INTRODUCTION

Occitan lyric poetry is very similar to modern scholarly writing. Both are obedient to pre-existing rhetorical models that are resistant to change, and constantly express their indebtedness to earlier compositions in their respective genres. Both adopt a first-person perspective which is complicated by requirements of convention and 'objectivity' and which is often subsumed to the masculine, even when the writer is a woman. Oral performance of a song or an academic paper, combined with written composition and transmission, can complicate the status of the textuality of both. Medieval poets didn't live on royalties any more than most scholars do, but they exchanged their literary production for inclusion within a courtly life-style in much the same way as academics use their writings as a means of admission to a professional élite. Composition, whether poetic or scholarly, involves an element of competition and self-promotion as well as an inevitable debt to pre-existing traditions.

In writing a book about the troubadours, I, like them, write partly because of what has already been said, and partly, in some sense, 'as myself'. Although I defer to scholarly institutions such as 'the literature', this study is personal − 'subjective' in the colloquial sense − in that I defend my own readings of troubadour lyric and criticize some of the readings advanced by others. Like the poetry it addresses, this book is the product of many influences. But because I have undergone these influences at a particular time, in a particular order, and have internalized them to varying degrees, for example according to my competence to understand them, there is a sense in which it is also 'autobiographical'; that is to say, it records a particular coincidence of the intertextual with the historical. The help which I have received from others, and which is detailed in the Acknowledgements, shows that 'autobiography' here does not exclude the notion of collaboration, and hence of the collective.

By 'subjectivity', I mean above all the elaboration of a first-person (subject) position in the rhetoric of courtly poetry. The status of such

1

Introduction

a subject is at issue in much postmodernist writing, of which it is impossible for even a medievalist to remain innocent. The 'decentering' of the subject as a result of the individual's entry into the social codes of language, and its consequent 'construction' by those codes, underlie the concern with language and rhetoric throughout this study, and especially the reading of allegorical self-presentation in Chapter 2.[1] Our inevitable dependence on prior discourses, which broadly constitutes what since Kristeva has been styled 'intertextuality', can be seen as overdetermining subjectivity;[2] when 'I' write, what others have written writes through 'me'. The subject is thus simultaneously the *subject of* what 'I' write (or say) and *subject to* what others write (or say). The question of whether such a subject has any individuality, or any ontological status outside discourse, also runs through this whole book; I return to the relationship between intertextuality and autobiography later in this Introduction. Male domination of the social order and its representations means that women's relationship with language is particularly problematic. My discussion (in Chapter 3) of whether the discourses of misogyny or courtly adulation make available to women writers a subject position from which they can compose first-person poetry owes much to the feminist rereading of Lacan by Irigaray and others.[3] The notion that a multiplicity of discourses exist in competition with each other, and that élite factions such as 'the courtly' have an interest in preserving their linguistic exclusivity, is an obvious one which finds echoes in Foucault,[4] and underlies much of the discussion of status in Chapter 3 and of performance in Chapter 4.

From the thirteenth to the mid-twentieth century the reception of the subject position in troubadour lyric followed a consistent tradition, which I call the 'autobiographical assumption'.[5] This consists in assuming that the 'I' of an individual text refers in some way or other to its supposed author and that the ideas and feelings expressed there are in some sense his or hers. The translation of poetry into autobiography by the *vidas* and *razos* rests on theoretical assumptions which remain largely unchanged in the work of a scholar such as Hoepffner.[6] According to this way of reading, texts which cannot be perceived as conveying solidarity between first-person subject and author are problems, for which a range of solutions can be invoked. They may be classed as parody or burlesque. They might be explained away as *pièces de circonstance* or as *exercices littéraires*. In the last resort they are stigmatized as 'insincere'; the criterion of 'sincerity' forms the chief basis for literary judgement in the writings of the great Alfred Jeanroy.[7] The advent of formalism marked the end of this

2

Introduction

era of criticism. 'Insincere' lyrics stood revealed as celebrations of their tradition[8] Inventories of the rhetorical procedures underlying individual instances of song did not altogether eliminate the subject, but did limit the options open to it to two: selection and appropriateness (decorum).[9] From the seventies onwards, under the influence of Zumthor, the critic rose in status from humble stocktaker of rhetorical techniques to high priest, dismembering the literary subject on the altar of intertextuality.[10] The autobiographical assumption met with no better luck in Marxist-inspired criticism; any apparent expression of subjective experience was translated into a metaphor of social aspiration with the poetic 'I' as either metonym or synecdoche for the social group concerned, depending on whether he or she could be shown to belong to it.[11]

Until very recently, therefore, the mainstream of Continental criticism[12] had completely reversed the centuries-long tradition of autobiographical reading, and deservedly so. That tradition had two radical flaws. The first was its optimism with regard to the transparency of meaning in any language, especially poetic language. The 'literal' was held to translate into autobiography and the 'metaphorical' underwent a translation procedure before also being recuperated autobiographically. This resulted in an over-literal understanding of 'autobiography' as anecdotal truth. The second was that its ideas about personality, or subjecthood, were unreflecting: scholars devoted endless patience to palaeography, metre, textual criticism, or archival research, and yet took it for granted that terms such as 'personality' and 'sincerity' were unproblematic. The notion of 'individuality' remained paramount and the rise of courtly literature was glossed as the 'discovery of the individual'.[13] Reliance on such concepts as 'individuality' and 'sincerity' is not surprising, given that the advent of medieval studies coincided to a great extent with Romanticism; reappraisal of these same ideas by more recent medievalists accompanies the general re-evaluation of our Romantic inheritance.[14]

An important advance in medievalist scholarly thinking on literary subjectivity is marked by Michel Zink's recent book *La Subjectivité littéraire au moyen âge* (1985). Examining literary texts of various genres from the twelfth to the thirteenth centuries, Zink observes that in early twelfth-century writers (such as Wace), subjectivity is dependent on antecedent texts and prior 'truth'; the subject is *subject to* preceding values with which it identifies, and is thus generalized. In the thirteenth century, however, the subject situates itself with respect to the contingent, and to the here and now; it thereby becomes far more particularized.

3

Introduction

The texts which I study here span the same period as Zink covers, but unlike Zink, I do not seek primarily to chart historical evolution. Zink's argument is largely founded on the development of new *genres* in the thirteenth century (*fabliaux*, *dits* such as those of Rutebeuf), whereas all the texts which I study in the first four chapters are lyrics, and principally love lyrics (*cansos*), a tradition characterized more by homogeneity than change. This relative conservatism includes the first-person subject position, which appears not to undergo marked development in the course of the century and a half which separates the careers of Guilhem de Peitieu and Guilhem de Montanhagol. For this reason, this book is not organized either chronologically, or troubadour by troubadour. I do, however, perceive a shift in the notion of value, and thus of status, in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the problem of whether or not to innovate is seen to be posed differently in the late thirteenth century from the way it had been in the mid-twelfth; and Chapter 5 considers retrospective interest in lyric subjectivity by romance writers.

The conservatism of medieval lyric does not mean, in my view, that it is untouched by time. Like Zink, I take account of 'auto-biography' in its widest sense.[15] That is, I consider that the time of insertion into rhetorical and linguistic tradition influences self-presentation; that time itself is relevant to subjectivity perceived as process and interaction (notably in performance, on which see Chapter 4); and that historical factors such as gender and economic status, relationships with authors and patrons, leave perceptible traces on the subjective voice.

Thus although this study is primarily concerned with subjectivity as produced by language or rhetoric, it also attempts a revival of the 'autobiographical assumption', in an (I hope) improved form. Chapter 1 confronts the indeterminacy of troubadour rhetoric, with a view to avoiding the trap of semantic optimism, and Chapter 2 begins the analysis of subjectivity *within* the domain of language – specifically, allegory and spatial metaphor. The subjectivity produced by this language is rhetorically complex, and the songs are not amenable to reading as 'true' or 'false' with respect to specific emotions or incidents. Chapters 2 and 3 keep open the question of how far this subject is 'individualizing' and how far it is 'generalizing'. Combining the typical with the particular is a feature of medieval autobiographical writing;[16] Christianity, which provided the first impetus to autobiography, justifies this duality since each Christian soul follows a unique path and yet epitomizes the universal potential for sin or salvation. Thus, in resurrecting the 'autobiographical

4

Introduction

assumption', I do not adopt an exclusively individualistic view of subjectivity. The 'individual' need not be conceived of contrastively, as differing in some essential way from others. The historical influences which combine with different discourses to construct the sense of self necessarily contribute features which are held in common with other selves. Some of these historical influences are discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. The notion of the 'individual' is more to the fore in Chapter 4, a study of conditions of performance in which the bodily presence of the performer is seen as transforming the song from 'text' to 'act' in the context of a specific, yet indefinitely repeatable exchange between individual interpreters and their audiences.

In the remainder of this Introduction I wish to elaborate on my contention that the coincidence between the intertextual and the historical is compatible with a view of 'autobiography' that can reasonably be applied to troubadour poetry. Although Occitan lyric poetry is clearly a poetry of 'convention', this does not necessarily mean that it thereby excludes all sense of 'self'. The contrary view, that intertextuality and subjectivity are incompatible, is most force-fully expressed in the influential writings of Paul Zumthor, who has consistently represented the subject as either marginal or irrelevant to the lyric. For Zumthor, lyric poetry is the best exponent of the traditional character of medieval literary aesthetics (*Essai* pp. 189ff.). By 'tradition' is meant not merely topics, comparable with the commonplace of earlier rhetorically based criticism (such as the *locus amoenus*), but their expression in *registres*:[17]

un réseau de relations pré-établies entre éléments relevant des divers niveaux de formalisation [that is, versification, lexis, syntax, motifs] ainsi qu'entre ces niveaux; ce réseau constitue une préfigure globale de la chanson, et élimine de celle-ci la pure impressivité.   (*Essai* p. 232)

The omnipresence of these 'registers' in the courtly lyric of the North is demonstrated by statistical analysis of a substantial corpus and cited as the basis for the two claims which underpin Zumthor's conception of intertextuality: (i) that 'la référence du texte, c'est la tradition' (*Essai* p. 117) and (ii) that any individual text is *overdetermined* or *objectified* by that tradition.

The first of these claims is expanded in the critical doctrine of *la circularité du chant*.[18] No text possesses autonomy; all meaning is mediated through the consensus about possible meanings which underlies the whole corpus of texts; within individual songs these meanings are so disposed as to be mutually supporting. Thus 'I' defines (in purely grammatical terms) 'you', the lady to whom 'I' sing;

5

Introduction

and 'sing' includes the notions of 'compose' and 'love'. Meaning circulates within the text, and between the text and its tradition, without ever escaping from this self-referring circle:

La chanson [a song by the Chastelain de Couci] apparaît ainsi comme un ensemble extrêmement complexe dont tous les éléments possèdent la double qualité de signifiant et de signifié, ce qui implique une circulation interne du sens dans le discours, comme si le message, dans le temps même où il s'achève, remontait à son point de départ. (*Essai* p. 206)

The effect of this circularity, for Zumthor, is the objectivization of the text. Any subjectivity it might once have possessed has been 'swallowed up' ('englouti') and scattered among the 'miroitements de la forme', so that 'la chanson est interprétable, par le critique moderne, en sa seule qualité d'objet' (*Essai* p. 192). The text is wholly determined by its participation in tradition, and we can have no access to the subjective world of author or audience except via the 'objectivizing' force of that tradition (*Essai* p. 82).

There would be no point in challenging now the views Zumthor held in 1972, if they were not still so influential.[19] His central point, that meaning in the lyric is mediated through a tradition, is incontrovertible, and indeed is not exclusive to him.[20] But Zumthor's account of intertextuality as 'objective' is too monolithic and inflexible. In the first place, his rejection of subjectivity seems to rely on an 'individualizing' notion of the subject: if one allows that the representation of subjectivity in language involves a collective dimension, then one can speak of the subject as being 'generalized' rather than 'objectivized' by intertextual reference. Secondly, it allows too little space to the historical. Despite his admission of the importance of incorporating diachrony into his theory (*Essai* p. 58, pp. 144ff. for example), it is difficult to see how a wholly circular system of meaning could be capable of change, for if all meaning derives from tradition, then anything not already traditional can only be meaningless. That Zumthor does not confront this question is not surprising, given that he concentrates his attention on the Northern French *trouvères* who bought into a particular period of troubadour poetry in the latter part of the twelfth century and maintained it into the thirteenth with little alteration. Zumthor pays almost no attention to the evanescence of literary practice among the troubadours of the South, nor to their apparent factionalism (for a brief mention, see *Essai* p. 102).[21]

There are manifest differences between indifferently ('objectively') drawing on a common fund of *registres*, and citing a specific predecessor by name, quotation or allusion. Some troubadours achieve

6

Introduction

the status of *auctoritates*. Invoking them might gradually become part of the tradition; but initially at least, such invocations show something of the specific knowledge and interests of those who cite them. They provide us with a fragment of 'autobiography'.

The distinction between an allusion based on traditional material and one based on specific reference can be illustrated by two of the four surviving *tensos* attributed to Bernart de Ventadorn. Two of these seem to have been composed with the participation of the famous troubadour, and don't concern us here. In his article 'Dialogues of the Dead', Marshall has argued that the other two (opposing Bernart with a 'Peirol' and a 'Gaucelm' respectively), are most probably thirteenth-century fabrications;[22] but they differ markedly from each other. The dialogue with Peirol, 'an adroit and in many ways convincing pastiche' (p. 42), shows conversance with the corpus of both troubadours; that is, it seems predicated on reference to known poets or at least to known, 'signed', texts. The second, 'altogether cruder', confronts two stereotypes: a 'courtly' Bernart and an 'uncourtly' Gaucelm. Since Gaucelm Faidit's surviving corpus is just as 'courtly' as Bernart de Ventadorn's, there is little likelihood that it, or he, is being referred to here. Instead, Marshall ingeniously suggests that the misogynistic 'Gaucelm' of the *tenso* reflects *mésaventures* attributed to the troubadour in the *razos* to two of his songs. Thus primed, the *pasticheur* concocted a misogynistic *persona*, drawing heavily on poetry in the tradition of Marcabru. The idealistic 'Bernart' owes little or nothing to the works of the authentic Bernart de Ventadorn either.[23] The *tenso*, therefore, alludes to tradition and 'can be seen as embodying a thirteenth-century perspective on twelfth-century literary history' (pp. 44–5). The intertextual reference of the 'Gaucelm' *tenso* may be 'objective' in Zumthor's sense, since it is determined by tradition; but that of the 'Peirol' one is not, since its unknown author displays specific knowledge.

Furthermore, the author of the 'Peirol' *tenso* emphasizes the 'autobiographical' dimension of troubadour poetry by identifying the poet *with* his corpus: when (the pseudo-) Bernart de Ventadorn is summoned to sing, he produces stanzas which are (in a sense) recognizably 'his'. The Peirol *tenso* is thus 'about' subjectivity in poetry whereas the Gaucelm one is 'about' literary tradition. Zumthor's 'objective' model of intertextuality cannot accommodate the difference, because it has not allowed for examples of the Bernart–Peirol kind.[24]

And what of the patterns which are shared between troubadours known to be contemporaries and who seem, so far as we understand

Introduction

the content of their songs, to be engaged in discussion with each other?
In such a case, Zumthor's '"lieu commun" de l'auteur et de
l'auditeur' (*Essai* p. 82) is not a timeless and impersonal tradition, and
probably not even a reservoir of fictive meanings, but a lively *ad
hominem* debate.

The recent accounts of these patterns, in important critical works
by Jörn Gruber and Maria-Luisa Meneghetti,[25] offer new perspec-
tives on intertextuality in the medieval lyric which, in supplementing
that offered by Zumthor, force open his 'circle'and admit possibilities
of meaning which he had ostracized. Both Gruber and Meneghetti
are influenced by reception theory, which Gruber defiantly dates back
to Thomas Aquinas:

omne quod recipitur [in aliquo], recipitur per modum recipientis, et non per
modum sui.

everything which is received by someone is received after the fashion of the
recipient and not after its own fashion.   (*Dialektik* p. 8)

Gruber's illuminating study of textual similarities in exordial or
concluding stanzas of songs by Guilhem de Peitieu, Marcabru,
Cercamon, Jaufre Rudel and Bernart de Ventadorn shows how
anxious these early troubadours are about the proper reception of
their work (*Dialektik* pp. 62–71). He then adduces examples of how
troubadours take up patterns from their predecessors and redeploy
them in such a way as to signal solidarity or, more commonly,
disagreement. Thus Arnaut Daniel's *Doutz brai e critz* is composed
with reference to Raimbaut d'Aurenga's *Braiz, chans, quils, critz*
(*Dialektik* p. 161; cf. also pp. 238–41); Jaufre Rudel in *Non sap
chantar* cites key words from Guilhem de Peitieu's *vers de dreit nïen*
in reverse order to mark divergence (*Dialektik* pp. 89–91). Through
the multiplication of such examples a picture of literary history
emerges which is altogether different from that painted by Zumthor:
instead of the vast, impersonal monolith of tradition, we find a finely
drawn network of precise allusion criss-crossing down the century
from text to text; and whereas Zumthor's view of tradition stresses
resemblances between texts, Gruber's is at least as alert to their
differentiation. His terminology for describing this blend of
resemblance and difference is Hegelian: the 'taking up' of earlier
textual material is styled *Aufhebung*, 'sublation', the process by which
successive mental or historical states transcend earlier ones without
discarding them; they adopt and surpass them, for Gruber, *per
modum recipientis*, that is, following an inevitable tendency for the
perception of the receiver to redefine the object perceived. This

8

Introduction

constant transcendence of earlier by later works results in the historical 'dialectic' of his title.[26]

Although conceiving this process as inevitable and global, Gruber nonetheless stresses the conscious and deliberate participation of individual poets; thus, for instance, he writes of Peire Vidal:

> Wie Petrarca, so versteht sich offenbar schon Peire Vidal als Erbe und potentieller Überwinder aller vorhergehenden Minnesänger: ihn hindert allein der 'Mangel an Materia' an der Realisierung seines Stilideals, das er in bestimmten Liedern Raimbauts d'Aurenga präfiguriert sieht.
>
> (*Dialektik* p. 194)

He also briefly alludes to the fact that court life in the South fostered contact between small groups of writers (*Dialektik* pp. 3–4), a point likewise stressed by Meneghetti, and to which I return in Chapter 4. Intertextuality thus enters the historical fabric of poetic biography. The subjectivity excluded from the intertextual process by Zumthor stages a dramatic come-back in this important work.

Meneghetti likewise sees active reception as comprising an element of transformation (*Pubblico* pp. 101–4), but the main thrust of her argument (*Pubblico* Chapter III) is to explain the origins of the dialogue genres, so she is more concerned with demonstrating the existence of particular polemics than with the sweep of historical change. Her presentation is carefully non-committal over the question whether these polemics are between individual poets or between texts; bringing her argument to a conclusion, she writes:

> Al continuo intertestuale, dato dall'omogeneità tematica del discorso portato innanzi dai coautori, si sovrappone, in questi casi, il discreto delle diverse, spesso sottili interpretazioni dell'oggetto del dibattito che si viene realizzando: il testo a più voci procede grazie ad una materializzazione di quel 'meccanismo di domanda e risposta' che è, come sappiamo, alla base dell'attività ermeneutica e ricezionale in genere. (*Pubblico* p. 149)

Although there is some overlap in the examples brought forward by these two scholars (who must have been engaged simultaneously on their similar projects) their combined evidence, in conjunction with shorter studies by others,[27] necessitates radical revision of Zumthor's conception of literary tradition.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of intertextual reference does not just exist *between* troubadours. Zumthor himself admitted that the existence of narrative cycles within the works of Peire Vidal, Raimon de Miraval and Uc de Sant Circ[28] marked a trend towards 'auto-biography' (*Langue, texte, énigme* pp. 171–6), but sought to limit the damage to his theory by minimizing the evidence for narrative

9

Introduction

within the lyric.[29] This is remarkable, given that the extent to which
medieval lyric genres drift towards narrative is second only to the
way the narrative ones fill up with lyric.[30] The fact that the narratives
are fragmented only bears witness to their tenacity *as* narratives
which remain recognizable even when their dismembered parts
surface from text to text. In Jaufre Rudel, for example, the motifs
of distance and frustration unite to construct two opposing stories,
one of pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the other of *mésaventure* in a
neighbouring castle, both of which are scattered provokingly, like
half-completed, half-mislaid jigsaw puzzles, across his songs. Here
intertextual reference is a conscious device of 'autobiography',
however fictional it might be.[31]

In other cases this cross-referencing is not based on narrative.
Kaehne, for example, points to the existence of groups of songs by
Bernart de Ventadorn which discuss a given topic from a variety of
standpoints (*Bernart von Ventadorn* p. 54). Gruber analyses Raimbaut
d'Aurenga's *Pos trobars plans*, *Aissi mou* and *Assatz m'es belh* as
a poetic cycle effecting a synthesis between the thesis and antithesis
of the *trobar clus* and *trobar leu* (*Dialektik* pp. 210–19). 'Inter-
textuality' thus focusses an intellectual or aesthetic preoccupation to
which the poet keeps returning at successive points in his career.
Another troubadour to refer to parts of his own corpus in other than
primarily narrative terms is Arnaut Daniel. I will conclude this
Introduction by examining his relatively neglected song XIV in relation
to the much better-known song X, in order to show the complex
interaction within them between intertextual reference and first-
person representation in time.

The text of XIV survives in only three MSS, *T*, *a*, and ψ, all of
which are in some way unsatisfactory. Here is my version of it:[32]

I		Amors e iois e liocs e tems
		mi fan tornar lo sen e derc
		d'aqel joi c'avia l'autr'an
	4	can cassava.l lebre ab lo bou;
		era.m vai mieltz d'amor e pieis,
		car ben am, d'aiso.m clam astrucs,
		ma non-amatz ai nom enquers,
	8	s'Amors no vens son dur cor e.l mieus precs.
II		Cel que totz bes pert a ensems
		mestiers l'es que ric segnor cerc
		per restaurar la perd' e.l dan,
	12	qe.l paubres no.il valri' un uou;
		per so m'ai ieu causit e lieis,