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JONGLEUR. Roughly from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries, throughout France and Tuscany and northern Italy, Jongleurs originally were entertainers (acrobats, actors, musicians, singers) who wandered from town to town offering their arts for a fee. Later, these Jongleurs became official fixtures of the various European courts as jesters, clowns, and reciters of poetry.

At first the Jongleur did not create his own poems but drew from a repertory of ballata and canti and chansons de geste, but by the twelfth century the minstrels or trouveres or Troubadours of Provencal and Tuscany were writing their own poems to be sung.

Southeastern France used langue d'oc dialect called Provencal, and Troubadour poetry began with William IX, Guillaume de Poitou (1070-1127 Duke of Aquitane, lord of an immense realm, who "as though he believed all things were moved by chance, and not ruled by Providence"; William's adventurous "leis de con" were an erotic substitute for theological order and Providence, and set the tone for later courtly love. William's granddaughter, Eleanor of Aquitane, began to gather poets at Toulouse, among them Berand de Ventadour and later, Bertrans de Born.

We know the names of about 446 Troubadours -- the Benedikbeuern. monastery in Upper Bavaria preserved the manuscript of the CARMINA BURANA or Beuern Poems, which is the main source for our catalogue of Troubadour poems. The major corpus of Troubadour work includes poems by Richard the Lion-Hearted; Marcabrun (1137-1150); Sordello (1180-1255); Hugh Primus of Orleans (1140); Guido Guinicelli, an immediate predecessor of Dante Alighieri; Arnaut Daniel (c 1150-1200) whom Dante has Guinicelli pay tribute to as "il miglior fabbro"; Guido Cavalcanti; Dante himself in LA VITA NUOVA; and Francesco Petrarch in his CANSONIERE, which consists of some 366 sonnets to Laura (one of which, number CII, Chaucer translates as his "CANTUS TROILII").

The Italian poets came to be known for their practise of dolce stil nuova, "the sweet new style" which Dante defines in Canto 26 of the PURGATORIO as "sweet and delicate rimes of love". And in point of fact this entire Troubadour movement gave rise to so many new complex verse forms such as the sestina (invented by Daniel), the canzone (brought to perfection by Cavalcanti and Dante), and the sonnet form (probably invented by Guinicelli and brought to perfection by Dante and Petrarch and the later Shakespeare).

Almost all of these Troubadour and Jongleur poems were originally written to be sung -- motz el son -- words as song, which was the chanson tradition. As one Troubadour, Folquet, put it: "A poem without music is a mill without water." We have records of about

2600 songs surviving, cantigas or cantos or canticles, all of them originally set to music of some sort and played on instruments ranging from bells, drums, guitars, lyres, trumpets, harps, pipes, lutes, horns and organs. In addition, returning Crusaders began to bring musical songs back from the East to enhance the Troubadour tradition.

The Troubadour poet (from trobar, to invent; also from trouvere, to find) usually sang of courtly love -- the ethereal, extra-marital praise of any Lady who inspired the poet to virtue and to moral excellence and achievement. Sometimes the Troubadour's songs followed specific conventions, as the following list indicates:

canzo - song of love

balada - story in verse

plante - elegy, or dirge for a lost lover

serenade - evening song

alba - dawn song, when lovers realize day has come and they must part; as, "Ah, God, ah God! that dawn should come so soon!" -- or as in Chaucer's TROILUS AND CRISEYDE, Book Three, stanzas 203-204-205:

But whan the cok, commune astrologer,
Gan on his brest to bete, and after crowe,
And Lucifer, the dayes messager,
Gan for to ryse, and out hir bemes throwe;
And estward roos, to him that coude it knowe,
Fortuna maior, than anoon Criseyde,
With herte sore, to Troilus thus seyde: --

"Myn hertes lyf, my trist and my plesaunce,
That I was born, allas! what me is wo,
That day of us mot make desseveraunce!
For tyme it is to ryse, and hennes go,
Or elles I am lost for evermo!
O night, allas! why niltow over us hove,
As long as whonne Almena lay by Jove?

O blake night, as folk in bokes rede,
That shapen art by god this world to hyde
At certeyn tymes with thy derke wede,
That under that men mighte in reste abyde,
Wel oughte bestes pleyne, and folk thee chyde,
That there-as day with labour wolde us brests,
That thou thus fleest, and deynest us nought reste!"

Still later in Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIET, the alba is beautifully realized in an exchange between the two lovers who have spent their only night together and must now separate from each other, forever -- and they try desperately to deceive themselves that it is not really the true dawn:

JULIET: Wilt thou be gone? it is not yet near day:
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear;
Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate-tree:
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO: It was the lark, the herald of the morn,
No nightingale: look, love, what envious streaks
Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east:
Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.
I must be gone and live, or stay and die.

JULIET: Yon light is not day-light, I know it, I:
It is some meteor that the sun exhales,
To be to thee this night a torch-bearer,
And light thee on thy way to Mantua:
Therefore stay yet; thou need'st not to be gone.

ROMEO: Let me be ta'en, let me be put to death;
I am content, so thou wilt have it so.
I'll say yon grey is not the morning's eye,
'Tis but the pale reflect of Cynthia's brow;
Nor that is not the lark, whose notes do beat
The vaulty heaven so high above our heads:
I have more care to stay than will to go:
Come, death, and welcome! Juliet wills it so.
How is't, my soul? let's talk; it is not day.

JULIET: It is, it is: hie hence, be gone, away!
It is the lark that sings so out of tune,
Straining harsh discords and unpleasing sharps.
Some say the lark makes sweet division;
This doth not so, for she divideth us:
Some say the lark and loathed toad change eyes;
O, now I would they had changed voices too!
Since arm from arm that voice doth us affray,
Hunting thee hence with hunt's-up to the day.
O, now be gone; more light and light it grows.

ROMEO: More light and light; more dark and dark our woes!

(Shakespeare, ROMEO AND JULIET, III, v)

In France the chansons de geste were epic poems to be sung which related the heroism and chivalry of Charlemagne and other feudal lords, thus anticipating the exploits of the later Crusaders. The "CHANSON DE ROLAND", an epic poem of 4002 verses, was composed between 1050-1100 in France and tells how Charlemagne's rear guard was overwhelmed in the Valley of Roncevaux in 778 A.D. by the Saracens who were aided by the traitor Ganelon. The poem celebrates Roland's

proud refusal to blow his horn, the olifan, and his vain attempt to break his sword, Durendal, before he is killed. Another chanson de geste, Chrétien de Troye's "LE CHEVALIER DE LA CARRETTE", the first stories of the Knights of the Round Table, celebrated the courtly love of Lancelot for Guinevere. In 1180, Chrétien wrote "PERCEVAL" or "LE CONTE DU GRAAL" which changed the goal of chivalry from courtly love for the Lady to Knight-Errantry in quest of the Holy Grail.

The fablaux or romans of this period were fables that were woven around tales of courtly love: thus the "ROMAN DE LA ROSE" of Guillaume de Lorris in 1225-1237 was an allegory and satire of wooing, and "AUCASSIN ET NICOLETTE" was a roman that rose to heights of lyric beauty:

> Lily-flower, so white, so sweet,
> Fair the faring of thy feet,
> Fair thy laughter, fair thy speech,
> Fair our playing each with each,
> Sweet thy kisses, soft thy touch,
> All must love thee overmuch ...

The "ROMAN DE RENART" were some thirty tales of Reynard the Fox, running to a total of some 24,000 lines, satires on lords, courts, and church forms; Chaucer would later adopt one of these tales for his "NONNES PREESTES TALE" in the CANTERBURY TALES.

In Germany the Jongleur tradition began with the first Minnesängers, or "lover-singers", some 300 of them having come down to us by name. Some of these early Jongleurs were illiterate and had to dictate their songs to be written down by another; hence the modern German word for poetry, dichtung, or dictation. The first Minnelider, "LADIES STROPHES", dates from 1152, and Kurenberg is the first Minnesänger, 1157. The Minnesänger Tannhäuser lived from 1205 to 1270, and the epic poem "LOHENGRIN" was written about 1285. At about this same time, the Nibelungen legends would be taking shape, and the "NIBELUNGENLIED" was a thirteenth century poem telling the story of Siegfried, son of Siegmund and Sieglind. In the poem, Siegfried woos Kriemhild, then helps Gunther woo Brunhild, queen of Issland; Siegfried is eventually killed by the bitter Hagen.

In England, the Jongleur and Troubadour traditions eventually provided Shakespeare with materials for both his sonnets and songs and dramatic characters; for example, aspects of the Jongleur/Troubadour types can be seen in both Mercutio and Romeo in ROMEO AND JULIET.

For further background see Ezra Pound: THE SPIRIT OF ROMANCE (1910); also C. S. Lewis: THE ALLEGORY OF LOVE; also M. Valency: IN PRAISE OF LOVE (1958).