

THE TROUBADOURS

An Introduction

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CHAPTER 1

Courtly culture in medieval Occitania

Ruth Harvey

Shortly before Christmas 1182, the Limousin troubadour Bertran de Born spent time at the court at Argentan in Normandy and this is what he says about it:

Ja mais non er cortz complia
on hom non gab ni non ria:
cortz ses dos
non es mas parcs de baros.
Et agra·m mort ses faillia
l'enois e la vilania
d'Argentos,
ma·l gentils cors amoros
e la doussa cara pia
e la bona compaignia
e·l respos
de la Saisa·m defendia. (III, 49–60)

(A court where no one laughs or jokes is never complete; a court without gifts is just a paddock-full of barons. And the boredom and vulgarity of Argentan nearly killed me, but the lovable, noble person, the sweet, kind face, the good companionship and conversation of the Saxon lady protected me.)

These lines raise a number of questions, many of which have wider implications for an appreciation of medieval courtly culture. What was a court and who would have been there? What was the significance of the women often celebrated in troubadour songs? Who were the troubadours and what was their place in court society? Although we can only reconstruct the immediate conditions of troubadour performance as hypotheses, this chapter will outline some of the factors which shaped the social context of the lyric.

The presence of an Occitan poet at a court in Normandy was rather unusual: generally speaking, troubadour activity was

focused on a region further south.¹ Troubadours received a welcome in the courts of Northern Italy from the second half of the twelfth century, while in Occitania the centres of culture and power frequented by these poets generally looked towards the South, across the Pyrenees. Those of Spain, especially Aragon and Catalonia, while ever preoccupied by the reconquest of lands from the Moors, looked north. Ever since the Provençal heiress Douce married Count Ramon Berenguer III of Barcelona in 1112, the Catalan house had claimed the county of Provence and it was ruled by Aragonese-Catalan princes until the mid-thirteenth century. But these claims did not go unchallenged: Toulouse in particular repeatedly asserted its rights to Provence, both through alliances and by military action.² The lesser lords of the Midi were inevitably caught up in this protracted struggle for domination over the lands from the Ebro to the Garonne and beyond the Rhône.³ Into this network of ambitions, alliances and conflicts were also drawn the kings of England. When Eleanor of Aquitaine was divorced from Louis VII of France in March 1152 and in May remarried Henry Plantagenet, Count of Anjou and heir to the Anglo-Norman realm, she took with her her vast inheritance of Poitou and Aquitaine: Henry II ruled over lands from Hadrian's Wall to the foothills of the Pyrenees, including the Limousin and Périgord, where Bertran de Born's castle of Autafort was situated and where much of the internecine strife among the Plantagenets was fought out.⁴ In consequence, the homeland of troubadour poetry was hardly a peaceful place.

Occitan lords were prominent in the early crusading effort, both in the Spanish *reconquista* and in Syria, and some settled there,⁵ so that many noble families of Occitania had relatives in the Christian states of the Middle East or in Spain. Probably the most famous love-song, Jaufré Rudel's celebration of *amor de lonh*, was inspired by a journey to the Holy Land, and other troubadour songs exhorted knights to take the cross.⁶ Peirol and Gaucelm Faidit are thought to have gone on crusade themselves, and Raimbaut de Vaqueiras accompanied his patron, Boniface of Montferat, on the ill-fated Fourth Crusade. Paris, on the other hand, was relatively peripheral for many, at least until the Albigensian Crusade brought Frenchmen into Occitania in large numbers. This protracted and violent incursion did not, however, sound the death-knell for the troubadours' art, as has often been claimed,

for there are at least as many poets attested in the century which followed the crusade as from the 120 years which preceded it. They produced more *sirventes* and fewer and less interesting *cansos*, and as the decades passed their creative talent diversified into new genres and avenues of expression.⁷ In its heyday, the courtly culture to which the troubadours belonged was European rather than restricted to the South of France and, in their later influence, the troubadours stimulated the production of lyric poetry in courts far beyond Occitania.

Occitania itself was a large, uncentralised and diverse region. It included increasingly wealthy, urban centres such as Toulouse, Avignon, and Montpellier, which developed their own municipal government,⁸ as well as small, isolated communities in inaccessible, mountainous areas such as the Carcassès, where 'the mountains were savage and the gorges terrifying', and even local men could get lost and fail to find the castle they sought.⁹

That such diverse conditions gave rise to a variety of traditions, customs and socio-political institutions is not surprising, and it is in this light that the vexed question of 'feudalism' in the Midi should be considered. Only a few, marginal areas in Occitania displayed seigneurial structures analogous to the Northern French feudal model, whereby vassals 'held land from' a lord in return for the obligations of military service and counsel and homage, involving the subordination of vassal to overlord and close vassalic ties of personal dependency. Rather, the norm among the aristocracy seems for a long time to have been *convenientiae*, egalitarian contracts between individuals in which each party promised fidelity and non-aggression, respect for the life, limb and rights of the other. The precise location of the grant or castle was specified and the vassal undertook a limited number of obligations in respect of it. To hold lands as a *fidelis*, then, meant not a general loyalty of vassal to overlord, but a specific and limited loyalty in respect of a particular castle,¹⁰ and resulted in much looser vassalic ties with little suggestion of liege-homage, submission to and dependency on one lord alone. During the twelfth century, tighter controls and conditions began to be imposed when a lord was in a position of strength, and most dramatically after the Northern French crusaders crushed the Toulousain lords. Overall, historians have noted the diverse nature of seigneurial institutions across Occitania.¹¹

To this can be added other practices regarding inheritance and *co-seigneurie* which also set Occitania apart from Northern France. Rather than passing to the first-born, Occitan patrimonies were frequently shared between all children, leading to a splintering of properties, fragmentation of resources and progressive impoverishment of families.¹² Bertran de Born, probably a *co-seigneur* himself, sang of the misery of conflict between co-owners, and Raimon de Miraval had only a fourth share in his castle.¹³ Arrangements featuring male primogeniture were appearing during the twelfth century, but *co-seigneurie* still existed in areas such as the Carcassès on the eve of the Albigensian Crusade.¹⁴

Younger sons may not have been uniformly excluded from inheriting, but shrinking patrimonies and incomes meant that it was the court of a magnate which represented significant opportunities for advancement and enrichment. Such courts were the focus of secular power in an age of personal lordship and poor communications. Best defined rather loosely as an assembly centred on the person of the lord, a court was made up of the *familia* of his household, his companions, advisers, servants, officials, clerks, household knights and followers, including entertainers. All these *familiars* of a nobleman depended on his patronage for their promotion and remuneration. This could take various forms: food, clothing, money, riding-tackle, a mount, income from land or appointment to an office which in turn could bring rights, income and ‘perks’,¹⁵ and securing such rewards required personal contact and presence at court.

This term could evoke a place or a series of places, for courts could be itinerant, especially in the case of great princes, who were obliged to travel their lands to govern and administer their subjects effectively. Staying in their own residences or those of their vassals, or in the guest-houses of monasteries, they settled disputes, heard petitions and legal cases within their jurisdiction, issued grants and mandates, and negotiated with neighbouring *seigneurs* and vassals.¹⁶ For much of the time, his entourage went with him, so that the ‘court’ was wherever the lord was. In Raimon Vidal’s *Abrils issia*, an early thirteenth-century verse narrative whose narrator instructs a *joglar* in courtly values and *savoir-faire*, the *joglar* relates how, having travelled from Montferrand to Provence and then Toulouse, he went to Foix, ‘but at Foix I found no one, for the count had gone to Aubières’.¹⁷ Such lordly itineraries

may also explain the presence of Bertran de Born so far from home in Normandy: the troubadour was at that time engaged in a bitter dispute with his brother, Constantine, over the castle of Autafort, and it would have needed his ultimate lord, Henry II, to resolve the affair.¹⁸

The composition of the court would have varied according to location and occasion; it could include local vassals and clerics, tenants, visitors, and, in baronial residences, the members of the lord's family, ladies and their female companions, and other noble children (*noiritz*) whose upbringing had been entrusted to him.¹⁹ The court was also the setting for festive assemblies on religious feasts such as Whitsun and Christmas.²⁰ Great festivals marked special events like noble betrothals, weddings, coronations, peace treaties, and receptions for visiting diplomats or notables. These were occasions for ostentatious displays of fine living and prodigality, and as such were a great draw for ambitious young men and for entertainers of all kinds.²¹ Perhaps the most famous court festival held in Occitania was that which Geoffrey de Vigeois, with some fantasy and exaggeration, describes as staged at Beaucaire in 1174 by Henry II to mark the reconciliation of King Alfonso II of Aragon and Raymond of Toulouse, although neither king was actually present. At this court (allegedly comprising 10,000 knights), 100,000 sous were given away; the castle grounds were ploughed up and then sown with 30,000 sous' worth of coins; food was cooked with expensive wax and pitchpine torches; and Guilhem Mita was crowned King of all minstrels.²²

Princely celebrations on this lavish scale were rare, however. More usual were smaller gatherings in seigneurial residences,²³ where what the troubadours seem to have prized were a liberal welcome, good company and stimulating conversation (*solatz*) – precisely those qualities found lacking at Argentan. Raimon Vidal's *joglar* again describes the company of lively, cultivated people he found in the great hall of Dalfi d'Avernhe's court at Montferand:

E la nueg si fo, co yeu vi,
 mot tenebrosa apres manjar,
 e'l solatz gran, josta'l foc clar,
 de cavayers e de joglars
 adreitz e fis e dos e cars
 e suaus ad homes cortes;

e no y ac cridat ni pus mes
 de pegueza sol de primier.
 Aital solatz e pus entier
 aguem aqui pus que no·us dic. (*Abrils*, 158–67)

(The night was very dark after supper, and, beside the bright fire, great was the companionship of knights and *joglars* who were skilled and accomplished, gentle, worthy and amiable towards the courtly men; and there was no shouting or foolishness, except at the beginning. We enjoyed such pleasure there, more than I can say.)

This kind of intimacy represented the ideal conditions for a troubadour performance, but the reverse of the courtly coin is depicted by Arnaut de Tintinhac, in his condemnation of a ‘vile race’ of drunken, badly behaved guests:

ricx malvatz, de pretz apostitz,
 q’uns non a joi ni conortz mais
 qui l’autrui afar gabeja,
 la nueg que·l frons li torneja
 ab lo vi en l’autrui maizo.²⁴

(the wicked rich, false in worth, not one of whom has joy or pleasure unless he jeers about other people’s business when his head is spinning from the wine, at night, in someone else’s house.)

The matter of good behaviour in the households of the nobility, *cortesía*, was becoming an art form. A man needed tact, charm and discretion; he had to be elegantly dressed, cheerful, urbane, and skilled in managing the sensibilities of other members of the household, including his superiors. Body-language and language itself became vitally important: the careful use of eloquence characterised the courtier, along with an agreeable public mask.²⁵ But such self-control in company could also be construed as hypocritical dissembling to cover ambition, jealousy, manipulation, greed, and back-stabbing in what could be a very competitive environment: advancement, material comfort and security depended on the smile of his lordship and his recognition of one’s services.

Rewards given to one man could not, however, be given to another and there must often have been disappointed men at court. It is in this light that we may read Marcabru’s sharp criticisms of stewards who ran the household, managed supplies and controlled access to the lord:

Non sia lauzenia plata
cell qe la mainad' afama.²⁶

(The man who starves the whole household never ceases his smooth-tongued flattery.)

Similarly, Bernart Marti complained bitterly of richly dressed officials apparently connected with the administration of justice: they suspend the court-sitting, play one party off against the other in order to increase their own *honoraria* and pervert the course of justice, and all this through clever use of their 'forked tongues'.²⁷

In the rivalries of courtiers may lie one explanation of the figures of the *lauzengiers* so execrated by the troubadours as wicked, tale-bearing, slanderous spies.²⁸ In Raimbaut d'Aurenga's view, 'not one of them is pleasant to a good knight except in order to attain his own advantage better', and some of them have ideas above their station:

Tal cug'esser cortes entiers
qu'es vilans dels quatre ladriers,
et a'l cor dins mal ensenhat;
plus que feutres sembla sendat
ni cuers de bou escarlata
non sabon mais que n'an trobat –
e quecx quo's pos calafata. (XXXVII, 22–4 and 43–9)

(Such a man who is common on all four sides thinks he is completely courtly while inside his heart is churlish; no more than felt resembles silk or ox-hide good scarlet cloth do they know any more than they have invented, and each one fills in the gaps as best he can.)

The nature of the court changed over time and differed over the regions making up Occitania. The ducal court of eleventh-century Aquitaine was a far cry from the administrative bustle of Aix after 1245, where Bertran d'Alamanon complained:

I have to think about lawsuits and lawyers in order to draw up notarial acts; then I look out along the road to see if any courier is coming, for they arrive from all directions, dusty and saddle-sore . . . And then they tell me 'Get on your horse, you're required in court; you will be fined, and you won't be pardoned if the hearing can't go ahead because of you.'
(VI, 28–42)

The court of Provence had become much more bureaucratic, and more records survive to give an idea of its nature and employees.²⁹ Perhaps it was more stressful and regulated by administrative

concerns, but it is equally the case that, from the outset, the troubadours always situate the heyday of elegant, civilised, courtly life in the past and their laments about contemporary decadence should be read in the light of the *topos* of a vanished Golden Age. At the turn of the twelfth century, Giraut de Bornelh asks 'Where have all the minstrels gone, and the gracious welcome you saw them receive?' There are no minstrels now praising ladies; in place of gracious conversation, he hears now at court raucous shouts, and men are more likely to want to hear trivial stories than 'a fine song about high and splendid affairs and the passing times and the passing years' (LXXIV, 31–2 and 55–60).

The number and location of courts associated with troubadour poetry was, however, very small initially. In Guilhem de Peitieu's day, only Ventadorn, Poitiers and Narbonne are explicitly mentioned. The number increases dramatically by the 1170s to include the Auvergne, Catalonia, the lower Languedoc and numerous small courts of the Limousin. From the late twelfth century, Provence becomes important and, while the *seigneurs* of Béziers-Carcassonne were destroyed by the Albigensian Crusade, Aix, Marseille, Rodez, Catalonia and the North Italian courts of Lombardy and Piedmont continued to attract the poets.³⁰

Many of these centres of patronage were interconnected by marriage and through the troubadours who frequented them. Although a full picture of the associations has yet to be drawn, a few examples suffice to indicate the complexity of these networks. In his song for the Argentan court, Bertran de Born alludes to three beautiful women as 'las tres de Torena' (III, 18). These were the three daughters of Raimon II of Turenne, then all aged under twenty: Contors, who married Viscount Elias of Comborn; Helis, wife of Bernart de Casnac; and Maria, who married Eble V of Ventadorn, descendant of 'Eble the Singer'.³¹ Maria, celebrated by many poets, composed a *partimen* with Gui d'Ussel (IX), whose two brothers and cousin were also troubadours and patrons.³² Eble V is praised in a song by Elias de Barjols, who also has complimentary things to say about Raimon de Miraval, and Raimon frequented the courts of the Carcassès, whose seigneurial families were also characterised by a complex network of relationships by marriage.³³ Eble V's mother was Sybilla, daughter of Ralph de la Faye, who was the uncle of Eleanor of Aquitaine, and it is one of

Eleanor's daughters, Mathilda of Saxony, who made the Argentan court just bearable for Bertran de Born.

Who and what were the troubadours? According to our main sources of surviving information, the *vidas*, they were drawn from a wide variety of social backgrounds, ranging from great lords and kings (Guilhem de Peitieu, Alfonso II of Aragon), to the nobility (Guillem de Berguedà, Bertran de Born, Dalfi d'Alvernhe), poor knights (Raimon de Miraval, Guilhem Ademar), scions of the bourgeoisie (Peire Vidal, Elias Cairel), and a *borges* who became a bishop (Folquet de Marselha) to clerks, errant minstrels and those whose origins were so unremarkable that they were identified by the *vida*-writers only by their region of provenance and distinguished solely by the cultivation and talents they displayed. In the cases of Gaucelm Faidit, Giraut de Bornelh and Cercamon, for example, worth features more prominently than birth, yet they were welcomed by kings and counts.³⁴

Cercamon is addressed as 'Maestre' (*magister*) in one song, which indicates that he had received a clerical education, studying the arts of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric.³⁵ Other poets, 'savis de letras' or 'ben letratz', began as clerks, canons or students, but then abandoned this calling and travelled in the secular world as poets and singers.³⁶ Also referred to as *maestre*, Giraut de Bornelh declares at one point that he will go back to being a scholar ('torn al mestier dels letratz') and give up singing.³⁷ His biography says that in the summer he travelled from court to court, accompanied by two *cantadors* to sing his songs, while he spent the winter in a school, where he 'aprendia letras' (taught rhetoric and poetic composition). It is probable that many troubadours picked up their techniques by listening to and imitating their fellows, rather than by studying Latin in a formal ecclesiastical school.³⁸

That some troubadours depended for their livelihoods on what rewards they could earn for their art is likely, but the division between 'gentlemen and players', between aristocratic 'amateur' troubadours and lowly 'full-time, professional' *joglars* is not clear-cut. From the Latin *trobare*, 'to find, to invent', the term 'troubadour' had the fairly specialised sense of a man who composed lyric poetry. *Joglar*, however, covered a vast range of performers,³⁹ including acrobats and lewd contortionists disapproved of by the Church, animal-tamers, jugglers, musicians and performers of narratives. The Catalan lord Guerau de Cabrera produced a long

list of all the works which his ignorant *joglar*, Cabra ('Goat'), ought to know, but the inventory is so long and includes such diverse material (many epics and romances alongside lyrics) that it is hard to imagine that one person could seriously have been expected to master it all.⁴⁰ It is also noteworthy that *Cabra, juglar* includes only four named troubadours: the lyric seems to have been considered only as part of a much larger repertory of courtly entertainments, even if few of the other texts Guerau mentions have survived in Occitan.⁴¹ Raimon Vidal's *joglar* says that he began by learning songs by Dalfi d'Alvernhe, that is, by specialising in troubadour courtly lyrics.⁴² Others were performers entrusted by the troubadour with taking a song to a different court: often referred to by diminutive nick-names, they are given their instructions at the end of the song:⁴³

Huguet, mos cortes messatgers,
chantatz ma chanzo volonters
a la reina dels Normans. (Bernart de Ventadorn, X, 43–5)

(Little Hugh, my courtly messenger, sing my song eagerly to the Queen of the Normans.)

According to his *vida*, Pistoleta ('Little Letter') was a *joglar* for Arnaut de Marueilh before he became a troubadour, but other artists described as *joglars* were clearly poets in their own right and many did not lead peripatetic lives.⁴⁴ There is some evidence to suggest that such skilled, eloquent men would have served their patrons in other ways too. Marcabru and Cercamon may have exercised some administrative function in the household of William X of Aquitaine; Raimbaut de Vaqueiras became the close companion of Boniface of Montferrat, while Bertran d'Alamanon and Falquet de Romans were functionaries in the service of the count of Provence and both served as diplomatic emissaries.⁴⁵ The clear evidence for 'professional' court poets dates from the beginning of the thirteenth century and it is likely that, before then, a fair number of poets had other roles and 'day jobs' which enabled them to live.⁴⁶ *Joglar* then was a general term – sometimes pejorative – for all kinds of entertainer, and it may be that it was used of individual troubadours when, for one reason or another, they were envisaged primarily as performers.

Encouraged by the narratives in the *vidas* and *razos*, early

scholars understood the troubadours' songs rather as autobiographical records reflecting 'real' experiences, including love affairs with noble women whose identities were often discreetly veiled by a *senhal*.⁴⁷ This relatively uncomplicated view of cultural artefacts was definitively transcended in the early 1960s by Köhler's sociological reading of the lyrics as stemming from the marginal position of poor, landless knights of a particular rank, the lesser nobility, at the courts of great magnates. Through their spokesmen, the troubadours, this group of *iuvenes* sought to integrate themselves into court culture by constructing a system of ethical values (*cortesía*, based on *fin'amor*, and *largueza*) which purported to be common to all the nobility.⁴⁸ Poetic courting of the lord's wife in the *canço* would then have functioned as an elegantly camouflaged expression of the desire of these men 'for economic and social parity with other members of the nobility'.⁴⁹

Kasten's 1986 study revises Köhler's arguments, but she nevertheless also sees such expressions of *fin'amor* (or, as she terms it, *Frauentienst*) as informed by the sociopolitical and economic conditions of Occitania, although she accords greater importance to the position of women. Since noblewomen like Eleanor of Aquitaine and Ermengarde of Narbonne supposedly often exercised considerable political power, they would have had an interest in encouraging the troubadours' panegyrics as a means of enhancing their prestige, while the songs' amorous intrigues remained a harmless, transparent fiction for its audience. Professional troubadours would have exploited this fashionable game as a means of earning a living.⁵⁰

Subsequent work has considerably modified a number of the bases of the German scholars' readings, notably as regards vassalic ties and feudal relations in Occitania which, as we have seen, emerge as more diverse and difficult to pin down than had been assumed.⁵¹ While the troubadours' images speak of liege homage and a vassalic dependency which prompts Bernart de Ventadorn to kneel before his lady as before his liege-lord, such abject postures of submission do not in fact correspond to what we know of feudal practices in the Midi.⁵² Such puzzling mismatches open up new areas of enquiry and Kay has recently suggested that one way of reconciling the importance of the lyric's feudal metaphor, the prominence and ambivalence of the *domna* and the aspirations of the *fin aman* with new perspectives offered by historical research

is to see the *canço* as the forum for the negotiation of the *status* of the speaker, rather than his social rank. Informed by appeals to the feudal as ‘an element in the cultural imaginary which offers scope for role-play and mystification’, the troubadour lyric would be the product of a creative dialectic between the lay and clerical elements of court culture.⁵³

If we can no longer simply see Bertran de Born’s compliments to ‘la Saisa’ as evidence that he loved Mathilda of Saxony, it remains true that his amorous panegyric to one *Elena* (a *senhal* for Mathilda) in the preceding stanzas blends seamlessly with them. This mirrors a common troubadour technique which appears suggestively and flatteringly to conflate the unnamed *domna* praised by the speaker in the body of the song with the noblewoman to whom the poet dedicates the song at the end.⁵⁴

Bertran’s words also indicate the importance of women in the social life of the court, however restricted their autonomy may have been in reality.⁵⁵ Ladies and their female companions formed part of the audience for the courtly lyric: the joyful, relaxed court of Hugh de Mataplana included ‘gracious ladies and the conversation was refined and pleasant’, and in Arnaut de Marueilh’s view, what adorns a lady above all is the wisdom and education which makes her honour each person as is fitting.⁵⁶

Many noble patrons of poets were troubadours themselves. Guillem de Berguedà sheltered Aimeric de Peguilhan for a number of years, and Blacatz, lord of Aups in Provence, was associated with Peirol, Peire Vidal, Sordello, Falquet de Romans and others. A telling clue to the extent to which the nobility of Occitania saw lyric activity as an essential concern of the seigneurial caste is supplied by a wax seal of Bertran of Forcalquier (c. 1163): conventionally depicted as a knight on one side, the count is shown in three-quarter profile on the other dressed in a robe, seated on a decorated stool and playing a stringed instrument with a bow.⁵⁷ Great lords were known to have performed their own songs themselves: Guilhem de Peitieu ‘took delight in singing of the miseries of his wretched experiences in rhythmical verse and pleasing melodies in the presence of kings, great men and Christian audiences’.⁵⁸ ‘Turning everything into a joke, he made his listeners laugh uncontrollably’, reports William of Malmesbury, and the disapproving monk Orderic Vitalis uses of the duke the term *histrion*, a synonym for *joglar*.⁵⁹ His contemporary, Eble II of Ventadorn, is

nicknamed 'Cantator', although no songs from him have survived. In Courthézon, Raimbaut d'Aurenga took part in singing competitions: 'It is indeed fitting', he boasts, 'that one who is skilled in singing should sing in a good court . . . for the blind and the deaf must know that I, of the twenty of us who will be in the lodging, shall carry off the honours . . . So the day after the contest I shall wear on my head the large cloth crown', to the envy of Mita, the minstrel crowned at the Beaucaire festival.⁶⁰ He also exchanged songs with Peire Rogier.

Peire Rogier's song hints at another dimension to the role of the troubadour. He says that he has come to see the comfort and fellowship (*conort* and *solatz*) of Raimbaut's court for himself, to ascertain whether what he has heard about it is true (VIII, 11–14). The older man gives Raimbaut advice on how he should behave in order to maintain his reputation for gracious hospitality (20–1). The fame of the Lord of Orange had obviously spread, possibly as far as Narbonne, for Peire Rogier is usually associated with the Viscountess Ermengarde. But a good name is by implication a fragile thing.⁶¹ If the troubadours were dependent on lordly courts, they also judged them; travelling between courts, they carried news and good and bad reports of one to another, both in gossip and in song. In this way, the troubadours can be seen as determining the limits and members of polite society, and binding together an exclusive community in which an appreciation of the courtly lyric and practice of the courtly virtues of hospitality, generosity and affability were seen as marks of status and cultivation.⁶²

In one of the songs he composed for the *joglar* Bajona (XXXIX), Raimon de Miraval praises Peire Rogier de Cabaret, Aimeric de Montréal, the seigneur of Minerve, and Olivier and Bertran de Saissac for their generosity: Bajona's performance of this song in all the courts mentioned would enhance the reputations of this circle. Such a list is also a clear indication of whose names and reputations a contemporary audience might be expected to know. Elias de Barjols carries these assumptions one stage further when he constructs for his lady a noble lover worthy of her from the best bits of another circle of courtly lords: his *cavalher soissebut* will have the charm of Aymar de Limoges, the gracious wit of Dalfi d'Alverne, the generosity of Eble de Ventadorn, the gaiety of Pons de Capduelh and the poetic talents of Raimon de Miraval.⁶³

This identikit paragon will also enjoy the *sen* ('wisdom') of one *En Bertran*, and it is likely that this refers to Bertran de Born, whose *dompna soissebuda* song (Poem VII) Elias is imitating here. We can infer that the first audience of this light-hearted piece would have been aware not only of the people named but also of the songs of Raimon and that by Bertran, to which this is a humorous homage.

Given the symbiotic relationship between the poets and the nobility, it is not surprising that their lyrics promoted the interests of their patrons. Over half the surviving troubadour corpus of poems are not love-songs, and the numerous *sirventes* indicate how lords were served in song in their various political, territorial and military struggles and in their conflicts either with or on behalf of the Church. While notions of 'propaganda' and 'public opinion' need careful definition in an age before mass communications and literacy,⁶⁴ *sirventes* were addressed to the same court audience as enjoyed the delicate subtleties of the *canso*.⁶⁵ The possibility that many *sirventes* were composed on the existing versification (and therefore probably melodies) of *canos* further reinforces the connections between love and war.⁶⁶ As Gérard Gouiran has remarked, if in the tense situation of 1181 the count of Toulouse commissioned a 'chant de guerre' from Bertran de Born in order to rally his allies (Bertran, X, 1–6), it was because he thought songs to be an effective adjunct to negotiation and persuasion.⁶⁷ The political *sirventes* goad or exhort to action, praise one party and/or criticise or slander the other. They were particularly numerous in times of tension and upheaval and a great outpouring of partisan songs characterised the period of the northern French campaigns against the Midi, and the conflicts which then engulfed Provence.⁶⁸

That courtly audiences were connoisseurs of other troubadours' songs is demonstrated by Peire d'Alvernha's famous 'galerie littéraire'. One by one, Peire reviews thirteen troubadours, devoting to each a stanza commenting on their attributes and defects and ending with himself! He has few complimentary things to say about any of them, but he bases many of his satirical remarks on their own compositions, though with an unexpected twist. Of Bernart de Ventadorn he says that

en son paire ac bon sirven
per trait'ab arc manal d'alborn,
e sa maire escaldava:l forn
et amassava l'issermen. (XII, 21–4)

(in his father he had a good servant expert at shooting with a laburnum bow, and his mother heated the oven and gathered vine-shoots [firewood].)

Here seems to be confirmation of Bernart's lowly origins, reported by the *vida* on the basis of this stanza; but Peire has taken the imagery and rhyme-words from Bernart's 'Be m'an perdut' (IX), and literalised its metaphors (which also have obscene connotations) in order to present to an informed audience a mocking image of the courtly Bernart whose father may have been Viscount Eble.⁶⁹ Similar ingenious parodies and allusions appear in Peire's treatment of his ninth target, Raimbaut d'Aurenga; Giraut de Bornelh is accused of wailing thin, miserable songs; but the fact that the whole song was composed 'At Puyvert, amidst jokes and laughter' (86) takes some of the sting from the mocking attacks. While the exact location of Puyvert is disputed, it is likely that this song was composed at a festive court at which all the troubadours mentioned would have been among the audience: the in-jokes would have more piquancy if their targets were present.⁷⁰ Such satires offer us glimpses of the performance styles, personal quirks and stage personalities of the troubadours, along with images of elderly *joglars* with dyed hair and those who shake their heads so much when singing that it looks as if they have a fever.⁷¹

Allusions to the works of others, their ideas or trademark metaphors create in the songs of many poets a concealed dialogue accessible, if not to all members of the audience, at least to the discerning few whose appreciation was the troubadours' main concern. While it may not have been uncommon for a performer to be asked to sing by boors who then immediately started talking amongst themselves,⁷² the tone of many songs shows that they were intended for the courtly elite.⁷³ Those who do not understand were from the beginning stigmatised as *vilan*, the crass opposite of courtly (Guilhem de Peitieu, I, 4).

Direct addresses to them draw listeners into a song, smoothing away the distinctions between the singer and the 'I' of the lover seeking guidance from his peers:

Era'm cosselhatz, senhor,
vos c'avetz saber e sen. (Bernart de Ventadorn, XXV, 1-2)

(Now advise me, my lords, you who are wise and knowledgeable.)

It may have been expected that songs would be discussed and commented on by those who heard them. Raimon Vidal's *joglar* is warned not to be critical (*Abrils*, 1565–70); the troubadours' metatextual comments on their own works invite a reaction,⁷⁴ and the *tenso* between Raimbaut d'Aurenga and Giraut de Bornelh revolves around audience response to style.⁷⁵ In addition to such overt debates, the troubadours also participated in a more subtle kind of continuing, intertextual dialogue. Individual songs take up linguistic, semantic or metrical elements from the works of their predecessors or contemporaries and rework them, enabling the troubadour to refute or respond to his peers.⁷⁶ Discussion and response conducted by these means similarly point to the presence of sophisticated *cognoscenti* among the audience. Later patrons even set exegetical competitions for poets: in response to such an exercise, Guiraut Riquer composed a commentary on a song by Guiraut de Calanson for Enric II de Rodez (1280).⁷⁷ *Partimens* often present debates between poets and patrons not otherwise known for their own compositional expertise, including women such as Maria de Ventadorn and the enigmatic 'Dompna H'. Whether female participants in poetic exchanges performed their own words or had them sung by someone else is not clear: *joglaresses* existed – Gaucelm Faidit apparently married one – but seem to have had a bad reputation.⁷⁸ Once the two sides of the case had been presented, the poets purport to submit the decision to the judgement of an authoritative third party: in the debate involving Dompna H, a lady called Agnesina was to give her verdict, while Dalfi d'Alvernhe is also named as arbitrator in such 'jeux de société'.⁷⁹ It may be that from *salon* games like this was born the legend of the 'Cours d'amour' over which Eleanor of Aquitaine, Ermenegarde of Narbonne and Marie de Champagne were supposed to have presided.⁸⁰

Submitting cases to arbitration is a reminder of the judicial role of a real court. Few lyric texts concern themselves explicitly with this, but legal cases and procedures are echoed in songs and their images. Guilhem de Peitieu's 'Companho, non puosc mudar' (II) is a burlesque piece, modelled on the court case heard by a lord and his advisers: a lady brings a complaint that her *gardadors* wrongfully keep her too closely supervised; the guardians are condemned by the judge and advised to come to a compromise with the complainant.⁸¹ From the end of the twelfth century, many

troubadour songs begin with an extended allegory which equates the speaker (lover) with a man suffering under an unjust overlord (Love or the lady), suits which would be heard in a court, and Ourliac notes that from the start poetry borrowed from the language of the law, evoking the experiences of the seigneurial public.⁸² Arnaut Daniel, singing of 'her who accuses him wrongly' (VI, 6), enlists the support of lords and companions listening to him:

preiatz lieis don m'amors no's tol
 qu'en aia merce cum del son;
 e diguas tug, pus ieu non l'aus nomnar:
 'Bela, prendetz per nos n'Arnaut en cort
 e no metatz son chantar en defes.' (31-5)

(beg her from whom my love is never removed to have mercy on me as one of her own; and everyone tell her, since I dare not speak her name, 'Beautiful Lady, for our sake, take Sir Arnaut into your court and do not put his singing under interdiction.')

There is no documentary record of Bertran de Born's tussles over Autafort, but if it was indeed a court hearing of that kind which brought him to Argentan in 1182, his courtier's tact and *trobar* talents enabled him to deflect his personal grievance into humorous aspersions on the courtly culture of his day and, by way of compensation, to celebrate the powerful charm of a single *domna*.

NOTES

- 1 See Paterson, *World*, pp. 91-9; Paden, 'Albigensian Crusade', pp. 173-4, also Bertran de Born, II, 17-20.
- 2 Higounet, 'Rivalité'; Baratier, 'Marquisat et comtés', pp. 131-66; Aurell, *Vielle*, pp. 19-28.
- 3 Duhamel-Amado, 'L'État toulousain'.
- 4 Gillingham, *Richard*, pp. 51-124.
- 5 Phillips, *Defenders*; Bull, *Knightly Piety*, pp. 70-114.
- 6 Riquer, *Los trovadores*, I, pp. 148-52; Hölzle, *Kreuzzüge*.
- 7 See Chapter 6.
- 8 Paterson, *World*, pp. 165-70.
- 9 *Chanson de la Croisade Albigeoise*, 36. 89; Barber, 'Catharism', p. 8.
- 10 Lewis, 'Féodalité', p. 258.

- 11 Martel, 'Construction', pp. 210–21; Paterson, *World*, pp. 10–19.
- 12 Martel, 'Construction', pp. 209–10, 215–17.
- 13 Bertran de Born, VI, 26; Boutière and Schutz, *Biographies* [Appendix 3, p. 301], p. 375.
- 14 Martel, 'Construction', pp. 218–19; Paterson, *World*, pp. 225–6; Barber, 'Catharism', p. 12.
- 15 Paden, 'Role'; Harvey, '*Joglars*', p. 230.
- 16 Paterson, *World*, pp. 90–1.
- 17 *Abrils*, 631–2.
- 18 Gouiran, ed., *Bertran de Born* [Appendix 1, item 11], p. xiii; Gillingham, *Richard*, pp. 92–6.
- 19 Bloch, *Feudal Society*, I, pp. 225–6.
- 20 Compare Giraut de Bornelh, LIX, 57–60.
- 21 Paterson, *World*, pp. 90–1 and 114–19.
- 22 Cited in *ibid.*, p. 114; *Raimbaut*, ed. Pattison [Appendix 1, item 50] pp. 139–40 (Mita).
- 23 *Raimbaut*, ed. Pattison, p. 18; Brunel-Lobrichon and Duhamel-Amado, *Au Temps*, pp. 150, 153–6.
- 24 Riquer, *Los trovadores*, II, pp. 782–4, 24–8.
- 25 Jaeger, *Origins*; Page, *Owl*, pp. 53–9; Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes*.
- 26 Gaunt, Harvey and Paterson's forthcoming edition, XI, 60–1. Paterson, *World*, p. 105.
- 27 Poem II; Harvey, 'Allusions'; Paterson, *World*, p. 109.
- 28 On the *lauzengiers* in the *canso*, see Kay, 'Contradictions'.
- 29 Aurell, *Vielle*.
- 30 Paterson, *World*, pp. 91–100; Meneghetti, *Il pubblico*, pp. 60–6.
- 31 Gouiran, ed., *Bertran de Born* [Appendix 1, item 7], p. lxxvi.
- 32 Rieger, *Trobairitz*, pp. 262–74. The number of dialogue pieces involving these men suggests their role as patrons: see especially Gaucelm Faidit and Elias d'Ussel, ed. Mouzat, LVII.
- 33 Barber, 'Catharism', p. 12.
- 34 See Boutière and Schutz, *Biographies*, for all references. Compare Ghil, *L'Age de parage*, pp. 38–56 on the inclusive, 'ideological programme' of *vidas*.
- 35 Cercamon, VIII.
- 36 Brunel-Lobrichon and Duhamel-Amado, *Au Temps*, pp. 96–8; Bonnet, 'Le clerc'.
- 37 *Giraut de Borneil*, ed. Sharman [Appendix 1, item 27], p. 17; XXXIX, 67–70.
- 38 Compare Vitz, 'Chrétien'. There were fewer schools and centres of learning in Occitania than in France: see Rouche, *Histoire*.
- 39 See Harvey, '*Joglars*'.
- 40 Pirot, ed., *Recherches*, pp. 545–95.

- 41 Cingolani, 'Sirventes-ensenhamen', p. 199, dates this piece 1196-8.
- 42 *Abrils*, 201; his repertoire includes songs by Giraut de Bornelh and Arnaut de Maruelh (*Abrils*, 44-5).
- 43 Paden, 'Role', pp. 91, 100-3 (nicknames).
- 44 On peripatetic and residential troubadours, see Paterson, *World*, p. 113.
- 45 Aurell, *Vielle*, pp. 125, 106.
- 46 Aurell, *Vielle*, pp. 126-9; Harvey, 'Joglars', pp. 231-2.
- 47 The best example is Appel's edition of Bernart de Ventadorn (introduction).
- 48 On *iuvenes*, see Gaunt, 'Marcabru'.
- 49 Köhler, 'Observations'; Kay, *Subjectivity*, p. 113.
- 50 Kasten, *Frauendienst*, pp. 88-141.
- 51 *Ibid.*, pp. 131-41; Gaunt, 'Marcabru'; Paterson, *World*, pp. 10-44; Harvey, 'Joglars'.
- 52 VII, 38-40; XXXVII, 39-41; Paterson, *World*, pp. 28-36.
- 53 Kay, *Subjectivity*, p. 114 and 'Contradictions'.
- 54 Kay, *Subjectivity*, pp. 153-61.
- 55 Brunel-Lobrichon and Duhamel-Amado, *Au temps*, pp. 50-2; Paterson, *World*, pp. 220-41; Martindale, 'Eleanor'.
- 56 *En aquel temps*, 1083-84; *Razos es*, 257-60.
- 57 Brunel-Lobrichon and Duhamel-Amado, *Au Temps*, pp. 60-1.
- 58 Orderic Vitalis, cited in Riquer, *Los trovadores*, I, p. 108.
- 59 Riquer, *Los trovadores*, I, p. 108.
- 60 XXI, 1-11. On the question of the literary contests at the court of Le Puy, see Routledge, 'Troubadours'.
- 61 Compare Marcabru's reproaches to Alfonso VII of Castile (XXIII), in Gaunt, *Troubadours*, pp. 48-51.
- 62 Eulogies in the *planhs* suggest the qualities for which lords would have liked to be known: see Bertran de Born, XIII, 29-42.
- 63 Riquer, *Los trovadores*, III, pp. 1196-8 for notes on these men.
- 64 Gouiran, 'L'opinion', p. 20.
- 65 See Chapter 3.
- 66 Chambers, 'Imitation', p. 106; Meneghetti, *Il pubblico*, pp. 114-16.
- 67 Gouiran, 'L'opinion', pp. 20-1.
- 68 See Chapter 6; Aurell, *Vielle*; Asperti, 'Sul sirventese'.
- 69 Rossi, 'Per l'interpretazione', pp. 79-82; Paden, 'Bernart de Ventadour', pp. 408-9.
- 70 Riquer, *Los trovadores*, I, pp. 322-3.
- 71 Monje de Montaudon, XVIII; Kay, 'Rhetoric'.
- 72 *Abrils*, 1435-44.
- 73 Guiraut Riquier, Epître XIII, 1-4.
- 74 See for example Guilhem de Peitieu, VI, 1-7; Jaufré Rudel, I, 31-2.
- 75 *Giraut de Borneil*, ed. Sharman [Appendix 1, item 27], LIX; Kay, 'Rhetoric'. See Chapter 10.

- 76 Gruber, *Dialektik*, and see Chapter 11.
77 Epître XIII; Guida, *Jocs*, pp. 29–35. See Chapter 6.
78 Rieger, ‘Beruf’, pp. 232–3.
79 Riquer, *Los trovadores*, III, pp. 1247–50; Chambers, *Proper Names*, pp. 105–6.
80 Andreas Capellanus, pp. 251–71.
81 See Pasero’s commentary; compare Monje de Montaudon, XVI and XV.
82 Ourliac, ‘Troubadours’, p. 162; Routledge, ‘Monk’.