

Close Encounters in Medieval Provençe: Spain's Role in the Birth of Troubadour Poetry

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CLOSE ENCOUNTERS IN MEDIEVAL PROVENÇE:
SPAIN'S ROLE IN THE BIRTH OF
TROUBADOUR POETRY

THE study of the school of lyric poetry once thought to be the earliest in any Romance vernacular, that of the troubadours, is fraught with peculiar problems. One of the most striking is the complete lack of agreement among scholars as to what constitutes its major thematic component, *amour courtois* or courtly love, and what were the formative elements of this phenomenon. Another perhaps not unrelated problem is the similar lack of accord as to what its primary signifier, *trobar* (and its variants, including *troubadour*) designated and what were, in turn, its etymological and semantic building blocks. Although the courtly poetry of Provence can no longer be regarded as the earliest vernacular lyric of Europe, it has not lost its prominence as one of the most important schools of Western poetry, both because of its widely appreciated beauty and because of the rôle many believe it played in the development of modern poetic conventions, especially in the realm of amorous ideology and in the articulation of a concept of love. The relatively recent "discovery" of an earlier Spanish Mozarabic form of vernacular lyric has not only failed to resolve the question of origins, but has in great measure contributed to the polemic. The etymological question so closely related to the study of the poetry designated by *trobar* is equally far from being resolved; although it has been the object of continuous revision and polemical debate, recently published etymological dictionaries still often reflect little more than the state of the debate fifty or a hundred years ago.¹

¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1933; rpt. Compact Edition. Oxford, 1971), xi, 404.

Roger Boase's *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love*² should be most useful to the generalist and specialist alike. The book's subtitle, *A Critical Study of European Scholarship*, indicates its uniqueness. Boase has produced a remarkably comprehensive and dispassionate compendium of the history of scholarship in this unusually fertile area of inquiry. He has also provided readers with a much-needed summary of the major points of view concerning origins on the one hand and meaning on the other, employing this analytic dichotomy to sift out many differing theories. Yet it does not do Boase's work justice to label it a compendium: his well-organized treatment of what might have been a tedious bibliographical enumeration is enhanced by an engrossing narrative style and a sometimes simplified but always engaging presentation of the multiplicity of ideas generated in almost seven hundred years of troubadour studies. This is not just an excellent reference book, but also embodies a highly readable series of descriptions of both the intellectual history of the problem and of the many schools of thought that have arisen to explain different aspects of the troubadour phenomenon. Of immense importance is Boase's eclecticism and impartiality in this area where scholarship has been so highly polemical. This unique combination of clarity in the analytic framework and dispassionate evaluation render Boase's work an invaluable source book for the study of most aspects of courtly love.

Boase's book consists of three major chapters, plus an introduction, conclusions, two brief appendices, a long bibliography, and an index. The first major chapter, "A Chronological Survey of Courtly Love Scholarship," is subdivided into three major time periods: 1500-1800 (pp. 5-18); 1800-1900 (pp. 18-26); and 1900-1975 (pp. 26-53). The first part of this chapter, dealing with the earliest period of criticism, is perhaps the most useful in that it provides little-known information about the earliest studies of courtly love. Even the scholar well-read in the comparatively recent history of courtly love scholarship will learn much from Boase's account of the long gestation period of this important aspect of Medieval Studies. It is especially interesting to find out that some of the most important and controversial theories of origin which came to prominence in this period, particularly the so-called "Arabist"

² Roger Boase, *The Origin and Meaning of Courtly Love: A Critical Study of European Scholarship* (Manchester, 1977).

theory, were originally postulated by some of the pioneers in the field.³

The second two sections of Chapter i are less revealing for the well-read scholar: the progress of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship is generally known. The value of Boase's narrative is that it clearly establishes both the thematic unity of given periods of thought with related cultural trends of the times and shows the vagaries and the discontinuity of scholarship over the long term. One readily sees how a given interpretation became conventional, even cliché, only to be completely discarded by a subsequent generation of researchers: "By the middle of the nineteenth century it had become a conventional maxim of criticism that the Gay Science and the Provençal ideal of *fin'amors* derived from Muslim Spain. However, during the latter half of the century . . . the theory suffered an eclipse" (p. 119). Although this is the starkest example of a convention become taboo, other theories also underwent similar trajectories.

The second chapter is an exposition of theories of origin, which according to Boase can be divided into seven major types. Each presentation is composed of an initial list of the distinctive features of each particular school of thought. This telegraphic summation is followed by a more detailed exposition highlighting the advantages and pitfalls of each critical ensemble. Here Boase sees the different scholars contributing to a given point of view as unorganized and often unconscious members of a community and, in Boase's exposé, it becomes clear how a given scholar's work fits into a perhaps fragmentary tradition. To the first, and surprisingly for some, the most fruitful theory of origin Boase applies the rubric "Hispano-Arabic" (pp. 62-75), a general term for the multiplicity of opinions characterized by their emphasis on the rôle of some aspect of Hispano-Arabic poetry and culture in the formation of Provençal poetry and its ideology.

The second major theory, "Chivalric-Matriarchal" (pp. 75-77) is a combination of points of view postulating that "courtly love was the product of the interaction of Christianity and a primitive Germanic/Celtic/Pictish matriarchy which ensured the survival of pre-Christian sexual *mores* and a veneration for women amongst the European aristocracy" (p. 75). Boase finds unacceptable the

³ Among them the most famous are the Italian Giammaria Barbieri (1519-1575) and the Spaniard Juan Andrés (1782-1822).

methodological basis of this theory: namely that the poetry reflects a specific social reality, in this case a reality in which women held a dominant position. The "Crypto-Cathar" (pp. 77-81) school of thought, prominent at certain periods of time, sees the troubadour phenomenon as a reflection of the Cathar or Albigensian heresy. One interesting aspect of this view is that most historians do acknowledge that the Albigensian crusade, which demolished the wealth and the power base of the feudal structure of Provence, brought on, at least in part, the historical demise of the social structure that supported the troubadours. From there to saying that the poetry of the troubadours (and of other disciples of courtly love) is a reflection of Albigensian religious doctrine is another step. Even if one rejects the theory as a comprehensive explanation of the origins of troubadour poetry, the argument has the virtue of highlighting many of the ideological and thematic peculiarities of courtly love. Moreover, Boase draws our attention to the points shared by this theory and others, a most useful and revealing synthesizing procedure applied throughout his work.

The "Neoplatonic" theory (pp. 81-83) is of prime importance, not only because of its sporadic popularity among critics, but because it addresses itself, at least in part, to the intellectual background of the troubadours. Moreover, the theme of the ennobling effects of love, perhaps present in troubadour poetry and certainly important for some of the later poets who reworked courtly material (Dante in particular), has decidedly Neoplatonic features. The interesting point of contention within this theory, and that which potentially binds it to several others, is the path of transmission of Neoplatonic thought to the troubadours. Whether the philosophical body of thought came through the Arabs of Spain or from another source may determine other critical aspects of the genesis of troubadour poetry, since it would be difficult to maintain that any philosophical or ideological underpinnings could be a-contextual.

The body of thought designated by Boase as "Bernardine-Marianist" (pp. 83-86) encompasses theories postulating that courtly love is a manifestation of spiritual-marianist love, religious and disinterested. St. Bernard, the mystic so important in Dante's system of love, and in the Cistercian movement in general, were important forces in Southern France at the height of courtly activity. (Note that St. Bernard is the third and last of Dante's three guides.) However, for reasons of chronology, they would have had little to

do with the actual genesis of an ideology of courtliness and courtly love. Boase also draws attention to the scholarship of many who have demonstrated the non-disinterested nature of Love as poeticized by most of the troubadours. Rejection of a comprehensive mystical explanation for the original nature of troubadour poetry does not rule out, however, the possibly important rôle this religious movement may have played in the later developments of this school of poetry. The relationships it may have had with both Neoplatonic thought and the Albigensian heresy appears to be a promising direction in which to approach chronologically later developments in troubadour poetry itself and in non-troubadour manifestations of courtly love.

One of the most celebrated origin theories must certainly be that of the "Spring Folk Ritual" (pp. 86-89) first postulated by Jeanroy.⁴ Although this approach has since been discredited, one of its guiding principles, namely that "folk" literature was an important factor in the development of the courtly lyric, is still viable, especially since the existence of the *kharjas* has become known. Although Boase gives the "Spring Ritual" little credit as a theory of origins, its dependence on oral literature raises the important question of the possible relationship between an oral tradition and a seemingly learned, individualized poetry, and to what extent the special characteristic of the first written vernacular lyric may be due to a tradition of oral vernacular poetry.

Finally, Boase analyses theories that have explained the rise of the troubadour phenomenon through sociological factors operating within the twelfth-century feudal environment: the "Feudal-Sociological" approach (pp. 89-93). In that the many different arguments that fall into this category postulate the conditioning effect of certain social factors, Boase finds them satisfactory. In this respect, the methodological approach of this theory is quite different from many others: one explores the social conditions that provided fertile ground in which the courtly lyric could thrive rather than substantive material for the poetry. The potential success of this theory as an explanation for the rise of a new school of poetry is its flexibility in terms of the thematic and ideological currents that it can accommodate as influences on the special characteristics of the texts.

⁴ A. Jeanroy, *Lancelot du Lac: Le Conte de la Charrete* (Paris, 1883).

In a similar fashion, Boase presents, in his third chapter, the five major theories of meaning as he sees them: "Collective Fantasy" (pp. 100-03), "Play Phenomenon" (pp. 103-07), "Courtly Experience" (pp. 107-09), "Stylistic Convention" (pp. 109-11), and "Critical Fallacy" (pp. 111-14). As in the case of the theories of origin, different classifications could have been established, but Boase makes this an irrelevant consideration by synthesizing the results of his analyses and by discussing related issues within each category. His "Conclusions" (pp. 117-30) begin with a brief résumé of the three chapters just described. This is particularly useful as a reminder of the chronology of scholarship as well as of the different theories' salient features. It is also effective as a first guide to the subject or as a brief introduction.

It is here, however, that Boase makes judgments based on his unprecedentedly wide-ranging and even-handed bibliographical survey. Despite this groundwork, his opinions will undoubtedly be unpalatable to many. He argues that the most convincing origin theories are Hispano-Arabic and Feudal-Sociological and that they are in fact related and complementary.⁵ What makes this an unusual point of view is that it is one of the few cases where these conclusions are manifestly the result of a careful study of all the different possibilities and the argument is devoid of the partisanship, emotion and polemic that have been characteristic of related discussions in the past.⁶

⁵ It is interesting to note that, in a recent book from the Soviet Union on the language of the troubadours, the author, Mixail Mejlx, *assumes* that Hispano-Arabic culture and literature played a critical rôle in the formation of the troubadours' poetics—to the point that he does not feel it even needs to be addressed as a disputable issue. See Mixail Borisovič Mejlx, *Jazyk trubadurov* [The Language of the Troubadours] (Moskva, 1975), especially the short preface on the title page verso. See also the bibliographical note by Yakov Malkiel, *RPh*, 31 (1978), 707-11.

⁶ One need only look at the works of some of the most notorious "Arabist" partisans to see the dogmatism that has characterized presentations of this point of view. See, for example, A. R. Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry and Its Relations with the Old Provençal Troubadours* (Baltimore, 1946). The refutations (or dismissals, in many cases) have been no less emotional or vitriolic, from that of early Romance scholars such as Schlegel, "Observations sur la littérature provençale," in *Essais littéraires et historiques* (1847), p. 270, to that of contemporary Orientalists, such as the well-known "discoverer" of the *kharjas*, S. M. Stern, esp. "Literary Connections Between the Islamic World and Western Europe in the Early Middle Ages: Did They Exist?," in *Hispano-Arabic Strophic Poetry* ed. L. P. Harvey (Oxford, 1974), pp. 204-30.

Moreover, in arriving at his conclusions, Boase has taken into account the plausible and positive features of each school of thought and has not designated one phenomenon as a single causative. He has concluded that the propitious encounter of a thriving culture in Islamic Spain with certain sociological phenomena in Medieval Provence provided the unique situation wherein an important new school of poetry was catalyzed. He summarizes the happy marriage of the two schools of thought: "Once it is conceded that the diffusion of cultural traits is a selective process it will be seen that these two theories explore different aspects of the same problem. 'It is not the products that influence, but creators that absorb'" (p. 123). Boase then proceeds to detail the many reasons why this "theory"—now a theory of multiple causation—is the most satisfactory: The receptivity of the social ambience of Provence in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the many literary parallels, the overlap of semantic fields, the traces of psychological and aesthetic principles inherent in troubadour poetry and traceable to Graeco-Arabic traditions, the multiple paths of "accessibility." Finally, Boase notes many areas in which there are serious dissimilarities between the Provençal and the Hispano-Arabic poetic modes and ideologies. However, since the author has clearly established a concept of influence that is not constituted by parroting and does not regard a single catalytic factor as something which is servilely imitated, these emendations are primarily important as exemplifications of Boase's dispassionate approach.

From certain points of view, one of the values of Boase's mode of analysis is that he limits himself to making internal criticisms of the secondary works he reviews. He rarely comments on the causes underlying the rise and decline of given theories; he does not offer much methodological criticism or explain why some scholars or groups of scholars have adopted or rejected certain points of view. It is perhaps a sign of his fairness that all points are evaluated equally on the basis of their internal logic and their relationship to the texts and to historical facts. However, in a field where the ideology of the critic has as often as not been as important a determining factor as that of the poets studied, this is a potentially dangerous omission and one that leaves unexplored and uncommented the paradoxical situation of wide discrepancy between the intrinsic value of a theory (as Boase himself has judged it) and its

lack of acceptance among the majority of critics. The danger in his failure to approach these explosive issues of critical ideology will become apparent as others react to Boase's conclusions, and it is our opinion that many will reject them out of hand.

The gravest difficulties involved in attributing any role, either catalytic or imitative, to Hispano-Arabic poetry and culture in the genesis of Occidental courtly love are not, as Boase has shown, internal, but external. They pertain to the methodological, attitudinal, and ideological biases of most scholars who have approached this area—an area not of inquiry but of partisan debate. A review of some of the principal external problems involved is a necessary complement to Boase's internal review. It may also serve to put into perspective some of the reactions (or lack of reaction) that Boase's book will evoke.

The most widespread and silently sanctioned scholarly inadequacy plaguing the wide range of studies involving Islamic Spain is also one of the most obvious roadblocks to any fair analysis or impartial evaluation of the "evidence": i.e., ignorance. In virtually any other field of cultural-historical investigation a scholar is expected to have detailed knowledge of the primary cultural forces in the sphere with which he is concerned. Scholars dealing with matters of either direct or peripheral concern with Islamic Spain, whether the connection is postulated, proven or being refuted, are seemingly exempt from this rule.⁷ If one returns to Boase's analysis of the scholars who most vociferously reject the Hispano-Arabic theory, in general or in some specific feature, one will find that many have done so without much knowledge of the culture whose "influences" they were denying.

Widespread ignorance of both the culture of Islamic Spain and its literary language (the language of an enormous amount of advanced scholarship and refined literature in the Middle Ages) is a direct result of two of the other principal external problems associated with investigations into the rôle of Islamic Spain in the development of Medieval Europe. The first of these is the anachronistic belief that, as an appendage of the Oriental world of Islam, the civilization of Spain did not constitute an integral part

⁷ The attitude was summarized by A. Jeanroy: "Puisque la poésie arabe est pour nous provençalistes un livre scellé c'est à nos collègues arabisants à venir à nous" (*La poésie lyrique des troubadours* [Paris, 1934], p. 75).

of Europe.⁸ The second, its counterpart, is anti-Semitic prejudice in forms ranging from subtle to blatant,⁹ prejudice that does not admit the possibility of an important Oriental component in a branch of cultural activity that is viewed as a reflection of our innermost sentiments: lyric poetry.

The problem is partially caused by Romance scholars who know little about Islamic Spain. Even in cases where there is no dispute over the indebtedness of the Christian West to Spanish Islam, it is considered sufficient to acknowledge the transmission of some technology, translation of Greek philosophy, or other cultural nicety. The acknowledgment, in its most commonplace form, presents the transmission as reflecting a transaction similar to the purchase of some object in a store. The nature of the culture (let alone the language) that was the "donor," even as it may be transmuted and reflected in the donation, would seem to be of little interest. However, a great deal of the blame for this state of affairs must be laid at the feet of Orientalists, those Arabists who study medieval Spain as a branch of a far-flung Islamic empire, and whose works and attitudes provide most of the information and attitudes that feed Romance scholars who have no direct access to information on that most important medieval culture.¹⁰

The consequences of this peculiar state of affairs are various, and all are negative. The dichotomy of scholarly endeavors has created a near vacuum in cultural interaction where once there were three cultures in intimate contact.¹¹ Scholars trained exclu-

⁸ This is reflected in virtually every book purporting to deal with Medieval European literature: None of them deals with the Arabic and Hebrew literatures of Spain. See also R. Menéndez Pidal, "El prejuicio antiárabe," in *Poesía árabe y poesía europea* (Buenos Aires, 1941), pp. 34-36.

⁹ As manifestations of subtle or, rather, disguised prejudice one can view all those works that lightly dismiss any meaningful Provençal-Arabic interaction as unlikely or unthinkable (see Jeanroy, *La poésie lyrique des troubadours*, p. 75). Examples of more blatant negative preconceptions about the value (or lack of it) of Islamic culture abound: "The great catastrophe of the Moslem onset puts an end for the time being to Mediterranean culture" is a not unrepresentative statement made by William Beare in *Latin Verse and European Song* (London, 1957), p. 262, a book not cited in Boase's Bibliography.

¹⁰ For some critical insights into the ironically anti-Semitic nature of European Orientalism in general and British and French Arabism specifically, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978), especially the Introduction, pp. 1-28.

¹¹ Ironically, although Hispano-Arabic poetry and Hispano-Provençal relations are both critical to Boase's theory, he omits many works dealing with these

sively in either Romance or Semitic languages and cultures address themselves to the issues of a civilization where both language families and both cultures were once complimentary. Scholarly impartiality is regularly breached by different manifestations of anti-Semitism; in Hispanic historiography and Arabism it is reflected in the view that Spain (i.e., Christian Spain) owes most if

subjects from his bibliography. On the one hand, Boase does not deal at all with primary sources, a decision which has no negative effects on the study of Provençal or Late Latin poetry (whose texts are readily available), but which is devastating when one wishes to have access to the Hispano-Arabic corpus. Doubtless published too late for inclusion in Boase's Bibliography, the most useful bibliographic apparatus available on the subject can be found in Richard Hitchcock, *The Kharjas: A Critical Bibliography* (London, 1977). Many works of criticism dealing primarily with Hispano-Arabic poetry are missing from Boase's presentation. This is undoubtedly due, at least in part, to the isolation of Hispano-Arabic studies from the mainstream of "European" literary history and criticism. We note some of the most salient omissions: Linda Fish Compton, *Andalusian Lyrical Poetry and Old Spanish Love Songs: The Muwashshah and Its Kharja* (New York, 1976); Julio Cailliet-Bois, "Sobre la poesía arábigo-andaluza," in *Cursos y Conferencias* Vol. 52, No. 280 (March, 1958), 1-12; Giuseppina Cernuschi, "Le kharje mozarabiche e la tradizione giullaresca romanza," in *RIL*, 89-90 (1956), 425-32; Margit Frenk, "Jarýas mozarábes y estribillos franceses," *NRFH*, 6 (1952), 281-84, and by the same author, *Las jarchas mozarábes y los comienzos de la lírica románica* (Mexico, 1975); Natale di Giannantonio, "Nota sulla poesia arabo-andalusa," *FR*, 2 (1955), 199-211; Pierre Le Gentil, "A propos de la strophe zejelesque," *RLR*, 70 (1949), 119-34. A. R. Nykl, "L'influence arabe-andalouse . . .," *BHi*, 41 (1939), cited by Boase is reproduced in English as the final and most important chapter of his *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (1946). Nykl's "La poesía a ambos lados del Pirineo hacia el año 1100," *Andalus*, 1 (1933), 357-408, is a Spanish version of the English introduction to his translation *Tauq al-Hamama: A Book Containing the Rişála Known as the Dove's Neck-Ring about Love and Lovers* (Paris, 1931). Several important articles by the Italian Arabist Aurelio Roncaglia are also omitted: "Il Muratori e la 'tesi araba' sulle origini della lirica romanza," in *Miscellanea di Studi Muratoriani* (Modena, 1951); "Gli Arabi e le origini della lirica neolatina," *I Problemi de Ulisse: L'Islam*, 31 (1977), 72-81; "Laizat estar lo gazel," *CN*, 9 (1949), 67-99; and "Can la frej' aura venta," *CN*, 12 (1952), 255-64. Other items omitted are: Samuel G. Armistead, "A Mozarabic *harğa* and a Provençal Refrain," *HR*, 41 (1973), 416-17; I. Frank, "Barbariol-Babarian dans Guillaume IX," *Romania*, 73 (1952), 227-34; Martín de Riquer, "Hei, ore dulce, qui de France venes," *CN*, 13 (1953), 86-90; Max Aub, "Orígenes de la poesía lírica española," *Humboldt*, 7:27 (1966), 68-75; Pierre Groult, "Un siècle de plus pour la poésie espagnole," *LR*, 5 (1951), 39-45; R. Menéndez Pidal, *Los orígenes de las literaturas románicas a la luz de un descubrimiento reciente* (Santander, 1951); J. B. Trend, "The Oldest Spanish Poetry," in *Hispanic Studies in Honor of I. González Llubera* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 415-28; Joan Vernet, "L'origen de les líriques populars arab i románica," *ER*, 9 (1961), 1-9.

not all of its problems, both current and historical, to a certain unfortunate crossing of the Straits of Gibraltar in 711. The feeling that Islam caused Spain to deviate from her "true course" is coupled with equally negative feelings about Spain's Jews.¹² The primary constituent of both aspects of anti-Semitism is the same: a belief that both Jews and Arabs comprise *negative* cultural influences. (We can see just how disfiguring such prejudice is if we remember that both Jewish and Islamic cultures had their Golden Ages in Spain and that these periods involved a cultural flowering that far surpassed anything Christian Europe produced during the same epoch.)

Although Spanish Arabism, with these and other negative attitudes about Islamic Spain, has been the branch of Orientalism most interested in Spain and its interaction with Europe, the attitudes of other Orientalists have been instrumental in determining the perspective from which medieval East-West relations are viewed. The peculiar historical ideology that has resulted from the admixture of Orientalist visions and the unicultural orientation of Romance and other European scholars is characterized by three distinct biases that inevitably affect any investigation of intercultural encounters and interactions. The first of these is the inherently racist view that the culture, the "real culture" of Western Europe, is unadulteratedly Christian. The result is a vision of a Latin-Christian Europe, Hellenic in its ultimate ancestry, in relation to which the new civilization developing south of the Pyrenees constitutes merely a temporary break in a cultural continuum and one that can be comfortably ignored. Even in cases of undeniable "intrusions" of Jewish and Islamic culture into the Christian sphere, scholars are able to view the Semitic rôle as that of an *alcahueta*—a go-between in the seemingly unbreakable transition from Greece, to Rome, to "the West."

The second bias is one that is undoubtedly a result of the historical circumstances (namely, nineteenth-century European colonialism) within which both Orientalism and the resurgence of great interest in the origins of our modern literatures arose.¹³ In many senses, the rôles of the two cultures in contact have been

¹² For numerous examples of these attitudes, as well as an outstanding and elucidating history of Spanish Arabism, see James Monroe, *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship* (Leiden, 1970).

¹³ For extensive documentation of this phenomenon, see Said, *Orientalism*.

dramatically reversed in the post-Medieval period. The nineteenth- or twentieth-century scholar thus operates with one world view when attempting to analyze and understand a substantially different world. Although a certain amount of lip service is paid to the fact that in the twelfth century, for example, Islamic Spain was far superior culturally and technologically to the rest of Europe and was indeed its benefactor, the far reaching implications of such a fact are rarely dwelt upon. Consciously or unconsciously, the working assumption of European and American scholars is still that East is East and West is West, with all of the stereotypes, preconceptions, and images that those terms conjure up. It seems to be too difficult to envision or accept a dramatic reversal of historical circumstances, particularly when that reversal entails putting one's own culture in a position of inferiority to a civilization which we have colonized and which, to our eyes, is manifestly less developed, not only technologically, but culturally as well.

The third important distortion in historical perspective is the inevitable result of the two we have just mentioned: Islamic Spain is classified as an "extrinsic" phenomenon when analyzing the cultural developments in the rest of Europe. Although most of our evidence shows that neither language nor the Pyrenees prevented close ties at every level of society between the different cultural communities that made up Medieval Europe,¹⁴ an unarticulated, but nonetheless pervasive system of hierarchies is used when evaluating the strengths of different possible factors involved in engendering a new phenomenon. Most discussions of the origins of given Medieval innovations justifiably distinguish between "internal" factors in the development of those innovations and "external" or

¹⁴ Ample documentation is available from many sources, including Boase's own summary in his conclusions. Some of the most accessible: Dorothee Metlitski, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England* (New Haven, 1977), esp. Chapter i; Norman Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London, 1975); A. J. Denomy, "Concerning the Accessibility of Arabic Influences to the Earliest Provençal Troubadours," *MS*, 15 (1953), 147-58; Menéndez Pidal, *Poesía árabe y poesía europea*, pp. 30-34; and the lengthy introduction to Fathi Nasser, *Emprunts lexicologiques du français à l'arabe* (Paris, 1966). The most eloquent and complete picture of the tri-cultural civilization of Medieval Spain is provided by Américo Castro in his scholarly corpus, of which there are, surprisingly, no citations in Boase's Bibliography. Cf. especially *The Spaniards: An Introduction to Their History*, trans. W. King and S. Margaretten (Berkeley, 1971), which includes much of the material in his seminal *Structure of Spanish History*, trans. E. L. King, (Princeton, 1954).

outside sources of influences. The first are taken to be of primary importance and the second to be resorted to only when "internal" or "primary" factors alone cannot provide a sufficient explanation for the existence of the new phenomenon at that particular time and place. While there is considerable advantage to devising a hierarchization of developmental factors for the sake of analysis, there are various logical and historical flaws in the manner in which hierarchies are assigned to possible factors in the development of the Provençal lyric. Along with personal poetic inspiration, native to the individual poet, scholars classify the rôle of the Graeco-Latin poetic tradition as primary, meanwhile assigning to a rôle of a potential secondary influence the part any aspect of the Hispano-Arabic world may have played.

There is a certain logical inconsistency in weighing one set of cultural values on the same scale as aspects of purely personal poetic inspiration, while relegating another to a different, much less weighty sphere of possible influence. On the basis of our knowledge of contemporary cultural conditions, we must note that this image too narrowly delimits the intellectual and cultural ambience of the well-travelled and cosmopolitan aristocrats who comprised the first generation of troubadours. Moreover, ambience as a primary influential factor is viewed as something primarily intellectual and scholarly in nature, rather than in terms of contemporary vogues and fashions. This is not readily reconcilable with what we know about the early troubadours and what we can learn about them from their poetry. Far from being cloistered "intellectuals" exclusively inspired in the Graeco-Latin and Christian traditions, the troubadours were, quite literally, men of the world. Well-travelled and knowledgeable about the Mediterranean world in which they lived (and this certainly includes the lands of Holy Wars, both Islamic Spain and Saladin's Palestine), they were, as modern scholars often forget, trend setters *par excellence*. How then is it possible to relegate to a position of secondary or marginal importance the highly active, well-dispersed, secular, and undoubtedly prestigious Hispano-Arabic tradition which flowered in the period immediately preceding the troubadours? Moreover, one is simultaneously elevating to a position of primary importance the impact of an essentially religious and didactic tradition that can certainly not have been in great vogue among such excommunicates as

Guillaume.¹⁵ At the very least scholars should recognize the strong influence that relatively recent history and cultural ideology play in the make-up of the images of the Medieval world they suggest. The troubadours created a secular, original and innovative school of poetry and their verses in Langue d'Oc—not in Latin—their frank sensuality, their lack of traditional Christian “erudition,” and all other distinctive characteristics of troubadour poetry favor a view of their milieu far different from that generally evoked by Western scholars up to now.

There are a series of additional external problems perceivable in most discussions of the Hispano-Arabic-Provençal connections that can be classified as methodological, although in all cases the ideological biases discussed above have helped form or perpetuate these bases for supposedly dispassionate scholarly research and speculation.¹⁶ The first of these is a problem in the conceptualization of cultural change, the failure to realize the essential relationship between ideological antagonism or rivalry and cultural supremacy and its resulting influence on another culture. The fact that Islamic Spain and Medieval Christendom co-existed in a state of ideological

¹⁵ Or Frederick II of Sicily, guiding light of the courtly “Scuola Siciliana,” first school of vernacular poetry in Italy. Although Frederick himself, as well as the traditional culture of Sicily at the time, was heavily Arabized, little work has ever been done on the connections between the “Scuola Siciliana” and the strong Siculo-Arabic poetic tradition of which it was to some extent an heir. Disappointingly few bibliographical references are found in Boase to works dealing with the “Scuola Siciliana” and later manifestations of courtly love in Italy, although the question of the “origins” of courtly love must, we believe, be defined more holistically to include this important branch of Romance poetry which may not be so imitative of the Provençal tradition as has been assumed. Boase might have referred his readers to some of the following works: M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (Catania, 1933–1939); F. Gabrieli, “Arabi di Sicilia e Arabi di Spagna,” *Andalus*, 15 (1950), 27–45; Camillo G. Crocetti, *La Magna Curia: La Scuola Poetica Siciliana* (Milan, 1947); M. Asín Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. Harold Southerland (London, 1926/1968); A. Cerulli, *Il Libro della Scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia* (Roma-Vaticano, 1949); Silvestro Fiore, “Arabic Traditions in the History of the Tuscan Lauda and Ballata,” *RLC*, 38 (1964), 5–17; Silvestro Fiore, *Über die Beziehungen zwischen der arabischen und der frühitalienischen Lyrik* (Köln, 1956); E. LiGotti, “I canti romanico-andalusi dei secoli XI–XII e la questione dello strambotto,” in *Atti del I Congresso di Studi Mediterranei* (Palermo, 1956), pp. 84–93.

¹⁶ One of the many myths shattered by Said in *Orientalism*, pp. 9–15, is that of the supposedly dispassionate, apolitical nature of scholarship. “Research” itself will reflect, in great measure, the ideology of the scholar who carries it out.

and physical warfare has led to a non-sequitur assumption that this level of rivalry prevented or at least diminished the possibility of cultural interaction at any level of cultural sophistication. The validity of this assumption is rarely questioned, and the resultant lack of discussion has led to the firm establishment of this assumption as a working hypothesis for most scholars. Many will undoubtedly criticize Boase's conclusions in that they violate this unquestioned article of faith. Yet, is it a legitimate hypothesis at all?

The observation of analogous situations in the modern world would lead us to answer with a forceful "No." Ideological antagonism does not imply or force a rejection of cultural values and less still an immunity to cultural influence. In certain cases it may produce quite the opposite result. The material and cultural trappings of a civilization, which may in other ways be considered despicable, often prove quite attractive, especially to "non-establishment" segments of the population (i.e., those whose rôle is not to perpetuate the state of rivalry). To mention briefly one salient example among many—and one which has the virtue of also dealing with a musico-poetic tradition—we note that the youth of the Soviet Union is not only willing to pay outrageous black-market prices for genuine American blue jeans, but, in the artistic sphere, is only too willing to imitate rock-and-roll, the lyric poetry of the "decadent" West.¹⁷ A future historian studying twentieth-century Soviet music would find documents—abundant documents—attesting to Soviet disdain for and condemnation of the West's musical trends. On the other hand, the songs sung in the Soviet Union during our time, if examined outside the context of official propaganda, would reveal remarkable affinity with the most distinctive and characteristic musical forms of the West during the past several generations. If future historians were to use the same modes of investigation and accept the same assumptions that many medievalists have when examining the relations between Islam and Christendom in Medieval Europe, they might well conclude that the development of a contextually innovative phenomenon such as rock-and-roll in the Soviet Union could not possibly have been influenced by the same phenomenon in a culture so vigorously

¹⁷ For information on this topic, as well as numerous insights into contemporary East-West relations and differences, see Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York, 1976) and Robert G. Kaiser, *Russia* (New York, 1976).

dismissed as decadent and abominable by all contemporary cultural commentators of that society. They would conclude that this new kind of lyric poetry, arising in the Soviet Union in the 60s and 70s, must have been primarily a product of "internal" influences: native Russian folk music perhaps influenced by a strong autochthonous tradition of classical music. Both of these influences are certainly more likely, i.e., "primary," than is that of the West, which would, because of cultural and language differences, have to be considered "extrinsic." One would also, of course, have to prove that those Russian rock-and-roll singers were all bilingual (just as one is faced with the gratuitous question of whether Guillaume knew Arabic). And so forth.¹⁸

This single example should suffice to show, at the very least, that the assumptions underlying much "origins" research are far from indisputably valid, and that much further discussion on the relationship between ideology and cultural "borrowing" is necessary. The "Arabist" theory, often dismissed out of hand on similar premises, can no longer be discarded on these grounds, at least not until some scholar can establish the validity of the very dubious theory that ideological warfare implies cultural warfare.

A second weakness in the methodological posture of many "origins" studies is the so-called problem of bilingualism (or rather the lack of it), which we have alluded to above and which is an integral part of a dichotomized vision of Medieval Europe. It is postulated as one of the insuperable barriers to arriving at conclusions such as those formulated by Boase.¹⁹ Although many

¹⁸ Professor Paul M. Lloyd has brought to my attention the analogous phenomenon in the sphere of linguistic borrowing, as studied by William Labov: "The fact that a group expresses hostility towards another group does not preclude the likelihood of linguistic influence. We have observed many cases of the contrary effect: that white groups surrounded by Negroes, and engaged in hostile combat with them, acquire many linguistic features from them" ("The Social Setting of Linguistic Change," *Current Trends*, 11 [1973], 242, n. 27).

¹⁹ "There is, however, no evidence that any troubadour knew any Arabic . . ." (T. J. Gorton, "Arabic Influence on the Troubadours," *JAL*, 5 [1974], 15). Two other relevant works by Gorton left uncited in Boase are *Ibn Zaidun and the Troubadours* (Oxford: Tylorian Library, unpub. D. Phil. diss.) and "Arabic Words and Refrains in Provençal and Portuguese Poetry," *MAe*, 45 (1976), 257-64. See also Stern: "That the troubadours could not have been in direct contact with Arabic poetry is a direct consequence of the indisputable fact that they did not know and could not have known enough [Arabic] to understand it" ("Literary Connections . . .," p. 217).

studies have dealt with the complex issues pertaining to the interaction of linguistically different cultural groups, the primarily anthropological and linguistic nature of such studies seems to have prevented many of them from filtering down to the literati working in this particular area of cultural and literary history. It is impossible in an article of this scope to go into the multi-faceted sociolinguistic studies that have attempted to define and redefine the nature(s) of bilingualism and its effects on cultural interaction.²⁰ There are, however, several points worth making that may suggest necessary revisions of some of our most widely held assumptions about the Arabic-Romance impasse in Medieval Europe.

A bilingual segment of a population, no matter how small, can introduce many foreign lexical items, and their corresponding meanings into the native language. The prestige of the bilingual group can ease the acceptance of such "borrowings." Moreover, even when there is widespread ignorance of its language (and this was not the case among men of learning in Romance-speaking Medieval Europe),²¹ a foreign, culturally aggressive and/or prominent culture may indeed be quite influential. In the area of song, particularly, language differences are relatively unimportant, even negligible, and the same must apply to a well-articulated ideology for which a body of song is the vehicle. The attempt, made by many scholars to distinguish (or divorce) "lyrics" and music in such a discussion, rests on the premise that those two constituents of a song are separable, which, like signifier and signified, they are not. Finally, in a situation where political antagonism does exist the language of the "disliked" cultural aggressor will be learned not only in spite of, but because of other levels of rivalry. The influencing language and culture cannot be restrained in its influence

²⁰ See, among many others, such works as Uriel Weinreich, *Languages in Contact* (The Hague, 1974). Another good starting point is offered by the relevant sections of Dell Hymes, ed., *Language in Culture and Society* (New York, 1964), which itself provides copious annotated bibliography on important areas of relevant research, such as "Social Structure and Speech Community" (pp. 385-445) and "Processes and Problems of Change" (pp. 449-563). See also especially Richard Diebold, "Incipient Bilingualism" (pp. 495-508). Many of the observations that follow are based on points discussed in these works. Further insights can be gained from observation of the linguistic interaction of an "encroaching," culturally dominant, but politically antagonistic language (culture) and other languages (cultures).

²¹ Cf. n. 14 above.

by those who wish to preserve the linguistic and thus cultural "purity" of the besieged society.²²

In light of these and other possible observations, medievalists can no longer reject the "Arabist" theory on the grounds of linguistic inaccessibility and should be obliged to state their assumptions concerning the nature of the language "barriers" they evoke as impediments to cultural interaction. Two final methodological considerations which Boase has not dealt with and which will certainly be summoned up by his critics remain to be considered here. The two key words are "proof" and "influences" and they are the touchstones of most of the studies that dismiss conclusions such as those of Boase.

One of the principal arguments used against claims of an Arabic increment in Medieval non-plastic art is that there is a lack of concrete and tangible "proof." The assumption underlying this argument is that if Islamic influence on Southern French architecture is indeed visible in the ornamentation of certain surviving edifices then something equally tangible must survive in the historical documents contemporary to the rise of troubadour poetry to warrant the assumption that interaction also took place at the literary and musical levels. Direct evidence is construed to mean "proof" of some sort that the troubadours knew Arabic.²³ For some reason, scholars following this line of thought do not consider indications of thematic borrowing or loan-words concerning musical instruments (we mention just a few possibilities) to constitute "proof." Since there is no autograph manuscript of Guillaume's attesting to his knowledge of Arabic and the Hispano-Arabic poets, the corollary assumption is that Hispano-Provençal poetic interaction did not take place. Clearly, this sort of covert (and antiquated) definition of "proof" or "evidence" needs to be re-examined. Not only is "evidence" in a more ephemeral art form such as sung

²² The example of French is relevant. Try as they may to battle "franglais," French "language policemen" appear to be fighting a losing battle. Just as for many years English absorbed French words, so now French is absorbing Americanisms, because cultural rôles have been altered. (A perhaps apocryphal anecdote has it that, at the end of the press conference announcing new laws against Americanisms, President Giscard d'Estaing answered "no comment" to a prickly question.)

²³ A "requirement" whose validity is disputable, as we have discussed above. See n. 19.

poetry going to be of a different nature than that which might be found in the plastic arts, but for reasons of cultural ideology as well as of creativity, Arabic influences are more likely to have manifested themselves in indirect and culturally transformed patterns.

A similarly specious argument is to be disputed when one talks of the nature of "borrowing." Why is this construed to mean direct and servile imitation? Although the borrowing of material goods of any sort may stem from the would-be borrower's lack of resources, the process is not at all analogous at higher levels. Literary historians dealing with this question should attempt to define their terms—and even the term "origins"—so that we may work from a more realistic and fair assumption: that artists of the caliber of the troubadours did not servilely copy any other poetic tradition (and that is clearly why they are still read today and why they had such an impact on the poetry that followed them). Moreover, we must define "borrowing" in more positive terms, an "influence" being one of the many resources at a poet's disposal, part of the subconscious level of cultural assimilation to which we are all subject. If a poet is a good poet, then the "borrowed" elements of his art are part of his creative process and not obtrusive, extraneous, "provable" additions.

Following his conclusions, Boase provides us with supplementary material in the form of two appendices. While these two sections offer some interesting material that may stimulate further research, Appendix I in particular accentuates the lack of correlation between "linguistic" and "literary" problems in Boase's study. This appendix embodies a very brief presentation of two etymologies intimately linked to the question of literary origins. That of *amor hereos* is relatively obscure, but fascinating as Boase presents it, and is closely linked to the theme of the destructive and paradoxical effects of love which is the topic of the second appendix (pp. 134–39). The questions of the etymology and the texts dealing with the notion of *amor hereos* might have been presented together more fruitfully. As in many other cases of the parallel ambiguity of etyma and thematic origin, the most appropriate methodological procedure is to investigate their relationships and perhaps common origins in terms of each other.

Much the same criticism could be made of Boase's sketchy presentation of the etymology of *trobar*. The etymology is not only intrinsically interesting, having aroused much attention among

etymologists over the years, but the action designated by the form in question is at the very heart of the "courtly love" phenomenon and is intimately linked to the problem of the thematic and structural origins of the poetry of the *troubadours*. Moreover, a more complete view of the etymology's intellectual history would serve to illustrate many of the methodological problems we have discussed above, for these problems have been as manifest in supposedly "linguistic" research as in more "literary" areas. Boase's presentation of the "debate" over the word's seemingly mysterious origins is seriously misleading. As he presents it, there is basically one point of view postulated by Romance scholars and another by Arabists and these two perspectives are irreconcilable. In point of fact, neither group of scholars has arrived at any agreement among themselves.

The original controversy took place completely within the body of Romance linguistic studies: F. Diez initially postulated as the etymon the Late Latin fishing term *turbare*;²⁴ the proposal was debunked by G. Paris, who proposed instead an unattested **tropare*.²⁵ H. Schuchardt then entered the discussion, supporting and elaborating on Diez's original proposal,²⁶ and A. Thomas came in on Paris' side.²⁷ In fact, the entire question was closely linked to the larger dispute over the value (or lack of it) of the Neogrammarians' theories concerning language change. While this debate raged on, the Spanish Arabist Julián Ribera proposed a possible Arabic etymon, *ṭaraba*,²⁸ which has two principal meanings: 'to become affected with emotion by reason of joy or grief'²⁹ and, especially in Spain, 'to make music or sing.'³⁰ Although Ribera made a reason-

²⁴ F. Diez, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der romanischen Sprachen* (Bonn, 1853), pp. 32-33.

²⁵ G. Paris, *Romania*, 7 (1878), 418-19; *Romania*, 31 (1902), 12-13 and 625-30. All three are reprinted, with additional notes in G. Paris, *Mélanges Linguistiques* (Paris, 1906), pp. 615-26.

²⁶ H. Schuchardt, "Romanische Etymologien II," *Sitzungsberichte der Philo. Hist. Classe der Kais. Ak. der Wissenschaften* (Vienna), 141 (1899), 54 ff.; also in *ZRPh*, 26 (1903), 385-94; 27 (1904) 97-100, 101-05; and 28 (1905), 36-55.

²⁷ A. Thomas, "Problèmes étymologiques," *Romania*, 31 (1902), 6-12; also reprinted with additional bibliography in A. Thomas, *Nouveaux essais de philologie française* (Paris, 1904), 334-43.

²⁸ Julián Ribera y Tarragó, *Disertaciones y opúsculos*, II (Madrid, 1928), 140-43.

²⁹ Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, 1874), 1835-36.

³⁰ R. P. A. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, II (Leyden, 1881), 29.

ably strong case for his etymology, it is interesting to note, especially since there was so much dissension within Romance circles, that it was not merely rejected (in which case counter-arguments could have followed), but was never even seriously considered or discussed in terms of other hypotheses, or evaluated on its own strengths and weaknesses. The few scholars, including several Arabists, who chose to allude to it in later years, did so marginally and disparagingly, and even incorrectly.³¹ In many ways the Arabic etymology became even more taboo than had the "Arabist" theory, perhaps because of its symbolic value. And yet, it is precisely this symbolic value, both at the level of the poetic material we are dealing with and at the critical level, that makes it all the more important that the question be examined even-handedly. The verb *trobar*, and derivatives such as *troubadour*, are, after all, the signifiers of the signified that Boase is attempting to define and whose origins he wishes to elucidate. It is the new term used to designate a new activity. Since the origins of both are, at best, the object of debate, is it not reasonable to expect greater elucidation to proceed from a common investigation of their "origin" and "meaning"?

One final word of criticism, this regarding Boase's extensive bibliography, which we have attempted to supplement in our notes:³² the careful reader will note that not all the works referred to or cited in the text are included in Boase's quite substantial bibliography (pp. 141-66). This is a puzzling procedure and one that could prove most inconvenient. In a work that is primarily bibliographical in character, it is a definite disadvantage not to be able to find in the bibliography references one remembers having seen in a note. The index, in turn, lists only those authors included in the bibliography, and not all of those works Boase may have had

³¹ Cf. A. Jeanroy, *La poésie lyrique des troubadours* (Paris, 1934), p. 75; Henry Davenson, *Les troubadours* (Paris, 1961), p. 128; Nykl, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry*, p. 386; Stern, "Literary Connections . . .," p. 226.

³² Besides the addenda we have noted in passing, several other noteworthy works should be added: F. Brittain, *The Medieval Latin and Romance Lyric to A.D. 1300* (Cambridge, 1951); Carla Cremonesi, *La lirica francese del Medioevo* (Milan, 1955), an anthology of Medieval French lyric poetry, preceded by an excellent Introduction covering much of the history of criticism in Boase's Chapter i; Julio García Morejón, "A mais primitiva lirica occitanica," *RHist*, 11:24 (1955), 269-305; J. H. Marshall, ed., *The 'Razos de Trobar' of Raimon Vidal and Associated Texts* (London, 1972); and the historically important G. Massieu, *Histoire de la poésie française* (Paris, 1739).

occasion to cite in the text. It may be that one or more of the bibliographical addenda we have suggested are known to Boase and have been included in his research, but they may only be mentioned in one of his many extensive notes.

Despite our many critical comments, it is important to re-emphasize the great value of Boase's book, which is the first comprehensive and even-handed examination of the extensive body of scholarly literature on this crucially important literary problem. Boase's admirable work will hopefully stimulate further thought on the questions he leaves unanswered and on the controversy that will undoubtedly be aroused by his conclusions. He has established not only the validity of the term and notion of "courtly love," but has firmly placed the theory of substantial Hispano-Arabic contributions to its origins among the ranks of the most acceptable and valuable in terms of understanding what "courtly love" was and how and why it became an innovative and influential school of poetic thought.

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