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Paroles gelées : Voices of Vernacular Authority in the Troubadour Vida Corpus

Abstract : The transmission of Occitan lyric corpus was strongly mediated by the concerns of the compilers of troubadour lyric manuscripts. This hermeneutic framing, in which the prose biographies known as vidas and razos played a significant role, aimed to create a tradition of written authority for the vernacular language of the songs. In this article, I look at how the troubadour biographies construct an impersonal voice of written commentary around the performative voice of troubadour song, inviting contemporary and future readers to validate the cultural project of authorising the vernacular.

Résumé : La conception que nous avons de la lyrique occitane doit beaucoup aux compilateurs et commentateurs des chansons des troubadours, et les textes biographiques que l'on appelle vidas et razos revêtent une importance particulière pour l'orientation de la culture troubadouresque. En effet, les auteurs de ces textes ont créé un cadre herméneutique qui visait la création d'une écriture vernaculaire placée sous le signe de l'auctoritas. Dans cet article, nous analysons les procédés de cette démarche, en prêtant attention au sort subi dans les biographies par la voix performative de la chanson troubadouresque, qui se retrouve effacée au profit de la voix impersonnelle du commentateur, ancrée dans l'espace de l'écriture. Le manuscrit s'ouvre ainsi à la postérité, en demandant au lecteur à venir de participer à « l'auctorisat[i]on » de la langue vernaculaire.

In a justly celebrated episode from the *Quart Livre*, Rabelais' characters chance upon a curious phenomenon : sailing on the edges of the « mer glaciale », they begin to hear disembodied voices¹. This odd occurrence prompts the humanist giant Pantagruel to recall a series of precedents drawn from the writings of the Ancients : Plutarch, Aristotle, Plutarch again (citing Antiphanes evoking Plato), and finally Virgil. The real cause, subsequently explained by the ship's captain, is a far more recent event, a sea battle that had taken place « au commencement de l'hyver dernier passé », of which the aural dimension had been frozen into silence until the arrival of the warm season. Unmoored from their context of enunciation, the voices represent the residual trace of a past event that, without the historical exegesis of the captain, Rabelais' protagonists would be incapable of situating chronologically. Crucially for my purposes, they also bear witness to an insurmountable rupture between past and present, since what is left (the voices) necessarily evokes what has disappeared (the event itself). In the absence of supplementary contextual clues, Pantagruel seeks understanding through the written record of Antiquity, symbol of a reassuring permanence. But when he learns that the voices are mere contemporary effluent, his attitude changes to irreverence, and he and his companions begin throwing the thawing words about the ship to see what sounds they will make.

¹ François Rabelais, *Le Quart Livre*, ed. R. Marichal, Geneva, Droz, 1967, p. 224-30.

Despite the rhetoric of rupture favoured by Rabelais and his contemporaries in relation to the preceding centuries, Pantagruel's reflexive citation of Ancient authorities would have been perfectly comprehensible to their medieval predecessors. Authority was conferred by survival of the passage of time ; the texts of the Ancients, copied, studied and commented through the centuries, like the Latin language in which they were transmitted, derived respectability from this permanence. Even Dante, while self-consciously promoting the possibility of vernacular eloquence, reserves a special status for Latin in virtue of its stability in time and space². It was only natural, then, that the newly flourishing literary culture in the romance vernaculars should aim to associate itself with this model of authority. The most common way to do so was to present vernacular literature as a process of translation or transmission of pre-existing traditions. Thus Jean Bodel, in the opening lines of his *Chanson de Saisnes*, famously identified three types of material which vernacular literature might treat :

N'en sont que trois materes a nul home vivant :
De France et de Bretagne et de Ronme la grant ;
Ne de ces trois materes n'i a nule samblant³.

Each of these « materes » refers to an originary narrative connecting past politics with those of the present : the Arthurian dominion, for Britain ; the Carolingian empire, for France ; Antiquity, for any nation claiming descentance from a Brutus or a Francus, putative survivors of the Trojan War⁴.

Bodel's formulation suggests that the only conceivable narrative model would take as its subject a distant and heroic foundational past. It is, therefore, quite incapable of accounting for the short troubadour biographies transmitted in Occitan *chansonniers* alongside lyric pieces, which will form the subject of the present article. These biographies, written in prose, document not the distant, but the recent past ; they deign to relate the lives of contemporaries and near-contemporaries, the poets and the courts within which they moved. The corpus is sorted by critics into two, roughly discrete categories : *vidas* (biographies detailing the background and life of individual troubadours) and *razos* (explanations of the reason for the writing of a particular song)⁵. It is generally believed that the troubadour Uc de Saint-Circ,

² Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. S. Botterill, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, t I, 9, 11. See the discussion in S. Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement: les intellectuels et la langue française aux XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, Vrin, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1987 (2nd edition), p. 44-46.

³ Jean Bodel, *La Chanson de Saisnes*, ed. A. Brasseur, Geneva, Droz, 1989, t. I, v. 6-8.

⁴ As Howard Bloch notes, a comparable « genealogical consciousness » underpinned the cultural strategies of the French aristocratic families which commissioned family chronicles from the tenth century onwards, first in Latin and later in the vernacular: « when aristocratic families began to write their own history, they did so, first of all, in terms of a heroic foundation in a mythical past. » See R. H. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies. A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983, p. 80.

⁵ I share with many critics a wariness of treating the terms *vida* and *razo* as describing discrete generic categories, especially as there is little to suggest that the authors of these texts thought

whose name appears in one *razo*, wrote all the *razos* and the majority of the *vidas*, either bringing them with him when he settled in Italy or composing them on request while he was there. The case for this has been made forcefully by a number of scholars based on similarities between the texts and historical evidence about Uc⁶. Though the available evidence is essentially circumstantial, the plausibility of this argument has allowed scholars to treat the *razo* corpus as an authored collection, and to analyse it in relation to Uc's other known textual productions and activities⁷. In this article, by contrast, I wish to focus primarily on the *vidas*. The resemblances between these texts and the Latin *accessus ad auctores* tradition is often noted, and they offer an intriguing case study for the construction of an alternative model of textual authority, one founded on a modern vernacular phenomenon rather than on ancient Latin books. Moreover, due to the temporal range which it covers (the latest *vida* may be posterior to 1330), the *vida* tradition can be read as an index of the development through the thirteenth century of this new authoritative model for vernacular literary transmission.

In the Latin commentary tradition, the *accessus* was a short introduction to a recommended author, and usually incorporated a biographical element, a *vita poetae*. Margarita Egan has argued for formal parallels between these *vitae* and the Occitan *vidas*, and there is general critical consensus that in offering introductory commentaries to the troubadour corpus, the *vidas* are part of an attempt to imbue this vernacular movement with the authority of Latin tradition⁸. Like the *vita poetae*, the *vida* begins with concrete details, setting up a biographical frame through which the poet's voice will be mediated: typically in the *vidas*, we are given the troubadour's birthplace and social origins. But the differences between the *vitae* and the *vidas* are perhaps as significant as their similarities. The whole purpose of the *accessus* is to introduce a work; the *vita poetae* is but one of a number of elements which might include the work's title (*titulus operis*), its purpose (*intentio scribentis*),

about the biographies in these terms. See M. Egan, « Commentary, *vita poetae*, and *vida*. Latin and Old Provençal 'Lives of Poets' », *Romance Philology*, 37, 1983, p. 36-48 [p. 37, n. 7], and E. W. Poe, *Compilatio. Lyric Texts and Prose Commentaries in Troubadour Manuscript H (Vat. Lat. 3207)*, Lexington, Ky, French Forum, 2000, p. 20. Nevertheless, as the argument of the following pages implies, there are differences of authorship, function and transmission between the majority of the *vidas* and *razos* which make it useful analytically to draw a broad distinction.

⁶ See E. W. Poe, « The *vidas* and *razos* », *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and J. M. Davies, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999, p. 188.

⁷ See for instance W. E. Burgwinkle, *Love for Sale: Materialist Readings of the Troubadour Razo Corpus*, New York and London, Garland, 1997.

⁸ M. Egan, « Commentary, *vita poetae*, and *vida* »; see also M. L. Meneghetti, *Il pubblico dei trovatori. La ricezione della poesia cortese fino al XIV secolo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1992, p. 277-321. In their contributions to the volume *Auctor et auctoritas: Invention et conformisme dans l'écriture médiévale*, dir. M. Zimmermann, Paris, École des Chartes, 2001, Françoise Vieillard and Laura Kendrick both argue that literary and codicological developments around troubadour song work to present the troubadours as *auctores*. See, respectively, « Auteur et autorité dans la littérature occitane médiévale non lyrique » (p. 375-89, especially p. 383ff.), and « L'image du troubadour comme auteur dans les chansonniers » (p. 507-19).

its content (*material*) and its moral qualities (*utilitas*); the biographical individual is clearly secondary to the book. As Egan comments, ‘lives in the *accessus* focus on texts. Once the creation of the work has been accounted for, there is no need to complete the « life » story’⁹. By comparison, the troubadour *vidas* show next-to-no interest in the moral qualities of the songs, and seem as interested in the social interactions acted out by the biographical individuals as in the troubadours *qua* poets¹⁰. In any case, the troubadour corpus is no weighty tome of learning, but an unstable performative tradition of love song; its basic unit is not the sentence, but the stanza¹¹. The working-up of the lyric tradition into a corpus of authoritative voices does not appear to be a self-evident process.

Another stumbling block for this process was the double marginality of the troubadour corpus to the traditional model of *auctoritas*: they were in a vernacular language, and they were modern. As I noted earlier, the authority of the *auctores* was predicated on their antiquity. Even a contemporary writer who produced an *opus* in the correct format could not hope to be accepted into the canon of *auctores* until much water had passed under the bridge, leading Walter Map to a sardonic assessment of the probable fate of his *Dissuasio Valerii ad Rufinum*: « I know what will happen after I am gone... in the most remote future its antiquity will cause the authorship to be credited to me, because, then as now, old copper will be preferred to new gold. »¹² The troubadours, therefore, were far from natural subjects for the process of « authorisation ». Moreover, if it is true that the *vidas* and *razos*, and the *chansonniers* in general, are largely responsible for creating the image of the troubadour as author, a further complication lies in the absence of an analogue for the writing of an authorial biography in the vernacular. In other words, the *vidas* and *razos* needed to construct themselves as a vernacular voice of authority before they could hope to perform the authorisation of troubadour lyric pieces. In order to demonstrate how they do this, I will draw on a limited sample of troubadour *vidas*, asking two fundamental questions of the text: Who is speaking

Old Copper and New Gold : Creating a Voice for Vernacular Writing

Marcabrunsi si fo de Gascoingna, fils d'una paubra femna que ac nom Marcabruna,
 si com el dis en son chantar :
 Marcabrunsi, lo fills Na Bruna,
 Fo engendraz en tal luna
 Qu'el saup d'amor cum degruna,
 – Escoutaz! –
 Que anc non amet neguna,
 Ni d'autra no fo amatz.
 Trobare fo dels premiers c'om se recort. De caitivetz vers e de caitivetz serventes
 fez, e dis mal de las femnas e d'amor.¹³
 [Marcabru was from Gascony, the son of a poor woman named Marcabruna, as he
 says in his song :
 Marcabru, the son of Lady Bruna, was begotten under such a moon that he knew
 how destructive love is, – Listen! – for he never loved any woman, nor was he loved
 by another.
 He was one of the first troubadours people remember. He composed wretched *vers*
 and wretched *serventes* and he spoke ill of women and of love.]

Two voices speak in this account – that of the commentator, and that of the early twelfth-century troubadour Marcabru himself, through lines cited from his song « Dire vos vuoill ses duptansa ». ¹⁴ This is by no means standard practice ; most *vidas* give over no space to the troubadour's voice, while some allow only a *rappel* from a designated song, as in this *vida* for Arnaut de Marueilh : « Mas si avenc c'amors lo forsa tant qu'el fetz una canson, la quals comensa : *La franca captenensa* » ¹⁵ [But it came to pass that love pressed him so hard that he wrote a song, which begins : *The noble deportment*]. Though more extensive, the Marcabru citation included in the *vida* in reality limits itself to two functions : to confirm the commentator's assertion about Marcabru's parentage, and implicitly to support the later assertion that he spoke badly of women and love (the suggestion being that this was because he was never in love himself). When the troubadour's voice is heard, then, his words are co-opted into the commentator's narrative as evidence for the claims being made. The circular logic of this process, and the lack of real biographical knowledge generated by these texts, is one part of the story ; what interests me here is that the two voices of troubadour and commentator are engaged in a process of reciprocal authorisation. In terms of content, the *vida* tells its audience nothing that the song cannot already assert ; but what it does bring to the troubadour is the *form* of authority, through the very process of treating Marcabru's life as worthy of documentation. At the same time, the commentary derives its own authority from the information in (and the existence of) the song. We thus see that

¹³ *Biographies des troubadours. Textes provençaux des XIII^e et XIV^e siècles*, ed. J. Boutière and A. H. Schutz. 2nd edition, revised and expanded, by J. Boutière and I.-M. Cluzel, Paris, Nizet, 1973, p. 10.

¹⁴ For the full text of the song, see *Marcabru: A Critical Edition*, ed. S. Gaunt, R. Harvey, and L. Paterson, Cambridge, D.S. Brewer, 2000, p. 237-63.

¹⁵ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 32.

the beginnings of vernacular literary *auctoritas* require a certain sleight of hand in order to produce the textual effect of authority.

A further consideration should make us pause in the assumption that the purpose of the *vida* is a straightforward glorification of the troubadour's work. What this *vida* tells us about Marcabru is that he wrote « caitivetz vers », which I translate as « wretched songs ». While the editors of his corpus suggest that « *caitivetz* may be a description of subject-matter and tone, rather than [a] critical judgement », this strikes me as a kind of special pleading motivated by dissatisfaction at the *vida*'s summary dismissal of Marcabru's songs¹⁶. A similar logic appears to be at work when Jean Boutière suggests that the « *paubres motz* » of Jaufre Rudel's « *bons vers* » as described by his *vida* might be understood to refer to simplicity of style, rather than poverty of verbal inspiration¹⁷. I would argue rather that the strategy of denigration or marginalisation of the earliest troubadours is fairly consistent through the *vidas*. A categorical instance of this, which appears to impugn Marcabru by implication, is provided by the biography for Peire de Valeira, whose comments fairly drip with disdain :

Joglars fo el temps et en la sason que fo Marcabrus ; e fez vers tals com hom fazia adoncs, de paubra valor, de foillas e de flors, e de cans e d'ausels. Sei cantar non aguen gran valor, ni el.¹⁸

[He was a minstrel in the days of and at the same time as Marcabru ; and he wrote songs as one did in those days, of little value, about leaves and flowers, and singing and birds. His songs did not have much worth, nor did he.]

For a genre supposedly working hard to consecrate the troubadours as a body of *auctores*, the ordinary period is given surprisingly short shrift. I take this to be a sign that the *vidas* are working not so much to exalt the troubadours themselves, as to promote a cultural project of authorisation of the vernacular. Disdain for the origins of troubadour lyric then appears as an effective way to announce a fairly radical break from the genealogical authority of Latin grammar. Instead, the period that is glorified in the *razos* and *vidas* is the more recent generation of troubadours active either side of 1200. This strategy is explicit in the *vida* for Peire d'Alvernhe. Peire is recognised by the commentator as the best troubadour of his generation, but is symbolically ousted from his own *vida* by the later poet Guiraut de Bornelh, in much the same way as the advent of Galahad makes Lancelot's particular brand of chivalry obsolete in the *Queste del Saint Graal* : « era tengutz per lo meillor trobador del mon, tro que venc Guirautz de Borneill. »¹⁹ [He was held to be the best troubadour in the world, until Guiraut de Bornelh came along.] This reads less like nostalgia for origins, more like a celebration of renewal.

For the valorisation of the vernacular to be successful, it was necessary that the voice of the commentary should bear the stamp of authority. The prose form

¹⁶ *Marcabru: A Critical Edition*, p. 38. It certainly appears that this apparently negative judgement is at odds with Marcabru's medieval popularity : forty-five of his songs survive in seventeen manuscripts, and he is cited by eleven later writers. See *op. cit.*, p. 5ff.

¹⁷ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 17, and p. 19 (n. 3) for the interpretive gloss.

¹⁸ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 14.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

played a significant part in this process ; as in the domains of Arthurian romance and historiography, the choice of prose went hand-in-hand with the virtual disappearance of the performative voice²⁰. The effect is all the more striking in the *chansonniers* due to the contrast between the prose of the biographies and the performative verse of the lyric texts that rub shoulders with them on the parchment page. Yet the absence of a performative voice does not equate to absence of voice altogether. Rather, lacking a specific enunciative referent, the kind of impersonal, apparently objective statement we have encountered in the *vidas* takes on a universalising character. Attributed to no one, these statements become the property of all. In effect, the biographies are acting out through voice an essential property of the written word, the very property so highly prized within the dominant medieval model of cultural authority : its ability to transcend a particular enunciative context and instead address a generalised multitude of potential readers.

Stephen Nichols has discussed *chansonnier* N (Morgan 819) in terms of « manuscript performance », with the manuscript acting as a « surrogate for the 'live' performance of the poetic persona »²¹. I would suggest that the *vidas* exploit precisely this potential of the manuscript to enact a written performance for its reader. Links are established within the manuscripts between different biographies, and between biographies and songs, through the recurrence of names and placenames, so that each codex appears as a web of biographical data. What Suzanne Fleischmann calls « speaker-now », the temporality of enunciation, is defined as much by space as it is by time²². Thus a Peire Vidal *razo* in *chansonnier* H (Vat. Lat. 3207) begins as follows : « De Peire Vidal vos ai dich q̄i fo ni de cal maineira, el comensamen de sas cansos. »²³ [I have told you who Peire Vidal was and what sort of a man he was, at the beginning of his songs.] In keeping with most medieval literature (including troubadour lyric song itself), this very writerly passage keeps alive the « fiction of orality » in its use of the vocabulary of direct discourse between speaker and audience²⁴. But what is most striking is that this supposed verbal exchange is defined by the spatial co-ordinates of the alternation of prose and lyric voices on the manuscript page. The *razo* refers back to a *vida* located (as is the case in most manuscripts that include the *vida*) at the head of the collection

²⁰ For comparison of explicit narratorial or performative presence in verse and prose narratives, see S. Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale : une approche linguistique*, Bern, Peter Lang, 1998.

²¹ S. G. Nichols, « 'Art' and 'Nature': Looking for (Medieval) Principles of Order in Occitan *Chansonnier* N (Morgan 819) », *The Whole Book: Cultural Perspectives on the Medieval Miscellany*, ed. S. G. Nichols and S. Wenzel, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1996 [p. 91 for the quote].

²² S. Fleischman, *Tense and Narrativity : From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction*, London, Routledge, 1990, p. 125: « Narratives are intrinsically structured with two time frames: the time of the telling of the story and the time during which the events of the story are assumed to have taken place. I refer to these respectively as *speaker-now* and *story-now*. »

²³ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 356.

²⁴ See S. Gaunt, « Fictions of Orality in Troubadour Poetry », *Orality and Literacy in the Middle Ages. Essays on a Junction and its Consequences in Honour of D. H. Green*, ed. M. Chinca and C. Young, Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, p. 119-38.

of Peire's *cansos*. The text has thus been written explicitly with its role within the economy of the manuscript in mind. The *razo* goes on to cite a number of passages from Peire Vidal's songs, situated once again in spatial terms: «Et en autre loc dis...»²⁵ [and in another place he says...]. The troubadour's voice is to be located in books, just like that of any other *auctor*. The voice of the commentary is thus addressed explicitly to a *reading* community, who are invited to associate themselves with the objective stance developed in these texts. Here we begin to sense the interpellatory force of the pronoun «om» in the Marcabru *vida* discussed above: «Trobair fo dels premiers c'om se recort». To accept the invitation is to join in the process of commemorating these troubadours, and thereby to join the community of readers of vernacular books.

Past and Present Scholars : Speaking to Posterity

It is sometimes asserted that the existence of the *vidas* and *razos* demonstrates that thirteenth-century audiences found it difficult to make sense of troubadour song²⁶. Yet to suggest that the audiences for these texts needed supporting biographical detail in order to appreciate the lyric material, and even the proposition that some kind of temporal and cultural gulf separates the makers and consumers of troubadour song, is perhaps to forget that the biographers were themselves active troubadours, and that Occitan lyric composition *increased* in the period when the prose biographies were composed. Next-to-nothing is known about the specific factors that might have prompted the writing of a new *vida*, and it certainly appears necessary to distinguish between the accounts of long-dead poets such as Marcabru or Peire de Valeira, those of Uc de Saint-Circ's contemporaries, or those of troubadours whose careers postdate that of Uc. I would suggest rather that this critical orientation towards the material demonstrates the potency of the voice of authority in the *vidas* and *razos*, specifically of the clear distinction it establishes between «speaker-now» and «story-now» (see the definition of these terms in n. 20 above); if some critics assume that a gulf separated the users of the *vidas* from the culture of the troubadour «golden age», it is because the biographies themselves work to produce an effect of rupture with the events they are describing.

A late thirteenth-century biography, the *vida* for Bartolomeo Zorzi, contains a revealing detail. We are told that the poet was a merchant, whose boat was taken hostage by the Genoese, «car adoncs avion mout gran gerra Venecian ab Genoese» [for in those days the Venetians were involved in a fierce war with the Genoese]. Scholarly estimates place this incident around 1266; in other words «adoncs» [in those days] (already encountered in the derogatory evocation of the heyday of Peire de Valeira) refers here to a time that postdates most of the poetic activity I have been discussing, and indeed postdates the composition of some of the extant troubadour manuscripts²⁷. If one pauses to ask what kind of reader is being assumed here, it is

²⁵ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 357.

²⁶ See for instance M. Egan, «Commentary, *vita poetarum*, and *vida*», p. 48; F. L. Cheyette, «Women, Poets, and Politics in Occitania», *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France*, ed. T. Evergates, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 138-77 [p. 143].

²⁷ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 576. For the estimate of 1266, see V. de Bartholomaeis, *Poesie provenzali storiche relative all'Italia*, Rome, Tipografia del Senato, 1931, t. II, p. 241.

clear that a contemporary audience would not have needed to be told about the rivalry between Genoa and Venice, two cities which spent much of the Middle Ages disputing control over the merchant routes of the Mediterranean ; the impulse here is to record enough background information to make the events of the *vida* comprehensible to the reader of the future. The text is thus projecting a posterity user of the books who may come to the material with no prior knowledge of its cultural context, comparable to Rabelais' *Quart Livre* protagonists coming across the frozen words left hanging in the air by others. Indeed, « paroles gelées » is a wonderfully evocative way of describing the relative fixity and permanence of written song ; the beauty of a written tradition, the biographers understood, is its openness to an unlimited number of readers. In order to guarantee this future for Occitan culture, the *vidas* and *razos* work hard to construct even – especially – the recent past as a long-gone era, knowing that this is what it will become, if only they can secure its entry into literary history. This is where the distinction between « story-now » and « speaker-now » functions to produce the requisite effect of rupture. « Story-now », the time of the events of the narrative, is narrated almost exclusively in the past tenses, with especial emphasis on the preterite. The troubadours' activities are entirely circumscribed within this temporality, with one important class of exception : the moment when the troubadour speaks through his song. The *vida* for Folquet de Marselha (c. 1150-1231), for instance, describes him as having been in love with the wife of his lord :

E pregava la e fasia sas chansos d'ella. Mas anc per precis ni per cansos no-i poc trobar merce, qu'ella li fezes nuill ben en dreit d'amor ; per que totz temps se plaing d'Amor en soas cansos.²⁸

[And he begged her and wrote his songs for her. But never through entreaties nor through his songs was he able to find clemency in her, nor to get her to do him any favour according to the law of love ; this is why he always complains about Love in his songs.]

Most of this sentence is narrated in the past tenses ; Folquet's speech and songs alike are consigned to the historical frame, within which they prove singularly ineffective. Yet the final clause introduces a temporality in which Folquet's voice can continue to speak, indeed cannot *but* speak in the present ; this is the ongoing, unlimited time of reception in posterity, and in manuscripts. This passage demonstrates neatly the two temporalities at play, and the way in which the troubadour's voice is projected ambivalently across both of these, even when (as here) he is not permitted to speak directly to the reader. The words of the poem have two existences, first within a historically- and physically-specific exchange (a song written on request, or to express the poet's emotions at a particular time), and then within the unlimited present of the written page. And these, of course, correspond to two conceptions of the troubadour : as an individual who lived, and as an *auctor*, an effect produced by his text and its readers.

This new model of vernacular authority posits a new kind of reader, a sort of vernacular scholar ; someone for whom grammatical correctness and stylistic taxonomy are primary concerns in dealing with vernacular texts. The elements of

²⁸ *Biographies des troubadours*, p. 474.

such an attitude to troubadour lyric can be glimpsed in the *vida* for Uc de Saint-Circ, thereby strongly hinting at his centrality to these new developments in Occitan culture. Forced into clerical education by his older brothers, Uc instead devises a new kind of curriculum for himself:

E quant ill cuideront qu'el amapres letras, el amparet cansos e vers e sirventes e tensos e coblas, e-ls faich e-ls dich dels valens homes e de las valens domnas que eron al mon, ni eron estat.²⁹

[And when they thought he was learning letters, he was learning *cansos* and *vers* and *sirventes* and *tensos* and *coblas*, and the deeds and the words of the worthy men and ladies that were in the world, and had ever been.]

As the *vida* suggests, this nascent tradition of Occitan literature *qua* writing represented a subversion of the forms of Latin learning to vernacular ends. The taxonomy of genres reeled off by the commentator concurrently announces an erudite approach to Occitan lyric which itself constitutes a challenge to the «*fin'amor*» ideological model imposed by earlier *vidas* and *razos* upon troubadour songs. We saw how the *vida* for Folquet de Marselha represented the composition of the song as motivated by Folquet's feelings for his lord's wife; Uc, by contrast, is described as producing relatively few *cansos*, «*quar anc non fo fort enamoratz de neguna; mas ben se saup feingner enamoratz ad ellas ab son bel parlar*»³⁰ [for he was never deeply in love with anyone; but he knew well how to feign love for them through his skill with words]. *Amar* no longer appears to be a pre-condition for *trobar*, as long as you have enough *saber* and *bel parlar* to talk the talk.

Perhaps the latest troubadour *vida* (it may have been written as late as the 1330s) is that of the Italian troubadour Ferrari de Ferrara, and it demonstrates the absolute triumph of the scholarly attitude to Occitan lyric.

Maistre Ferari fo da Feirara. E fo giullar e intendez meill de trobar proensal che negus om che fos mai[s] en Lombardia e meill entendet la lenga proensal. E sap molt be letras, e scrivet meil ch'om del mond e feis de molt bos libres e de beill[s]... E qan venia qe li marches feanon festa e cort, e li giullar li vinian che s'entendean de la lenga proensal, anavan tuit ab lui e[-] clamavan lor ma[i]stre... si che li era per un canpio en la cort del marches d'Est... E fe[s] un estrat de tutas las canços des bos trobador[s] del mon; e de chadaunas canços o serventes tras .I. cobla o .II. o .III., aqelas che portan la[s] sentenças de las canços e o son tu[i]t li mot triat. Et aqest estrat e scrit isi denan; et en aqest estrat non vol meter nullas de las soas coblas; mais [a]qel de cui es lo libre li-n fe[s] scriure, per che fos recordament de lui.³¹

[Master Ferrari was from Ferrara. And he was a minstrel and understood Provençal *trobar*, and the Provençal language, better than any man who had ever lived in Lombardy. And he knew letters very well, and wrote better than any man in the world and made most worthy and beautiful books... And when it happened that the marquises held a feast at court, and minstrels came there who understood the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 581.

Provençal language, they all followed him around and called him their master... so that he was considered a champion at the court of the marquises of Este... And he made an extract from all the songs of the good troubadours in the world ; and from each *canso* or *sirventes* he took one, two or three *coblas*, those which contained the meaning of the songs and where all the words are well-chosen. And this extract is written herein ; and in this extract he did not wish to put any of his own *coblas* ; but he who owns the book had some written in, so that there would be a record of him.]

The laudable qualities of Ferrari de Ferrara are explicitly those associated with « letras » ; but where learning and troubadour culture were represented as conflicting choices in the Uc de Saint Circ *vida*, here learning is defined in terms of the « *lenga proensal* », which has displaced Latin as a language of knowledge³². By the same token, « trobar », the art of composition, is now presented entirely without reference to sincerity in love, and instead as part of the scholarship in which Ferrari excelled. The opposition between the clerkly culture of Latin and the love lives of the courtiers, with Occitan lyric situated awkwardly but productively between the two, is collapsed into identification, with Ferrari acquiring standing at court for his erudition. It had been Uc's « *bel parlar* » that had allowed him to get on in the courts, charming lords and ladies in equal measure. For Ferrari, it is more particularly his status among those who understand *trobar proensal* that makes him a « champion ». And the oral skills praised in Uc have been replaced by writerly qualities : Ferrari is a scribe who makes « most worthy and beautiful books », while patronage is similarly conceptualised in terms of book ownership. Indeed, it becomes apparent at the end of this passage that the *vida* is designed to introduce a *florilegium* put together by Ferrari, which is precisely the position it occupies in the quires that make up folios 243-60 of *chansonniér* D (Modena, Bibl. Naz. Est., Q, R.4.4.). We thus have a situation much closer to that of the *accessus ad auctores*, with the *vida* serving to introduce a specific work, and creating the legacy of « maistre » Ferrari as an authority on vernacular poetry ; we also have explicit avowal, at the end of the passage, that to enter into literary history a poetic voice must now be mediated via the pages of a written work.

Our diachronic analysis of a range of troubadour biographies reveals that, by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Occitan lyric is being evaluated within traditional models of authority ; the voice of the vernacular manuscript is louder than that of the performed song. The construction of a vernacular language of authority by the *chansonniers* in general, and the biographies in particular, has succeeded. In doing so, a challenge has emerged to Jean Bodel's conceptualisation of three narrative types, all drawing on events from the distant past : the authority of the « *lenga proensal* » reflects onto its wielders, the poets and scholars whose biographies are recounted in these manuscripts. Yet, tellingly, this is achieved by

³² Ferrari's *vida* highlights the fact that, like Latin, Occitan owed part of the authority it achieved to its status as an international language. Once again, Uc de Saint Circ appears as a transitional figure, for his relocation from Occitania to Italy coincides with the dissemination of troubadour lyric in Italian courts ; by the turn of the fourteenth century, Ferrari's mastery of « *proensal* » is presented less as the successful acquisition of a foreign language than as the attainment of a laudable level of general education.

constructing the present as a distant past, creating what we might call a sort of *matière d'Occitan*, with the language taking the place of a polity such as Britain or Rome.

We modern readers may compare the productions of this period unfavourably with those of the «golden age» of troubadour song, but we must recognise that in doing so we are pursuing the agenda set by the biographies themselves. Moreover, despite their evident admixture of truth and fictionality, we frequently find we cannot do without the mediation of the *vidas* and *razos* in our reading of the songs. Set down resolutely on the manuscript page, these unmoored utterances are fiercely resistant to any attempt to resolve the fundamental ambivalence about their referential value³³. Thus we find ourselves taking up the proffered invitation to access troubadouresque culture as posterity readers, and, in the absence of further context, treating the *vidas* and *razos* as Pantagruel and his companions treated their frozen words, mixing serious scholarship with exuberant play.

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³³ For further reflections on the developing awareness of the cultural potential of writing in the Middle Ages, see J. Kittay, « Utterance Unmoored: The Changing Interpretations of the Act of Writing in the European Middle Ages », *Language in Society*, 17, 1986, p. 209-30.