

Provençal Troubadours, the Love of Beauty that Exalts the Poet, and the Wandering Arabic Minstrels of Islamic Spain

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Abstract

Through the Arabs and a blossoming Islamic culture in eleventh-century Islamic Spain, classical Greek philosophy, accompanied by new ideas on science, astronomy, mathematics, and love, was flowing back to a France that had lost this knowledge in the centuries following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. This included the mystical philosophy of Plotinus, who attests to “the love of beauty that exalts the poet as an authentic profession for reaching that height above the actual and the particular where we stand in the immediate presence of the In-finite.” This artistic way of the heart towards such a spiritual state had definite appeal for the first Provençal poet and troubadour, the cultured, but cavalier Guilhem, IX Duke of Aquitaine and VII Count of Poitou. New Saudi-Arabian scholarship and the forgotten but recently republished work of musicologist and historian John Frederick Rowbotham describe the presence of popular Arabian minstrels or *raouis*, who were welcomed in homes across the Iberian Peninsula with their inspiring songs of love, nobility of purpose, and defence of womanhood. These Arabian minstrels struck a meaningful chord with this first troubadour. In view of the ongoing power struggle between the Church and the Royal Courts across medieval Europe, it is concluded that, with the call to arms by Pope Urban II and the Latin Church for a crusade against the Muslims to retake Jerusalem, this powerful nobleman and the Court of Poitou effectively took over this popular Arabian practice and refined it into an art form suitable for the Royal Courts and nobles. This created the troubadours whilst simultaneously keeping alive a mystical tradition that had long honoured the spiritual feminine and “the love of beauty that exalts the poet.”

Keywords: Courtly Love, Mysticism, Provençal Troubadours, Arabian Raouis, Minstrels, Al-Andalus, Zajal, Muwashshah, Feminine

Les troubadours provençaux, l’amour de la beauté qui exalte le poète et les ménestrels arabes errants de l’Espagne islamique

Christopher Eriksson, PhD

Résumé

Par le biais des Arabes et de la culture islamique florissante dans l’Espagne du XI^e siècle, la philosophie grecque classique, tout comme des concepts nouveaux sur la science, l’astronomie, les mathématiques et l’amour, étaient de retour à une France qui avait perdu cette connaissance dans les siècles qui suivirent l’effondrement de l’Empire romain d’Occident. Cela incluait la philosophie mystique de Plotin, qui décrit « l’amour de la beauté exalté par le poète, semblable à une véritable démarche pour atteindre ces cimes au-dessus du réel et du particulier, où nous nous

pouvons nous sentir en présence immédiate de l'Infini ». Cette voie artistique et cardiaque vers un tel état spirituel, inspira certainement le premier poète et troubadour provençal, le chevalier Guilhem, IXe Duc d'Aquitaine et VIIe Comte de Poitou. De nouvelles études saoudiennes et les travaux oubliés, mais récemment republiés, du musicologue et historien John Frederick Rowbotham, décrivent les ménestrels arabes populaires, ces "Raouis" qui étaient accueillis dans des foyers à travers la péninsule ibérique avec leurs chants inspirants d'amour, de noblesse et de défense de la féminité. Ces ménestrels arabes touchèrent donc la corde sensible de notre premier troubadour. Compte tenu de la lutte de pouvoir en cours entre l'Église et les cours royales, à travers l'Europe médiévale, avec l'appel aux armes du pape Urbain II et de l'Église catholique pour préparer une croisade contre les musulmans et reprendre Jérusalem, l'article explique comme ce puissant noble et la cour du Poitou aient effectivement repris cette pratique arabe populaire en la raffinant en une forme d'art adaptée aux cours royales et aux nobles français. Ce fut là l'origine des troubadours, qui sut maintenir vivante une tradition mystique qui avait longtemps honoré le féminin spirituel et « l'amour de la beauté qui exalte le poète ».

Mots-clés : Amour courtois, Mysticisme, Troubadours provençaux, Raouis arabes, Ménestrels, Al-Andalous, Zajal, Mouashshah, Féminin

Trovadores Provenzales, el Amor a la Belleza que Exalta al Poeta y los Juglares Arabes Errantes de la España Islámica

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Resumen

A través de los Arabes y una floreciente cultura Islámica en la España Islámica del siglo XI, la filosofía Griega clásica, acompañada de nuevas ideas sobre ciencia, astronomía, matemáticas y amor, fluía de regreso a una Francia que había perdido este conocimiento en los siglos posteriores al colapso del Imperio Romano Occidental. Esto incluyó la filosofía mística de Plotino, quien da fe de el "amor por la belleza que exalta al poeta como una profesión auténtica por alcanzar esa altura por encima de lo actual y lo particular donde nos encontramos en la presencia inmediata del Infinito". Este camino artístico del corazón hacia un estado tan espiritual tuvo un atractivo definitivo para el primer poeta y trovador Provenzal, el culto, pero arrogante Guilhem, IX Duque de Aquitania y VII Conde de Poitou. La nueva erudición de Arabia Saudita y el trabajo olvidado, pero recientemente reeditado del musicólogo e historiador John Frederick Rowbotham describen la presencia de populares juglares Arabes o cantores, quienes fueron bienvenidos en los hogares de la Península Ibérica con sus inspiradoras canciones de amor, nobleza de propósito y defensa de la feminidad. Estos juglares Arabes tocaron una fibra sensible con este primer trovador. En vista de la lucha de poder en curso entre la Iglesia y los Tribunales Reales en la Europa Medieval, se concluye, que con el llamado a las armas del Papa Urbano II y la Iglesia Latina para una cruzada contra los Musulmanes para retomar Jerusalén, este poderoso noble y la Corte de Poitou se hicieron cargo de esta práctica popular Arabe y la perfeccionaron hasta convertirla en una forma de arte adecuada para las Cortes Reales y los nobles. Esto creó a los trovadores mientras que al mismo tiempo mantuvo viva una tradición mística que había honrado durante mucho tiempo la espiritualidad femenina y "el amor por la belleza que exalta al poeta".

Palabras claves: Amor cortesano, Misticismo, Trovadores Provenzales, Cantores Arabes, Juglares, Al-Andalus, Zajal, Muwashshah, Femenino

Trovadores Provençais, o Amor Pela Beleza que Exalta o Poeta e os Menestréis Árabes Errantes da Espanha Islâmica

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Resumo

Por meio dos árabes e de uma cultura islâmica florescente na Espanha islâmica do século XI, a filosofia grega clássica, acompanhada por novas ideias sobre ciência, astronomia, matemática e amor, estava fluindo de volta para uma França que havia perdido esse conhecimento nos séculos seguintes ao colapso do Império Romano do Ocidente. Isso incluiu a filosofia mística de Plotino, que atesta “o amor pela beleza que exalta o poeta como uma profissão autêntica por atingir essa altura acima do real e do particular onde nos encontramos na presença imediata do Infinito”. Este caminho artístico do coração em direção a tal estado espiritual teve apelo definitivo para o primeiro poeta e trovador provençal, o culto, mas cavaleiro Guilhem, IX Duque da Aquitânia e VII Conde de Poitou. A nova erudição saudita e o trabalho esquecido, mas recentemente republicado, do musicólogo e historiador John Frederick Rowbotham descrevem a presença de menestréis ou *raouis* árabes populares, que foram recebidos em lares em toda a Península Ibérica com suas canções inspiradoras de amor, nobreza de propósito e defesa da feminilidade. Esses menestréis árabes atingiram um acorde significativo com este primeiro trovador. Em vista da luta pelo poder, em curso entre a Igreja e as Cortes Reais em toda a Europa medieval, conclui-se que, com o apelo do Papa Urbano II e da Igreja Latina por uma cruzada contra os muçulmanos para retomar Jerusalém, este poderoso nobre e a Corte de Poitou efetivamente assumiram essa prática popular árabe e a aperfeiçoaram em uma forma de arte adequada para as Cortes Reais e os nobres. Isso criou os trovadores, mantendo viva simultaneamente uma tradição mística que há muito honrava o feminino espiritual e “o amor pela beleza que exalta o poeta”.

Palavras-chave: Amor cortês; Misticismo; Trovadores provençais; *Raouis* árabes; Menestréis; Al-Andalus; Zéjel; Moachaha; Feminino

Provenzalische Troubadours, die poetische Verherrlichung der Liebe zur Schönheit, und die arabische Minnesänger aus dem islamischen Spanien

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Zusammenfassung

Im 11. Jahrhundert erlebte die arabische und islamische Kultur eine Blüte in Spanien. Sie brachte die klassische griechische Philosophie zurück nach Frankreich und gleichzeitig auch neue Ansichten der Wissenschaft, Astronomie, Mathematik und Liebe. Frankreich hatte nach dem Zusammenbruch des Römischen Reiches dieses Wissen über die Jahrhunderte verloren. Dazu

gehörte auch die mystische Philosophie von Plotin. Ihren Angaben zufolge „verspricht die poetische Verherrlichung der Liebe zur Schönheit verlässlich Aktuelles und Einzelnes zu übersteigen sogar in unmittelbarer Gegenwart des Ewigen zu verweilen.“ Dieser musische Ausdruck des Herzens bezüglich solch eines spirituellen Zustands hat ohne Zweifel den ersten provenzalischen Dichter und Troubadour, der gebildete aber ungezwungene Wilhelm IX Herzog von Aquitanien und VII Graf von Poitou inspiriert.

Neue Saudi-Arabische Forschungen und das vergessene aber kürzlich neu herausgegebene Werk des Musikwissenschaftlers und Historikers John Frederick Rowbotham beschreiben die populären arabischen Minnesänger bzw. raouis. Sie waren sehr willkommen in den Häusern der Iberischen Halbinsel. Sie sangen inspirierende Lieder über Liebe, edle Ziele und über den Schutz der Weiblichkeit. Diese arabischen Minnesänger berührten im hohen Maße diesen ersten Troubadour.

Im Mittelalter wüteten anhaltenden Machtkämpfe zwischen Kirche und Königshöfe. Papst Urban II und die Römische Kirche riefen zu Kreuzzügen gegen die Moslems auf mit dem Ziel Jerusalem zu befreien. Der Herzog und der Hof von Poitou übernahmen tatsächlich diese populäre arabische Gepflogenheit und passten sie an der Mentalität der hiesigen Königshöfen und Adel an. Hieraus entstanden die Troubadours die sowohl eine mystische Tradition, die die spirituelle Weiblichkeit lange verehrte, als auch die „poetische Verherrlichung der Liebe zur Schönheit“.

Schlüsselwörter: die höfische Liebe, die Mystik, provenzalische Troubadours, arabische Raouis, Minnesänger, al-Andalus, Zajal, Muwashshah, die Weiblichkeit

Introduction

Guilhem (in the Language of Occitane, Guillaume in French, William in English), IX Duke of Aquitaine and VII Count of Poitou is the first troubadour known to history. He was born in 1071 CE into a cultured court going back to his grandfather Guilhem the Great, who was renowned for his wisdom and respect for learning. This troubadour's grandfather had a keen interest in science and the religious issues of the day, and had established a large library where he arranged for the transcribing of many manuscripts. The Royal Court of Poitou had maintained its contact with the famous cathedral school at Chartres with the court's new spirit of enquiry and humanism in the twelfth century that was based on a return to studying the classics and especially the Neoplatonic writings of Cicero, Plotinus, and Boethius. This connection had also provided a focus and conduit for the new ideas on science, astronomy, arithmetic, algebra, navigation, and love that had flowed into Occitane (now southern France) and into the French north from Islamic Spain during the eleventh century. Guilhem the Great's third wife Agnes of Burgundy is credited with refining the manners of this feudal court and introducing the courtly values and virtues that were in place when this first troubadour composed his lyrical love poetry (Topsfield 1975/2010, 3).

However, the most striking feature of medieval sentiment at this time has been described by C.S. Lewis as the cleavage and power struggle between the two pillars of this feudal society: the Church and the Royal Courts, including the Court of Poitou (Lewis 2012, 21; Russell 1965, 406). According to Lewis, the powerful medieval Church found room for innocent sexuality but had no

acceptance of passion, whether romantic or otherwise, even of one's own wife (Lewis 2012, 20). Lewis adds that the general impression left on the medieval mind by its official Church teachers was as though "all love, at least all such passionate and exalted devotion as a courtly poet thought worthy of the name, was more or less wicked."

This clearly rang true with the first known troubadour-poet the cultured but cavalier Guilhem, IX Duke of Aquitaine and VII Count of Poitou, who is known for having had no tolerance for the Church telling him what to do in matters of love or when he felt his interests were being infringed on by the Church (Topsfield 1975/2010, 12).

The recognized excellence of this first troubadour's technique regarding stanza construction and rhyme, artistic conventions in his poetry, and clear ability to express lofty and refined ideas in poetical form, (despite occasional lapses into coarseness) was interpreted by nineteenth century literature scholars who coined the phrase "courtly love" as precluding the idea that he could have been the first actual troubadour (Chaytor 1912/2011, 6; Topsfield 2010, 2). If there were earlier troubadours, the manuscripts and *vidas* (biographies written in Occitane) have ignored them (Topsfield 1975/2010, 11).

The origin of troubadour lyric love poetry, which was sung and not recited, has been associated by scholars with the Limousin dialect of what is now southern central France, known then as the Langue d'Oc, or Occitane; the language often now referred to loosely as Provençale.

Although troubadour poetry dealt with war, politics, satire, and other subjects, the predominant theme, and that in which real originality was shown, was love. The troubadours were the first lyric poets in medieval Europe to deal exhaustively with the subject of love. The skill of the Provençal troubadours was imitated across Europe and has been recognized as having had a significant impact on Western literature. The modern social etiquette "Ladies First" has been seen as a legacy of the troubadours (Chaytor, 1912/2011, 104).

In this southern medieval feudal society that was culturally separate from the French north, the noble lady had a little more independence and authority in her own right, as did Eleanor of Aquitaine who became Queen of France then Queen of England. Male primogeniture was not the norm in Occitane, and women could inherit in their own right. The noble lady could represent her husband's authority to his vassals as overlord, especially when he was away at war. Chaytor tells us that unmarried women were inconspicuous in this feudal society. A small number of troubadours were women, the most famous being The Countess of Die, and some clerics became troubadours too. In general, however, the troubadours were not greatly interested in religious affairs. Some are reported to have had a fine contempt for the Church of their time, commenting on the dissolute lives of the priests before the crusade against the Cathars (Chaytor 1902, xvii).

The Theory and Practice of Courtly Love

Courtly love was an art, restricted like poetry by formal rules, and the troubadour was a skilled artistic inventor, a creative poet-musician. He composed poetry and music that was meant to be sung and not recited in this Occitane dialect, not Latin, following clear poetic guidelines. After winning his noble lady's approval to send her his love poetry in her honour, and with her husband's permission, he would officially become her "lover," which meant solely that he could

send her his love poems, as marriage was not the object. It is to be remembered that romantic love played little or no part in marriages amongst the feudal nobility, and that most husbands allowed their wives their admirers. As secrecy was a duty incumbent upon the troubadour, the lady was referred to by a pseudonym (*senhal*). However, the lady's reputation would be enhanced if her attraction for a famous troubadour was known, and so the *senhal* was surely an open secret at times. The love poems were generally delivered by a travelling *joglar* (*jongleur* in French) who would sing the love poetry to the noble lady on the troubadour's behalf (Chaytor 1912/2011, 1-21).

The dominant theme in the Provençal love poetry, and the goal of the troubadour, was the experience of an idealized, intellectual, quasi-mystical love through an honouring of the feminine (Chaytor, 1912/2011, 7; Topsfield, 1975/2010, 1-7).

Characteristics of the troubadours' music poetry included rich vowel sounds and rhymes, resembling those of modern Spanish and Italian. Early troubadours sang about love (*amors*) and a *jois* (individual happiness), in honour of a specific noble lady, the *domna*. This love was related to youthfulness and rejuvenation (*joven*), and a spirit of loving playfulness (*jeu*). The love poem generally began with a description of spring, the time of renewal. This *amors* was an idealized intellectual love, a refined love and a discipline, a holistic attitude which was considered to supply the *jois* or personal happiness. The mystical exaltation inspired by this love was known to the first troubadour despite his being ridiculed as a ladies' man by the Church and attacked for taking nothing seriously.

The quest for *jois* on the three traditional planes of medieval times has been identified to be the inspiration for the love lyrics of the early troubadours – the sensual plane, the imaginary plane (which allows one to separate oneself from the sensual), and the visionary.

Key characteristics of troubadour lyrical love poetry identified by Chaytor are:

- the idealizing of love;
- the elevation and honouring of the beloved or noble lady;
- the ennobling character of such love for the troubadour;
- the obligation of service to the beloved, analogous to that of a vassal to his feudal overlord.

Requirements for the success of the troubadour lover in his quest have been described as:

- the willingness and resilience to suffer for this ideal love;
- ongoing perseverance to deal with the lady's rejections and whims – in this feudal relationship she is the overlord, and the troubadour is akin to the vassal;
- the ability to take pleasure in the pleasure of others, seen as requiring wisdom and self-restraint or *mesura*, a measured response. (Chaytor 1912/2011, 15)

The troubadour attained his position only by stages (Chaytor 1912/2011, 17).

There were four stages:

- The first is that of aspirant – *fegnedor*.
- The second is that of suppliant – *precador*.
- The third is that of recognized suitor – *entendedor*.
- The fourth is that of accepted lover – *drut*.

The troubadour-lover was formally installed as such by the lady, took an oath of fidelity to her, and received a kiss to seal it, a ring, or some other personal possession. The contract merely implied that the noble lady was prepared to receive the troubadour's homage in poetry and to be the subject of his song.

Troubadour Love, Music, and the Mystic Way of the Heart

This idealized love, conveyed through the singing of love poetry to the noble lady, may be linked to that experienced by mystics and the master artists such as Beethoven, as described by Raymund Andrea (Andrea 1938/2015). According to Andrea, the relationship between the technique of the mystic and the awakening spiritual fire of the soul is a subtle one, but no less real than the magnetic quality which a great artist infuses into the creation and execution of a masterpiece. In both instances, Andrea sees an awakening within the individual of a profound harmony with the universal spirit of life, a chord that resonates with the inherent harmony of the universe and which gives rise to geniuses like Shakespeare, Mozart, Beethoven, or Rumi. Andrea sees the creative artist's objectives as potentially as important as those of the mystic disciple on the path.

This is given direct and profound support by modern English musicologist and literature scholar John Stevens in his book *Words and Music in the Middle Ages* (Stevens 1986/2008, 397). He relates the harmony of music and poetry to the heavenly music of the Divine:

[M]usic, because it is ultimately inaccessible to human reason, could be used as a metaphor for the inexpressible religious experiences of the higher contemplatives and mystics. The relation of music to spiritual experience is a complex one. First, the sounds of actual music induces a joy, a *gaudium*, which as Cassiodorus says raises our senses to divine realities, and charms our ears with its measure. But the reason why this works, so to speak, is that these divine realities are themselves a music; and in the "heavenly habitations." If this heavenly music is indeed "real," then to share in it is not a metaphoric experience; it is rather our earthly music that is the metaphor.

Psychologist Lewis Way has a similar view:

We sometimes see examples of this sense of kinship with all that exists in the work of great artists, like that of Beethoven, in the recognition of oneness, and in the love, sympathy, and desire for combination with life which music such as his so often expresses. In a narrower form, the same emotion can also be felt sexually towards another human being, especially when that being comes to symbolize the whole sex, so that in the love for one is expressed the love for all. It is difficult to believe that the feeling of

natural sympathy for life which is apparent in the work of great artists and mystics is not a more comprehensive form of the same feeling as expressed by the lover. (Ansbacher 1968, 135)

Like our body parts and organs that are integrated to work together for the common good of the whole body, Alfred Adler sees human nature and Nature broadly connected together as in a greater, coherent whole. The troubadour Marcabru had a similar viewpoint as we shall see below. Using an analogy from cellular biology, Adler writes about this sense of kinship, *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* in German, as though it were a pluripotent cell “in its rich differentiations into parental love, filial love, sexual love, love of one’s country, love of nature, art, science, love of humankind” (Ansbacher 1968, 133).

All forms of love are thus seen by Adler as specific outcomes of this feeling of harmony and belonging, cast into movement by the individual’s creative power to the goal desired. Topsfield in his book on Troubadour Love relates this to the troubadours: “Love takes its quality from the quality of the lover who may succumb to sensual desire and allow his mind to speak foolish words, or who may use his mind to disentangle himself from the sensual plane” (Topsfield 1975/2010, 100).

The Fin ’Amors or Whole Love of Marcabru – One of the Most Original of Medieval Poets

The troubadour Marcabru who railed against uncontrolled carnal love took a view somewhat similar to Adler in recognizing the value of a sense of kinship and feeling part of the whole: “The individual who can shape self-interested desire so that it forms part of a higher ideal is thinking in a whole or integrated way (*entiers cuidars*)” (Topsfield 1975/2010, 100).

Marcabru composed from the mid- to late-twelfth century and is described as one of the most original of all medieval poets. In him can be seen many of the ideas and qualities of Jean de Meung and the later *Roman de la Rose*. Contrary to Bernart de Ventadorn’s courtly view, Marcabru sees love as part of the natural order of life, predating by a century the *Roman de la Rose* of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung.

Most importantly, Marcabru allows us to see that courtly behaviour is not just a social affair but a rationalized system of values. He was influenced by contemporary thinkers such as the mystic William of Saint-Thierry, who advocated living a life led by reason, and possibly by Hispano-Arabic literature then available. Steeped in the classics, these thinkers were analyzing love in all its manifestations and its effects on the body, mind, and spirit of humankind (Topsfield 1975/2010, 106).

Francesco d’Assisi (known in English as Francis of Assisi) has been described as a troubadour, since history records that he sang troubadour love songs all his life and was a truly happy individual (Jewett 1910; Russell 1965, 441). He called the feminine he honoured Lady Poverty, and described his vocation as a troubadour: “We are the troubadours (*jongleurs*) of the Divine, for as servants of the Lord, are we not in truth troubadours (*jongleurs*) whose vocation it is to uplift the hearts of men and women and lead them to spiritual joy?”

Historian, mathematician, and philosopher Bertrand Russell (1965, 441) says that what makes Francesco d'Assisi unique among Catholic saints was his spontaneous happiness, his universal love, his gifts as a poet, and that he seemed to have no dross to overcome. He adds that his *Canticle of the Sun* could almost have been written by the Pharaoh Akhenaton, but not quite. Christianity informs it but not very obviously. Attesting to his humility and common humanity, his biographer Thomas of Celano says that Francesco “was more than a saint among saints; among sinners he was one of themselves.”

Origin of The Troubadours

Three main theories have been proposed in the literature to account for the origin and appearance of these highly skilled troubadours in what is now southern France: the first theory is that they are a continuation of Latin Ovid poetry; the second theory is that they sprang from the Cult of the Virgin Mary; and the third theory is that they were influenced by Arab minstrels in Arab Islamic Spain.

Provençal Love Poetry as a Continuation of Latin Ovid Poetry in its Decadence

Wandering entertainers in the region go back to Roman times in Gaul (France) with their tumblers, clowns, and *joculators* who amused the common people by day and the nobles by night with bawdy songs set to musical accompaniment (Chaytor 1912/2011, 11). Differences in character between those from the cooler French north and those from the warmer Occitan south in the eleventh century have been recorded in the historical literature of the time. The Northerners are described as militaristic, proud, and inhospitable; the Occitans as easy-going, lax, and sometimes a little more tolerant of social and religious differences. Some church authorities are reported to have viewed the Occitans as corrupters of morals on account of “jongleur-like fashions in dress and shaving” (Paterson 1998, 6-7).

In the cooler, less civilized northern parts of Gaul which had been dealing with invaders, the wandering entertainers were seen as having remained largely buffoons. But in the milder, more developed urban areas of the feudal south with more seigneurial courts and where artistic traditions had been better preserved, greater artistry and performance were expected. Here the Roman *joculator* is seen as having evolved musically into a *joglar* (*jongleur* in the north) like a wandering minstrel. In this theory he evolved further into the highly skilled troubadour who, as the name implies, was an inventor of his own music and poetry, an *artiste* (Chaytor 1912, 7). A variation of this theory is that the troubadours were influenced by the Goliards who were itinerant scholars, clerics, and students who sang satirical songs and poems like the troubadours, but used a more secular Latin. However, in the literature, they are associated with licentiousness and riotous living, and in their poems and songs, women are not the subject of veneration, but are rather objects of play and entertainment (Swabey 2004, 59).

Provençal Love Poetry from the Cult of The Virgin Mary

In the eleventh century there was a growing Cult of the Virgin Mary, which later came to be associated with Bernard of Clairvaux. It has been suggested that this was a powerful influence on

the content of troubadour lyrics (Swabey 2004, 59). However, C.S. Lewis in his *The Allegory of Love* (Lewis 2012, 20) challenges this theory as lacking any historical support:

But there is no evidence that the quasi-religious tone of medieval love poetry has been transferred from the worship of the Blessed Virgin; it is just as likely – it is even more likely – that the colouring of certain hymns to the Virgin has been borrowed from the love poetry. Nor is it true in any unequivocal sense that the medieval church encouraged reverence for women at all: while it is a ludicrous error (as we shall presently see) to suppose that she [The Church] regarded sexual passion, under any conditions or after any possible process of refinement, as a noble emotion.

The Troubadours Influenced by the Arab Minstrels from Moorish Spain

One of the original theories put forward has been that a predominant influence on the troubadours came from the Islamic Spain just to the south (Topsfield 2010, 3; Chaytor 1912/2011, 8; Swabey 2004, 58), a theory very recently elaborated on by a Saudi-Arabian author (Dahami, 2015, 1-20). This idea was largely rejected by Western literature scholars of the mid- to late-nineteenth century who first coined the phrase “courtly love,” as they saw no literary evidence that the complexities of Provençal poetry bore any resemblance to Arabic poetry (Chaytor 1912/2011, 8).

Swabey (2004, 58), however, states that Arab influence cannot be discounted as the Arab courts of southern Spain experienced an extraordinary blossoming of a sophisticated Islamic culture in the eleventh century which is widely recognized. Not only were there debates in Toledo between Islamic, Christian, and Jewish scholars using scholarly translations of classical Greek texts (Russell 1965, 413-421; Dahami, 2015, 17), but in these courts Hispano-Arabic songs with similar lyrics and complicated structures not unlike the troubadours’ later creations were performed by singers in either Arabic or Hebrew with a Spanish refrain. (There were many Jews in Spain who had helped the Arabs defeat the Visigoths). And the topic of many was a quasi-religious veneration of women that reflected an interest in both secular and mystical love (Swabey 2004, 58). This notion is given support by the Arabic philosopher, jurist, and theologian, Ibn Hazm who was born in Cordoba, Spain in 994 CE. In his book *The Ring of the Dove*, he speaks directly to nobility of purpose in action and the importance of defending womanhood consistent with troubadour poetry (Ibn Hazm, 1994):

Do not use your energy except for a cause more noble than yourself. Such a cause cannot be found except in the Almighty Divine Itself: to preach the truth, to defend womanhood, to repel humiliation which your Creator has not imposed upon you, to help the oppressed. Anyone who uses his energy for the sake of the vanities of the world is like someone who exchanges gemstones for gravel. There is no nobility in anyone who lacks faith. The wise man knows that the only fitting price for his soul is a place in Paradise.

Hickman (2014) in his doctoral thesis on “Islamic Sources of Courtly Love” advances the view that Ibn Hazm’s treatise incorporates all the literary features of courtly love: the ennobling force of love for the troubadour, the superiority of the female beloved, and the obligation to render service to the beloved; although he acknowledges that not every tale in *The Ring of the Dove*

shows all these features together. His thesis is that Ibn Hazm had a lasting philosophical influence on the foundation of love common to courtly love literature across the whole Iberian Peninsula.

Connections between Spain and the Langue d'Oc or Occitane via royal marriages are recorded historical facts, suggesting that considerable Arabic influence existed at the court of the first known troubadour, Guilhem, IX Duke of Aquitaine, VII Count of Poitou (Swabey 2004, 115). It is recorded that his second wife was the widow of Sancho Ramirez, King of Aragon; his daughter Agnes married Pedro I King of Aragon; and his sisters had also wedded Spanish nobles. Ties between Spain and Occitane were strengthened further when in the year 1112 Provence was joined to the Crown of Barcelona and in 1136 to the Kingdom of Aragon (Chaytor 1902, xviii). This first troubadour is known to have fought in Spain and is quoted by Swabey as having brought back to the royal court in Poitou several female Arabian singers (Swabey, 2004, 58). He later on participated in the First Crusade where he lost 30,000 men in an ambush, and according to Dahami (2015, 6), whilst in the Middle East he learned Arabic.

Victor Balaguer's *Historia de los Trovadores* (1888) (quoted by Rowbotham) relates that Arabic poet-singers or minstrels found a warm welcome in the homes of northern parts of Spain including Leon, Castile, and Catalonia in addition to those in Al-Andalus or Islamic Spain to the south (Fauriel, 338; Balaguer 1888, 177; 216).

This idea is in agreement with the forgotten work of nineteenth century English musicologist and historian John Frederick Rowbotham in his book *The Troubadours and Courts of Love* recently republished (2010, 20), but not mentioned by traditional literature scholars in the late-nineteenth century. Rowbotham reminds us that the Prophet Mohammed was against music resulting in there being no religious music in the mosques. Rowbotham adds that music became an illicit pleasure, and only with the later caliphs and their luxurious courts did music flourish. He describes the many different types of musical instruments brought to Arabic Spain from the Middle East including the Persian lute, the Arabian lyre, the Tartar pipe, and the Egyptian dulcimer, along with the talent and knowledge of the popular Arabian minstrels who made music with them in accordance with the established Arabian theory of music. Nezih Nasr illustrates some of these musical instruments in Shems Friedlander's modern book *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes* (Friedlander 2003, 129-142), citing Ibn Arabi's book *Sufis of Andalusia*. Rowbotham quotes Ibn Chaldun to show that these Arabian minstrels originated from Persia after the Arabian conquest of the Persian Empire in 651 CE and their adoption of Persian culture.

This historical connection is supported by Dahami's recent paper on Arabic musical love poetry, the "*Al Muwashshat - muwashshah and zajal*" which developed in Andalusian Spain in the ninth to eleventh centuries and which Dahami maintains is the forerunner to Provençal love poetry (Dahami, 2015, 1-2, 5; Alharthi 2010, 172-178). Rowbotham reminds us that these Arabian minstrels or *raouis* are favourably mentioned in that fabled Western book of Arabian culture *Arabian Nights*, with its stories of Sindbad the Sailor, Aladdin, and Ali Baba. In the introduction to that book, W.H.D. Rouse quotes Denham's Travels in Africa:

Arab songs go to the heart, and greatly excite the passions. I have seen a circle of Arabs straining their eyes with fixed attention one moment, and bursting with loud laughter: at

the next, melting into tears, and clasping their hands in all the ecstasy of grief and sympathy.

The overriding theme of these Arabian minstrels according to Rowbotham was love and passion in the warm east in its countless manifestations; including stories from the hareem where many bards or minstrels would wait to respond to the smiles of the caliph and then sing and play their instruments with the hope of being rewarded if deemed the winner.

Rowbotham cites Ibn Chaldun: “To be a good musician, it is necessary not to play pretty tunes and jingle nice melodies, but to utter clever words and make your hearers understand every word as you chant it.”

Rowbotham also writes about the importance of poetry used by these Arabian minstrels, citing Ali of Ispahan (*Liber Cantilenarum*, folio 52): “A good musician will have at his fingers’ ends a hundred pieces of poetry, and countless songs, both humorous and melancholy; he will have a fluent tongue and a copious command of speech; he will be a good grammarian, and know how to form his sentences properly and elegantly.”

Additional requirements to be a good minstrel (and not just a good musician) in the Arabian art of music are specified by Rowbotham:

Another theorist praises as the great essential in music “an abundant wit,” which comprises all that is desirable in the art, and is equally strong on the necessity of a “refined sentiment,” which is entirely indispensable to the existence of music; “without it there is no music, it is all music, and nothing but music.” To these definitions of the art of music another theorist adds the prime qualification of “a clear pronunciation,” which brings home to the hearer the words that are uttered.

According to Ali of Ispathan, quoted by Rowbotham, the subject of love was not the only topic of their songs, like the troubadours: “This devotion to the theme of love on the part of the Arabian minstrels must not be understood as assuming that love was the exclusive subject they sang of. They treated of other subjects, of subjects too of wide range, as wide as the culture of their numerous universities.”

The commentaries above on the Arabian art of music and its minstrels clearly bear a resemblance to those descriptions of the troubadours (Chaytor 1912/2011, 14; Dahami, 2015, 5):

Troubadour poems were composed for singing, not for recitation, and the music of a poem was an element of no less importance than the words.... Consequently, music and words were regarded as forming a unity, and the structure of the one should be a guide to the structure of the other.

This paper commented earlier that John Stevens in his treatise on *Words and Music in the Middle Ages* (Stevens 2008, 409) clarifies their intimate relationship through a mystic-like harmony reminiscent of Boethius’ music of the spheres. He later on adds:

We may say that the early Middle Ages had a strong, it sometimes seems, an overwhelming sense of the metaphysical importance of organized sound.... Poetry is traditionally seen – and we must not think this a light or superficial idea – as a branch of music or better, as another manifestation in sound of “*musica*.” When words and music come together they have to agree, certainly, but this agreement is primarily a matter of parallel harmonies, agreements of phrase and structure, of balance and number, so that in song, the mind and ear may be doubly charmed by a double melody.

Steven’s comments on the harmony of words and music in the Middle Ages apply to the Arabian art of music used by the minstrels in Islamic Spain as described by Dahami (2015, 5) and Rowbotham. It is known that through Islamic scholars including Kindi (CE 801- 873), Avicenna/Ibn Sina (980-1037), and Averroes/Ibn Rushdi (1126-1198), that Greek philosophy and metaphysics from Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Boethius had been studied and incorporated into Islamic theology, including Greek ideas on harmony and music that were seen as governing the heavens and the human body and soul. The Sufi sect, which is seen as the mystic dimension of Islam, has been described as being essentially Neoplatonic (Russell, 1965, p.417; Friedlander, 2003). This idea is further supported by Nezhir Uzel and Shems Friedlander in *Rumi and the Whirling Dervishes* when they write that the Mevlevi movements where the whirling dervishes represent the planets may well have originated from the Pythagorean schools which performed certain dances or movements where each person turned to the ratio of the particular planet that they represented (Friedlander 2003, 142).

There is therefore substantial evidence that the Royal Court of Poitou and the first troubadour himself, Guilhem IX Duke of Aquitaine and VII Count of Poitou, were well familiar with these Arabian wandering minstrels who sang about love in its many forms, the importance of a noble sentiment, and the need to honor and respect womanhood.

Conclusion

With the First Crusade called in 1096 by Pope Urban II and the powerful Latin Church to retake Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Muslims, it would have been timely, and politically appropriate for this first known troubadour, Guilhem, IX Duke of Aquitaine and VII Count of Poitou, and his cultured court to develop and build on the popularity of these wandering minstrels from Arabic Spain by effectively reinventing them under his own high authority. This choice may be likened, in principle, to members of the British Royal Family at the end of World War I renouncing their titles that originated from Hesse and Germany and changing their family name from Battenberg to Mountbatten.

This decision would have afforded Duke Guilhem the opportunity to raise the status of the art form from that of a wandering minstrel to one more suited to the nobles and the royal courts, the *trobar*, to whom the inventive troubadour lyric love poetry is known to have been addressed in honour of the feminine and womanhood (Chaytor 1912/2011,10).

On a personal level, this would have suited him and the feudal nobles well, since the two pillars of this medieval feudal society, the royal courts and the Church, were at odds across Europe. The Church had recently made marriage a sacrament, where formerly it had been a secular affair, and

now wished to make love, both human and divine, a topic entirely under their own authority. This first known troubadour was well known for having no tolerance at all for the Church telling him what to do in matters of love or when he felt his interests threatened by the Church (Topsfield 1975/2010, 12; Chaytor 1912/2011, 41-42).

It is therefore entirely plausible that Duke Guilhem and others at the Royal Court of Poitou would develop the rules of lyrical love poetry in honour of the feminine to suit the Occitane language and culture and specifically the nobility and Royal Courts. For those who had ears to hear, including the public at large, this dramatized the message that nobility of mind and the love of beauty that exalts the poet was a well-travelled and authentic way to spiritual heights in addition to the way of the Church; such roots going back to ancient Rome and Greek civilization. This new development would not have been opposed by the Church since Arabic love poetry and its minstrel singers coming from the Middle East were associated with the hareems of the caliphs and the religion of Islam, upon whom the Church had just declared war (Rowbotham 3). Besides, the Church could easily interpret this homage to the feminine as reverence for the Virgin Mary, which it subsequently did. In 1323, a society was formed in Toulouse by seven troubadours to preserve and encourage lyric poetry (*lo gay saber*). Competitors for the prizes found that songs to the Virgin were given preference. Eventually, she became the one subject of these prize competitions (Chaytor, 1912/2011, 138).

The poetry of the troubadours in due course showed an increasing refinement and delicacy of sentiment. Whilst the earlier troubadours strove to be their best in the hope of obtaining their heart's desire, there came about a gradual change. Seeing that love was the inspiring force to good deeds, the later troubadours gradually dissociated their love from the object which had aroused it. Among them, love is no longer sexual passion; it is rather the motive to great works, to self-surrender, to winning an honourable name as courtier and poet, and to Divine Union, the higher concept of *joi*. It thus finally came to be seen as "love seeks the noble heart by affinity, as the bird seeks the tree," instead of "sight is delight" (Chaytor 1902, xxii; Chaytor 1912/2011, 107). Once this philosophical view had taken hold, Provençal poetry was no longer able to be a moving force. It was studied, but not imitated.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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