Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouveres

An Anthology and a History

Translations and Introductions by

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First Edition
Guillaume, the seventh Count of Poitiers and the ninth Duke of Aquitaine, was the lord of an immense realm. He succeeded his father in 1086, and from that moment to the end of his life his rule involved him in interminable conflicts with his own vassals, the lords of other domains, the King of France, and the Church. In 1101 he led a disastrous crusade into the Holy Land. In 1120 he aided the King of Aragón in a victorious battle against the Moors. Guillaume is depicted by contemporary chroniclers as witty, boisterous, riotous, salacious, “as though he believed all things were moved by chance, and not ruled by Providence”; and he was excommunicated many times for various reasons: many disputes with the Church regarding rights, and a liaison with the Vicomtesse de Châtellerault that he refused to terminate. He told the papal legate, who was bald: “The comb will curl the hair on your head before I put aside the Vicomtesse.”

Guillaume is the first troubadour whose songs are extant, and he is sometimes regarded as the originator of the courtly love lyric. In any case, whether he is really the first troubadour or rather the first whose work survives, this boisterous misruler of his realm was a first-rate poet. In eleven little lyrics, which are all that we have today, he shows his mastery of the basic metrical forms and the essential themes that would hardly vary in the troubadour lyric in the following generations; and, most important of all, he perfects the technique of composing a song for performance before an audience. For versification and theme are of the essence of all poetry; but the special distinction of the troubadour lyric is that it depends for its coherence and effect on a live relation between the poet, or the singer, and an attending audience.
Companho, faray un vers o covinen:
et aura i más de foudaz no y a de sen,
et er totz mesclatz d’amor e de joy e de joven.

E tenguatz lo per vilan qui no l’enten
o dins son cor voluntiers qui no l’apren;
greu partir si fai d’amor qui la trob’a son talen.

Dos cavalhs ai a ma selha ben e gen;
bon son e adreg per armas e valen;
e no ls puesc amdos tener que l’us l’autre non cos-
sen.

Si ls pogues adomesjar a mon talen,
ja no volgra alhors mudar mon guarnimen,
que miels for’ encavalguatz de nuill home viven.

Laëns fon dels montaniers lo plus corren;
mas aitan fer’ estranhez’ a longuamen,
et es tan fers e salvatges que del bailar si defen.

L’autre fon noyritz sa jus, part Cofolen,
et anc no n vis bellazor, mon escien;
aquest non er ja camjatz ni per aur ni per argen.

Qu’ieu doney a son senhor polin payssen;
pero si m retinc ieu tan de covenen
que s’elh lo teni’ un an qu’ieu lo tengues mais de cen.

1 A song, of the type that later troubadours would call *canso.*
My companions, I am going to make a vers\textsuperscript{1} that is refined,
and it will have more foolishness than sense,
and it will all be mixed with love and joy and youth.

Whoever does not understand it, take him for a peasant,
whoever does not learn it deep in his heart.
It is hard for a man to part from love that he finds to
his desire.

I have two good and noble horses for my saddle,
they are good, adroit in combat, full of spirit,
but I cannot keep them both, one can’t stand the other.

If I could tame them as I wish,
I would not want to put my equipment anywhere else,
for I’d be better mounted then than any man alive.

One of them was the fastest of the mountain horses,
but for a long time now it has been so fierce and shy,
so touchy, so wild, it fights off the currycomb.

The other was nurtured down there around Confolens,
and you never saw a prettier one, I know.
I won’t get rid of that one, not for gold or silver.

I gave it to its master as a grazing colt;
but I reserved the right
that for every year he had it, I got it for more than a hundred.
Cavallier, datz mi cosselh d'un pessamen!
Anc mais no fuy issarratz de cauzimen:
Gees non sai ab qual mi tenga de N'Agnes o de N'Arsen.²

25 De Gimel ai lo castel el mandamen,
E per Niol fauc ergueil a tota gen,
C'ambedui me son jurat e plevit per sagramen.³

2 Companho, tant ai agutz d'avols conres
qu’ieu non puesc mudar non chan e que no·m pes;
Enpero no vueill c'om sapcha mon afar de maintas res.

E dirai vos m'entendensa de que es:
5 no m’azauta cons gardatz ni gorcs ses peis,
ni gabars de malvatx homes com de lor faitz non agues.

Senher Dieus, quez es del mon capdels e reis,
qui anc premiers gardet con com non esteis?
C’anc no fo mestiers ni garda c’ia si donts estes sordeis.

10 Pero dirai vos de con cals es sa leis,
com sel hom que mal n’a fait e peitz n’a pres:
si c’autra res en merma qui·n pana, e cons en creis.

E silh qui no volran creire mos casteis
anho vezar pres lo bosc en un deveis:
15 per un albre c’om hi tailla n'i naison dos ho treis.

³ Gimel and Niol are two castles in his domaine, the dwellings of the two “horses” whose masters are his vassals. Niol is a little more than thirteen miles from Confolens in the Department of Charente.
¹ “Conres provides a pun on con and a variety of meanings, ‘equipment, provisioning, hospitality, feast, a course in a meal,’ as well as ‘company, the people one frequents.’” (L. T. Topsfield)
GUILLAUME IX

You knights, counsel me in this predicament, no choice ever caused me more embarrassment:
I can't decide which one to keep, Na Agues or Na Arsen.²

25 Of Gimel I have the castle and the fief, and with Niol I show myself proud to everyone, for both are sworn to me and bound by oath.³

My companions, I have had so much miserable fare,¹ I cannot keep from singing and from feeling vexed. Still, I do not want my little doings known in great detail.

And I shall tell you my thoughts: these things do not please me: a cunt under guard, a fish-pond without fish, and the boasting of worthless men when there is never to be any action.

Lord God, King and Ruler of the universe, why did he who first set a guard on cunt not perish? For no servant or protector ever served his lady worse.

But I shall tell you about cunt, what its law is, as one who has done badly in this matter and suffered worse: as other things diminish when you take from them, cunt increases.

And those who will not believe my advice, let them go and behold in a private preserve near the woods: for every tree that gets cut down, two or three grow up in its place.

¹...
E quam lo bocx es taillatz nais plus espes,
E·l senher no·n pert son comte ni sos ses;
A revers planh hom la tala si·l dampn .

Tortz es ca . . . dan noi a . . .

3

Farai un vers de dreyt nien:
on er de mi ni d’autra gen,
non er d’amor ni de joven,
i de ren au,
qu’enans fo trobatz en durmen sobre cheuau.

No sai en qual hora·m fuy natz: ¹
no suy alegres ni iratz,
no suy estrayns ni sui privatz,
i no·n puesc au,
qu’enaissi fuy de nueitz fadatz,
sobr’ un pueg au.

No sai quora·m fuy endurmitz
ni quora·m velh, s’om no m’o ditz.

15 Per pauc no m’es lo cor partitz
d’un dol corau;
e no m’o pretz una soritz,
per Sanh Marsau!

Malautz suy e tremi murir,
20 e ren no sai mas quan n’aug dir;
metge querrai al mieu albir,
e non sai tau;
bos metges es qui·m pot guerir,
mas non, si amau.

¹ Which is to say, I do not know what astrological influences determined my character.
And as the wood is cut, the thicker it grows,
and the lord does not lose any property or dues.  
A man is wrong to cry damaged goods when there is no 
loss.
It is wrong to cry loss when there's no damaged goods.

3

I will make a vers of exactly nothing:
there'll be nothing in it about me or anyone else,
nothing about love or youth
or anything else.
5 It came to me before, while I was sleeping
on my horse.

II
I do not know the hour of my birth.¹
I am not cheerful or morose,
I am no stranger here and do not belong in these parts,
and I can't help being this way,
I was turned into this, one night, by some fairy
high on a peak.

III
I don't know when I slept
or wake, if someone doesn't tell me.
15 My heart is almost broken
from the grief in it,
and I swear by Saint Martial, to me the whole thing
isn't worth a mouse.

IV
I am sick and shiver at death
20 and don't know it except when I'm told.
I will look for the doctor I have in mind,
I don't' know who he is.
He's a good doctor if he can make me well,
but not if I get worse.
M'amigu' ai ieu, no sai qui s'es,
qu'anc non la vi, si m'ajut fes;
  ni·m fes que·m plassa ni que·m pes,
ni no m'en cau,
qu'anc non ac Norman ni Frances
dins mon ostau.

Aanc non la vi et am la fort,
  anc no n'aic dreyt ni no·m fes tort;
  quan non la vey, be m'en deport,
  no·m pretz un jau
qu'ie·n sai gensor et bellazor,
e que mais vau.

No sai lo luec ves on s'esta,
  si es en pueg ho es en pla;
  non aus dire lo tort que m'a,
  abans m'en cau;
e peza·m be quar sai rema,
  ab aitan vau.²

Fag ai lo vers, no say de cuj;
e trametrai lo a selhuy
que lo·m trametra per autruy
  lay vers Anjau,
que·m tramezes del sieu estuy
  la contraclau.

Farai un vers, pos mi somelh
e·m vauc e m'estauc al solelhi.
  Domnas i a de mal conselh,

²Jeanroy regarded this strophe as "apocryphal" on the grounds that it was
flat and merely repeated ideas already expressed; it is not included in the
text of his edition. In this case, flatness lies in the eye of the beholder, for
other scholars consider it authentic, and even essential. The first word of
I have my little friend, I don't know who she is, because I've never seen her, so help me God; she's done nothing to make me feel good, or bad, and I don't care, because there's never been a Frenchman or a Norman yet inside my house.

I have never seen her and love her a lot, she has never yet done right by me, or wrong. When I do not see her, I enjoy myself. And I don't care a cock, because I know a nicer one, better looking, and worth more.

I do not know the region where she dwells, whether it's in the heights or on the plains. I dare not tell how she wrongs me, it hurts me in advance. And it pains me to stay on here, and so I go.²

I have made this vers, I don't know what about; and I shall send it to someone who will send it for me with someone else to someone in Anjou there; let him send me from his little box the key to what we have here.

I shall make a vers, since I am sleeping, and walking around, and standing in the sun. Well, there are ladies who are all wrongheaded, the last line, ab, is an emendation for the sake of meter, the manuscript reading simply aitam vau. The word es in the second line, also missing in the manuscript, is a similar emendation.
e sai dir cals:
5  cellas c'amor de cavalier
tornon a mals.

Domna fai gran pechat mortal
qe no ama cavalier leal;
mas si es monge o clergal,
10  non a raizo:
per dreg la deuri'hom cremar
ab un tezo.

En Alvernehe, part Lemozi,
m'en aniey totz sols a tapi:
15  trobei la moller d'en Guarí
  e d'en Bernart;
saluderon mi simplamentz
  per sant Launart.

La un'am diz en son latin:
20  "E Dieus vos salf, don pelerin;
mout mi semblatz de belh aizin,
  mon escient;
mas trop vezem anar pel mon
  de folia gent."

25  Ar auzires qu'ai respondut;
anc no li diz ni bat ni but,
ni fer ni fust no ai mentaugut,
mas sol aitan:
  "Babariol, babariol,
30  babarian."

So diz n'Agnes a n'Ermessen:
  "Trobat avem que anam queren.
Sor, per amor Deu, l'alberguem,
qe ben es mutz,
35  e ja per lui nostre conselh
  non er saubutz."
and I can say who:
the ones who turn down the love of a knight
and treat it badly.

A lady who does not love a loyal knight
commits a great mortal sin.
But if she loves a cleric or a monk
she is in error:
her they should burn by right
with firebrands.

In Auvergne, beyond Limousin,
I was walking alone, on the sly.
I met the wives of En Garin
and En Bernard.
They greeted me modestly in the name
of Saint Leonard.

One of them says to me with her high-class speech:
“God save you, my lord pilgrim,
you look to me like a gentleman,
as far as I can tell;
but we all see crazy fools too often
walking through the world.”

Now you are going to hear how I answered them:
I didn’t say but or bat to them,
didn’t mention a stick or a tool,
but only this:
“Babariol, babariol,
babarian.”

Then Agnes says to Ermessen:
“We’ve found what we are looking for.
Sister, for the love of God let us take him in,
he is really mute,
with this one what we have in mind
will never get found out.”
La una·m pres sotz son mantel,
e mes m'en sa cambra, al fornel.
Sapchatz qu'a mi fo bon e bel,
40 e·l focs fo bos,
et eu calfei me volontiers
als gros carbos.

A manjar mi deron capos,
e sapchatz agui mais de dos,
45 e no·i ac cog ni cogastros,
mas sol nos tres,
e·l pans fo blancs e·l vins fo bos
e·l pebr' espes.

"Sor, aquest hom es enginhos,
e laissa lo parlar per nos:
nos aportem nostre gat ros
de mantenent,
qe·l fara parlar az estros,
si de re·nz ment."

50 N'Agnes anet per l'enujos,
e fo granz et ac loncz guinhos:
e eu, can lo vi entre nos,
aig n'espavent,
qu'a pauc non perdei la valor
60 e l'ardiment.

Qant aguem begut e manjat,
eu mi despoillei a lor grat.
Detras m'aporteron lo gat
mal e felon:
65 la una·l tira del costat
tro al tallon.

Per la coa de mantenen
tira·l gat et el escoissen:
One of them took me under her mantle
and brought me to her chamber, by the fireplace.
Let me tell you, I liked it,
and the fire was good,
and I gladly warmed myself
by the big coals.

To eat they gave me capons,
and you can be sure I had more than two,
and there was no cook or cook's boy there,
but just the three of us,
and the bread was white, and the wine was good,
and the pepper plentiful.

"Sister, this man is tricky,
he's stopped talking just for us.
Let us bring in our red cat
right now,
it'll make him talk soon enough,
if he's fooling us."

Agnes went for that disgusting animal,
and it was big, it had a big long mustache,
and I, when I saw it, among us, there,
I got scared,
I nearly lost my courage
and my nerve.

When we had drunk and eaten,
I took my clothes off, to oblige them.
They brought the cat up behind me,
it was vicious.

One of them pulls it down my side,
down to my heel.

She gets right to it and pulls the cat down
by the tail, and it scratches:
plajas mi feron mais de cen
aqella ves;
amus eu no·m mogra ges enguers,
qui m’ausizes.

“Sor, diz n’Agnes a n’Ermessen,
mutz es, que ben es conoissen;
sor, del banh nos apareílem
e del sojorn."
Ueit jorns ez encar mais estei
en aquel forn.

Tant les fotei com auzirets:
cen e quatre vint et ueit vetz,
q’a pauc no·i rompei mos coretz
e mos arnes;
e no·us puesc dir lo malaveg,
tan gran m’en pres.

Ges no·us sai dir lo malaveg,
tan gran m’en pres.

---

Ben vuelh que sapchon li pluzor
d’est vers si’s de bona color,¹
qu’ieu ai trag de mon obrador:
qu’ieu port d’ayselh mester la flor,
et es vertaz,
e puesc en traire·l vers auctor
quant er lassatz.

Ieuocos ben sens e folhor,
e conosco anta et honor,
et ai ardimen e paor;

¹*Color* can mean ‘manner,’ ‘kind,’ ‘quality,’ ‘brilliance,’ ‘deception,’ but here refers to the images used by Guilhem and to the nuances or levels of
they gave me more than a hundred sores that time;
but I wouldn't have budged an inch if they killed me.

"Sister," Agnes says to Ermessen, "he's mute, all right.
So, Sister, let us get ourselves a bath and unwind."
Eight days and more I stayed in that oven.

I fucked them, you shall hear how many times:
one hundred and eighty-eight times. c.LXXX.VIII.
I nearly broke my breeching strap and harness.
And I cannot tell the vexation, it hurt so bad.

No, no, I cannot tell the vexation, it hurt so bad.

I want everyone to tell whether there's good color to this vers ¹
that I have brought out of my workshop:
because I'm the one that gets the flower in this craft,
and that is the truth,
and I will call this vers to witness when it is all laced up.

I know what wisdom is, and foolishness, and I know what honor is, and shame,
I can tell bravery and fear;
meaning given to those images." (L. T. Topsfield)
e si·m partetz un juec d’amor
no suy tan fatz
no·n sapcha triar lo melhor
d’entre·ls malvatz.

15 Ieu conosco ben selh qui be·m di,
e selh qui·m vol mal atressi,
e conosco ben selhuy qui·m ri,
e si·l pro s’azauton de mi,
conosco assatz
20 qu’atressi dey voler lor fi
e lor solatz.

Mas ben aya sel qui·m noyri,
que tan bo mestier m’eschari
que anc a negu non falhi;
25 qu’ieu sai jogar sobre coyssi
a totz tocatz;
mais en say que nulh mo vezi,
qual que·m vejatz.

Dieu en lau e Sanh Jolia:
30 tant ai apres del juec doussa
que sobre totz n’ai bona ma,
e selh qui cosselh mi querra
non l’er vedatz,
35 ni us mi noa tornara
descosselhaz.

Qu’ieu ai nom “maiestre certa”: ja m’amigu’ anueg no m’aura
que no·m vuelh’ aver l’endema;
qu’ieu suy d’aquest mestier, so·m va,
40 tan ensenhatz
que be·n sai guazanhar mon pa
en totz mercatz.

2“Juec d’amor (11) is a literary term meaning a ‘debate on love,’ and . . . serves with its ambiguity to point the way to the two levels of gaming and sensuality. Lo melhor (13) suggests the summum bonum, the mielhs to be
and set before me a game of love,²
I am no such fool
but I can tell the best chances
from the worst.

15 I know which man speaks courteously to me,
yes, and which one seeks my harm,
and I know the one who smiles at me,
and whether valiant men take pleasure in my company;  III
I understand,
20 I too must try to get their trust
and solace.

A blessing on the man who brought me up,
for my portion he gave me such great skill,
I have never disappointed anyone;
because I know how to play, on a cushion,  IV
every winning roll;
I know more than anyone around,
this man you see before you.

I praise God for it, and Saint Julian,
30 I have learned that sweet game so well,
I have a winning hand over all the others;
and whoever wants advice from me,
I will not deny him,
no one will ever part from me
35 unadvised.

For they call me the old reliable master:
that’s right, my little friend will never have me for a
night
without wanting to have me again next day;
for in this craft—that’s right, I boast of it—I am  V
40 so expert,
I could earn my bread by it
in any exchange.

(attained in love, and, looking ahead to the next stanza, ‘the better man from among the wicked,’ as well as ‘the better side to choose in a debate.’”  (Topsfield)
Pero no m’auzetz tan guabier
qu’ieu non fos rahusatz l’autr’ier,
que jogav’a un joc grossier,
que m fon trop bos al cap primier
tro fuy ’ntaulatz;
quan guardièy, no m’ac plus mestier,
si m fon camjatz.

Mas elha m dis un reprovier:
“Don, vostre dat son menudier,
et ieu revit vos a doblier.”
Dis ieu: “Qui m dava Monpeslier,
non er laissatz.”

E leviey un pauc son taulier,
ab amos mos bratz.

E quant l’aic levat lo taulier,
empeis los datz,
e lh duy foron cairavallier

e l terz plombatz.

E fi ls fort ferir al taulier,
E fon joguatz.

Pus vezem de novel florir
pratz e vergiers reverdezir,
rius e fontanas esclazor,
auras e vens,

ben deu quascus lo joy jauzir
don es jauzens.

D’Amor non dey dire mas be.
Quar no n ai ni petit ni re?
Quar ben leu plus no m’en cove;
But, friends, you don’t hear me bragging
that I wasn’t shaken up the other day.

I was playing at a game that was gross
and enjoying it enormously, at first—
till I took my place at the gaming table:
I took one look, and I lost the whole craft,
I was that unnerved.

But she gave me this reproach:
“My Lord, your dice are too small,
I challenge you to start again.”
I said, “If they gave me Montpellier,
I shall not fail.”

And I raised her gaming table a little
with my two arms.

And when I had raised the gaming table
I threw the dice,
and two of them rolled,
and the third sank.

And I made them strike that table hard,
and it was played.

Now when we see the meadows once again
in flower and the orchards turning green,
streams and fountains running clear,
the breezes and the winds,
it is right that each man celebrate the joy
that makes him rejoice

Now I must not say anything but good of Love.
Why do I get not one bit of it?
Maybe I wasn’t meant for more.
Marcabru was a Gascon, born in the first decade of the twelfth century. One of the *vidas* makes him a foundling, while he himself says he was the son of a poor woman named Marcabruna. He had many patrons throughout the Midi and Spain, including Guillaume X of Aquitaine, the son of “the first troubadour,” and Alfonso VII of Castile and León.

The low birth and noble patronage are reflected in his point of view and in the variety of his style. No one equals him in the furor with which he denounces the effeminacy and depravity of the courtly life and the conventions of courtly love. From this moral urgency and highly idiomatic style arises some of the most difficult poetry in the whole Troubadour canon, the first instance of *trobar clus*, the hermetic style. But these moralizing lyrics are only one mark of his range. At the other end are songs extolling true love; and other songs, such as *A la fontana* and the *pastorela*, which dramatize a profoundly medieval view of right order—they are among the most civilized utterances in Provençal poetry.

His influence was great, not only on the practitioners of the hermetic style, but on others who chose from the wide variety of his forms (compare his *Estornel*, no. 12, with Peire d’Alvernhe’s *Rossinhol*, below, no. 29), or who took up his moral stance (compare Peire Cardenal). But no one could ever re-create his irascible and exalted tone. About forty-two lyrics are extant.

The most frequent theme in his songs is the distinction between true love and false love: true love is joyful, intense, in harmony with the welfare of a community and with divine intentions; false love is bitter, dissolute, self-regarding, and de-