

INTRODUCTION

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This volume presents a poetic practice deployed in one language (or a panoply of mutually conversant variants) and one tradition (or a network of permeable traditions) across the European Southwest. In the nineteenth century, the study of *oc* poetry became compartmentalized in national institutions, and publishing and teaching tradition strongly reflects that. Our volume restores some of the lost continuity, along the lines of post-postcolonial studies and the focus on the “rediscovered” concept of the Mediterranean,¹ at the expense of fragmented (and ideologically fraught) “national” histories. Along these lines, this volume includes discussions of Occitan authors who were born in today’s Spain (Catalonia) and wrote in today’s Italy (Sicily). At the same time, the contributions do justice to the irreducible plurality of the *oc* tradition. The authors discussed here are the founding poetic ancestors of Catalonia and Castilia, Aragon and Auvergne, of Portugal, Spain, Italy, and France. Two essays focus on one of the greatest Italian troubadours, Sordello, and another three on his Catalan contemporary and equal, Cerverí. The two poets are connected, among others, through the person of Charles of Anjou, Sordello’s main patron and enemy of Cerverí’s *mécène* James I of Aragon.² Another three essays focus on the poets of the classical period often claimed by the French, Bernart de Ventadorn and Marcabru. And, the essays extend over nearly the whole span of the *oc* tradition, from the classical period (mid-12th c.) through 13th c. flourishing to Dante, and through the late fifteenth century (Pfeffer, 1477).

¹ Not for the first time; cf. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean*, 1923-66.

² In 1246, Charles married Beatrice, successor to Raymond Berenger V, count of Provence, and in coalition with northern France forced James I of Aragon to limit his plans of expansion across the Pyrenees (1258).

Another level of diversity consists in the range of styles in the essays, from very technical to succulently cinematic. For instance, Isabel de Riquer and Andreu Comas evoke Cerverí with such immediacy that one feels plunged into the reality of the event:

Imagine, for a moment, a day of celebration in the court of King James I of Aragon in the mid-thirteenth century. It doesn't matter whether the court is convened at the Royal Palace in Barcelona or in any of the crown's other possessions. In the hall are the monarch and the Heir Apparent, Prince Peter, surrounded by their family, high counselors, their scribes and their vassals. Before them all stands Cerverí de Girona. Silence falls on the assembly: Cerverí is the court's most famous troubadour, and he's about to perform a brand-new song. The audience listens attentively; the minstrels play their instruments, and a few moments later Cerverí begins to sing in falsetto.

Cerverí's songs were always full of surprises, such as the *Vers estrayn*, odd tongue-twisting, childlike games that hid the words of the poem among random groups of letters: *Taflamart faflama hoflomom maflamal puflumus siflima eflementrefleme boflomonaflamas geflemens . . .*

Try as they might, the members of the audience understood nothing.

Whether they offer the wealth of exhaustive philological pedigree and detail (Marchesi in particular, but also all the other essays), the experience of performer/musician as well as textual scholar (Grange), the temperament and imagination of a poet (Greene, Howie), the authority of the most recognized voices in the field (Burgwinkle, Greene, Riquer, among others), each of these commentaries is a gem. Together, they constitute what I think is the best introduction to Occitan poetry. I, for one, intend to use it in my classes: nowhere else can I find comparable variety of regions described, and scholarly writing genres represented with such compelling energy. This volume, I know, will never be boring.

Another great didactic advantage, in my mind, is that the volume spans the hierarchies of scholarship, from archangels to cherubim, from graduate students to distinguished professors. In

that lies a double promise: that our students, in turn, will find heroes and contemporaries to emulate; and that our discipline, undermined by non-replacement of faculty, elimination of programs, and general narrowing down of the fields of inquiry that receive support, proves in this collection to be irreplaceable. I will leave to the readers the specific reasons why it is so – whether because it inspires and produces new critical modes (Greene’s essay), or because it is the tip of the scholarship iceberg that Marchesi builds up a span higher through his commentary. Each reader will, no doubt, name their favorites.

I have never been more thrilled to introduce a book, or to be associated with a project than with this one. I want to acknowledge the invaluable help of my colleague Valerie Wilhite, who brought on board the Catalan contingent, without which this collection would lack an essential part of its wealth. We want to thank all the contributors who generously and brilliantly answered our invitation.

It remains to describe the individual contributions. More than it is usually the case, they are impossible to summarize. The content may be subsumed, but not the elegance and pleasure of the style. Instead, I attempted to situate each essay in a general context, providing the bare minimum of information needed to render the essay accessible for someone new to the field, with student readers in mind. A more succinct version of each introduction also serves as the essay’s abstract. Brief biographies of the volume’s authors follow.

Cary Howie’s “Inextricable” and the following essay both focus on Sordello, one of the greatest Italian troubadours (see details below, in the description of Burgwinkle’s essay). Sordello’s “Lai a.n Peire Guillem man ses bistenza” (14) is a “meditation on praise: too much praise, or just the right amount. If praise is in excess to its object – but how would this excess be measured, and by whose criteria? – then this interferes with the very manifestation of praise. Not only does praise stop looking like itself, but the agent of praise becomes the patient of blame; the poem, a gorgeous failure.” Declined through four canonical forms of troubadour poetry – *razo*, *sirventes*, *tenso*, *canso* – Howie’s commentary is focused on the inextricable bonds between the object of praise and the poet. Throughout, Howie develops the problematics of praise, a *fil conducteur* in his work spanning a decade of publications on diverse subjects.

Bill Burgwinkle's "Rhetoric and Ethics in Sordello's *Ensenhamen d'onor*" continues the focus on Sordello (fl. 1220-69), an iconic but ambiguous figure. The greatest of Italian troubadours, he is an exemplar of uncompromising integrity for Dante, while the Occitan *razos* portray him as a rogue and political opportunist. Later literary *hommages* by Robert Browning, Ezra Pound, Samuel Beckett, and recently by the novelist Roberto Bolaño, are only tenuously connected to a factual account of Sordello, and portray him as a frustrated, dangerous and seductive figure. They are more projections of the modern authors' own concerns than an exploration of a historical figure and his poetic work. Burgwinkle's essay is an exploration necessary to appreciate the "ghostliness" of these instances of "reception" of Sordello. He contrasts the two: modern fictional Sordello, and the no less fictive, but historicized medieval one. Sordello's poetry prepared his myth (cobla "Si com estau" and canso "Atant ses plus viu hom"), but Burgwinkle focuses on the putative moment of writing of Sordello's most important text, the *Ensenhamen*. *Ensenhamen* is probably the fruit of Sordello's Provençal exile, when he left Italy and the earlier political scandals behind, and built a career as a diplomat for Charles of Anjou, comparable to the role the poet Raimabut de Vaqueras played for Boniface of Monferrat, or Uc de Saint Circ, for Alberic da Romano. Sordello's most famous poem, *Ensenhamen d'onor* concerns patronage, chivalry, and courtly conduct. Its didactic content makes it more likely that it would belong to a later Provençal period when the poet found stable and respectable employment at court. Burgwinkle's commentary aims to "extricate from the sometimes stodgy rhetoric of *mezura* (moderation) and rectitude that the poet is desperately attempting to project, the poetic bite that characterizes his work in general, and the essential continuity that unites this 'moral treatise' with his more playful, gritty, and exuberant work."

Continuing only slightly later, among many of the same political constellations, Isabel de Riquer's and Andreu Comas's essay, "Family Matters," sets the stage at the court of James I of Aragon in the mid-13th c. The place is the royal palace of Barcelona or any of the crown's other possessions, and the *dramatis personae* include the heir to the throne, prince Peire (future king Peire the Great), and the court's most famous troubadour, Cerverí de Girona (his full name, with which he signed only some of his works, was Guillem de Cervera, fl. 1259-85). Author of one of the

largest *oeuvres* of any Occitan troubadour (114 poems), Cerverí distinguished himself from Aragonese court's other poets (Folquet de Lunel, Dalfinet, Peult de Marseilha) by the surprises and challenges he presented to his audience: an *alba* (the most openly erotic genre) to the Virgin Mary, the *Cobla in sis lengatges* (*Cobla in Six Languages*), the *Vers estrayn*, “odd tongue-twisting, childlike games that hid the words of the poem among random groups of letters” cited above (“*Taflamart faflama hoftlomom maflamal puflumus siflima eflumentrefleme boflomonaflamas geflemens*”). Cerverí borrows equally from the folk-inspired Galician-Portuguese poetry and from the French tradition, including the *chanson de malmariée* on which Riquer and Comas focus their reading. *Chanson de malmariée* is a poem where a young woman bemoans being sold off by her family to an old man (*gilos*, “Jealous”) and separated from her youthful *doulz amis*, sometimes even praying for the death of her husband. Both within that tradition and among Cerverí's three *chansons de malmariée* (*Viadeyra*, *Espingadura* and *Gelosasca*), the *Gelosasca* stands out as “especially determined” to lose her husband, conspiring to murder him with the aid of her mother and brother, using every “solution” (prayer, black magic, potion or *experimenta*), every likely traditional and scientific remedy. Knowing that Cerverí also wrote poems to flatter James's senile love affairs, the dedication of that singular song to Peire and Cerverí's mysterious lover *Sobrepretz* only enhances the mystery.

Miriam Cabré continues the study of Cerverí in her essay, “Who Are Cerverí's Worst Enemies?” She proposes a new interpretation of a poem by the great Catalan troubadour, an interpretation that departs from the accepted, literal solution to this poem (other scholars before Cabré looked for “enemies” Cerverí describes among the political or familial figures surrounding the poet). Cabré shows, *via* an intertextual reading, that these “enemies” are instead entirely metaphorical. Cerverí is the proud successor of two centuries of troubadour tradition at the Aragonese court of Pere the Great, facing the influx of fashionable Angevin trends, especially the dance-songs imported from the court of Pere of Arragon's enemy Charles of Anjou (Sordello's patron). Like Sordello's *Ensehnamen* in Burgwinkle's essay, Cerverí's poem ‘Una re dey a Deu grazir’ serves Cabré as a focal point to refract his present and past career: polemical when his patron was young, more stately now that Cerverí is the public voice of a king. The poem's seven verses deploy the themes that can be fleshed out

both by Cerveri's biographers and by intertextual readings (Lanfranc Cigala, Rutebeuf, *romans* of Chrétien de Troyes and the Occitan *Flamenca*), but it is a comparison with the Portuguese *trovador* Johan Soares Coelho (active at the court of Alfonso III of Portugal until 1279) that conclusively proves the "identity" of Cerveri's enemies whom he so self-righteously descrites: his own eyes that have betrayed him. The two poets, who share the conceit of the treacherous eyes – and the riven, complex identity that this image implies, one part of the body rebelling against the rest, the fundamental structure of willfulness³ – would have interacted at the Toledo court of Alfonso X of Castile: Coelho also resided there, and Cerveri is attested there in 1269, when then-prince Peire the Great travelled there to visit his brother-in-law, Alfonso X.

Simone Marchesi's "Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio* XXVI.139-148" is focused on Dante's famous ten lines on Arnaut Daniel, the "miglior fabbro," the best craftsman in the native tongue. These lines are also the last lines of the canto, the most quoted in English (thanks to T.S. Eliot's citation in *The Wasteland*), the most extended stretch of non-Italian vernacular in the *Commedia*, the center of a reflection on the nature of language (Virgil-Arnaut-Adam, *Inferno-Purgatorio-Paradiso*) and the center of a triangle of *oc* poets in the poem (between Bertran de Born in *Inferno* and Foulquet de Marseilles in *Paradiso*). The thematic triangle of poetic concealment, erotic fire, and *affinar* (purification), derived from Arnaut's poetry, is redeployed by Dante as a reflection on the nature of language and the promise of poetry.

Huw Grange's "Musico-literary commentary on Bernart de Ventadorn's "Quan vei la laudeta mover" is an invaluable contribution thanks to Grange's own experience of singing troubadour poetry. What are the mechanisms facilitating the memorization and minimizing variation in the transmission of troubadour poems? A close analysis shows that even in the best documented case, "as modern readers look at a transcription of the manuscript page, they should not expect to see reflected back at them the image of an original song, free from the influence of oral

³ See Sarah Ahmed, "The Willfulness Archive," forthcoming in 2012, and her article "Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)," *S&F Online (Scholar and Feminist Online)*, 8:3 (Summer 2010), Special Issue: *Polyphonic Feminisms: Acting in Concert*.

and written transmission.” Grange’s reading takes into account the modalities of these two strata of transmission as they are deployed, complicating each other in each particular case. Bernart de Ventadorn (fl. 1147-90) is the best-known troubadour, and “Quan vei la laudeta mover,” the most famous of his 45 extant poems (and the most famous troubadour poem, period), as it is clear from the abundance of copies: three manuscripts for music, twenty for text, and innumerable citations. “Time and again modern listeners have heard the bird’s descent echoed in the downward motion of the melody,” even though such correlations are extremely rare in medieval tradition. But how closely are the words and music bound together in the manuscript tradition? The third and fourth line of the poem are exchanged, as we can clearly see from the exceptional rhyme pattern (abba, as opposed to the prevailing abab). Whatever the reason for that alteration (expectation of the generally more common abba rhyme scheme, homeoteleuton), after the music scribe (probably distinct from the main scribe) noted the melody, the lark no longer descends slowly but plunges precipitously in the fourth line. Since in each line the melody rises, then falls, it could be said each one represents a lark; but a closer look at words emphasized by the melody’s rise and fall suggests that key lexemes are bound to melodic leaps, pitch goals and melismas. Manuscript evidence suggests that these accentuated lexemes were more stable in the transmission tradition than others; just as in the textual stratum there is more variation in the beginnings of the verses than in the ends, stabilized by rhymes. This provides an argument for a transmission through performance, or a transmission that is both manuscript and oral (a solely manuscript tradition that did not bind text and melody as tightly would result in greater amount of variation in spite of the melodic emphasis). This is definitely the case of that famous poem, where there is considerable variation, between manuscripts, of the non-accented words, but none of the ones emphasized by music. Another mnemonic support was repetition (whether of content/concept or its different vocabulary/phonetic manifestations), both intensifying each experience of the song and stabilizing it in the transmission process. Macro-structure (progression from positive to negative) remains, but its particular vocabulary is subject to variation. A similar trend is visible in the melody: while this poem is usually described as *oda continua* (composed without repetition, with a schema of *abcdefgh*), such

descriptions ignore the fact that the elements, while not identical, bear striking resemblance, facilitating memorization. In turn, the rhythmic hiatus, melismas, and leaps (such as the transition from the verse 4 to 5) are helpful to memorize dramatic changes of content. These and other examples show that troubadour poetry is equally dependent on scribal as it is on oral transmission.

The essay by Marion Coderch, “Lo rossinhols s’esbaudeya’ (70, 29): Bernart de Ventadorn, Courtly Ethics, and the Catalan Tradition,” continues the theme of Bernart de Ventadorn, focusing on his legacy in Catalan and Valencian lyric of the 14th and 15th centuries. While just as important as his impact on German and French traditions (for instance, Gaucelm Faidit, fl. 1172-1203), the Catalan tradition is much less known. This article fills an important gap by tracing intertextual echoes of one poem, “Lo rossinhols s’esbaudeya,” in later texts by Pere Torroella (ca. 1420-95, author of poems in Catalan and Castilian, and the central figure at the court of Carlos IV of Navarra and Juan II of Aragon, including in Naples from 1450), Gilabert de Próixita (fl. 1392-1405, author of 21 extant Catalan poems. His family, originary of Naples, was connected to Pere the Great), Joan Berenguer de Masdovelles (author of some 180 poems, the greatest medieval poetic corpus in Catalan, active in Barcelona ca.1442-76), and the Valencian poet writing in Catalan Joan Roís de Corella (1435-1497). Thus, we are still within the reach of the same patronage circles as in the Sordello and Cerverí essays. Coderch’s essay provides another bridge between these later poems and the classical early troubadour tradition.

Luke Sunderland’s “Marcabru in Motion: ‘Dire vos vuoll ses duptanssa’ in *Chansonniers* A and C, and in Matfre Ermengaud’s *Breviari d’amor*” focuses on another great troubadour of the classical period alongside Bernard de Ventadorn. Sunderland studies three versions of a poem by Marcabru (fl. 1130-50), two from earlier sources and the third version retained by Matfre Ermengaud (d. 1322), to illustrate the intertextual nature of the Occitan tradition. While Marcabru is famous for his biographical legend of humble Gascon origins and violent death (abandoned by his mother and raised by Aldric del Vilar, he had Cercamon for poetic mentor; he so alienated his patrons with bitter critique that they had him killed), his poetry is part of the classical period of the troubadour tradition. His patrons were William X of Aquitaine and Alfonso VII of León. While only some four or seven of his melodies

survive, his extant corpus is sizeable: 45 poems, defining his characteristic acerbic and sometimes obscene tone, and setting him as the exemplar of that variety of Occitan tradition which prizes the hermetic, self-referential *trobar clus* style. Of Matfré Ermengaud (originary of Béziers), one canso and one sirventes survives, but he is principally known for the thirty-five thousand lines long *Breviari d'amor* (written ca. 1288-92), a didactic poem (or an encyclopedic “theory of everything”) reminiscent of 12th c. Honorius of Autun’s *Imago mundi*, that reconciles Christian theology and troubadour courtly love ethics. It survives in a dozen manuscripts and again as many fragments from Languedoc, Toulouse and Catalonia, as well as Castilian and Limousin translations. The poem’s final section of 7-8 thousand lines, *Perilhos tractat d'amor de las donas*, is a quasi-anthology of Occitan poetry, citing over 250 poems. Sunderland’s essay compares three versions of Marcabru’s text (chansonniere A, longer version in C, and Matfré’s citations) to address the question, why does this poem in particular have such plasticity? If the version A appears “broadly biographical or personal,” including the famous ending repeated in Marcabru’s *vidas* to define him as a misogynous character, the version C, almost twice as long (23 stanzas to A’s 13) does not include that last stanza of A, and overall has less “biographical” material: “less of a poem about Marcabru’s life, more of an attempt to define love in all its attractions and horrors.” At the same time, the C version corresponds to the *persona* of Marcabru crafted through other texts: the art imitating the (fictional) life. Finally, the *Breviari* cites Marcabru’s poems three times, each time borrowing from C. Unlike any other poem in the *Breviari*, Marcabru’s poem is quoted to express an opinion and then, also, to testify against itself. Matfre’s point is that a man who never properly loved, as Marcabru admits he didn’t, should not be the judge of love: “the ability of *vers* (poem) to tell the *ver* (truth) remains the key question.” This epistemological meditation is at the center of the preoccupations of both Matfre and Marcabru.

Wendy Pfeffer’s “The Passion of Occitan” continues the history of *oc* intertextuality to the threshold of modernity. Her focus is the fragment in Auvergnat (Northern Occitan) in the *Passion d’Auvergne*, part of an interpolation that occupies the folios 26-28 of the manuscript of the *Passion*, dated to 1477, the year when the *Passion* was performed in the city of Montferrand. Most of the interpolation is in French, but 66 lines are in Auvergnat,

more precisely from Clermont or Montferrand. Since 1388, the language of the city registers and accounts in Montferrand was French, and through the following century, the divide between *bas-auvergnat* and French was also a class divide, where the educated and wealthy used French and the peasants, Auvergnat. That social stratification is also reflected in the Passion interpolation. “Some sixty years before the [royal] Edict of Villers-Cotterets” that formalized the status of French, already widely used, as the language of all legal documents, “Occitan has already been displaced in Montferrand. The language of culture and of entertainment is French; Occitan exists for comic relief,” concludes Pfeffer.

Virginie Greene’s “*Suite provençale* for Ocarina, Triangle, and Powerpoint” is a playfully experimental piece, a post-postmodern palimpsest that is, among others, a companion to the most whimsical and hermetic of manuscript registers: the historiated initial. I will let Greene’s text speak for itself, paraphrasing it because more than perhaps any other in this volume, it should not be reduced: “In Provençal poetry, what sings is not a subject but a machine: it is an art of engineers and designers. The figurative capital letters in manuscripts are emblematic: one creature, like a petite musical box, cranks a mechanic air out of the notes – black marks – it consumes. The sounds agglutinate in spherical compounds, which fall into the box. Their chance collisions produce music. After a while, used spheres are expelled and replaced by fresh ones for new combinations of sounds. Like the repetitive pictemes in the initials, the elements of poetry are both expressions and a sentence: the subject is supposed to sing, to love, and to love to sing.” The infernal machine, says Greene, sends love letters, delivered centuries too late – or are they? What Greene says about these poems, the vivid response that she documents, and with which I fully, vicariously identify, lifts the posthumous gloom of the too-late arrival of these ancient letters. In this essay, as she did in her PMLA piece of 2005, Greene both creates and explicates new modes of knowledge.⁴

⁴ Virginie Greene, “Three Approaches to Poetry,” *PLMA* 120:1, *Special Topic: On Poetry* (Jan 2005), 219-234.

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