

CHAPTER THREE

The Oldest Issue: Courtly Love

This makes it clear without further ado why love as passion is our European specialty—it absolutely must be of aristocratic origin: it was, as is well known, invented by the poet-knights of Provence, those splendid, inventive men of the “gai saber” to whom Europe owes so much and, indeed, almost itself.

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Perhaps no area of medieval Romance literary studies so well illustrates the decisive effects of a preconceived image upon scholarship as does the problem of the origins and formal characteristics of the vernacular lyric. At the very center of this wide-ranging subfield is the lyric poetry written in southern France and variously referred to as “troubadour,” “Provençal,” “Occitan,” or “courtly love” poetry. Its centrality for scholars derives directly from its assumed centrality in the history of vernacular European poetry itself. For most of its students it has been the oldest, the most exemplary, the most central flower in the history of lyric, and particularly of the love poetry of medieval and modern western Europe. From this, our histories of literature tell us, derived any number of the distinguishing characteristics of the lyric forms that are, or were until relatively recently, so vital and so lustrous a part of the literary heritage and makeup of western Europe’s vernacular tradition.

The centrality of the Provençal lyric has also traditionally been determined by its pivotal position in literary history. It was always believed to be a pioneer in a number of critical ways, ranging from its language (the vernacular) to its forms (the song, *canso*, with a number of apparently new formal features, among other things), its prestigious role within its own society, and most of all its best-known theme, dubbed “courtly

love” more than a century ago. But just as determining as its chronological primacy was the fact that in our western traditions, many or most of these essential features, modified or not, remained salient traits of the poetics of lyric poetry in general and of love poetry in particular. A more accurate statement of why troubadour poetry has been so central, then, is that it has been perceived as being the originator of a whole branch of European literature, one that left its imprint, either formally or thematically, on many other types of literature long after the school had itself ceased to exist. It is certainly emblematic that Ezra Pound, a critical figure in the creation and nurturing of modernism, was a devotee and translator of Provençal troubadour poetry.

Origins and originators were, after all, the stuff of Romance studies (“Romance philology,” as it was often designated) when it coalesced as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century. The validity of genetic studies—as they would come to be referred to, somewhat disparagingly after they were displaced as a central pursuit—was rarely questioned in the long first stage of literary studies, when they were still married to studies in historical linguistics. Moreover, this was a linguistics that was fascinated and preoccupied with the written word and its earliest attestations, a field at first untouched, and later unconvinced, by the theories and practices of the Neogrammarians.

Little wonder then that within such a framework the earliest literature in Romance in attested written form was the beneficiary of such lavish attention. Not surprisingly, of all of the questions raised by studies of the poetry, none was more fascinating than one whose answer, assuming there was a coherent and convincing one to be found, would in some measure undermine at least one of the reasons for the poetry’s preeminence: Where had it come from?

Perhaps in part because an answer would so rob us of a cherished and rather romantic notion of a neat and pretty beginning nestled in southern France (that quintessence of Europe creating itself, as Nietzsche described it), perhaps because an answer would so disrupt a hierarchy as well established as this one, and perhaps for many other reasons an answer agreed on by even a slender majority of scholars in the field has never been found. Given the amount of thought and hard labor that has been dedicated to finding the answer over so long a period of time, one cannot help but be impressed that the cloud on the Provençal horizon is still as dark and mysterious in many ways as it once was. Or perhaps, to see it in a more positive light, the efforts devoted to such a labor are only commensurate with its difficulty, with the elusiveness of seeing what lies behind

the cloud, if anything. Even the origin of the name of the poets themselves, the verb designating their art, this symbol of poetry at the most basic level, has been most elusive, perhaps the longest debated and most extensively written about etymology in all of Romance linguistics.

But the history of Romance philology and of interest in Provençal poetry goes back considerably further than its more formal and codified academic beginnings in the last century. Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, written in 1303–1304, can be adduced as the first work of scholarship in our field, and it is characterized by those combinations of literary and linguistic thought, theoretical speculation and practical instruction, and historical and descriptive perspectives that would become the discipline's calling cards. As would be so many of his academic progeny, Dante was fascinated by the Provençal lyric and its relation to the other earliest vernacular poetry in which he was interested, primarily that of the different parts of Italy. Further, as the title of his work indicates, the problem of writing in the vernacular was what interested him most.

And a problem it was. For Dante, and for others after him (particularly in Italy, the most Latinizing of Europe's cultures), the legitimacy of writing in the vernacular was far from well established, a situation with which we might legitimately have some trouble sympathizing, since diglossia is a linguistic state few of us have experienced in its full form, and to write in the language that seems to us to be the one we speak (despite marked stylistic differences and a more rigorous codification in its written form) requires little justification.

But obviously, the situation was not always thus (and still is not in many other cultures and languages), and Dante's interest in the lyrics of the troubadours is in great measure due to his search for legitimate and legitimizing antecedents, those who had made writing in the vernacular—in Romance per se—a reasonably respectable enterprise. But the poets and the poetry of Provence did not solve all Dante's problems, although they were indispensable as antecedents. He was plagued by a further problem, which was, ironically, to be one of the banes of all writers born in the Italian peninsula for centuries to come and even well into the modern period, that of the specific form of Italian to be adopted and codified as the new Latin, the written *lingua franca*.

Nevertheless, the poets of Provence, the troubadours, were propitious models and it is as models that Dante treats them in the second half of his treatise, which resembles a manual on poetics more than anything else. The *De vulgari eloquentia* thus identifies, or ratifies (in a document precious also because of the status acquired by its author thanks to the *Com-*

media), many of the essential features that would come to characterize troubadour scholarship. First, the *De vulgari* leads the way in its perception or tacit depiction of its importance as the first, exemplary, and guiding model of literary writing (which meant predominantly poetry) in the vernacular. Dante himself, who in turn would be perceived and treated as the progenitor of Italian literature, regarded the Provençal poets as the begetters of the relatively new and in some ways struggling tradition of which he was a part. The question of lineage and ancestry, moreover, was not limited to the mere problem of the language of choice, although this was indeed a critical issue that clearly concerned Dante enormously. The consideration of lineage, in poetic-linguistic terms, in fact led him to an accurate historical linguistic observation of great importance, whose validity is all too often forgotten or ignored by the keepers of the flame of our cultures: that languages are mutable, always have been and always will be. He noted that all great writers, including those of antiquity, of whom he was also the offspring, had written in their own vernaculars. Thus, if the language he and his contemporaries used was structurally different, that was only because language is mutable and is continually changing. From a contextual and functional point of view, however, it was the same.

But, although Dante's observation was certainly accurate in the abstract and in terms of the more objective (descriptive) current understanding of language and its mutability, the break from the Latin written tradition appeared no less revolutionary contextually. Not only the subject of Dante's book but also its language (Latin) attest amply to the momentous break that was indeed taking place. And the choice of a new language was not the only break involved: hand in hand with the new vehicle for poetry went a new substance, a new purpose for which it was and would be used, and this was the poetry of love.

Although Dante's own love ideology would itself differ sharply from that of his Provençal and Sicilian ancestors, the essential orientation, the focus on that particular subject as a defining characteristic, of the vernacular lyric, remained unchanged. This too, from Dante's perspective—and it was a perspective we would come to adopt in fits and starts—was as revolutionary as the new language, and it played the same double role as a break with the past and a basis for the future. Even in the area of form, Dante sets the standard for later work: He unequivocally identifies the *canzone* as the exemplary form, and he defines it as a rhetorical composition set to music and as the action or passion itself of singing, making its link to both music and moving emotion its defining characteristic. He insists that the stanzaic or strophic structure is requisite and distinctive.

In most ways, then, Dante's appreciation of the earliest period of Romance lyrics and his identification of its critical features and its most lasting contributions to European poetry are strikingly akin to those that would prevail when, centuries later, research and thought in this area would become a fundamental part of our branch of the academic profession. But there is one major difference, one noticeable, and even stark omission: Dante seems not in the least concerned with the bases, inspirations, or roots of the Provençal poets themselves. His silence concerning these subjects is noteworthy, and it is conspicuous, because the *De vulgari* is palpably driven by the desire to establish antecedents, authorities, and standards in an area where they are totally lacking or few in number. Dante's work is a document saturated with a sense of the importance of literary history and precedence, imbued with a sense of the wisdom of resorting to the past, even while canonizing a revolution, in order to give credence and legitimacy to the future. In such a context, the lack of preoccupation with the problem of his revolutionary ancestors' own inspirations and provocations, their claims to legitimacy, is indeed startling. What would be anachronistic would be to postulate that Dante's inattention to this subject is due to any belief that it is not a question worth asking. The tenor and substance of his book, as well as Dante's preoccupation with and detailed cognizance of the history of poets and literature before him, would belie this. One is left to assume that the question remains unasked either because the answer is too obvious to him and his readers to be worth setting out explicitly or because the question raised issues, and possible answers, that Dante did not, for some reason, want to discuss.

But the sources and the setting of the poetry (two concepts closely intertwined) would come to dominate work in this area, an area so vast in terms of both volume and variety of approaches that one can hope to complete even a book-length study dedicated to the history of scholarship in the area only if the full bibliography is not commented on and if the subject is presented schematically and telegraphically.¹ Thus, generalizations about the directions and features of so prodigious a field are fraught with danger and are open invitations to contradiction and the citation of exceptions. And yet, as I have pointed out elsewhere in this book, there is a certain value in tracing broad patterns, in attempting to see the most general of frameworks from which may hang even the most widely variegated specific works. In this case, a synoptic overview would include two principal points, neither without its exceptions. But these general observations are not, I believe, invalidated as observations on the

state of canonical studies and knowledge by the practice of pointing out the exceptional scholar or study nor explained by such a generalization.

The first point is that the background, the origin, of this first Romance lyric has never ceased to be dominant. Even when it has not been the explicit subject of study, assumptions made about it have significantly dictated the orientation of synchronic or structural studies. The second generalization is that the most general concept of that background is very much grounded in—even exemplary of—a quite strict construction of what constitutes the Western tradition. Or, to formulate it negatively, it is a general concept of the background that has denied or excluded the hypothesis that any significant part of that background could be Arabic-derived or inspired—Andalusian for the Provençal troubadours or Sicilian for the *scuola siciliana*.

Even after protracted examination of the relevant studies, these hardly appear to have been crippling or impoverishing constraints. Indeed, few specific areas of literary, particularly historical literary, study show such a range of theories, hypotheses, and speculations about the origins and, in part derivatively, the nature and meaning of a group of poetic texts. Moreover, the number of specific issues ancillary to the discussion of the historical background raised in the course of such explorations is considerable, and substantial disagreement on them still plagues the field (or blesses it, depending on one's notion of the goals of the profession).

Most fertile among these issues is certainly the central thematic question of what, if anything, was courtly love, the “religion of love,” as it has been dubbed. Opinions on the subject run the whole gamut. At one end is the detailed set of rules that presumably were established, known, and followed in most or all poetic compositions. This is most commonly characterized in the following terms: the poem involves the adulterous or at least extramarital love of a woman who is superior in status to the male suitor. She is impossibly beautiful and clearly superior to all others. The suitor is rebuffed or the possibility of consummation is sabotaged by evil enemies, spies for the husband, or malicious gossips. In the rebuff or the lover's frustration and subsequent pain lies his redemption and the power and beauty of love . . . and so forth. At the other end of the spectrum is the rejection of the idea that such a phenomenon ever even existed, the assertion that no system so amoral or immoral could have been exalted in the medieval period any more than in any other and that courtly love is critical conceit, an invention and/or a fallacy.²

Even within any subcategory of opinion in this range there is more

than ample room for divergence of opinion. Within the rulebook school, for example, which in great measure has Andreas Capellanus as its model, the questions of what the specific rules or conventions were, how strictly they had to be adhered to, who set them and who did and did not follow them, the extent of their formal ties with lyric poetry, whether and how they could be transposed to a literary genre such as the romance, are all asked, or assumptions about them are made, in studies that do not wish to question them. At the other end lie disputes about the nature of a society that might create or borrow and codify such rules of love, and the continuing effects on both literature and Western society of the glorification of such a perverse, antisocial, un-Christian, and self-punishing conception of love. Nietzsche's statement, although he clearly approves of the notion of passionate love, reveals how deeply ingrained the notion is that this is, for better or worse, a fundamental feature of Westernness.

Discussion of these issues has invariably raised others, some of which dovetail nicely with more general issues in literary studies. Why is woman idolized and respected, made the center of the poetry and the master over the male, and what (if anything) does this reflect about the society in which such a system arose? Is this condition a fairly direct reflection of social circumstances, the product of a situation in which many women were lord and master over feudal domains while their husbands were off on crusade? Or is it a case of the literature of a society reflecting what does not exist in it in reality, a wish projection or dream fulfillment? Or is this the case of a society in which women themselves were not revered but in which certain female images that derived from its religion were?

Thus courtly love poetry has provided fertile territory for the consideration of both general and specific questions about the relationships between society and literature. No less so has it provided the provocation for raising questions related to different kinds of literary and sociological perceptions of the relations and roles of men and women, as poets and protagonists of the poetry itself. What does one do in this context, for example, with the poetry of the *trobairitz*, the women troubadours, texts relatively neglected until fairly recently but which appear to be remarkably like those of their male counterparts and present similar features and problems?³ Or, again, how do we handle somewhat bizarre features, small but appearing significant to some, such as the use of *midons*, a masculine form ("master" rather than "mistress"), as applied to objects of love who are women? Are there indeed, as some would have it, two sets of rules, two ideologies, one for women, the other for men, one embodied

in a courtly love in which the female is idolized and the other manifest in songs that are more accurately perceived as women's lamentations, related to the courtly love ethic in some ways but quite separate from it in others?⁴

The relationship such courtly poetry may have had with more popular songs is a closely related issue that has engendered no fewer discussions. At least one of the major theories about the origins of the more formal poetry, in fact, is based on the assumption that it is closely related to more popular, less formally codified poetry, much of it belonging to the female brand of love songs. And there is the other side of this coin, namely, what relationship the poetry of the courts had, whether it was originally dependent on popular poetry or not, with other later forms of literature and song. Was it, for example, incorporated into, or did it influence, songs sung outside the setting of the courts? And what of its ties to music? How central and formative were the poems and how long did they last? What was the difference between the *trobador* and the *joglar*? between the singer of love songs and that of narrative poetry? or between the composer and the performing artist? Ultimately, was all this much too variable for us to codify with any hope of verisimilitude?

The troubadour lyric has also been fertile ground for those interested in the ways in which literature can manifest an ideology. Have we constructed this love ideology ourselves, or have we borrowed and adapted it from such prose texts as Andreas's *De amore* and then read these poems to fit it? Is it legitimate to apply Gaston Paris's description of Chrétien's *Lancelot* to earlier lyrical compositions? The question, then, is not only whether they really fit such a system, but in more general terms, can any group of poems really reflect or embody a coherent ideological system, or even a coherent set of ideas? This poses the further question of the relative objectivity or subjectivity of such poetry. Why and how, some have noted, usually in some discreet fashion, could a group of poems that all seem to be saying the same thing have become so popular and so highly regarded and have remained so for so long? And, in the transition from short lyric pieces, the *canço*, to longer narratives, how would such an ideology hold up? Or how would it be applied?

But these are merely hints and suggestions of the richness and variety of the critical issues deriving from the study of this body of poetry, and the range of solutions and opinions on them offered through the years. Such wealth and variety is commensurate with one aspect of this poetry on which there is at least a general consensus: that it was immediately influential in a number of other areas of Europe and that its form and themes were adopted in other Romance vernaculars.

The lyric poetry of *langue d'oil* in northern France was for a considerable time very much under the spell and dominance of the Provençal troubadours, and no less can be said of poetry on the Italian peninsula. Since a decline in the vigor of Provençal poetry coincided with political upheavals in southern France that forced or coaxed into exile a number of the troubadours of the last generation, some of their domination in foreign parts derived from their physical presence at foreign courts. But those courts were also hospitable to them personally, because the reputation and prestige of the singers of Provence had preceded them.

Moreover, even in cases when the poetry as such was not fully adopted, many aspects of it were influential in other genres. The influence of Provençal poetry was felt throughout Europe in one form or another, directly or indirectly, for hundreds of years, and in some cases even down to the present. More than one prominent and influential writer of the twentieth century has revered such poetry and sung its praises. In sum, exposure to the poetry itself or its progeny, the notion of "courtly love," or some other aspect related to the lyric poetry of Provence is virtually unavoidable.

The agreement, at least at the most general level, on the impact and formative effects this poetry had is in no way shared, however, in the related issue of how and why, in terms of its own past, it was so pivotal. The intricately intertwined questions of the ways in which it differed dramatically or substantively from some or most of its predecessors or, conversely, what it took from other forms of poetry have largely shaped the field of troubadour studies. Even many aspects of the formal description of the poetry are shaped by such considerations.

The focus on this question has remained compelling even in a period in which genetic or origins studies are not only not *de rigueur* but in many quarters are distinctly out of fashion.⁵ This is in part precisely because of the influential and formative position the poetry holds vis-à-vis later European literature. Scholars perceive that this position may reflect a paradox: that in great measure the poetry achieved such eminence and popularity because it was perceived as new, revolutionary, and fresh in some ways. At the same time, it must have had at least some roots somewhere, as all revolutions and innovations do. Thus we have the long quest for its origins, the Holy Grail of Romance philology.

Although Dante did not pursue the search, it was undertaken formally quite early on. Perhaps the earliest case is that of Giammaria Barbieri, who wrote *Dell'origine della poesia rimata* in the middle of the sixteenth century. As the title indicates, Barbieri identified the governing use of rhyme as a

distinctive new facet of that poetry, and he would not be alone in taking such a position. But his search for the origins of this feature of the poetry, as well as others that had contributed to its influential position in the development of European literature, led him to al-Andalus. Although the “Arabist” theory, as it is so often called, might thus claim the distinction of being chronologically first in Provençal studies, it was not destined to become the first in importance. Far from it.

The theory was reiterated in the eighteenth century following the publication of Barbieri’s work in 1790, although it was apparently known and circulated extensively before its transformation from manuscript to book. Its second champion was the Spaniard Juan Andrés, a Jesuit exile in Italy whose *Dell’origine, progresso e stato attuale d’ogni letteratura* (1782–1822) was apparently at least partially motivated by shock and consternation that his Italian hosts, and other Europeans, were unaware of how deeply indebted they were to the Spanish Arabic tradition.⁶ Andrés’ sympathies were thus with the theory expressed in Barbieri’s *Dell’origine*, and in his own, more ambitious work he supports the notion that in the refined and artistically innovative courts of Islamic Spain were to be found the roots and inspiration for what would become the most renowned poetry of Europe.

But a negative reaction to such notions was not long in coming. The first refutation of the Arabist theory was Stefano Arcega’s *Della influenza degli Arabi sulla poesia moderna* (1791). As in the case of the *Dell’origine della poesia rimata*, the title provides significant indications of the orientation of the writer: Arcega rephrases the question of where one would find the origins of modern poetry, and in his view it certainly was not in the Arab world. Many scholars of later generations were to agree with his position.

But Arcega’s firm rejection of such a possibility did not immediately produce universal agreement. In fact, the Arabist theory reached the peak of its popularity, and the peak of its support among *literati* (Sismonde de Sismondi, Claude Fauriel, Stendhal, E. J. Delecluze, and Eugène Baret, for example), in the first half of the nineteenth century. It has been pointed out, and it is an observation that might surprise many, that by the middle of the nineteenth century the notion that the origins of troubadour poems and courtly love lay in al-Andalus was a conventional maxim of criticism.⁷ But even so, at this same time virtually all the other theories that would eventually be spun out were first postulated, at least in rudimentary form.

Madame de Staël (*De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les in-*

stitutions sociales, 1800) and Chateaubriand (*Génie du Christianisme*, 1802) both laid the foundations for seeing the basis of Provençal poetry as Christian and European, and both were in some measure reacting negatively to the suggestion that it is in some way Muslim, or at least not Christian. More telling, they insist that it was fundamentally a European phenomenon, and they exclude Islamic Spain from their definition of that community. The many other theories first developed at more or less the same time shared two distinctive features with those of de Staël and Chateaubriand. First, although they might be at odds with each other in terms of *which* European and Latin/Romance tradition they thought had been formative, they shared a view of the Middle Ages in which the dominant forces were those of Christianity and Latinity. Secondly, they fundamentally opposed the Arabist theory, either directly or through their depiction of a medieval Europe within which Islamic Spain was a hostile or foreign force, a culture with marginal connections or no connections at all with what was clearly becoming the “real Europe.”

Thus Schlegel directly disputed the validity of the Arabist theory on the grounds that Arab society was too repressive toward women to have produced courtly love. His view is noteworthy in this regard as an early example of a trend to dismiss the Arabist theory on less than a firm and knowledgeable footing, and the concomitant tendency not to question too deeply the accuracy of such arbitrary assertions. Dante Gabriel Rossetti laid the groundwork for an interpretation of troubadour poetry and its origins as a vehicle of religious dissent, the embryo of a theory that would see in courtly love the literary propaganda of the Albigenian heresy. Later in the nineteenth century Paul Meyer and other philologists would see the troubadours’ roots in the Latin tradition that had preceded them and with which Meyer and the others increasingly perceived there to be a continuum. Meyer singled out the writings of Ovid as particularly formative and influential. Yet another school of thought originated and blossomed during this period: Gaston Paris’s folkloristic theory, which saw the missing link as being that of popular poetry, especially the poetry of the *fêtes de mai*.

It is evident that a number of critical perspectives on the poetry of the troubadours and on the Europe in which they lived had crystallized shortly after the midpoint of the nineteenth century. But this was also a period of crystallization and definition, both for the field of Romance studies and for the Europe within which that area of inquiry was formed. And it was a Europe, as I discussed at some length in the first chapter, that was at precisely that moment shaping its views of the Arabs as colo-

nial subjects. Napoleon's first campaign in Egypt at the turn of the century (1798–1801) is a convenient benchmark for the beginning of this key period. By 1831 Disraeli would write of that world from Cairo: "My eyes and mind yet ache with a grandeur *so little in unison with our own likeness*" (emphasis mine), and just before the midpoint in the century Marx would write of those "others" that "They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented."⁸ The fairly specific and well-articulated view of the Arab and the Muslim world, developed and refined through what was by then an extended and cumulative colonial experience, was one whose assumption of the irremediable inferiority of the Arabs (and that of other colonized nonwhites) might be untenable today, but it was completely acceptable then, and it was destined to remain so until close to the middle of the present century.

The vaguer, more romantic, and in some ways more positive views that had been common even fifty years before were replaced with far less tolerant ones. Within this broader context, Romance studies came of age and achieved a level of respectability and interest that had not been accorded them before, and medieval studies was not the least among them. Further, the establishment of the centrality of such studies—"modern philology," as it would be known for some time—was part and parcel of the general tendency to define and respect modern Europe. The study of that culture's literature, its contribution to the finest of the world's cultural monuments, was both a reflex and a handmaiden to such a general cultural self-definition. Finally, the need to distinguish more coherently what was European from what was not was triggered by an expanding colonial experience, or at least it took place in its shadow. It would be incongruous to imagine that the general views of the emerging European nations did not affect an area of scholarship so intimately tied to that emerging sense of Europeanness in other ways. And the defining ideologies of self and other that contributed positively to making the study of the Romance languages and literatures so central a discipline at this time cannot but have affected scholars in the field in other ways as well.

It is clear, in any case, that it was at this moment that the Arabist theory not only ceased to be one of those theories advocated, denied, or discussed; it became virtually taboo. While the other theories, none of which violated any fundamental principle of Europeanness as it was then emerging, were spun out and set against each other, the older Arabist one, which was clearly at odds with the larger views that were affecting not only members of the profession but all Europeans' views of the world and of themselves, slipped into oblivion and undiscussability.

The groundwork had been laid, *grosso modo*, for continuing and ever-popular discussions of the origins and importance of Provençal poetry, the ancestor of all European literatures. The preeminent issues for debate were whether the sources of inspiration for the troubadours were popular or learned, in the local vernaculars or in Latin or Late Latin; whether its relationship to Christianity was heretical or transformational, the rebellion of the Albigensians or the secular transformation of ecclesiastical hymns and the adoration of the Virgin; and whether its other seemingly original features were really original or were instead inspired by some aspect of their background. But the possibility that their background may have been the Arabic component of Europe in the Middle Ages was so effectively banished (despite the idea's popularity as little as a generation before) that one might never have known that the theory of Arab influence in Europe had ever even been proposed. By the time Nietzsche was writing, as one can deduce from the citation above, the possibility could scarcely have been voiced without being greeted with derision. By the time the great debate about the etymology of *trobare* formally commenced in 1878, two years after Victoria had become empress of India and four years before the British occupation of Egypt, it would no more have occurred to any of the participants to trace the word's etymon to Arabic than to propose an origin in classical Chinese.

This academic conceptual banishment of the Arab from medieval Europe was to have extraordinary power. While versions of the Arabist theory were to be brought up again and again, it would not be reinstituted as part of the mainstream of philological thought. The sporadic suggestions of Arabic influence on this or that aspect of medieval European literature or on salient features of its lexicon, such as *trobare*, were largely ignored, were dismissed as unworthy of serious consideration, or at best were subjected to unusually heated and vitriolic criticism.⁹ The proponents of such ideas, predominantly Arabists, were dismissed as individuals who simply had an ax to grind rather than a conceivably legitimate contribution to make and who, in any case, were not knowledgeable in the field of European literature.

Stern's stunning discussion of the *kharjas*, published in 1948 under a rather unassuming title, was proclaimed by some to signal the beginning of a new era in medieval Romance scholarship.¹⁰ The addition to the corpus of medieval literature of what would prove to be a significant number of lyric poems in a Romance vernacular, Mozarabic, would in and of itself have broadened the horizons of the field, because here was a Romance language not previously included in the inventory of those languages that

had produced literature. But what seemed to assure that the field would be shaken and transformed was the fact that these Mozarabic poems not only preceded those of the troubadours, thus dislodging them from their chronologically primary position, but at first glance they also resembled the poetry of Provence in some fundamental structural features and thematic characteristics. Some scholars suggested that something akin to courtly love was being voiced in these Mozarabic refrains. It also seemed to some that the origins question would again be pushed to the forefront and the Arabist theory reestablished in a position of, if not preeminence, at least credibility and respectability. It would be hard to dismiss textual evidence of the existence of vernacular love poetry in Romance that was clearly tied to the Arabic tradition, since the Mozarabic refrains were part of Arabic and Hebrew *muwashshahāt*, and that existed before the rise of the Provençal lyric and shared at least some of its major characteristics. It was all plausible and logical enough.

In fact, despite the wishful thinking of a relative minority of scholars, who were intrigued by these texts and whose views on Romance literature even before their discovery were well disposed to the Arabist theory (Menéndez Pidal and Américo Castro, among others), it would be inaccurate to say that the views of medievalists in general were revolutionized or that the borders of medieval Europe were redrawn to include al-Andalus. Beginning with Stern himself, who denied in no uncertain terms the possibility that such verses in any way affected those of the troubadours (the latter being part of a very different world), scholars were able, with very little difficulty, to reconcile the discovery and the existence of such texts with established views that effectively shut out the Andalusian world.¹¹ In fact, for the majority of scholars working in the field, no such coming to terms was even required. The *kharrjas*, to say nothing of the *muwashshahāt*, were simply ignored by the mainstream of scholars and students, as they had been for the previous eight centuries.¹²

There were and are exceptions, of course, but the fact that they are exceptions serves to demonstrate that the notion of what was European and what was not was certainly not shaken in a way that would cause it to be redefined. In fact, the very existence of something called “*kharrja* studies” is a ratification of the gulf between Arabic and Romance literary studies. That such a subdiscipline exists at all clashes with the essential characteristics of poems that would otherwise seem to defy such segregation, because the poems are themselves so obviously a part of a mixed rather than a segregated culture.¹³ Clearly, it would be premature to say that Stern’s discovery has brought down any walls or barriers. But those

are walls that could well be breached, and our current view of the Middle Ages, and specifically of the world in which the troubadours first wrote and thrived, could well be replaced with a more expansive concept, one that assumes that the Arabist theory is as plausible and compelling as any.

But what of the specific arguments that have been adduced to refute the various formulations of the Arabist theory? And what other arguments might justify a different view of the medieval lyric, seemingly already so meticulously explored, or a reopening of the question of its origins, when such approaches are now effectively eclipsed by other very different orientations? And from the simplest of perspectives, what would one have to gain?

I have attempted to answer the first question, at least implicitly, in the first two chapters of this book. A significant number of the arguments against specific parts of the Arabist theory have been assertions of the impossibility or implausibility of attributing textual similarities or congruities to direct interaction between the two cultures or knowledge on the part of members of the Latin-Romance orbit of the literature of the Arabic world, even those living in al-Andalus or Sicily. Thus it has been argued that William of Aquitaine could not have adapted any element of Hispano-Arabic songs to his own poetry because he could not have known enough Arabic to have understood them.¹⁴ Following a similar line of reasoning, it has also been argued that it is more plausible to imagine that where there are similarities between the sung lyrics of these two different worlds, parallel development accounts better and more logically for the phenomenon than any theory of direct connection.¹⁵

But both a more realistic definition of influence (one that does not trivialize it by making it mean copying or rob it of other possible complexities) and the historical evidence tell us that such assertions about William and his complete ignorance of the songs of the Arabic world are unreasonable hypotheses. Similarly, it would be more reasonable to assume something other than parallel development when one observes the appearance of quite similar and distinctive features in two schools of lyric poetry, one arising in the wake of the other, in two regions near each other and with no lack of communication, indeed with all sorts of traffic, between them. Significant, too, is the cultural prestige one of the two regions possessed in the eyes of the other. In fact, most of the refutations of the influence of Hispano-Arabic poetry on that of the Provençal troubadours derive their validity from the basic assumption of the unreasonableness of such a proposition, an assumption that is itself strongly governed and shaped by ideology. Once such a proposition is discarded

and the hypothesis adopted that such influence is plausible, the force of the refutation is deflected. What is at stake is hardly whether William sat down and copied out some Arabic poetry, any more than it would be when we talk about an Ovidian influence on William. Rather, the question is whether an Andalusian factor was a significant part of his cultural background.

Among the least legitimate and most easily overturned is the argument first made by Schlegel: that courtly love, or poetry in praise of women, could not come from a culture that so despised and repressed them. There are two weaknesses to such an argument, and they are even evident in refutations more sophisticated than this one. The first problem is that the statement is based on incomplete or inaccurate assumptions about Arabic poetry. Poetry in praise of women, for example, certainly was and has been written and sung in Arabic, and perhaps this and other general features of such poetry, particularly as it existed in al-Andalus, will soon become more widely known.

The second problem regarding such an argument is that it is based on a very strict construction of the relationship between a society's values and those of its literature. One could point out, of course, that the canon of Arabic poetry is replete with wine songs despite (or because of?) the strict Islamic prohibition of alcohol. One might also point out that the actual social position of women in European society in the medieval period was hardly the exalted one that might be suspected if one regularly read literary texts as if they were sociological treatises or interpreted images in poetry as if they were direct representations, faithful mirrors, of society. Nor can literature, any more than any other art, be expected to follow party lines, yet this assumption, too, has fueled many refutations to the effect that if ignorance did not prevent a Provençal poet's use of Arabic songs, repugnance certainly would. The problem, of course, is that such views, problematic as they may seem when one analyzes them from this critical perspective, have in many cases been enshrined in the scholarly literature. The refutation of the Arabist theory expressed by Jeanroy, for example, is somewhat sanctified by the fact of Jeanroy's other achievements in troubadour scholarship. But the validity of the rest of his work—or that of Curtius, Auerbach, Gaston Paris, or Leo Spitzer—does not mean that we must continue to accept their views on this particular matter.¹⁶

But there do exist refutations, or what might appear to be refutations, that are not based on the exclusionary ideology. They are considerably

more complex, and they are really more suggestions of some of the interesting problems that might be explored than they are barriers to such avenues of discourse. Curiously enough, the poetic complexities raised by many of these arguments are very similar to those that in the past, in a more restricted context, have made the study of Provençal poetry so fascinating for so many scholars.

Many of these seeming refutations of the Arabist theory revolve around the notion that Hispano-Arabic poetry, particularly the *kharjas* and *muwashshahāt*, is more complex than scholars may have thought and that its forms and themes may not be so readily associable with those of Provence as some earlier enthusiasts had believed. For example, in some critics' views, the love lamentations so often found in the *kharjas* (and with which the *kharjas* are invariably associated) are more akin to the female poetic love ethic of popular poetry than to the male one that is so characteristic of courtly love poetry—and of the main part of a *muwashshahā*. Complicating this issue even further is the suggestion, a quite reasonable one, that while the main body of the *muwashshahāt* is part of the tradition of classical Arabic poetry, the *kharjas* were originally quite independent of them, being part of a body of Romance popular poetry with congeners throughout Romania. In this view, such a priori compositions were later embedded in the classical poems. The conclusion some might draw from such observations is that it is not a question of Arabic poetry influencing Romance but the reverse.

These discussions, these questions, even the suggestion that the obverse of the Arabist theory is possible, reveal all the more why an alteration in our perspective is so desirable and potentially profitable, for if the Andalusian world is part of the medieval West, and indeed a critical and often central part of it, then detailed discussions of the complexities of Provençal poetry can only be enhanced by parallel and intertwined discussions of significantly similar complexities and problems in the Hispano-Arabic sphere. It is telling that these arguments over the very nature of Hispano-Arabic poetry reveal that many if not most of the problems involved are similar to those that have been discussed ad infinitum by Provençalists: the differences, similarities, and relationships between the masculine and feminine branches of love poetry of the period and the nature of the relationship between courtly and popular poetries. Was the poetry part of a long tradition that was merely given a new twist, or was it really revolutionary? This latter question is as heated and problematic for Hispano-Arabic poetry as for Provençal, and many of the ar-

guments focus on the poetry's apparently revolutionary features: the way rhyme is used, the strophic form, the use of the vernacular instead of the classical language, and so forth.

At a minimum, the sharing of insights and the comparison of possible solutions to these questions, remembering how parallel they are, could not help but be fruitful. But if to such a rudimentary concept of the value of shared knowledge in similar fields we add the incentive provided by remembering that we are talking about bodies of poetry that may very well have interacted at some level—the popular one in the county of Barcelona and the more courtly one at Palermo, just to name two of the myriad possibilities—then the case could be made that it would be a dereliction of our duty not to explore conjointly such multiple parallels.

It all seems to boil down to the question of what we have to gain and what we have to lose. An important part of what we have to gain is the addition to the canon of our commonly read secondary texts an extensive body of literature, much of it quite cogent, whose authors have concluded that the role played by the prestige and the songs, the neo-Platonism and the music of al-Andalus, were significant inspirations for the creation of what would become Europe's first poetry. What we might lose, of course, is the somewhat romantic notion that the question of the bases for the revolution in Provence are *introuvable* or, in a more recent version of the argument, that they are insignificant.¹⁷ We would also lose a good part of our long and closely held ideology that sets us apart, as Europeans, from all others.

But even if we eventually conclude, as we might, that the Andalusian influence was only one of many, and perhaps not the decisive one, we gain in expanding our canon of medieval courtly love poetry by including texts that in critical ways parallel the poetry of Provence and also share many of its difficulties and mysteries, much of its fascination, all of which are significant common bonds in both their background and success. We should see that this can only enrich our perception of so momentous and pivotal a period in our literary history.

Notes

1. Boase 1976 is the major full-length study of the history of scholarship on Provençal troubadour poetry. Although he concludes that the Arabist theory is the soundest overall, Boase's general recounting of the history of the scholarship is both nonpartisan and thorough. See the 1978 review by Cummins. In Menocal 1981, also a review of this book, I provide further bibliography and an analysis of why Boase's evenhandedness vis-à-vis the Arabist theory is valuable and convincing. It is unfortunate that Boase does not, however,

come to grips with the problem of why the Arabist theory has continued to be rejected, especially in light of the fact that he has found it the most reasonable and convincing overall. Nevertheless, this is certainly the best study of both the earliest history of scholarship on the question, that which precedes the institutionalization of Romance studies, and the more recent intellectual history. It may be supplemented by Cremonesi 1955, which is also a detailed history and evaluation of origins work in the modern period (that is, after the middle of the nineteenth century). Cremonesi pays special attention to the question of how scholarship has dealt with the distinction between popular and courtly literature (5–35). She also notes that theories of Arabic origins “non incontrano il favore della critica” (25). These two sources have provided much valuable information for the discussion in this chapter.

2. Besides Boase 1976, the two best discussions of our understanding of “courtly love” are Frappier 1959 and, especially, Frappier 1968, which is an extensive, lucid and highly informative critique of the series of essays in Newman 1968. Since the Newman collection includes Robertson’s well-known article, “The Concept of Courtly Love as an Impediment to the Understanding of Medieval Texts” (Donaldson 1970 is also dedicated to the same proposition), Frappier’s response is particularly important and valuable. See also an earlier critique in Silverstein 1949.

3. Recent *trobairitz* studies include the sketchy Bogin 1976 and Paden et al. 1981. Although in both cases the authors focus on what distinguishes them from their male counterparts, the similarities and parallelisms that emerge from these studies are substantial. See further discussion of this issue in Chapter 4.

4. Dronke has explored this position in depth and has canonized the distinction between male and female love songs. See Dronke [1968] 1977.

5. Note especially Payen’s 1979 attempt to dismiss the question: “Les romanistes ont perdu trop de temps à énoncer de vaines hypothèses sur les origines de la lyrique troubadoursque” (98). He goes on to conclude, however, as the title of the article indicates, that William created a “révolution idéologique” (106).

6. For information on Andrés himself, the expulsion of the Spanish Jesuits, and his text, see Mazzeo 1965.

7. This is Boase’s conclusion, and he documents it thoroughly. See, for example, Fauriel [1860] 1966. Studies not devoted to this issue in particular but rather to the question of the “Orient” in eighteenth-century French literature and literary studies would lend support to his thesis. See, for example, Martino [1906] 1970.

8. Said 1978: xii and 102. He includes, particularly in the first two chapters, an extended discussion of the development of largely negative attitudes toward the Arab world in the period of colonialism.

9. The best and most succinct example is certainly that of Jeanroy 1934, whose brief negative appraisal of the Arabist theory is capped by the statement: “Puisque la poésie arabe est pour nous autres provençalistes un livre scellé, c’est à nos collègues arabisants à venir à nous.” (1:75). In fact, judging from some recent evidence, even that does not necessarily work very well. A pointed example is the 1972 Saville study of dawn songs, which ignores the 1965 Stern and Wilson investigation of the same motif in Mozarabic poetry.

10. “Les vers finaux en espagnol dans les muwaššahas hispano-hebraïques” (Stern 1948); also in English in Stern 1974.

11. See Stern’s “Literary Connections between the Islamic World and Western Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Did They Exist?” (1974) a question to which the resounding answer is No. The paper was originally delivered at the Spoleto conference and is thus published in Italian in the *L’Occidente e l’Islam nell’alto Medioevo*. See Stern 1974 for a complete bibliography of Stern’s work. Note also Zumthor 1954, which identifies the *kharjas* as further proof of the separation of the two cultures.

12. As I have noted in Chapters 1 and 2 about Hispano-Arabic literature, the *muwashshahāt* are relatively rarely integral parts of courses, anthologies, or histories of medieval

literature. Knowledge of their intricacies is admirable in a Hispanist and exceptional in a French or Italian medievalist.

13. Yet segregation and partition are still, perhaps even increasingly, the dominant features of *kharja* scholarship. *Kharja* studies have become a specialized subdiscipline within Romance medievalism and are largely segregated from the mainstream. See my more detailed discussion in Chapter 4 of how the study of the *kharja* itself is often characterized by segregation: it is studied independently of the *muwashshaha* and is seen as part of one tradition or the other, but not both.

14. There is a series of articles that deal with the interconnected questions of whether William of Aquitaine knew any Arabic and whether there is textual evidence of Arabic words or expressions in some Provençal poems. These articles, several of them exchanges and responses to others, include: Roncaglia 1949 and 1952, the first on the use of *gazel* (< Andalusian *ghazal*) in a Provençal poem and the second on a poetic motif of possible Arabic origin in a Bernart de Ventadorn poem; Riquer 1953 is a response to the latter; Lévi-Provençal's 1948b suggestion (1: 298–300; reprinted as Lévi-Provençal 1954) that “babariol-babarian” in a poem of William of Aquitaine's was decipherable as Arabic provoked the response of Frank 1952, which includes a succinct presentation of the arguments of why it is absurd to imagine that William could have known any Arabic. On this problem, see also Sutherland 1956. Later specialized studies of lexical or refrain echoes include Dutton 1964 and 1968 and Armistead 1973. Gorton 1976 is a review of some of these and of other such studies. Gorton himself is very negative on the question of the possibility of any direct knowledge of even spoken Arabic by any troubadours, principally because of the state of warfare and ignorance of each other that existed between Muslims and Christians.

15. Again, Dronke is the primary exponent of such parallelism.

16. Nor, of course, is the obverse true, that because we reject their views on this issue, we need discard their accomplishments wholesale. I will, in fact, argue in Chapter 5 that many studies that have ignored the Arabic-derived component dovetail remarkably with the view that emerges if one introduces into the global image the crucial participation of the Andalusian and Sicilian orbits of medieval culture. As I have indicated in this chapter, many of the questions posed about the origins question in troubadour and courtly love studies are prime candidates for the integration of Andalusian material into their proposed solutions.

17. Payen 1979 (see note 5) and Guiraud 1971 and 1978 (see Chapter 1) are two good examples of unsuccessful attempts to bypass the origins question.