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Women in Troubadour Song:  
Of the Comtessa and the Vilana

# Women in Troubadour Song: Of the Comtessa and the Vilana

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**T**wo WELL-KNOWN SONGS from the Occitan (Old Provençal) repertory, "A chantar m'er de so qu'ieu non volria," a *canço* by the Comtessa de Dia (fl late twelfth century), and "L'autrier jost'una sebissa," a *pastorela* by Marcabru (fl 1127–50), lead us to confront the question: when we listen to a trobairitz song, or to a song by a male troubadour with a prominent female speaker, what "feminine" voices do we hear?

These two songs present both similarities and oppositions. The *canço* by the Comtessa de Dia has a single poetic voice, textually defined as "female" by theme and grammar. It is particularly precious because it is the only trobairitz song for which music has been preserved. In contrast, the

*pastorela* by Marcabru is a dialogue whose interlocutors are a *seigneur* (thus presumably a knight) and a *vilana* (that **is**, a shepherdess). In both songs, there is an encounter, an engagement, direct or indirect, of a woman with **a** knight. In both songs, the female voice is presented as strong and persuasive. But in **the** *pastorela*, the narrator is male and the woman a character he invents, while the *canço* is presumably composed by a woman. And further: in **the** *pastorela*, **the** female character is a *vilana*, of peasant stock, while the female author of the *canço* is a countess, a member of the nobility (although this "difference" is more complex than it at first appears to be.) Since we have melodies for both songs, the question of

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what “feminine” voices we are hearing is a musical as well as a poetic issue.<sup>1</sup>

The question itself is not new. It has, in fact, already caused considerable debate. Why, then, raise it again? Much recent criticism has tended to limit the sphere of women’s activity in medieval literature and life. For some, the lady in troubadour song is entirely circumscribed by the male poet’s language; she is an objectified female “Other” that occasions masculine discourse and satisfies male eroticism. Within the theory of “homosocial desire” and the concept of troubadour *cansos* as a series of competitions between men, the female construct within the poetry becomes merely a means to an end.<sup>2</sup> These interpretations assume that the song functions in a society where women are subordinate and without power or any political role of their own. Our purpose here is first, to show why this historical assumption is false, and second, by analyzing our two songs in the light of historical evidence, ask yet again whether we should hear female voices in each of these songs, and if so, of what kind.

### The sociohistorical context

We will take Simon Gaunt’s recent work as typical of those critics who deny the possibility of a real female voice. “When [Bernart de Ventadorn] does turn to his lady,” he asserts, “he can conceive of their relationship only as a simulacrum of a male one.” “The *domna* is produced *in* the text,” he later adds, “so that she can function as a reflection of the poet’s worth for other men outside it. Real women are excluded.” Therefore, “a woman singing. . . disrupts the homosocial discourse of the *canso*: giving women a voice, even as fictional *domnas*, constitutes a major intrusion.”<sup>3</sup> The assumption behind these statements, indeed behind Gaunt’s entire analysis of troubadour language, especially what he calls (following Sarah Kay) its “feudal and other socially loaded metaphors,”<sup>4</sup> is that such metaphors can only refer to relations among men. Real women are excluded from this poetry because they are excluded from the world of power relationships whose language the troubadours—and the *trobairitz*—employed. “Homage

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1. The melody of the Marcabru *pastorela* is in MS R (Bibliothèque Nationale fr 22543, 5r<sup>o</sup>). The melody of the song by the Comtessa de Dia is found only in the northern French MS W (Bibliothèque Nationale fr 844,240 r<sup>o</sup>-v<sup>o</sup>), with one stanza of the text in Frenchified Old Occitan. There is space after the melody, presumably for stanzas that were never added. Since the text is corrupt, some adjustments have been made to adapt the melody to the Occitan words of the song. For a discussion of the problems, see Vincent Pollina, “Troubadours dans le nord,” *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte* 9 (1985): 263–78. Melodies and texts for both songs are taken from *The Medieval Lyric: Anthologies and Cassettes for Teaching, A Project Supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities and Mount Holyoke College*, ed. Margaret Switten and Howell Chickering, *Anthology I*, 51 and 94 (South Hadley, Mass., 1988). Both songs are recorded on cassette I. Translations of Occitan and Latin texts are by Switten and Cheyette.

2. The concept of homosocial desire was developed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Applied to the troubadours, homosocial desire means that the songs do not portray love of a woman; they represent men singing about themselves, displaying poetic (and musical) skill before a male audience in a kind of song competition to demonstrate their worth; expression of one poet’s desire is to be compared with that of another; women are used not as love objects but only to mediate social relationships between men.

For examples of recent criticism, see E. Jane Burns, “The Man Behind the Lady in Troubadour Lyric,” *Romance Notes* 25 (1985): 254–70; Sarah Kay, *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For a discussion of the concept of homosocial desire applied to *trouvère* performance, see Christopher Page, “Listening to the Trouvères,” *Early Music* 25 (1997): 647. For psychoanalytic readings, see Rouben C. Cholakian, *The Troubadour Lyric: A Psychoanalytic Reading* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), or Jean-Charles Huchet, “Les femmes troubadours ou la voix critique,” *Littérature* 51 (1983): 59–90. Doris Earnshaw, *The Female Voice in Medieval Romance Lyric* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 158, argues, applying Bakhtin’s terms to Marcabru’s *pastorela*, that “‘contamination’ from the general qualities of male speech. . . has passed into the female speech voice.”

Not all recent criticism has so radically reduced the role of women. See in particular the new editions of the *trobairitz* corpus: Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, Laurie Shepard, and Sarah White, *The Songs of the Women Troubadours* (New York: Garland, 1995); Angelica Rieger, *Trobairitz: Der Beitrag der Frau in der altokzitanischen höfischen Lyrik, Edition des Gesamtkorpus, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1991), 233; and Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “Na Castelloza, *Trobairitz*, and Troubadour Lyric,” *Romance Notes* 25 (1984–85): 239–53, and “Fictions of the Female Voice: The Women Troubadours,” *Speculum* 67 (1992): 865–91.

3. Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 142, 144, 161.

4. *Ibid.*, 124.

to women in the real world was exceptional, if not **unknown**.”<sup>5</sup>

Is that assertion true? Let us look at one obvious exception to Gaunt’s generalization and ask if she is truly exceptional, and if so in what ways.

Ermengard of Narbonne was one of the major patrons of twelfth-century troubadours. She appears to figure in the songs of **Bernart de Ventadorn**, **Peire d’Alvernhe**, **Azalais** de Porcairagues, **Giraut de Bornelh**, and **Peire Rogier**.<sup>6</sup> Her fame as “she who protects joy and youth” and as one who gives “joy and merit” spreads to the far reaches of the Latin Christian world. Even a Norse skald of the Orkney Islands knew of the legendary beauty named Ermingerda who ruled the sea town of “Nerbon.”<sup>7</sup> The child Ermengard succeeded her father, viscount **Aimery II**, in **1134**. She took over personal control of her city and viscounty in **1143**, when an alliance of the major barons of the **Occitan** plain freed her from the marriage bed and her city from the political control of **Alfonse Jourdan**, count of Toulouse, and remained in power until she was forced into exile by her impatient nephew in 1192 or 1193. She died in Perpignan in **1196**.<sup>8</sup>

When Ermengard came to power her city was the most important port between the mouth of the Rhone and Barcelona, and though its commercial traffic was soon surpassed by that of Montpellier (with its vast nearby lagoon that connected directly to the Rhone), it continued to be a major trading and cloth manufacturing center

into the fourteenth century, its ships sailing as far as Byzantium. Narbonne’s fleet and army made it a force to be contended with. In **1114**, under the command of Ermengard’s father, they joined the fleets of Genoa, Barcelona, and Montpellier to capture (if only momentarily) the Moslem strongholds of Majorca and Ibiza. In 1148 they joined the **Genoese**, Catalans, and Aragonese to capture Tortosa, at the head of the Ebro River delta, winning substantial trading privileges as the city’s reward.<sup>9</sup> Ermengard may very well have been present at this siege. She certainly was present at the siege of les Baux in **1162**,<sup>10</sup> and, but a few years later, after a momentary shift in alliances, she promised King Louis VII to “march with [her] army against the enemies [of the count of Toulouse].”<sup>11</sup> Nineteenth-century scholars may be pardoned for seeing this Ermengard behind the legendary Ermengard, the one in the poem *Aliscans* who boasts:

I myself will ride there  
Wearing my coat of mail, my shining helmet laced on,  
Shield at my neck, sword at my side,  
Lance in hand, ahead of all others.  
Though my hair is grey and white,  
My heart is bold and thirsts for war.<sup>12</sup>

Ermengard’s viscounty included far more than her city. From the practices of her contemporary lords we can be sure that she once kept invento-

5. See Gaunt’s extended discussion, *Gender and Genre*, 146ff.

6. The various references to **Ermengard** in troubadour poetry are discussed in *The Poems of the Troubadour Peire Rogier*, ed. Derek E. T. Nicholson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), 160-64.

7. *Orkneyinga* Saga: *The History of the Earls of Orkney*, ed. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards (London: Hogarth Press, 1978). For a discussion of this text, see Jacqueline Caille, “Une idylle entre la vicomtesse Ermengarde de Narbonne et le prince Rognvald Kali des Orcades au milieu du XIIe siècle?” in *Hommage à Robert Saint-Jean*, vol. 21, *Mémoires de la Société archéologique de Montpellier* (Montpellier, 1993), 229-33, and older bibliography listed in Nicholson, *Peire Rogier*, 164 n.

8. The documentation for what follows will be found in a forthcoming book by Fredric Cheyette, *Lady of the Troubadours: Ermengard of Narbonne and the Politics of Her Age*. For a general survey of Narbonne history in the Middle Ages, see the chapters by Jacqueline Caille in *Histoire de Narbonne*, ed. Jacques Michaud and Andre Cahanis (Toulouse: Privat, 1981).

9. Archives communales de Narbonne, *Inventaire des archives*, 2 (*Annexes de la série AA*), doc. 1.

10. Dom **Cl. Devic** and Dom J. Vaissete, *Histoire générale de Languedoc*, 16 vols. (Toulouse: Privat, 1872-73) (hereafter HGL) 5:1264: agreement between Ermengard and Raimond **Trencavel** negotiated by the count of Barcelona and his court. At this moment the count was besieging les Baux.

11. *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, 24 vols. (Paris, 1738-1904), 16:90, no. 275.

12. *Aliscans*, ed. Claude Régnier (Paris: Champion, 1990), vv. 2717-22. Thanks to Paul Rockwell for assistance with the translation. An abridged translation of the entire *chanson de geste* appears in *Guillaume d’Orange: Four Twelfth-Century Epics*, ed. Joan Ferrante (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

ries and account books of her possessions in her treasury, but they have long since disappeared. We can, however, infer the extent of her **rural** holdings from **the** division made between the two sons of her great-grandnephew, Viscount Amalric I, after his death in 1270. This text and the brothers' recognition of fief to King **Louis IX** in 1272 give us the names of **IOI** castles and villages where Amalric I had rights of lordship or where fiefs were held of him. Though doubtless some lands and rights were acquired and others lost during the first **seventy-five** years of the thirteenth century, these surely approximate **Ermengard's** holdings.<sup>13</sup> Lordship in these **villages** would have included many things: lands and vineyards; mills and ovens; pastures, meadows, and woodlands; quarries and mines (Ermengard's holdings included important silver and gold mines in the mountains north of **Béziers**); dues from hunting and fishing; portions from peasant harvests, justice, and fiefs; the services of fief holders; and taxes, uses, requisitions, and demands.<sup>14</sup> Above all, lordship would have included oaths of fidelity from the castellans who held her many castles and homage and fidelity **from** those, whether lords or peasants, who held **fiefs**.<sup>15</sup>

Of the hundreds of such oaths that once must have existed in writing (for they were regularly recorded), one survives, the oath of Bernard of Durban given in 1157:

*De ista hora in antea... fidelis ero... per directam fidem sine ullo inganno, sicut homo debet esse ad suam dominam cui propriis manibus est commendatus.*

(From this hour forward, I Bernard son of Fida will be true to you Ermengard **viscountess** of Narbonne daughter of Ermengard by true faith without deceit

as a man should be **faithful** to his lady to whom he has commended himself by his hands... )<sup>16</sup>

This is the language **Bernart** de Ventadorn employs when he sings:

*Mas jonchas, ab col cle,  
vos m'autrei e.m coman.*

(Hands joined and with bowed head,  
I give and commend **myself** to you.)<sup>17</sup>

and it comes straight from a decidedly **unerotic** scene he could have witnessed in Ermengard's court, or, indeed, in the courts of other **twelfth-century** women, for Ermengard was not alone of her kind.

Eastward along the **costal** plain there was her exact contemporary Beatrice, countess of **Mauguio**, who inherited her tiny county on the edge of the Rhone delta in 1132. Her first marriage to **Berenguer-Ramon**, count of Provence, produced a son, who succeeded his father as count of Provence in **1144**. Beatrice remained countess of Mauguio. Two children came from her second marriage to Bernard Pelet, lord of **Alès**: Bertrand and Ermessend. Beatrice associated both of her husbands in her rule: They both enjoyed the title of count of Mauguio, though neither acted independently of her within her lands. Then, in 1170, came the first signs of a family feud: Her husband Bernard Pelet and their son Bertrand made an important grant to the lords of a nearby village without mentioning Beatrice, with the son styling himself "count of Mauguio." The following year, his father now dead, Bertrand, "count of Mauguio," allied himself with William of Montpellier. To

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13. **HGL 8:1728** and 1735 and Archives départementales de l'Hérault G 274.

14. This list is taken **almost** word for word from the division of **1271**. For Ermengard's gold and silver mines, see **HGL 5:1289**, and the commentary on this text by **Claudie Amado**, "La seigneurie des mines en pays de Béziers," *Mines et mineurs en Languedoc-Roussillon* (Montpellier: Fédération historique du Languedoc Méditerranéen et du Roussillon, 1977), 125–44.

15. This is not the place to go into the complexities of the Occitan *févum*, which was far more generalized than the familiar "knights fief" of English practice. For some details see H. Richardot, "Le fief roturier à Toulouse," *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 4e série, 14 (1935): 307–59, 495–569, and Paul Ourliac, *Le Cartulaire de la Selve* (Paris: CNRS, 1985), 52–59.

16. **HEL 5**, col. 1204:II.

17. "Pois preyatz me, senhor" (PC 70.36), vv. 50–51. Carl Appel, ed., *Bernart von Ventadorn: Seine Lieder* (Halle: Niemeyer, 1915), 208.

Beatrice this was an act of defiance, perhaps even of treachery. She was countess of Mauguio, and no one, not even her son, would take the title without her good grace. She responded by disinheriting him, eventually giving her county to her daughter Ermessend, who was quickly married to the future Raimond VI of Toulouse.<sup>18</sup> She had vindicated her dynastic self-esteem and she quietly retired on a pension of 4,000 sol. Melg. per year.

Beatrice and Ermengard were heiresses, fulfilling a role that had been modeled by other heiresses at least as far back as Garsendis, who inherited the viscounty of Béziers—including a number of rural castles—from her father, Viscount William, in 990. William's other heiress was his widow, who received the city of Agde and some neighboring fortresses<sup>19</sup> She represents the more frequent case of women as major players in regional politics. Among the Trencavels, viscounts of Albi, Béziers, Agde, and Nîmes and rulers of Carcassonne and the Razès, widows appear as rulers of their late husbands' domains in nearly every generation, beginning with Ermengard, sister of the last count of Carcassonne, who with her husband, Raimond-Bernard, allied with the count and countess of Barcelona to take over her brother's lands. After Raimond-Bernard's death (in 1074 or soon thereafter), this Ermengard quickly established herself in her late husband's familial territories of Albi and Nîmes as well as her own around Béziers, Carcassonne, and the Razès. Oaths of fidelity for twenty-five castles sworn to her, or jointly to her and her son Bernard-Ato, survive in the Trencavel cartulary. She must be considered the real founder of the Trencavel dynasty.<sup>20</sup>

So too in the lineage of the lords of Montpellier, there were Ermessendis, the widow of William V,

who took over the lordship on her husband's death in 1123; Tiburgis, whose father, William of Omelas, bequeathed her five castles plus all his lands and rights in the Narbonnais (though he had a son who succeeded to most of the remainder of his holdings); and Adalais, widow of Burgundio, who claimed the castles of Paulhan and Poujet as her marriage portion. (In her settlement with her brother-in-law, William VIII, she gave up those two castles in return for the castle of Pousan and 2,000 sol. Melg.)<sup>21</sup>

These women of the great aristocracy had their counterparts further down the hierarchy, for practices of dowry, marriage gift, and succession were the same as far down the social scale as documents let us reach. As there were *domina* who received oaths of fidelity for castles, so there were others who gave them (and received them from their fellow *castellans* and fighting men). Among the castles held by the lords of Montpellier, six had a woman castellan at some time during the twelfth century. Even the powerful vicariate of the city fell to an heiress at the very end of the century.<sup>22</sup>

Were these women in any way "exceptional"? It is meaningless to count up those who can be identified in the surviving documents and compare their number to the men in equivalent positions. First, the information that survives is not a random sample; there is no way, therefore, to estimate the margin of error in whatever percentage we might calculate.<sup>23</sup> Second, being an "exception" is not a matter of numbers but of expectations. Medieval society was not an equal opportunity employer. In the line of succession in Occitan wills, daughters took their place after their brothers. Dowries were given to couples, and marriage

18. HGL 6:44–45; J. Rouquette and A. Villemagne, eds., *Cartulaire de Maguelone*, 2 vols. (Montpellier: L. Valat, 1912), 1: no. 155; HGL 8:293.

19. HGL 5:316.

20. See Fredric Cheyette, "The 'Sale' of Carcassonne to the Counts of Barcelona and the Rise of the Trencavels," *Speculum* 63 (1988): 826–64, esp. 854ff.

21. Ermessendis: A. Germain, ed., *Liber instrumentorum memorialium* (Montpellier: Société archéologique, 1884) (hereafter LIM), nos. 440, 441; Tiburgis, no. 552; Adalais, no. 494.

22. Castries: LIM nos. 348, 360, 365, 367; Villeneuve: no. 377; Pignan: no. 421; Balaruc: no. 468; Poujet: nos. 482, 485, 495, 525; Clermont: nos. 534, 535; vicariate: no. 119. See also Adalais, vicar of Paulhan (no. 541).

23. It is on this point that we part company with Claudie Amado, "Femmes entre elles," in *Femmes-Mariages-Lignages: Mélanges offerts à Georges Duby* (Brussels: De Boeck, 1992), 125–55, esp. 140ff.

gifts (*sponsalitia*) remained in the **control** of husbands during their lifetimes, though wives' potential claims meant their participation was required if dowry or marriage-gift lands and rights were alienated. But death took its toll of brothers and husbands, and the throw of reproductive dice meant that some couples would produce only daughters. When men died, their widows took control of dowries and marriage gifts and, often enough, of their husbands' entire honors. If the men were not married, it was sometimes their mothers who succeeded. Here is one example, particularly instructive because of the person involved. When Berenger of Puisserguier died in 1169, he left his entire honor to his mother. After her death, his two castles, Puisserguier and Florensac, his right to "protect" merchants on the road between Béziers and Narbonne, and his other properties and rights were to be divided between his two brothers. If they were to die without legitimate heirs, he ordered, one sister was to have Puisserguier and the other Florensac.<sup>24</sup> Berenger of Puisserguier was the only person we know of to challenge Ermengard of Narbonne's justice -unsuccessfully- **because she was a woman**.<sup>25</sup> He doubtless picked up the idea from someone trained in the newly revived Roman Law, but whatever else the experience may have taught him, it did not get in the way of his pursuing a traditional family strategy of leaving possessions, including castles and rights of justice, to women when he dictated his will.

Under the appropriate circumstances, it was fully expected that women would control prop-

erty, do justice, collect tolls, command castles, give oaths of fidelity and receive them, and in every way act as a [lady] lord. Indeed, the very language of oaths of fidelity and the boilerplate formulas that scribes employed when they drew up conveyances assumed that women would play such political roles. Both Latin and Occitan had grammatically gendered but semantically neutral words for "a person": "persona" and "om" or "hom" (from Latin "homo"). Yet in order to be **all-inclusive** the person who swore the oath of fidelity promised:

if a man or a woman [*si homo aut femina*] should take this castle by force I will make no agreement nor associate with them nor come to their aid without the consent of [you, the **overlord**.]<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the guarantee clause in conveyances regularly reads, "if any man or woman or any person seeks to break this agreement" (*si quis autem venerit, sive homo sive femina aut ulla persona*). We therefore should not be surprised to discover Rixendis de Parez joining a posse of village lords in attacking some mills on the Orb River when she claimed a share in those mills and their tenants as her own, nor to watch the wife of Bernard of Nisan taking revenge on her husband's enemy when the two men were fighting over a castle they jointly held.<sup>27</sup>

In this society, women were expected to have a role and a voice. **What** consequences might this social fact have for our interpretation of "A chan-tar m'er" and "L'autrier jost'una sebissa"?

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24. J. Rouquene, ed., *Cartulaire de Béziers (Livre Noir)* (Paris: Picard, 1918), no. 225.

25. That story is told in a series of letters to and from King Louis VII: *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, 16:89–91, one of which (no. 280) contains the famous sentences: "Therefore sit in judgment and examine matters with the diligent zeal of Him who created you a woman when He could have created you a man and of his great goodness gave the rule of the province of Narbonne into a woman's hands. On no account may anyone by our authority refuse to be subject to your jurisdiction because you are a woman." One may wonder what Ermengard thought of this language.

26. Numerous oaths are printed in HGL vols. 5 and 8, as well as in LIM. In her introduction to *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1), Ruth A. Solie has emphasized an important feature of the "discourses of the West: the everyday terms we use for human subjectivity make universal claims but are nonetheless situated as male within cultural practice." The evidence of Occitan oaths suggests that this observation does not entirely pertain to Medieval Occitania.

27. *Cartulaire de Béziers*, no. 147; HGL 5:790.

**The Comtessa de Dia,  
“A chantar m'er de so qu'ieu non volria”**

We cannot securely identify the Comtessa de Dia. She was probably a contemporary of *Azalais* de Porcairagues and may have frequented the court of Ermengard of Narbonne. Both trobairitz likely belonged to a poetic circle that included the troubadour Raimbaut d'Orange, himself a cousin of the lords of Montpellier.<sup>28</sup> “A chantar m'er” (fig. 1) is constructed around the linked notions of sin, fault, and betrayal. To elaborate these notions, the comtessa adopts the vocabulary of disputes over lands and rights and of oaths of fidelity. Considering the language used by the comtessa as merely an uneasy transfer from male discourse leads to interpretation of the song in a romanticized “mournful lady on a pedestal” mode. But in the light of evidence presented above, we may argue that women like the comtessa regularly used such language in their society. Their ability to manipulate this language came not only from familiarity with a masculine poetic code but also from their own experiences as rulers and *castellans*.<sup>29</sup> This allows us to interpret the song as a forthright discussion of amorous discord and of expectations deceived, couched in the usual terms of a legal complaint.

The *versification* and melodic structure of this song at first appear deceptively simple. The rhymes follow the scheme a'a'a'ba'b, with the

feminine “a” rhyme sounds changing for each stanza and the masculine “b” rhyme sounds remaining the same. The ample melodic phrases are paired two by two in the beginning portion of the song, with more spacious contrasting development in the middle, and a return of the second and fourth phrases to close (thus ABACDB). A tonality of D is clear from the outset. The initial logical unfolding of phrases that stand in antecedent/consequent relationship, determined by the alternation of melodic cadences (“open” cadences in lines 1 and 3 followed by “closed” cadences in lines 2 and 4), helps establish the legalistic character of the complaint. The contrasting development of lines 5 and 6, with the initial triad of line 6 rising to the melodic peak, convey emotional tension. The end of line 6, identical to lines 1 and 3, prepares the repeat of the second and fourth phrases that rounds out the argument in a decisive manner.<sup>30</sup> But at the same time, comparing melodic movement and rhyme scheme also reveals a suggestion of frustrated expectations in this conclusion. One might imagine that the “a” rhyme would return in line 7 with the “b” musical cadence to conclude the song. The association had been firm until that point. But the rhyme pattern associates the new masculine “b” sound with the “b” cadence. The melody has set up expectations that are “deceived” by the final rhyme sound—which, indeed, because of the shift

28. See Bruckner, Shepard, and White, *Songs*, 143, and Rieger, *Trobairitz*, 608–14. It is tempting to think that the comtessa might herself have held court, but we have no evidence that she did. Another comtessa, Garsenda de Forcalquier, Comtessa de Provence, from whom we have one short poem, is mentioned by the Catalan jongleur Raimon Vidal de Besalú as a patron in his description of his travels: “Per Alvernhe et per lo Puey / m'en vinc en Proensa de sai, / on atrobey mant baro gai / e.l bon comte e la comtessa” (By way of Auvergne and Le Puy / I came to Provence in this direction / where I found many gay barons / and the good count and the countess). Raimon Vidal: *Poetry and Prose*, II: “Abril issia,” ed. and trans. W. H. Field (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971) vv. 623–66.

29. See Kay, *Subjectivity*, 102–4 and 127–28, for a discussion of the trobairitz' allegedly “problematic” relationship to masculine discourse. Gaunt writes also, in referring to “feudal metaphors,” about the trobairitz' “anxiety about language.. linked to anxiety about power,” or their “anxiety about the right to speak” (*Gender and Genre* 168–69). If women were users of “feudal language” in “reality,” there seems to be no reason for them suddenly to develop anxiety in the poetry. This does not mean that women do not criticize male language; they criticize deceit and betrayal using the same terms that men used because these were the terms with which both were familiar. Although we cannot agree with Gaunt's notion that women felt trapped and constrained by the rhetoric of the *canso*, we can certainly join in the view that “the surviving *cansos* of the trobairitz are testimony to the fact that if more women's voices from the Middle Ages have not survived, this does not mean that women did not articulate their ideas” (*Gender and Genre*, 179). Masculine discourse in trobairitz' songs was first fully discussed by Pierre Bec, “‘Trobairitz’ et chansons de femme: contribution à la connaissance du lyrisme féminin au moyen âge,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 22 (1979): 235–62, and taken up again in his *Chants d'amour des femmes-troubadours* (Paris: Stock, 1995).

30. See Vincent Pollina, “Melodic Continuity and Discontinuity in *A chantar m'er* of the Comtessa de Dia,” *Miscellanea di studi romanzi offerta a Giuliano Gasca-Quierazza* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell' Orso, 1988), 2:887–96.



1. A chan- t a r m'er de so qu'ieu non vol- ri- a,

2. Tant me ran- cur de lui cui sui a- mi- a,

3. Car ieu l'am mais que nu- illa ren que si- a;

4. Vas lui nom val mer- ces ni cor- te- si- a

5. Ni ma bel- tatz ni mos pretz n i mos sens,

6. C'a- tres- si. m sui en- ga- nad' e tra- hi- a

7. Com degr' es- ser, s'ieu fos de- sa- vi- nens.

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from feminine to masculine, requires a different distribution of cadential tones, telescoping the last four notes. This places even greater emphasis on the last lines of the stanza and especially the final resolution.<sup>31</sup>

At the beginning of the song, the comtessa expresses her displeasure in legal terms by the use of the expression "me **rancur**." In twelfth-century vernacular documents, the word "**rancura**" (equivalent of the Latin *discordia* or *controversia*) serves

to record the formal lodging of a complaint against another person in a dispute, usually a dispute about property. For example, "Na Florenza, la sor P. la **Roca** se rancurava d'en P. la **Roca** del mas **della** Britolia" (Florenza, sister of P. la **Roca** lodged a complaint against P. la **Roca** concerning the farm house of **Britolia**).<sup>32</sup> The rhetoric of dispute is the same in the charter and in the song. But at the same time, the word "se rancurar" carries also in the song a meaning more usually associated

31. Note, however, that in the manuscript the Old French text reads "desavinence," with an extra syllable compared to the Old Occitan; therefore the cadence here has been changed: the **melisma** and single note have been telescoped to fit the Old Occitan masculine rhyme.

32. Clovis Brunel, *Les plus anciennes chartes en langue provençale* (1926; reprint, 2 vols. in 1, Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1973), vol. 1 no. 298, line 58 (dated Rouergue, 1195).

	I A <b>chantar</b> m'er de so qu'ieu non <b>volria</b> , Tant me <b>rancur</b> de lui cui sui <b>amia</b> , Car ieu l' <b>am mais</b> que nuilla <b>ren</b> que sia: Vas lui no.m val <b>merces</b> ni <b>cortesia</b> 5 Ni ma <b>beltatz</b> ni mos <b>pretz</b> ni mos <b>sens</b> , C' <b>atressi.m</b> sui <b>enganad'e</b> <b>trahia</b> Com <b>degr'esser</b> , s'ieu fos <b>desavinens</b> .	I am obliged <b>to</b> sing of that which I would not, So bitter am I over the one whose love I am, For I love him more than anything; With him mercy and courtliness are of no avail Not my beauty, nor my merit nor my good sense, For I am deceived and betrayed Exactly <b>as</b> I should be, if <b>I</b> were ungracious.
	II D'aisso.m conort car <b>anc</b> non fi <b>faillenssa</b> , <b>Amics</b> , <b>vas vos</b> per nuilla <b>captenenssa</b> , 10 <b>Anz</b> vos am <b>mais</b> non <b>fetz</b> <b>Seguis Valenssa</b> , E <b>platz</b> mi <b>mout</b> <b>quez eu d'amar</b> vos <b>venssa</b> , Lo mieus <b>amics</b> , <b>car etz</b> lo plus <b>valens</b> ; Mi <b>faitz orguoill</b> en dia et en <b>parvenssa</b> , E si <b>etz francs</b> <b>vas totas</b> <b>autres gens</b> .	I comfort myself because never was I at Fault, Friend, towards you on account of any behavior, Rather I love you more than <b>Seguin</b> [loved] <b>Valensa</b> , And it pleases me greatly that I vanquish you in love, My friend, because you are the most valiant; You are haughty to me in words and appearance, And yet you are so affable towards all others.
	III 15 <b>Meravill</b> me <b>com</b> vostre <b>cors s'orguoilla</b> <b>Amics</b> , <b>vas</b> me, per qu' <b>ai razon</b> qu' <b>ieu.m</b> <b>duoilla</b> Non es <b>ges dreitz</b> c' <b>autr'amors</b> vos mi <b>tuoilla</b> Per nuilla <b>ren</b> <b>qe.us diga</b> ni <b>acuoilla</b> ; E membre <b>vos cals fo.l comenssamens</b> 20 De <b>nostr'amor!</b> ja <b>Dompnedieus</b> non <b>vuoilla</b> <b>Qu'en</b> ma <b>colpa</b> <b>sia.l departimens</b> .	I am astonished at how you become haughty, Friend, towards me, and I have reason to grieve; It is not right that another love <b>take</b> you from me On account of anything said or granted to you. And remember how it was at the beginning Of our love! May God never wish That my guilt be the cause of separation.
	IV 25 <b>Proesa</b> <b>grans</b> qu'el vostre <b>cors s'aizina</b> E lo <b>rics</b> <b>pretz</b> qu' <b>avetz m'en ataina</b> , <b>C'una</b> non sai, loindana ni <b>vezina</b> , Si <b>vol amar</b> , <b>vas vos</b> non si <b>aclina</b> ; <b>Mas</b> <b>vos, amics</b> , <b>etz</b> ben tam <b>conoissens</b> Que ben <b>devez</b> <b>conoisser</b> la plus <b>fina</b> , E membre <b>vos</b> de <b>nostres</b> <b>covinens</b> .	The great valor which dwells in you And your noble worth retain me, For I know of no woman, far or near, Who, wishing to love, would not incline toward you; But you, friend, are so discerning That you certainly must discern <b>the</b> finest, And remember our agreement.
	V 30 <b>Valer</b> mi deu mos <b>pretz</b> e mos <b>paratges</b> E ma <b>beltatz</b> e plus mos <b>fis coratges</b> , Per qu'ieu <b>vos</b> man <b>lai</b> on es <b>vostr'estatges</b> <b>Esta chansson</b> que me sia <b>messatges</b> : Ieu <b>vuoill</b> saber, lo mieus <b>bels amics</b> gens, Per que <b>vos m'ea</b> <b>tant fers</b> ni <b>tant salvatges</b> , 35 Non sai, si <b>s'es orguoills</b> o <b>maltalens</b> .	My worth and my <b>nobility</b> , My beauty and my faithful heart should help me; That is why I send there to your dwelling This song, that it may be my messenger. I want to know, my fine and noble friend, Why you are so cruel and harsh with me; I don't know if it is haughtiness or ill will.
	VI <b>Mas</b> <b>aitan</b> plus <b>voill</b> <b>qe.us diga.l</b> <b>messatges</b> <b>Qu'en</b> <b>trop d'orguoill</b> ant <b>gran dan</b> <b>maintas gens</b> .	But I especially want the <b>messenger</b> to tell you That many people are harmed by excess <b>pride</b> . <sup>33</sup>

Fig. 1. "A chantar m'er"

33. Notes to the text: v. II, *Seguin* is probably the hero of a *lost* romance, known for his love of Valensa—the comtessa compares herself to a male lover; v. 18, it is not clear whether *diga* and *acuoilla* are first person or third person. The translation is neutral, leaving the interpretation to the reader. The third person sets a context of rivalry (amorous with political overtones); the first person suggests the possibility of misinterpretation by the lover of the countess's words or actions.

with the troubadour *canso*: the idea of bitterness or anger. Thus, both the psychological dimension of the comtessa's song and its function as a formal legal complaint are present from the start.

By the end of the first stanza, the reasons for the comtessa's complaint are clear. She has been deceived and betrayed unjustly. She points out the traits that should have prevented the betrayal from occurring: she loves fully; she has all the requisite qualities—beauty, merit, good sense. But these are to no avail; she is betrayed as she ought to be if she did not have those qualities. The use of the verb *dever* (“degr’esser,” line 7) places obligations on both sides. The term *enganada* (line 6) recalls the exact word of what the faithful man promises in the oaths that he will not do to his lord or lady. The notion of *engan* is central to the southern oaths of fidelity: the primary reason for the existence of the oaths is to avoid deception. The lover's obligations are underscored (some would say ironically) by the fact that the qualities presented in this first stanza by the countess as proof that she has kept her part of the bargain and therefore has reason to complain are the very qualities that male troubadours claim in their *cansos* to desire from their ladies.

In the second stanza, the comtessa reaffirms her own faultless behavior with the surprising assertion that she vanquishes her friend in love (line 11). She loves *more*—a reaffirmation of “am *mais*” from the first stanza—therefore she is worth more. *Why* is she then not rewarded? The answer lies in the word “orguouill,” first appearing in line 13, again in stanza V, and in the *tornada*. In stanza V, “orguouill” is linked to “maltalens” (ill will) to help explain the lover's behavior. Pride in other genres is usually an attribute of men: we are all familiar with the pride of a Roland. But in the troubadour *canso*, pride is more usually transferred to women; it is what makes them haughty and distant. In transferring pride back to her friend, the comtessa operates a thematic reversal.

Pride is the opposite of love because it destroys the equilibrium of reciprocity. This equilibrium presided over the beginning of the relationship between the comtessa and her friend. Twice the comtessa asks her *amic* to look back, to remember:

lines 19–20, “E membre vos *cals fo*.l comenssamens / De *nostr’amor*” (Remember the beginning of our love), and line 28 at the end of stanza IV, “e membre vos de nostres *covinens*” (remember our agreement). *With* the word “*covinens*,” the countess arrives at the heart of the affair. The *convenientia* or *concordia* is the standard term for agreements that ended conflicts in eleventh- and twelfth-century Occitania. The comtessa confers upon the love relationship the solemnity of a legal bond. Like the legal agreement of the acts, the poetic *covinens* manifests a coming together of intentions; this coming together alone creates the obligation. Lady and *amic* share equally in the making of the promise and should share in maintaining it. Since the purpose of the *covinens* is to ensure stability and permanence in family and other legal affairs, the one who fails to meet the obligation is subject to penalties, often spelled out precisely in the legal formulas. No specific punishment is detailed in the *canso*, but the *tornada* carries the threat of harm from the overweening pride which, as *we* have seen, is the cause of betrayal.

The use of the word *colpa* and the mention of God at the end of stanza III color the discourse with Christian notions of sin and judgment. But there is no direct reference to adultery in this song (in another, “Estat *ai* en greu cossirier,” the comtessa does mention a husband to whom the lover is distinctly to be preferred). “*Colpa*,” like “*faillensa*” at the beginning of stanza II, functions mainly in a universe of song values where native qualities such as *beutatz* or *sens*, and social comportment (*captenenssa*, line 9) permit the distinction of good from bad, of innocence from guilt. The countess, by virtue of the fact that she possesses the requisite qualities and has observed the proper behavior, claims the right to love whomsoever she chooses without guilt or shame. Sexual love itself is not a cause of guilt. Guilt can arise only out of derogation from the norms of social behavior which, in poetic discourse, do not include adultery and its consequences. In the song world, nonreciprocity and infidelity are the chief sources of blame.

The fact that adultery is not involved permits the comtessa to lodge her complaint forcefully

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and on more than one level. By and large, adultery is a woman's **crime**.<sup>34</sup> Social comportment, however, is a domain in which men can be held as accountable as women. This is precisely the point of the **comtessa's** attack. Initially the attack is carried out, as we have seen, by the countess's claim that she possesses all those values that are adduced in masculine poetic discourse to characterize the perfect woman. When her friend betrays her, he betrays his own ideal. He says one thing and does another. To appreciate this attack, the audience has to be familiar with troubadour song so that the mirroring of a man's complaint in a song by a woman takes on its **full** corrosive irony. On one level, then, the comtessa is juxtaposing discourses, playing with words and images, showing that two can engage in the game of love. But on another level, her criticism moves beyond the judgment of a knight's sexual behavior to a larger context. By couching her complaint in the language of the oath of fidelity and by giving prominence to the rich concept of *covinens*, the comtessa evokes the network of accords and agreements upon which aristocratic Occitan society depended: the observation of *covinens*, faith pledged and kept without fail. In Occitania, where tenurial relations as such were modest and sometimes only symbolic, emphasis was always on the personal oath, on the promise not to betray and to come to the aid of the other party when necessary. More than re-

buking the lover's duplicity, elaborated in song, the countess exposes her friend's behavior as a threat to the entire social fabric. Her strategy is not merely linguistic. She makes the opening gambit in a game of love that turns out to be the game of life. She gives a lesson in proper amorous behavior that is also a lesson in proper political behavior toward your lord, your lady, and your fellow knights: do not out of pride defraud or betray; do not break covenants; do not give those to whom you are linked by *amor* any cause for *rancuna*. If this behavior is not observed, the society collapses.

Now we may ask: what performance context can we imagine for this song? Would the comtessa have performed it herself? Sarah Kay has argued that women poets "already marginalized discursively were further disadvantaged by the expectation that they would not perform their songs in person but entrust them to someone else."<sup>35</sup> The scribe of the late-thirteenth-century troubadour manuscript A (Biblioteca Vaticana 5232) did not agree with this perception: he instructed the illuminator of the letter A of "A chantar" to portray "una dona que cante" (a lady singing). If we adopt the position that women in Occitania were expected to participate in political and public life, that they exchanged oaths of fidelity with men, then we can also expect them to sing songs at court and in groups that also included men.<sup>36</sup>

34. James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 30–32, 385ff. Churchmen did criticize men as well as women, especially beginning in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. For some of the ramifications of these views, see John W. Baldwin, *The Language of Sex: Five Voices from Northern France around 1200* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 63ff.

35. Kay, *Subjectivity*, 145–46. See also for a related point of view, Marianne Shapiro, "The Provençal *Trobairitz* and the Limits of Cody Love," *Signs* 3 (1978): 569–70.

36. Women's ability to sing is suggested by a number of sources. Conduct books and romances describe singing as an accomplishment that women are expected to possess. Garin le Brun, in his *Ensenhamens*, written around 1200, tells women to sing for their guests and to welcome "joglars e chantadors" in such a way as to create a favorable impression so that the poet/musicians will speak well of them (Carl Appel, ed., "L'Enseignement de Garin Le Brun," *Revue des langues romanes* 33 [1989]: 404–32, vv. 511–58). In his *Chastoiement des dames*, Robert de Blois tells women that if they have a good voice, they should sing—and "en compaignie/de gent de pris," (in the company / of worthy people) (John Fox, ed. [Paris: Nizet, 1950], vv. 463–64). As Christopher Page has pointed out: "Here Robert of Blois not only anticipates that women will sing for their own pleasure but also that they will perform before gent de pris" (*The Owl and the Nightingale* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989], 104). Chretien de Troyes' heroine in *Philomena* knows how to compose poetry, to sing and to play (ed. C. de Boer, in *Chrétien de Troyes: Romans* [Paris: Livre de poche, 1994], vv. 194–204). And in Gerbert de Montreuil's *Roman de la violette*, the heroine sings *trouvère* songs "en la sale" during the course of an amorous dispute (ed. D. J. Buffum [Paris: SATF, 1928], v. 367). For general discussions, see Yvonne Rokseth, "Les Femmes musiciennes du xiie au xive siècle," *Romania* 61 (1935): 464–80, and Maria V. Coldwell, "*Jouglerses and Trobairitz*: Secular Musicians in Medieval France," in Women *Making Music*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 39–61. These examples speak chiefly of young women, but the situations described at court could pertain to the *trobairitz*.

1. L'au- trier jost' u- na se- bis- sa 2. Tro- bei pas- to- ra nes- tis- sa  
 3. De joi e de sen mas- sis- sa 4. Si cum fi- lla de vi- la- na  
 5. Cap' e go- nel' e pe- lis- sa 6. Vest e ca- mi- za tres- lis- sa  
 7. Sot- lars e caus- sas de la- na

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Ex. 2. "L'autrier jost' una sebissa"

While the biographies, or *vidas*, of Occitan poets do not portray women as singing, they do speak of their ability to compose: of *Azalais de Porcairagues*, for example, it is said that she "sabet trobar" (knew how to compose).<sup>37</sup> The troubadour *Bertran de Born* tells us in one of his songs that he has used the "son de n'Alamanda" (Alamanda's tune), suggesting that Alamanda may have composed the tune- or, perhaps, it was a tune that she sang.<sup>38</sup> In one of *Raimon de Miraval's* songs, "Tot quan *fatz*," the lady is enjoined to learn the song he sends her: "Dreg a mon belh *Mai* d'amic / Chansos vai dir que t'entenda, / E si tan fai que t'aprenda, / Ben tenh mon chantar per *ric*" (Go, song, straight to my beautiful *Mais d'amic*, / so that she may hear you, / and if she goes so far as to learn you, / I shall certainly consider my singing noble).<sup>39</sup> Although performance is not specifically mentioned, one can presume that having learned the song, the lady might well perform it. The *trobairitz* refer to their art as singing ("A chantar *m'er*," "Ja de chantar"); if one grants that men sang songs so entitled, there is no reason to refuse to grant the same activity to women. One therefore

can argue with some confidence that the *Comtessa de Dia* sang her song herself, or that it could also have been sung by someone else; available evidence suggests that the performing conventions of *trobairid* songs likely paralleled those of the troubadours. And if the purpose of the song was to give a lesson in proper behavior, women could give that lesson in singing as well as men.

#### Marcabru, "L'autrier jost' una sebissa"

Let us now move both chronologically and geographically to our second song. *Marcabru* belongs to the second generation of troubadours (the first from which we have music). Although he must count among the most celebrated and prolific of the troubadours, like the *Comtessa de Dia* he cannot be identified with absolute certainty.<sup>40</sup> References in the poems indicate that he likely worked at the courts of *William X*, Duke of Aquitaine (son of the first known troubadour and father of *Eleanor of Aquitaine*), *Alfonse Jourdan* of *Toulouse*, and also *Alfonso VII* of *Castile-Léon*. "L'autrier jost' una sebissa" (fig. 2) is one of the best known *pastorelas*, in part because it may have been the earliest ex-

37. Jean Boutière and A-H. Schutz, *Biographies des troubadours*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Nizet, 1964), 343.

38. "D'un sirventes no.m cal far loignor ganda" (PC 80.13), v. 25.

39. Margaret Switten, *The Cansos of Raimon de Miraval: A Study of Poems and Melodies* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy, 1985), 227.

40. Ruth E. Harvey, *The Troubadour Marcabru and Love* (London: Westfield College/University of London Committee for Medieval Studies, 1989), introduction.

	I L'autrier jost'una sebissa Trobei pastora mestissa, De joi e de sen massissa, Si cum filla de vilana, 5 Cap'e gonel'e pelissa Vest e camiza treslissa, Sotlars e caussas de lana.	The other day beside a hedge I found a humble shepherdess Full of joy and good sense Like the daughter of a peasant girl; A cape, a coat and fur She wore, and a shirt of rough cloth, Shoes and woolen stockings.
	II Ves lieis vinc pet la planissa: "Toza, fi.m ieu, res faitissa, 10 Dol ai car lo freitz vos fissa." "Seigner, so.m dis la vilana, Merce Dieu e ma noirissa, Pauc m'o pretz si.l vens m'erissa, Qu'alegreta sui e sana."	I came to her across the plain "Young girl," I said, "charming creature I am pained because the cold pierces you." "Sit," said to me the <b>peasant</b> girl, "Thanks to God and my nurse, If the wind <b>ruffles</b> my hair, I don't mind, For I am <b>cheerful</b> and healthy."
	III 15 "Toza, fi.m ieu, cauza pia, Destors me sui de la via Pet far a vos compaignia; Quar aitals toza vilana No deu ses pareill paria 20 Pastorgar tanta bestia En aital terra, soldana."	"Young girl," I said, "sweet thing, I have <b>turned</b> out of my way To keep you company, For such a young peasant girl Should <b>not</b> , without a comrade, Pasture so many beasts In such a place, alone."
	IV "Don, fetz ela, qui que.m sia, Ben conose sen e folia; La vostra pareillaria, 25 Seigner, so.m dis la vilana, Lai on se tang si s'estia, Que tals la cuid'en bailia Tener, no.n a mas l'ufana."	"Sir," said she, "be what I may, I know <b>common sense</b> from folly; Your company, Sir," so said to me the peasant girl, "Should be offered where it is fitting, For one who thinks she can hold it In her <b>power</b> , has nothing but the illusion."
	V 30 "Toza de gentilafaire, Cavaliers fon vostre paire Que.us engenret en la maire, car fon corteza vilana. Con plus vos gart, m'etz belaire, E pet vostre joi m'esclaira, 35 Si.m fossetz un pauc humana!"	"Young girl of noble condition, <b>Your</b> father <b>was</b> a knight Who got <b>your</b> mother with child For she was a courtly peasant girl. The more I look at you, the prettier you seem And by <b>your</b> joy I am gladdened, If only toward me you were more human!"
	VI "Don, tot mon ling e mon aire Vei revertir e retraire Al vezoig et a l'araira, Seigner, so.m dis la vilana; 40 Mas tals se fai cavalgaire C'atrestal deuria faire Los seis jorns de la setmana."	"Sir, all my lineage and my family I see returning and going back To sickle and plow, Sir," so said to me the peasant girl: "But some pass themselves off as knights Who should be doing likewise Six days of the week."
	VII 45 "Toza, fi.m ieu, gentils fada, Vos adastret, quan fos nada, D'una beutat esmerada Sobre tot'autra vilana;	"Young girl," said I, "a noble <b>fairly</b> Blessed you, when you were born, With perfect beauty Above any other peasant girl;

Fig. 2. "L'autrier jost'una sebissa"

	VII, continued E <b>seria.us</b> ben doblada, Si <b>m vezi'</b> una vegada, Sobira e vos sotrana."	And it would be doubled If I saw myself just once Above and you below."
50	VIII "Seigner, tan m'avez lauzada, <b>Que tota.n</b> sui enojada; Pois en pretz m'avez levada, Seigner, <b>so.m</b> dis la vilana, Per so n'auretz per soudada 55 Al partir: bada, fols, bada E la muz a meliana."	"Sir, you have praised me so much That I am quite annoyed; Since you have raised me in worth, Sir," so said to me the peasant girl, "You will have for recompense On departure: gape, fool, gape Vainly waiting at noonday."
60	I x "Toz'estraing cor e salvage Adomesg'om per uzatge. Ben conosc al trespassatge 60 Qu'ab aital toza vilana Pot hom far ric compaignatge Ab amistat de coratge, Si l'us l'autre non engana."	"Young girl, a wild and skittish heart One can tame by using it. I certainly realize on passing by here That with such a young peasant girl A man can find noble company <b>With</b> heartfelt friendship, If neither deceives the other."
65	X "Don, hom coitatz de follatge 65 Jur'e pliu e promet gatge: Si <b>m</b> fariatz homenatge, Seigner, <b>so.m</b> dis la vilana; Mas ieu, per un pauc d'intratge, Non vuoil ges mon piucellatge 70 Camjar per nom de putana."	"Sir, a man pressed by madness Swears and pledges and guarantees: Thus you would do me homage, Sir," so said to me the peasant girl; "But I, for a cheap entrance fee, Do not want to exchange my virginity For the name of <b>whore</b> ."
75	XI "Toza, tota creatura Revertis a sa natura: Pareillar pareilladura Devem, ieu e vos, vilana, 75 A l'abric lonc la pastura, Car plus n'estaretz segura Per far la cauza doussana."	"Young girl, every creature Reverts to its nature; We should prepare to form a couple, You and I, peasant girl, Under cover beside the pasture, For you will be in greater safety there To do the sweet thing."
80	XII "Don, oc; <b>mas</b> segon dreitura Cerca fols sa follatura, 80 Cortes cortez'aventura, <b>E.il</b> vilans ab la vilana; En tal loc fai sens fraitura On hom non garda mezura, So dia la gens anciana."	"Sir, yes; but according to what is right, The <b>fool</b> seeks his foolishness, The courtly, courtly adventures And the peasant boy, the peasant girl; Wisdom is lacking in any place (circumstance) Where moderation <b>is</b> not observed, So say the <b>ancients</b> ."
85	XIII "Toza, de vostra figura 85 Non vi altra plus tafura Ni de son cor plus trefana."	"Young girl, about your <b>face</b> , I never saw one more dishonest, Nor a heart more deceitful."
90	XIV "Don, lo cavecs vos ahura, Que tals bad'en la pintura 90 Qu'autre n'espera la mana."	"Sir, the owl promises you That one man gapes before the painting While <b>the</b> other expects reward."

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Fig. 2. "L'autrier jost'una sebissa," continued

ample of the genre in the vernacular. It embodies characteristic features of the genre, such as a country setting with the attempted seduction of a shepherdess by a knight, or the combined use of narrative and dialogue, with the primary point of view being that of the man. But in the development of these features, Marcabru displays poetic sophistication and rhetorical dexterity that set his song apart from most of the *pastourelles* that would follow it. To be sure, if Marcabru “invented” the genre, he cannot be said to have followed any “rules” because those rules would only have emerged as subsequent poets transformed his “innovation” into a “tradition.” Consequently Marcabru’s *pastorela* especially needs to be considered in and for itself. Our focus will be on the female figure, the *vilana*. How do the arguments previously advanced concerning the political and poetic roles of real women affect our interpretation of the imagined female voice in Marcabru’s poem?

The central position of the female figure in the song is fixed by the return of the word *vilana* in the fourth line of each stanza – technically, this is a word-refrain – and by the prominence given it by both metrical and musical structures. The stanza is composed of seven seven-syllable lines, with feminine rhymes arranged according to the pattern *aaabaab* (each letter represents a rhyme sound). Stanzas are grouped two by two, following a technique called *coblas doblas*, a technique that not only sets off the rapid-fire exchanges of the debate but also produces a complex and constantly changing sonorous image. The “a” rhyme sound changes every two stanzas; in contrast, the “b” rhyme – the *vilana* rhyme – remains the same: amidst the turns and twists of the debate, it anchors the song. The melody exhibits considerable repetition, following a pattern that could be roughly diagrammed *ABABCCD*, although the phrases take up motifs from the *A* and *B* phrases, so that only the last line has entirely different

music. What emerges from the comparison of metrical and musical diagrams is an apparent disjuncture in the fourth line: where the melody repeats, the rhyme sound does not, but moves to the key sound *vilana*. Precisely this “disjuncture” emphasizes the central focus of the song on the character of the shepherdess.<sup>41</sup>

A crucial question for Marcabru’s *pastorela* is the question of narrative voice. The point of view is clearly that of the man, but it is legitimate to ask: which man? To whose male voice are we listening?

At the outset, we do not know – or we would not have known at a time when conventions of genre were not firmly in place. The very first word, “*L’autrier*,” conjures up for us a knight setting forth in pursuit of a shepherdess. But would Marcabru’s audience have had the same instantaneous recognition? The narrator does not initially define himself other than by the use of the first person “*trobei*” (line 2). Plausible arguments have been made that the choice of this verb suggests both the act of poetic composition, *trobar*, and the discovery of the shepherdess. The narrator constructs both shepherdess and song. The fact that the object of “*trobei*” is “*pastora*” (still line 2) suggests that the narrator is male. But this is clarified only in the second stanza and by the shepherdess. She designates the narrator and defines his status as a “*Seigner*” (line 11). In that same line, this status of the narrator is directly contrasted to that of his interlocutor by the term *vilana* at the rhyme, pronounced by the knight. Thus, the interlocutors name each other as members of different social groups. Line 11 forms a kind of half refrain. It is repeated in stanzas IV, VI, VIII, and X, every other stanza, until the pattern is broken in stanza XII, the last stanza. In this last stanza, the shepherdess herself sings the word *vilana*, thereby assuming an identity she did not previously have, a development not accorded to the knight. Beside the terms *vilana* and *seigner*, the words *toza* and

41. See Margaret Switten, *Music and Poetry in the Middle Ages: A Guide to Research on French and Occitan Song, 1100–1400* (New York: Garland, 1995), 15–16. To characterize the structure of this song, thinking only of the melody, as AAB or bar form (Elizabeth Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996], 149, or Andrew Hughes, *Style and Symbol* [Ottawa: The Institute of Medieval Music, 1989], 143) is not only anachronistic but inaccurate because it obscures the real charm of the song created by the interwoven patterns of musical and textual repetitions.



*don* are sung by knight and shepherdess, respectively, in regular alternation to begin stanzas. The participants in the dialogue are defined by each other through the forms of address they use to carry the debate forward. To be sure, the entire debate is the creation of the one who initially “found” (“trobei”) the adventure. But precisely this circumstance allows us to perceive an ambiguity of male voice: that of the *knight* who will subsequently be identified as such in relation to the shepherdess, and that of the *poet* who originated the *song*.<sup>42</sup>

This differentiation permits a sharper delineation of the poet’s stance and a more *nuanced* interpretation of the song, particularly as regards the shepherdess. A simple identification of the poet Marcabru with the knight-implicit or *explicit*—undergirds arguments that Marcabru in this song is trying to elevate himself to a higher status and fails or that the feminine figure is an “other” that serves merely to explore masculine *eroticism*.<sup>43</sup> The perception that we are listening to more than one male voice—the knight’s story told by the knight and the poet’s manipulation of male and female characters—invites different views. It becomes appropriate to ask what may appear to be a simplistic question: Who was the poet? Who was Marcabru? As mentioned above, we cannot be sure. The Old Occitan *vidas* describe Marcabru as being of humble origins, perhaps illegitimate. Recent scholarship has characterized him as an educated *soudadier*, possibly a *joglar*.<sup>44</sup> If he was not a *vilan*, he at least does not seem to have been a knight. We may posit a distinction of class between the poet and the knight in the song as well as a distinction of outlook. In other songs, Marcabru has sharp words for wayward knights and adul-

terous ladies. His attitude is not unlike that of moralizing chroniclers or clerics such as Orderic Vitalis or Etienne de Fougères, both of whom wrote in the twelfth century, the former in Normandy, the latter in Brittany. The knight in the *pastorela* is clearly bent on seduction; the poet is more than likely critical of such activity. The resulting irony—a knight unaware of how foolish he is and a poet poking fun at his foolishness—was surely not lost on the poet’s audience. And finally, the distinction between knight and poet allows the shepherdess to emerge in sharper relief. Although it is the knight who is presented as telling the story, so that within the fiction of the song, the shepherdess’s words are mediated and not reported directly, still it is the poet who has invented the story. The shepherdess consequently takes on a certain independence with respect to the knight—she, too, fully realizes what a bumbling seducer he is. The perception of a *double-layered* narrative voice allows us to see the two characters in the *pastorela* as equally creatures of their creator.

With that perception in mind, let us now look more closely at the *vilana*. She is, as has often been remarked, a quite remarkable woman. Her masterful use of proverb and rhetoric is, of course, Marcabru’s mastery. The question then is: what does she represent and to what end is she made to deploy such debating skills?

The *vilana* is first of all a cheerful and healthy young girl: “alegreta sui e sana,” line 14. But there is more than physical health. In another poem, Marcabru speaks of the “votz sana” (the healthy voice) of the bird preparing to sing a mating song. In the crusading song “Pax in nomine Domini,” the word “san” refers to a kind of spiritual purifi-

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42. A number of scholars have hinted at this differentiation without fully considering its importance especially for the shepherdess. See, for example, James J. Wilhelm, *Seven Troubadours: The Creators of Modern Verse* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1970), 83; Charles Fantazzi, “Marcabru’s Pastourelle: Courtly Love Decoded,” *Studies in Philology* 17 (1974): 390; Prospero Saiz, *Personae and Poiesis: The Poet and the Poem in Medieval Love Lyric* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 75; Frank M. Chambers, *Old Provençal Versification* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1985), 60. Michel Zink, *La pastourelle: poésie et folklore au moyen âge* (Paris: Bordas, 1972), 53–56, does point out the atypically favorable role given to the shepherdess.

43. See Joan M. Ferrante, “Male Fantasy and Female Reality in Courtly Literature,” *Women’s Studies* 11 (1984): 67–97; Cholakian, *Troubadour Lyric*, 75.

44. R. N. B. Goddard, “The Early Troubadours and the Latin Tradition” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1985), 62–69; Harvey, *Marcabru and Love*, chapter L.

cation. Thus the shepherdess is both natural and pure. Sound of body and of mind, she can distinguish good sense from folly (line 23). She is prepared to stand her ground in the face of the knight's provocations.

What then are these provocations and how does the shepherdess reply?

The first is the offer of protection and **companionship** (stanzas II and III). Turning the knight's "**pareill paria**" (like or suitable companionship) (line 19) into a mocking "**pareillaria**" (line 24), the shepherdess rejects this approach, qualifying it as "illusion" (*ufana*) (line 28).<sup>45</sup> The companionship the knight wants between them would leave her with nothing; she figures that out right away.

Companionship would be more fitting if they were of the same class. To remedy the defect of their differing social classes, the calculating **seigner** proposes that the *vilana* is really a courtly peasant girl because her father was a knight. Again the *vilana* is quick with a rebuff (stanza VI): her ancestry, she affirms, is pure, and the association of peasant and plow guarantees its authenticity. But the knight. . . is his ancestry so clear? There are those who only pass themselves off as knights (line 40). Innuendo is met with innuendo. But the knight persists. He will try flattery. The *vilana* possesses by birth perfect beauty (stanza VII); she is in a sense born noble, or at least with one of the major attributes of a noble lady. But the flattery suddenly becomes comic -the knight is a rather crude fellow- when we discover that the *vilana's* beauty would be doubled if the knight just once saw himself above with her below (lines 47-49).

The shepherdess's reply plays on a collection of themes and values that early on appear in Occitan song: The lady is **beautiful**, the lover/poet praises her, enhances her reputation, her **pretz** (line 52), and then she should reward him. The shepherdess flings back an ironic undercutting of this motif: certainly the knight would not be enhancing her

worth by seducing her. He will then have the reward he deserves: "**Bada, fols, bada**" (line 55).<sup>46</sup>

The knight does not yet give up. He shifts registers, conflating two disparate ideas: the wild beast tamed and the oath of fidelity.

The shepherdess picks up on both of these. First she exposes the futility of homage coming from a man possessed by madness, that is, by lust: "**hom coitatz de follatge / Jur'e pliu e promet gatge: / Si.m fariatz homenatge**" (a man pressed by madness / Swears and pledges and **guarantees**: / Thus you would do me homage) (lines 64-66). Then she draws out the implication of bestiality by linking it to prostitution. *Intratge* (line 68) picks up the previous *trespassatge* (line 59). For a fee one can pass along certain roads. The venality of women is sharply evoked to unmask the knight's true intentions. Prostitution is a prominent theme in many *pastourelles*. Peasant women were looked upon as women of easy virtue, and the notion of prostitution clung readily to their class. The implications of the knight's clumsy rhetoric outrage the *vilana*. She defends her honor by categorically rejecting both the act of prostitution and the name of whore. In the strongest statement of the poem, she flatly negates the rhyme link of *vilana* with *putana* (prostitute) (line 70). One thinks of how she originally defined herself: "**sana**," the opposite of the image the knight would project on her.

The knight still can't quite believe he will fail. He returns in stanza XI to his opening gambit: "we should do what comes naturally, over there," "**a l'abric lonc la pastura**" (under cover beside the pasture).

The shepherdess initially agrees: "**Don, oc**" (line 78). But then in a masterful rebuff, she turns the knight's rhetoric against him. She will act according to what is right, in a correctly natural manner, according to *mezura* (moderation). She then sorts out the proper couples -a bit like the

45. See L. T. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 91, 148, 225.

46. Involved in this exchange, too, is the notion that **excess** praise is simple **mockery**: "**E qui trop plus que non val / Lauza dompna, fai parer / Qu'escarn dia e non ren al**" (He who praises his lady more than she is worth / makes it appear / that his words are **mockery** and nothing else). Raimon de Miraval, "A penas saï, in Switten, *Cansos*, 149. For what might be called the "excess praise" theme, see Switten, *Cansos*, 83-86.

finale of Beaumarchais' *Marriage of Figaro*—and caps it all off with a reference to the authority of the ancients. During the sorting-out process, she makes it clear that as a *vilana* she can only love a *vilan*, and by pronouncing the word *vilana*, she takes upon herself her true identity, dismissing completely the identity the knight would force upon her. In the face of her wisdom, the folly of the knight collapses, and the two separate with a *tart* exchange: the knight loses control and reveals both his true feelings and his inability to “read” the *vilana*; she responds with an enigmatic proverb which leaves her in command of the field.<sup>47</sup>

In this *pastorela* we have a very powerful woman's voice opposed to the voice of the knight. The dialogue establishes an exchange between the interlocutors in a relationship of near equality—near equality because in the last analysis, the knight's bungling overtures are no match for the shepherdess's biting wit. One can certainly argue that the shepherdess, not the knight, is the protagonist of Marcabru's ideas. The concepts of moderation and natural good sense opposed to lust and the veneer of courtliness are typical of Marcabru. Speaking through the voice of a woman allows Marcabru to attack knights directly and noble ladies by contrast.

Can we relate this imagined female voice to voices of real women? The case of the knight is perhaps instructive. Nicolò Pasero has persuasively argued from intertextual allusions that the “model” for the knight in the poem is William IX, the first troubadour.<sup>48</sup> The criticism of knights in the song becomes specific as well as general. We cannot point to any lady who could be the “real” *vilana*. But as has often been noticed, the *vilana* sometimes speaks as a “courtly” lady: she uses the vocabulary of oaths (lines 64-66) and of com-

mercial activities (*intratge*) to make some of her points. The text could be read as an erotic presentation of the *engan* (deceit) of the oaths, pointedly answered. Some of the language is as appropriate to political/social – or, more appropriately perhaps for Marcabru, moralistic/social – contexts as to poetic ones. The court at Poitiers certainly knew strong female figures, among whom one could count Philippa of Toulouse, the wife of William IX and mother of William X. Indeed, William X sometimes styled himself as “William whose mother was of Toulouse.”<sup>49</sup> It is hard to believe that William's daughter Eleanor played no role at court. She was born circa 1122 and left the court to marry Louis VII of France in 1137, the year her father died on a pilgrimage to Compostela. Marcabru received patronage at court during the years of Eleanor's youth; he, too, left Poitiers in 1137. It seems clear that Marcabru knew Eleanor; one of his songs has been interpreted as a criticism of her conduct during the Second Crusade.<sup>50</sup> In these circumstances, it seems not too great an exaggeration to posit a “true” female voice, the kind of voice Marcabru might have heard at court, as a “model” for the imagined *vilana*. This opens the way to a subtler reading of the song than is possible when the shepherdess is reduced to a mere male fantasy. We may see a moral lesson given by a powerful female figure to those in her society. The lesson is given both by example and by rhetoric: the *vilana* behaves as a courtly lady ought to behave; the answers she gives to the knight are couched in language a noble lady could well have used. Deception and treachery in the moral sphere are clearly rebuked, as they would be also in the political sphere. The argument that “real” women's voices may be heard through Marcabru's *pastorela* adds another layer of meaning to an already rich song.

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47. Critics have emphasized the importance of the folly versus wisdom theme for this song. See Harvey, *Marcabru and Love*, 112, and William D. Paden, “Reading Pastourelles,” *Tenso* 4 (1988): 7.

48. Nicolò Pasero, “Pastora contro cavaliere, Marcabruno contro Guglielmo IX - Fenomeni di intertestualità in *L'autrier jost'una sebissa* (BdT 293, 30),” *Cultura Neolatina* 43 (1983): 9–25. See also Pasero, “Sulla collocazione socioletteraria della ‘pastorela’ de Marcabruno,” *L'immagine riflessa* 4 (1980): 347–64.

49. D. D. R. Owen in his recent biography, *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen and Legend* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) calls attention to “the perhaps surprisingly active role played by women in the Poitiers/Aquitaine line” (6). In the light of more recent research on both southern and northern France, one may clearly recognize the important role played by women at Poitiers, but not think of it as surprising.

50. Harvey, *Marcabru and Love*, chapter 6: “Cortesía and the Example of Eleanor of Aquitaine.”

The character of the *vilana* might indeed reflect a taste for works in which powerful women figure prominently. It may also reflect a taste for debate at court over both political and poetic issues. And this brings us to ask: How might this song have been performed? In what kind of context can we place the performance? Available evidence indicates that the audiences at court, and this would be especially true of the court at Poitiers, were small. Although it is likely that the dominant figures at court may have been young male noblemen of sophisticated tastes— it is known that William X himself was a man of some learning<sup>51</sup>—the audiences also included noblewomen, professional members of the count's entourage, and other performers. As Ruth Harvey has pointed out: "Poets knew one another, rivalled one another in composing verses, and debated interpretations of love and the art of poetry."<sup>52</sup> Further, among women's songs, debate poems figure prominently.<sup>53</sup> It is in such an atmosphere of free debate and rhetorical display that we must place the *pastorela*. In such an atmosphere, a sharp-tongued poet such as Marcabru, clearly perceived as a critic of ladies but presenting himself as an upholder of virtue, might have fared well.<sup>54</sup>

We may now ask By whom might this song have

been performed? In all likelihood, the Marcabru song would have been performed by Marcabru himself or by a male singer. One can imagine the multiple levels of meaning and the multiple ironies that could be brought out in a performance by Marcabru before an audience aware of the allusions to "real" voices the song might contain, aware of the difference between the poet as narrator and the poet as knight," and fully able to appreciate the various effects of melodic stability amidst textual change, and the effect, too, of a deceptively lighthearted melody carrying a series of exchanges that are both witty and telling. A different array of meanings would pertain if the song were performed by a jongleur. And performance by a *joglaressa* is not unthinkable. Indeed, a modern singer found this possibility intriguing: one of the first modern transcriptions of the song was made for Yvette Guilbert, the belle-epoque *diseuse*; judging by the recordings of Yvette Guilbert, a more perfect interpreter of Marcabru's song could scarcely be imagined.

The feminine voices we hear in the songs discussed in this essay are differently situated within the corpus of Occitan lyric. If we place the song of the Comtessa de Dia in what we can know of its social contexts through careful consideration of

51. Goddard, "The Early Troubadours," 56.

52. Harvey, *Marcabru and Love*, 2.36 n. 50. For the range of questions involving debate, rivalry and intertextuality, see Maria Luisa Meneghetti, *Il pubblico dei trovatori* (Modena: Mucchi, 1984) and Jörn Gruber, *Die Dialektik des Trobar* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1983).

53. See Angelica Rieger, "En coselh no deu hum voler femna: Les dialogues mixtes dans la lyrique troubadouresque," *Perspectives médiévales* 16 (1990): 47-57; Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, "Debatable Fictions: The *Tensos* of the *Trobairitz*," in *Literary Aspects of Courtly Culture*, ed. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994), 19-28, and "The *Trobairitz*," in *A Handbook of the Troubadours*, ed. F. R. P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 217-20; Linda M. Paterson, *The World of the Troubadours: Medieval Occitan Society, c. 1100-c. 1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 260. It is evident that we cannot agree with the views of Simon Gaunt on the role of women in debates at court: "if women did engage in witty dialogue at court, . . . they did so within an environment devoted primarily to the regulation of a male hierarchy and to the distribution of power within a man's world" (Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 161).

54. Marcabru was attacked directly by at least one medieval poet, probably a *trobairia*, although the song was long attributed to Raimon Jordan because that is the attribution in the one manuscript (C: BNF fr 856) where it is found: "No puesc mudar no digua mon vejaire" (PC 404.5), stanza 3, lines 25-30, "Qu'En Marcabrus, a ley de predicaire / quant es en gleiza ho orador / que di gran mal de la gen mescrezen, / et el dia mal de donas eyssamen. / E dic vos be que non l'es gran honransa / selh que dia mal d'aisso don nays enfansa" (For Lord Marcabru, like a sermonizer / in church, or a preacher / speaking ill of unbelievers, / speaks similarly ill of women; / I tell you there's no great honor / in maligning that from which a child is born) (Bruckner, Shepard, and White, *Songs*, 99). It is to be noted that the designation "En" given to Marcabru in this song suggests that he was perceived as belonging to the knightly class, but the honorific "en" may be ironic; it is avoided elsewhere with Marcabru (Harvey, *Marcabru and Love*, 12). Angelica Rieger (*Trobairitz*, 712-13) suggests that the composer of "No muesc mudar" might have been associated with the court of Maria de Ventadorn where questions of women's stance as singers were debated, if we are to judge by the *tenso* exchanged between Maria and Gui d'Ussel (Bruckner, Shepard, and White, *Songs*, 38-41). For a discussion of "No puesc mudar," see Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 161-65. On the reception of Marcabru's work, see Ruth Harvey, "The Troubadour Marcabru and his Public," *Reading Medieval Studies* 14 (1988): 47-76.

55. Topsfield, *Troubadours and Love*, 89.

available evidence, we can hear in her song the poetic voice of a real woman raising issues that are of concern to her and to her society. There is no reason to deny to her the right to speak. Jean-Charles Huchet has argued that the Comtessa de Dia we think we know is just a creation of manuscript attributions and *vidas*; the poems attributed to her and to other *trobairitz* constitute a kind of disembodied “voix critique” (critical voice) invented by men to define male discourse. That the woman remain silent is, for him, a necessary condition of the troubadour *canso*.<sup>56</sup> But many troubadour poets are the creation of manuscript attributions and *vidas*: If one accepts manuscript attribution to males in those cases where there is no other firm evidence of the poet’s identity, and Huchet continues to call troubadours by their names, then why deny the validity of such attribution to females solely because they are female? And if we consider the social and political roles of real women, we can easily reach the conclusion that the necessary condition of the troubadour *canso* is that powerful women do speak. Nor need we imagine that women have no “subject position” from which to sing.<sup>57</sup> They may occupy the same subject position in the poetry that they occupy in the oaths of fidelity. The song is of a whole with the society from which it springs. This interpretation of the feminine voice allows us to give richer meaning to the critical aspects of the discourse elaborated in women’s songs.

The voice we hear in the *Marcabru* poem is, so far as we can judge, invented by a man. It does not speak to us directly. Nonetheless, our evidence permits us to imagine *real* women as “models,” just as we think of a real man as a “model” for the knight. It also permits us to argue that strong female figures need not be restricted to literature; literary portrayals acquire greater depth when we know that in Occitan “reality” strong female figures were not unusual. Our evidence permits us to hear in the *pastorela* a powerful female voice assuming her right to be what she is and to resist treachery and images of corruption foisted upon

her. In this interpretation, the critical voice, though invented by a man, takes on a substance (dare one say, a “body”) and a corrosive edge that other interpretations would deny to it.

§ § §

Our main purpose here has been to restore to Occitan women, in song as in life, the right to speak without concluding that the world of troubadour song would collapse because they opened their mouths. Although couched in different terms, the issues raised by comtessa and *vilana are* in many ways the same: knights should practice what they preach; women have the power to claim their rights, including the right to resist exploitation or to express their love openly through their songs.

Despite its status as literary game, troubadour song is concerned with “real” struggles, conflicts, and emotions. Many conflicts involve women, and the status of women in southern France makes it plausible that women should have articulated some of them. The conflicts are not peculiar to the period of flowering of troubadour song. The Old Woman in the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*, affirming that all men betray and deceive women, traces her vengeful attitude to her own betrayal by a lover to whom she had had the folly to devote herself exclusively. The Old Woman is not a very savory character. But later, Christine de Pizan—and most critics do recognize her as a real woman writer—rebukes knightly hypocrisy in *the Epitre au Dieu d’amour* (Cupid’s Letter) and in some of her *ballades*. Christine’s critique is both literary and social; it situates itself at a juncture of the life she perceived around her and its artistic representation—like the critique of her earlier sisters in *Provence*. If we cease thinking of the *dompna* (the lady) as a metaphor for something else, if we reintegrate song into a social setting where the language of power relations and the language of love are fused into a discourse used on equal footing by both women and men, then we may grant to women their own voices and allow them to make music.

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56. Huchet, “Les femmes troubadours,” 76, 70.

57. Kay, *Subjectivity*, 102, and Paterson, *The World*, 261.