, as a poetic assemblage of various historical, cultural, and social debts crystallized in a lyrical form, one that emerges and survives through time.

A Cosmopolitan and Local Culture of Poetry

As an international courtly language, troubadour poetry treated feudal politics and the domestic and overseas crusades – the various military campaigns of the church to liberate lands in the east and west from Islamic rule or prevailing heresies – in which patrons and troubadours themselves participated. The topics, people, and places covered by their verses show the extent to which the troubadour world was an interconnected network ranging from the Iberian Peninsula south of the Pyrenees to the Latin East. The troubadours created new verse forms and genres to accommodate these encounters that would resonate for modern poets.

Warfare and Crusade Poetry: Marcabru and Bertran de Born

Marcabru and Bertran de Born (b. c. 1140) adapt the courtly themes and conventions of troubadour poetry for martial action. Marcabru's two crusading songs, “Peace in the name of the Lord” (*Pax in nomine domini*) and “By the fountain” (*A la fontana*), demonstrate the flexibility of courtly motifs and his distinct cultivation of a moral authority. In “By the fountain,” a courtly lover approaches a girl only to be rejected as she laments the departure

of her lover who went overseas on crusade with King Louis VII. Marcabru here extends his critique of false lovers to the knights who stay behind rather than go off to holy war. Despite her grief, the girl's rejection of the knight's courtship demonstrates her rejection of earthly chivalry for celestial chivalry. In "Peace in the name of the Lord," Marcabru elaborates on the "washing place" (*lavador*) that symbolizes the spiritual cleansing that crusade offers, and/or the actual Holy Land and the domain of the Moors in Spain and the crusades taking place there. The manner in which this crusade song cultivates polysemy through the image of the *lavador* provides an example of the power of vernacular lyric to exhort holy warfare.

On the other hand, Bertran de Born celebrates medieval warfare as *fin'amor*, strikingly adapting topoi such as the *Natureingang* or springtime opening:

I love the joyful time of Easter,
that makes the leaves and flowers come forth,
and it pleases me to hear the mirth
of the birds, who make their song
resound through the woods,
and it pleases me to see upon the meadows
tents and pavilions planted,
and I feel a great joy
when I see ranged along the field
knights and horses armed for war.
(Paden, Sankovitch, and Stäblein 1986, 338–339)

Bertran transforms springtime from a time for nature and love into a time for battle. Warfare, he sings, creates an occasion for rebirth and for proving one's worth through deeds and plunder. Most important, the *Natureingang* and his explicit pleasure indicated in the repetition of "it pleases me" in seeing violent scenes of besieged castles, vassals striking each other, and lords fearlessly rushing into battle indicate his view of war as an erotic undertaking. Rather than for Christian redemption, as with Marcabru's crusade songs, one wages war not toward an end but as an end in itself. Dante memorably places Bertran in hell for his divisive poetry: in the *Commedia* the pilgrim and Vergil come upon him holding his head as a lantern, just as his *vida* describes how he divided King Henry II from his son Richard Lionheart. His celebration of the violence of ritualized warfare has inspired poets and has an important place in the history of war poetry.

Cultural Encounters : New Genres of Networks

Just as Bertran and Marcabru adapt troubadour themes and conventions to give us two different views of warfare, so other troubadours invent new genres and modes to map spaces of conquest, crusade, and political alliances according to their situations of courtly status. In one strophe of "I can put together and interlace" (*Ajostar et lassar*; Daniel 1960, 37), Peire Vidal (fl. 1180–1205) mentions three cities in Palestine where he has been exiled from his lady ("Le Daron, Le Toron, and Ibelin"; l. 261) and how he would like to return to "a little field" (*un pauc cambo*; l. 82) between Arles and Toulon. Here homeland serves as a metonymy for the desired lady, his "dear Friend" (*Amic*), in a real place. Peire spatializes partisan politics and his personal sympathies through his references to the many places and

patrons encountered in his travels (indicated variously through *senhals* or by actual names such as the King of Aragon). His songs seamlessly combine the conventions of the *canso* and *sirventes* (moral or political song), geographic coordinates, and historical figures within the discourse of courtly love.

Another well-traveled troubadour, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (fl. 1180–1205), invents new genres that articulate the political alliances and dynamics among courts of southern France and northern Italy and their neighboring cities. Raimbaut went on crusade with his friend and patron the Marquis Boniface of Montferrat I, a leader of the Fourth Crusade of 1202. When Raimbaut was not present at the Italian courts of Montferrat, Malaspina, Este, and Savoy, or in Thessalonika, he participated in events such as the siege of Constantinople in 1204 with Boniface. He is well known for his celebrated multilingual *descort* and having invented new hybrid genres such as the “Epic Letter” – a narrative poem in monorhymed decasyllabic *laissez* that is by turns chronicle, amorous letter in verse, and epic (see Linksill 1964). He also invented the “procession of ladies” genre that would be cultivated by poets after him. A mock-epic and collective panegyric that depicts an armed conflict between aristocratic ladies, this genre uses ladies’ names as metonymies for Italian city-states and courts in a manner that records the political tensions of the region.

Cultural Critique: The Female Voice

The corpus of the women troubadours (*trobairitz*) reorients the homogeneous discourse of the troubadours by providing another view of the relation between history, identity, and *trobar* as an art practice. The corpus numbers 36 (depending on the edition) but it is significant that the 21 attested *trobairitz* were fully integrated into the contemporary culture and not distinguished as a separate group in some *chansonniers* until the thirteenth century. The genre of dialogue or debate poetry (*tenso*) forms an integral part of troubadour verse and a large proportion of the *trobairitz* corpus, and represents how the female voice participated in the performative song environment of the seignorial courts, fully debating topics and utilizing conventions from their perspective. *Vidas* and the lyric texts attest to the debates between troubadours and *trobairitz*, and, most important, describe how *trobairitz* composed songs with the same qualities and attributes of knowledge and courtliness. Although the historical reality of women’s reduced social status and power in the Middle Ages (and this power dynamic inverted in the importance given to the lady in troubadour verse) still obtains, scholars have attributed the rise of women poets to the unique situation of southern France: the tolerant nature of its culture, the preference for peacetime pursuits, and especially codes of law that allowed women a more privileged status and the inheritance of property. As if in explicit response to the solipsism of the *canso* in which the troubadour uses the lady as a pretext to speak of himself, in “It will be mine to sing” (*A chantar m’er de so*; Bruckner, Shepard, and White 2000) the Comtessa de Dia (fl. c. 1160) describes herself and changes her ranked list qualities (e.g. beauty, status, courtliness) in the course of song to foreground her agency as a singer and lover. Rather than singing of an inaccessible *amor de lonh* and impossible love that creates an occasion for self-improvement, she speaks of a love in the past tense, and arguing that the separation was not her fault, she addresses her love and calls for its continuation through debate. She calls for the physical and verbal sharing (*partimens*) in which this love consists. As with the other *trobairitz*, her songs remind us how

the performative and social milieu of Occitan courts shaped an art concerned about power relations between the sexes. Despite being a formal game of conventions for an initiated audience, the art still enabled the female voice and perspective.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can think about troubadour lyric as a global poetic phenomenon in two ways. First, it was a vehicle for creating distinct poetic identities within a preconceived world of aesthetic conventions and social constraints. These localized conditions engendered a lyric form in which finding something new as an art form (*trobar* means to find) embodied a poetic craft that would shape poetry ever after. Second, the nature of troubadour lyrical subjectivity – its reflection upon the artifice of language and attentiveness to how lyric shapes social and gender relations through a coded discourse of love – resonates with other traditions of lyric across time and space. This occurs through the adaptation of its verse forms by modern poets or in different genres, or through the dynamic and performative nature of desire translated into aesthetic form. The troubadour phenomenon in effect established a poetics that could sustain the phenomenological ambivalence of wanting and not wanting, of criticizing a society to which one subscribes, before a more coherent epistemology of “world” emerged. That is to say, the troubadour phenomenon constitutes a global poetics that creates and invents anew within a given world, a situation in which we can find correlates and analogues in world literature.

SEE ALSO: Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; Sappho(s); Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and World Literature; The Global Pilgrimage of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*; Love and Reason in the Ghazal; Ibn al-‘Arabi, the Greatest Master; Jalal al-Din Rumi’s Poetic Presence and Past; War and the Worlding of Story; Introduction to World Literature 1451 to 1770; William Shakespeare

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