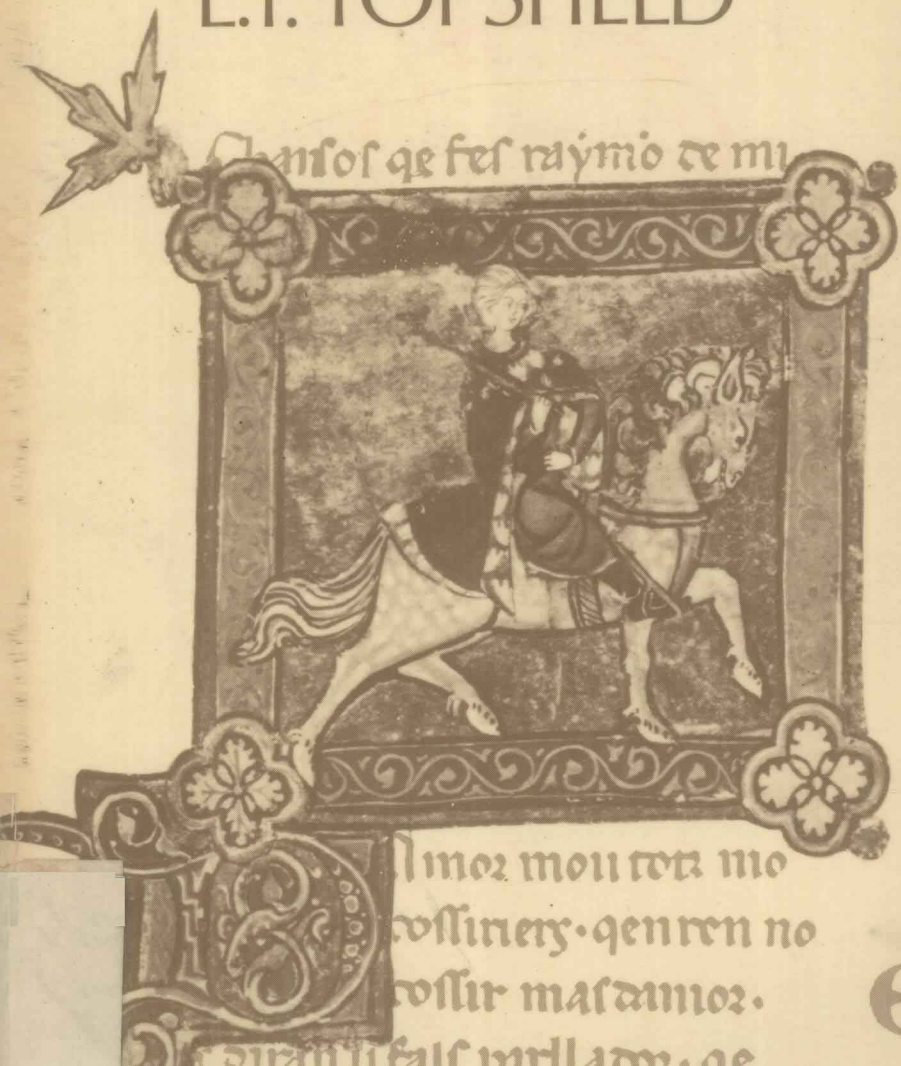
Troubadours and Love

L.T. TOPSFIELD



TROUBADOURS AND LOVE

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Qui aquestz digz estiers enten,
si mielhs hi dis, non lo·n repren,
quar s'a trops sens una razos,
mout m'es mieller quan quecx es bos.
Anon.

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PLATES

(between pages 72 and 73)

Ia Jaufre Rudel
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IIIa Jaufre Rudel and the Countess of Tripoli
b Bernart de Ventadorn
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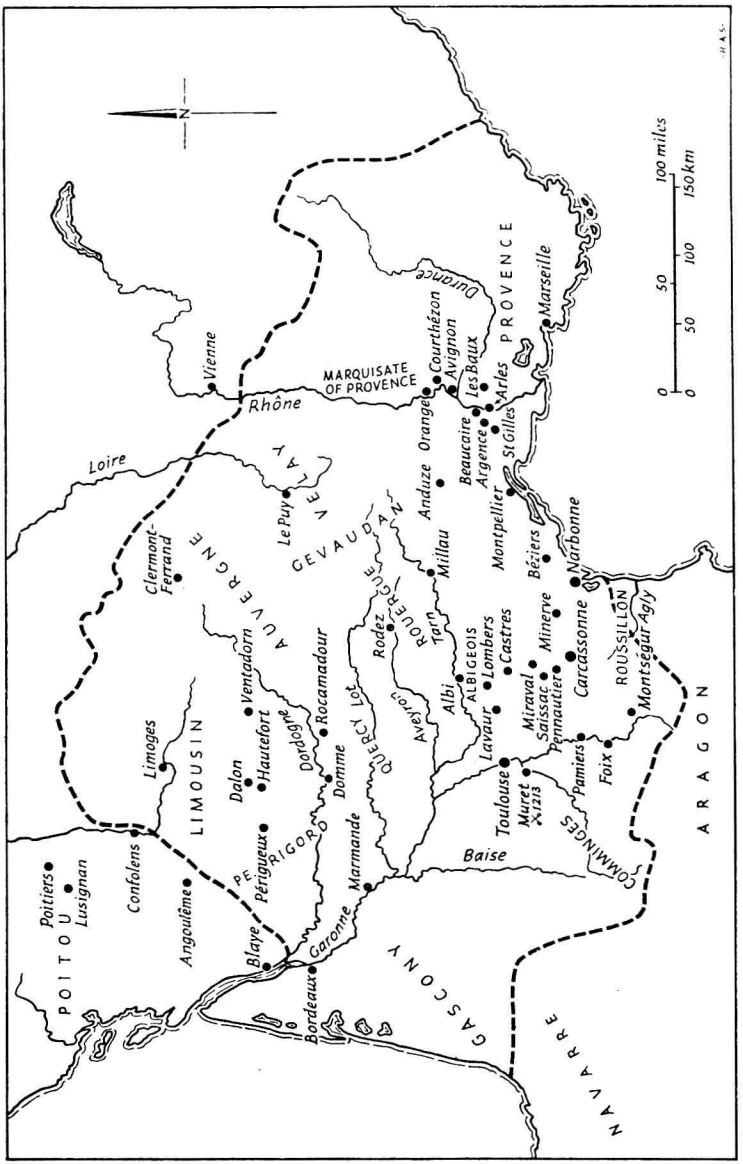
THE CHAPTER ON Guilhem IX of Aquitaine reproduces material from 'The burlesque poetry of Guilhem IX of Aquitaine' in NMi, LXIX (1968), pp. 280–302, and from 'Three levels of love in the poetry of the early troubadours, Guilhem IX, Marcabru and Jaufre Rudel' in *Mélanges de philologie romane dédiés à la mémoire de Jean Boutière* (Liège, 1971), pp. 571–87. The chapter on Jaufre Rudel is reprinted with additions and amendments from '*Jois*, *Amors* and *Fin' Amors* in the poetry of Jaufre Rudel', NMi LXXI (1970), pp. 277–305. The sections on Peire d'Alvernhe, Raimon de Miraval and Guilhem de Montanhagol also contain paragraphs which have appeared in *Mélanges offerts à Charles Rostaing* (Liège, 1974), MLR, LI (1956), pp. 33–41, and FS, XI (1957), pp. 127–34, respectively. References to these articles will be found in the notes, and full details are given in the bibliography. I thank the editors of these journals and collections of studies for their permission to use this material.

I am also greatly indebted to all the scholars who have worked on editions of the troubadours whom I have discussed; to the Syndics and Officers of the Cambridge University Press, and especially to Mr Michael Black, Miss Diane Speakman and Mr Jay Bosanquet, for their kindness and helpful suggestions. I also thank Mrs M. Anderson for doing the general index and Mrs Susan Church, Mrs Ruth Hebblethwaite and Miss Iris Little for their invaluable help in transforming my manuscript into legible material.

January 1975 L.T.T.



The South of France at the time of the Albigensian Crusade.

The approximate limits of the sovereignty of the Counts of Toulouse extended along the Baise in the west to Marmande, Rocamadour, Millau, Anduze, the Rhône, the coast, the river Agly and the Pyrenees. They also had rights in the Marquisate of Provence. The broken line marks the approximate linguistic boundary of Provençal at this time.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK IS an attempt to understand the poetry of the troubadours and their ideas on love. It is not concerned with any view of troubadour poetry as a uniform phenomenon or the illustration of a rigid, isolated doctrine of *Fin'Amors* or 'courtly love'. It aims to show, through individual studies of certain troubadours, the ways in which their ideas on love, social behaviour, and the quest for happiness evolved from one generation to another and varied from one troubadour to another in the same generation. It tries also to bring out the poetic qualities of these troubadours and to show how love and joy, folly and reason could not have the same meaning for troubadours who composed in a 'dark' allusive style as it did for courtly poets who sang in the clear, easy style of the *trobar leu*,* on their single plane of worldly experience.

The troubadours who have been chosen for inclusion in this work were all famous in their day and exercised a strong influence on later poets, and they also exemplify the division between reflective and courtly poetry which is a feature of troubadour poetry in the twelfth century. They all show a strong sense of individuality in their poetry, and, to judge from their work and what we know of their lives,[1] they were all, in some degree, in a state of conflict with themselves, with the noble society in which they lived, and with courtly, conventional ideas on love. Some major troubadours have had to be omitted; the greatest of these is Guiraut de Bornelh, whose significance in the evolution of the troubadour love lyric appears to lie more in the manner and the style rather than the substance of his work.

* This and other technical terms are defined in the glossary on p. 256.

Troubadour poetry has been compared to a flower which appears from the earth without root or stalk. Although the comparison is very probably untrue, the flower imagery is itself apt, for, to our eyes, troubadour poetry buds, opens out and blooms, in perceptible stages, in the South of France in the twelfth century, and in its flowering, and its decline in the thirteenth century, it encourages and enriches the poetry of Western Europe in marked and lasting fashion. Troubadour poetry, as it exists in about fifty MSS.,[2] flourished actively for nearly two hundred and fifty years, and this is the span of time which is covered in this book, from the end of the eleventh century, when Guilhem IX Duke of Aquitaine began to compose, until 1323 when seven citizens of Toulouse, forefathers of the nineteenth-century Felibrige, founded the Consistory of *Gai Saber* in the hope that they might revivify Provençal poetry with the literary concourse of the *Jocs Florals*.[3]

In this long period of poetic development four main stages can be discerned. In the first half of the twelfth century we find a primarily experimental and seeking type of poetry which is centred on the court of Poitiers and its dependencies. This early poetry, which is not normally tied down by courtly ideas of behaviour, is often more abstract than worldly in intention and is concerned more with the personal quest for joy and the absolute ideal of an ultimate happiness than with conformity to social convention. In the second 'stage' from about 1150 to 1180, which may correspond to the period of influence at Poitiers of Eleanor of Aquitaine, there appears to be a widespread strengthening of courtly doctrine in the South of France and a clash for some of the greatest and more individually minded troubadours between the demand from their noble audiences for poetry of 'courtly love' in the light, easy style and their own inclination towards the composition of more reflective poetry. This conflict appears to be resolved in the period from about 1180 to 1209, by the victory of the 'light', courtly type of poetry, but not before troubadour song has reached its finest flowering with Arnaut Daniel. By this time, the focal point of patronage has moved south from Poitiers to Toulouse and Carcassonne, Montpellier and Narbonne, and is diffused among the myriad minor courts of Languedoc, the marquisate of Provence, and Auvergne. In 1209, at the moment of greatest poetic richness and social

splendour, the axe of the Albigensian Crusade falls on the noble society of the South. Courtly society in many areas is decimated, and in the changed world of the late thirteenth century love for the courtly lady or *domna* is transformed into love for the Virgin. Troubadour poetry has travelled its full cycle, reaching in its end and beginning towards a happiness outside earthly existence.

This book is primarily concerned with the poetry of the troubadours, and it is not part of its purpose to look for the 'roots' and 'stalk' of their song, although account has been taken of classical, Christian and medieval thought which may have influenced their ideas. The 'roots' of the courtly system of moral values based on profane and not religious love appear to extend back to the thought of Greece and Rome and Moorish Spain, and to have been nourished more immediately by Christian and feudal doctrine. Music and the technique of composition came to these poets most probably from the Church and from medieval Latin verse, and perhaps from Hispano-Arabic sources.[4] But the 'stalk' of the flower was the inspiration which flowed from the traditions and life of the court of Poitiers into which the first known troubadour, Guilhem VII Count of Poitou, IX Duke of Aquitaine, was born. This court had been famous for its civilised interest in letters and learning since the days of Guilhem the Great, III Count of Poitou and grandfather of the troubadour.[5] During his reign, from 993 to 1030, he held splendid court and won renown for his wisdom. He was keenly interested in the religious issues of his day and was on good terms with Odilon of Cluny and Fulbert of Chartres, whom he persuaded to accept the treasurership of the cathedral at Poitiers. This connexion between the court of Poitiers and the school of Chartres, which continued after Fulbert's death,[6] may have provided a vital link between the lay world of the court and the new humanism of Chartres which was based on a return to the study of the classics, especially the Platonic writings of Cicero, and Boethius, and may also have acted as a focus and filter for the 'new' ideas on science, on astronomy, arithmetic, algebra and navigation, and on love, which were flowing to France from Moorish Spain.

To this growing interest in the things of the mind at the court of Poitiers in the eleventh century there should be added

the civilising influence of the remarkable women who ruled this court. It is probable that these women were partly responsible for the refinement of social manners and the system of courtly values and virtues which existed when the first troubadour began to compose. The greatest of these women was Agnes of Burgundy, third wife of the ageing Guilhem the Great, mother of two successive Counts of Poitou and of Agnes who married the Emperor Henry III in 1143. Well travelled in Germany and Italy, Agnes of Burgundy put her imprint on her day almost as decisively as did her descendant Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of France and England, and Blanche of Castile, Queen and Regent of France, and mother of Saint Louis.

What was a troubadour? The word *trobador* comes from *trobar*, the Provençal equivalent of *invenire*, which in classical Latin rhetoric meant 'to discover, invent or devise'.[7] The troubadour, who might be of noble, bourgeois or peasant birth, was responsible for inventing the words, the scheme of versification, and the melody for his song. A courtly audience would esteem him for his poetic and musical craftsmanship, his voice and courtly accomplishments, and for the individual inspiration which he, if he were a great troubadour, would bring to his work. The *joglar*, on the other hand, was not a creative poet or musician but a minstrel who lived by singing the troubadour's songs. If he learnt to compose songs and to refine his manners, he might rise to the status of a troubadour. If he were down on his luck, he might earn his keep as an acrobat or juggler, with a performing bear or monkey, like his ancestor the Roman *joculator*.

The supreme genre of troubadour poetry was the *canso*, which treated of the highest subject, love, in the highest style, which was free from base words and thoughts, and demanded a fresh scheme of versification for each new composition.[8] The early troubadours gave the name of *vers* to love songs and moralising poems alike, possibly taking this word from the paraliturgical *versus*, a form of medieval Latin trope which was widely practised in Aquitaine in the eleventh century and which may have provided the first troubadours with rhyme schemes and melodies.[9] By the mid-twelfth century the term *sirventes*[10] was used for poems of blame and praise and deeds

of war, and the word *canso* came to be applied generally to the love song. Other genres in troubadour lyric poetry include the debate forms of the *tenso*, and the *joc partit* or *partimen*, in which a choice of argument was offered to one's adversary, the *alba* or dawn song, the *pastorela*, which was a poem about the attempted seduction of a shepherdess, and the *planh*, a lament on the death of a king, a great personage or poet.

Troubadours, and especially *joglars*, travelled widely through the courts of France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Cyprus, Malta and the Holy Land, and their songs, in subject matter and style, exerted a profound influence on the poetry of Western Europe. Many Italians, Catalans and poets of other nationalities composed in Provençal, which in the early thirteenth century was described by a Catalan, Raimon Vidal, as the supreme language for the composition of the love song or *canso*.[11] Some idea of the spread of troubadour poetry can be gained from the fact that about one-quarter of the four hundred and sixty[12] troubadours known to us, of whatever nationality, composed in countries outside the South of France about a quarter of all the poems which have survived.[13] The troubadour *canso* exerted a varying but direct influence on the *trouvères* of Northern France such as Gui de Coucy and Gace Brulé, on Catalan and Spanish poets, the poets of the *dolce stil nuovo*, the Sicilian school, Dante, Petrarch and his imitators, and through them the sixteenth-century French poets of the school of Lyons. Troubadour ideas on love and courtliness which were absorbed and distilled in the *Roman de la Rose*, and in the great Arthurian romances of Northern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, influenced through them the literary traditions of Germany, Spain and England.

The poetry of the troubadours was meant to be sung, and works on their music are included in the bibliography. Their poetic language, which remained remarkably stable during the two centuries of their main creative activity, is rich in vowel sounds and rhymes, and can be appreciated more fully if it is read aloud or recited. The rules of pronunciation, so far as we understand them, are not difficult,[14] and the variations in orthography, which are mostly due to the regional peculiarities of the scribes, can be ignored. The vowel sounds resemble those of modern Spanish and Italian, and Vulgar

Latin. They have an open and closed quality, resulting in most cases from their Latin derivation: *a* is normally open (as in *patte*) but is close when followed by unstable *n*, e.g. *ma* (*man*) and is pronounced as in *âge*; *e* open (always in diphthongs) as in *mère*, *e* close (usually close before a consonant) is pronounced as in *été*; *o* open as in modern French, *o* close can be pronounced as *ou*; *u* usually as in *lune*, or possibly as *ou*; *i* as French *i*, or semi-vowel, e.g. in *Blaia*, pronounced as in French *payer*. Diphthongs and triphthongs usually count as one syllable in the verse line, although each vowel should be pronounced separately. The approximate English equivalents of some common diphthongs are: *au* as in 'cow'; *ai* as in 'try'; *ei* as in 'hay'; *eu* as in Cockney 'fell' and *oi* as in 'joy'.

Enclitic forms are common in Provençal poetry. They may be monosyllabic: *no·n* for *non+en* (very frequent), *no·m* for *non+me*, *els* for *en+los*, *el* for *en+lo*; or diphthongs: *qu'ie·m* for *que+ieu+me*; or triphthongs: *ie·us* for *ieu+vos*.

The consonants in medieval Provençal can be pronounced as in English, with some exceptions:

c before *e* or *i* is pronounced *ts* (or sometimes *s* regionally).

ch is *tch* as in 'watch'. As a final sound it can be written with a *g* or an *h*: *fug*, *fuh*.

g before *e* and *i*, and *j*, which is often written as *i*, are like English *j* in 'Jack', e.g. *Lemoges*, *domnejaire*.

l palatalised as in Italian *egli* or Spanish *ella* is found written down as *ll*, *lh*, *il*, *ill*, *li*, and the *i* in these forms is merely an indication of palatalisation.

n palatised as in French *gagner* can be written as *gn*, *nh*, *ing*: e.g. *loing*, *lonh*.

q is always occlusive *k*, whether written as *c*, *q* or *qu*.

r is rolled as at the present day in Spain, Italy and parts of Southern France.

s intervocalic is pronounced as in modern French *voisin*.

z final is pronounced as *ts*. This sound may also be written down as *tz*: e.g. *toz*, *totz*.

Our present-day patterns of thought and our 'visual' imagination[15] make it difficult for us to appreciate troubadour poetry to the full. Our hearing and mind are indifferently

attuned to words which in themselves form a separate entity of sound and sense, and also to poems in which theme, vowels, consonants, rhyme and music and the structure and interconnexion of stanzas are bound together as integral parts of the poet's creation. And we also need to take account of the part played by a troubadour or *joglar*, who with intonation or gesture was freer to evoke a response from his audience than is now possible for the poet who speaks through unchanging print. Yet, in spite of such limitations and the occasional inevitable uncertainty of textual correctness and attribution, it is hoped that this book will give some understanding of the troubadours and their ideas, and that it will lead to enjoyment of the exceptional quality of their poetry.

Early Troubadours