

H-France Review Vol. 9 (January 2009), No. 11

William D. Paden and Frances Freeman Paden, trans., *Troubadour Poems from the South of France*. Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, New York: Boydell and Brewer, 2007. xiii + 278 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliography, index. \$85.00 U. S. (cl). ISBN 978-1-84384-129-6.

Review by Sarah-Grace Heller, Ohio State University.

The reader of *Troubadour Poems from the South of France* will, I predict, be able to echo some lines of Arnaut Daniel found therein:

It is true that I've been to many good courts,
But here with her I find much more to praise:
Measure and wit and other good ways,
Beauty, youth, good deeds and pleasures.[1]

This collection of translations from the lyric tradition of medieval Occitania indeed visits many courts: it is a wonderful survey of the regions and cultures comprising that section of France where the *langue d'oc* was the language of poetry, from Poitou and the Limousin to Aragon and Castile, from Gascony to Provence to Northern Italy. The introduction and notes to each work give a brief and succinct picture of what is known of the poets and the courts with which they were associated, creating a fine mosaic of the politics, lyrical trends, and complex social hierarchy. Overall, the selections demonstrate the high degree to which the Padens have internalized that virtue so highly prized by the troubadours, *meysura* (measure): no particular poet is overrepresented (as has often been the case for the justly celebrated Bernart de Ventadorn), most all of the genres are represented (not just the *cansos* of love-longing, there are plenty of politics, pieties, and obscenities here), and the long-neglected women poets, the *trobairitz*, are given generous attention. Moreover, there is much wit, beauty, and pleasure to be found in the translations.

Arranged chronologically by “seasons” (Before the Troubadours, Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, Aftermath), the selections offer an excellent introduction to the history of the Occitan language and its uses. The first is a charm dating to the second half of the tenth century, “*Tomida Femina/ Swollen Woman*,” preserved written upside-down as a marginal insertion in a law text. An image of the manuscript is included, vividly illustrating the fragmentary state of the evidence for the early vernacular. Although the translators chose to give translations only in the interest of breadth (a happy choice), rather than giving the original on the facing page as a number of recent troubadour volumes have done (so there was no need to do it again), in this case they give a transcription of the marginal insertion, an edited version of the original Occitan, as well as a translation of the rather mysterious charm, perhaps related to childbirth.[2] They draw an elegant parallel between this birthing incantation and the birth of the Occitan vernacular.

This first section also includes a bilingual dawn song with stanzas in Latin, and the only monastic song written entirely in Occitan. The “Spring” section (1100-1150) brings selections that will be more familiar, including songs by the first known troubadour, Guilhem IX of Aquitaine (with a reproduction of one of the poems from the only troubadour manuscript in North America, at the Morgan Library),

Jaufre Rudel of *amor de lonh* (love from afar) fame; several by the first great satirist of the tradition, Marcabru, including the first *pastorela* and two crusade songs; as well as songs by Cercamon, Bernart Martí, and Peire d'Alvernhe.

The Summer section (1150-1200) similarly features many of the “greats”—Dante’s favorite Arnaut Daniel, the Comtessa de Dia, Gaucelm Faidit, Peire Vidal, Bernart de Ventadorn—but also some interesting surprises: the rich similes of Rigaut de Berbezilh; a translation of an Old Norse love song to Ermengarde of Narbonne by Rögvald, Earl of Orkney, written during a stop in Languedoc while on pilgrimage, the prose breakout “talking blues” of Raimbaut d'Aurenga’s witty verses resisting generic classification.

The Fall section (1200-1250) features many *tensos* and *partimens*, debate and dialogue poems in two or more voices, often departing from a provocative question about love. The exchange between Bernart Arnaut and Lombarda is particularly well rendered, a worthy attempt to capture the sprightly rhyming and geographic word play of the original. There are numerous, often haunting poems by anonymous or barely-known women, dealing with topics such as gossip, distance, and widowhood. Some narrative works figure, such as a *fabla* (fable) by Peire Cardenal, and the celebrated *vidas* (fictional biographies) of Jaufre Rudel, Bernart de Ventadorn, and Guilhem de Cabestanh (the famous tale of the eaten heart).

In the Winter section (1250-1300), there is recognition of the growth in importance of dance songs, *baladas*; the “wintry” aspect is perhaps the decrease in complexity and poetic content that they represent. Three songs feature the voice of an unhappily married woman (*malmaridada*), a theme considered more common in the north. The Padens note the eclipse of the *trobairitz* in this period, as well as the moralization of erotic desire through poets such as Guilhem de Montanhagol. Three Jewish poets are featured in this section: Bonfils, in a rather disturbingly anti-semitic and lacunary *tensò* with Guiraut Riquier, the only known example of a Hebrew poet participating in the troubadour tradition; and several songs translated from the Hebrew, a prelude to prayer by David Hakohen, and satirical pieces by Isaac Gorni. There are a sonnet and a ballad recalling a lady of Toulouse by Guido Cavalcanti, poet of the *dolce stil nuovo* circle, demonstrating the troubadour influence on Italian poetic development.

This section also includes the full series of six *pastorelas* by Guiraut Riquier, in which a knight meets the same shepherdess over the course of twenty-two years, with observations on how she grows from maiden to mother, but continues to send him on his way. The final section, Aftermath (1300-1350), opens with a lovely sketch of the spring at Vaucluse made by Petrarch. The volume closes with Petrarch, first a poem written in Vaucluse, then the first sonnet in his *Canzoniere*, “*Voi ch’ascoltate in rime sparse*.” This last section traces the refiguring of the troubadours in Italy, where many of the poems were collected. It includes Dante’s stanzas in Occitan from *Purgatorio* 26. There is a Hebrew liturgical song; a memorable, seemingly autobiographical poem in the voice of a leper; and the priest Raimon de Cornet’s injunctions to learn from the “artful troubadours” rather than reproach them, demonstrating the moralizing direction obviously taken by other representatives of the Church.

Troubadour poetry often rose to towering levels of formal virtuosity with unique rhyme schemes and syllabic formulas. It is common for *cansos* to be composed in unique metrical forms. This presents particular challenges to the English translator. English verse is accentual syllabic, whereas Old Occitan counted syllables only, not feet or stresses, so even the effort to reproduce the exact number of syllables in an Occitan line can yield something awkwardly lurching in English. The troubadours varied their line lengths, creating staccato effects with very short lines, more discursive effects with longer ones, but generally employing what seem like short lines to those accustomed to the iambic pentameter. Old Occitan was a highly efficient language, capable of expressing more in seven syllables than English can in ten or twelve. The many shared verb and noun endings of Occitan are hospitable to rhyme, in contrast with the rather impoverished treasury of rhymes available to the Anglophone.

The Padens have elected to make their versions look as much like the originals as possible, imitating the stanzaic structure that characterizes most of the songs, matching the number of syllables in each line as much as possible, indicating a regular number of syllables by justifying the left margin, variation in syllabic count with indentation. They have favored accuracy and clarity over rhyme and strict versification. This cannot be considered an unhappy choice, if the reader considers William D. Paden's long distinguished career in Occitan and Romance studies: he knows these poems as well as anyone living, and has scrutinized them for multiple decades. The close back-and-forth collaboration with Frances Freeman Paden has done much to make the poems readable, "come to life," as the translators hoped. They have successfully transmitted the tone of the originals. Arnaut's Daniel's sestina "*Lo ferm voler/ The firm intent*," in which the lines end in the unpoetic words "enters," "nail," "soul," "rod," "uncle" and "chamber" in a different, mathematically determined order in each stanza, actually makes sense here, for instance, as much as could be expected from *trobar clus*, the "closed style" it typifies.

Rhyme is only decorative in the translations, rather than a formative principle as in the Occitan. Sacrifices must be made. When it does appear, it is sheer delight. And it sounds like the troubadours. A delicious example is Raimbaut de Vaqueiras' "*Eras quan vei verdayar/ Now when I see the meadows turning green*," a *descort* in which he mixes Occitan, Genoese, Old French, Gascon, and Galician-Portuguese to express the lover's mental disarray. The *tornada* includes a bit of each language, and serves as an example of the felicity of a bit of use of the romance languages, which the translators permit themselves in this case. The narrator addresses his lady by her *senhal* or secret name, "Fair Knight":

Fair Knight, your ladyship (in Occitan)
 Is so dear to me, *tant car*,
 That (in Genoese) I'm quite dismayed,
 Woe is me, what to do, *que far*,
 If (in French) she whom I truly love
 Kills me and I know not *pourquoi?*
Ma dauna (in Gascon), faith I owe,
 And by the head of Santa Quitera,
 My heart (in Portuguese, *corassó*)
 You've stolen with your charming speech.

Alas, for an end rhyme...

NOTES

[1] "*Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan que.m sortz/ Alone, I know the supergrief that surges*," poem 53, p. 121, stanza 3.

[2] Robert Kehew, *Lark in the Morning: The Verses of the Troubadours* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Ronnie Apter, *A Bilingual Edition of the Love Songs of Bernart de Ventadorn in Occitan and English: Sugar and Salt* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999); Gérard Zuchetto and Jörn Gruber, *Le livre d'or des troubadours, XIIIe-XIVe siècle: anthologie* (Paris: Éditions de Paris, 1998).

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ISSN 1553-9172