

Troubadours and Prakrit Poets

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

- Opening questions and definitions
- Courtly vernacular lyric in Europe
- Courtly vernacular lyric in India

2 Problems of historicization

- Formation and manifestation
- Manifestation is not an accident

3 Ethics is aesthetics

4 The language question

- What are the language questions, anyway?
- Regionality
- Grammaticality

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

- Opening questions and definitions
- Courtly vernacular lyric in Europe
- Courtly vernacular lyric in India

2 Problems of historicization

- Formation and manifestation
- Manifestation is not an accident

3 Ethics is aesthetics

4 The language question

- What are the language questions, anyway?
- Regionality
- Grammaticality

Vernacular courtly lyric

- **Vernacular:** *not* Latin or Sanskrit
- **Courtly:** relating to “a class of people...who discovered their collective consciousness in the experience of life at a court”
[Zumthor 1992 [1972]: 5–6]
- **Lyric:** *not* narrative [Zumthor]

Literary beginnings

- At a first approximation: vernacular courtly lyric, in Europe in the 12th century and in India in the 1st century, begins a massively influential “movement” in literature and opens up a new episode in cultural history:
 - Vernacular literature (Dante, Petrarch, etc.)
 - *kāvya* (Pravarasena, Kālidāsa, etc.)
- Can comparing these two moments help us to tell the story of literary beginnings?
- Can the comparison help us pin down what “vernacular” actually means?
- How are the communities that engage in these practices defined?

Preview of conclusions

(These are not laws of physics, but I am curious about their generality:)

- *Pūrvapakṣa*: literary communities are isomorphic with linguistic communities (which are *primordial*).
- *Uttarapakṣa*: starting from an original state of isomorphism, literary communities developed autonomously from linguistic communities.
- *Siddhānta*: literature makes the language; to belong to a linguistic community is to inhabit the social imaginary of a literary community (which is *elective*).

Vernacular

- *not* Latin, which was the *gramatica sermo*;
- the “speech of the masses” (*vulgare*), considered an *ydioma tripharium* by Dante:
 - Greeks,
 - Northern Europeans (*lingua iò*), and
 - Southern Europeans, whose speech is likewise *tripharium* (but otherwise closely related):
 - *lingua oc* → “Occitan”
 - *lingua oïl* → “French”
 - *lingua si* → “Italian”

The ambiguity of *vulgare*

- On the one hand Dante uses *vulgare* in the sense of the native language (*materna sermo*) of every person, whether educated or not;
- on the other he uses it in reference to *literary languages*, whether already established (the language of the troubadours) or envisioned for the future (Dante's own *vulgare illustre*)

How much friction is there (or was there) between these usages?

Courtliness

“...courtliness can be defined as an art of living and a moral elegance, a sophisticated way of acting and thining, based on magnanimity, loyalty, fidelity, and discretion revealed in kindness, gentleless, and humility to ladies, but coupled with care for one’s reputation, open-handedness, and the rejection of lying, envy, and all forms of cowardice.” [Zumthor 1992 [1972]: 389]

The *trobar* movement

- Latin *tropare*: “compose a trope” (a new musical setting for an existing liturgical chant) →
- *Trobar* (*lingua oc*) begins in the early 1100s in Limousin and Gascony (the “first generation”), then spreads to Provence (“second generation”) and then to Catalonia and northern Italy (“third generation”) by the later 1100s.
- *Trouver* (*lingua oïl*) begins in northern France in the mid-1100s.
- *Trovare* (*lingua si*) begins at the court of Frederick II in Palermo in the early 1200s.

The *trobar* movement

- Poems by *trobadors* are collected in manuscripts called *chansonniers*
- Some poems are transmitted with musical notation
- The earliest extant *chansonniers* date from the mid-13th c.

Lyric

- **genre:** *canço* “song” (originally set to music and sung) *planh* “lament,” *tenso* “debate,” *sirventes* “invective”;
- **form:** rhymed stanzas (of variable length) of syllable-counting meters;
- **theme:** life and love at court, and especially *fin’amor* “perfect love,” by definition outside of traditional Christian marriage, between a noble woman and man of lesser status;
- **style:** traditionally *trobar leu* “light” (readily understandable) is distinguished from *trobar clus* “closed” (esoteric and difficult).

Vernacular

- in practice, a language that is not Sanskrit.
- functional differentiation (Pollock): a local or regional cultural formation that is delineated from a supraregional (“quasi-global”) cultural formation, i.e. Sanskrit, by the logic of either one.
- similar ambiguity as Dante: “vernacular” *connotes* language practices that require no teaching or cultivation (*verna*, the household slave), but we almost always use it *in reference to* literary languages that are indeed cultivated.

Vernacular

Around the 1st c.:

- **Sanskrit:** a language characterized exhaustively by grammatical texts, initially preserved among Brahmins who performed Vedic rituals, but already widely used for learned communication throughout India and certain forms of literature (viz. epic)
- **Prakrit:** a language *distinct from* Sanskrit, although closely related to it, used for certain *other* forms of literature (lyric, stories, etc.).

Unclear whether we should describe Prakrit as a “vernacular” at any point in its history.

Courtly

Commonly used in the sense of:

- A set of practices convergent on royal courts, but more specifically,
- practices of ethics and aesthetics, rather than those of rule and administration,
- and generally abstracted from religious concerns.

See especially Ali 2004.

The *prākṛta* movement

- Initially associated with courts in the Deccan (Sātavāhanas and Vākāṭakas), 1st–5th c.
- Central text: the *Saptaśatī*, an anthology of single-verse poems attributed to a Sātavāhana ruler named Hāla (1st or 2nd c.).
- Influential for the later *kāvya* tradition, but not much is known about it.

Lyric

Taking the *Saptaśatī* as an example:

- single-verse poems in a mora-counting meter (*gāthā*);
- abounds in evocative or symbolic references to the natural world;
- focus on the romantic lives of anonymous characters who mostly live in the village or countryside (hunters, farmers, ploughmen, robbers);
- many of the verses have to do with arranging illicit (extramarital) affairs.

Note that the first-person reference which (heuristically) characterizes lyric in other traditions is clearly *conventional* in much of the *Saptaśatī*.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

- Opening questions and definitions
- Courtly vernacular lyric in Europe
- Courtly vernacular lyric in India

2 Problems of historicization

- Formation and manifestation
- Manifestation is not an accident

3 Ethics is aesthetics

4 The language question

- What are the language questions, anyway?
- Regionality
- Grammaticality

Formation and manifestation

- **Manifestation:** “the appearance in our documents of texts reducible to a model not previously attested”
 - Zumthor’s example: the oldest *planh* is Marcabru’s in 1137.
 - The oldest *mahākāvya* is Aśvaghoṣa’s *Buddhacarita* (2nd c.).
- **Formation:** “Medievalists are constantly brought face-to-face with a long past lying hidden behind the surviving texts...[exploring such byways] can (alas!) only lead us astray from the proper object of our study — the texts themselves.”

[Zumthor 1992 [1972]: 35]

Manifestation around 1100

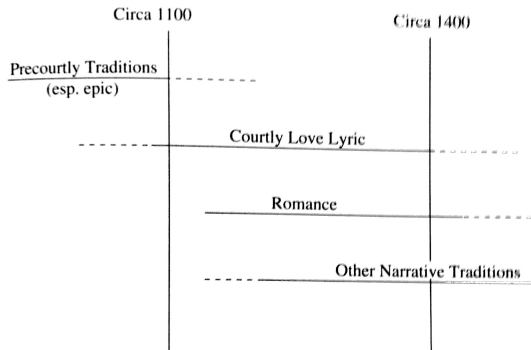


Figure: Zumthor 1992 [1972]: 37

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What is the significance of the gap in each case?

The work–manuscript gap

“But why was virtually no profane poetry in the vernacular committed to writing before 1100, very little before 1150, and not so very much even in the second half of the century—although we know how many significant works were created in that period?” [Auerbach 1993 [1958]: 287]

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Review

- The formation/manifestation distinction is intended to prevent us from assigning too much significance to the “first” representative of any genre, since the survival of medieval poetry owes a lot to chance.
- This leads to a “natural history” of cultural forms: they are continuously developing, and only a few happen to get stuck in the amber.
- What are the alternatives?

“Manifest” to who and how?

Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, in search of the *vulgare illustre*:

Per hoc quoque quod illustre dicimus, intelligimus
quid *illuminans et illuminatum* prefulgens.

The vernacular was the subject and object of a new kind of *publicity*: being directed to, manifest to, and intelligible to a new form of public.

→ the works are “manifest” to us because they were *made manifest* to this public.

What kind of public was it?

- notionally a small group of men, associated with a royal court, who recited and critiqued each other's poetry: *goṣṭhī*, *solatz*;
- by extension, a larger network of such gatherings of people with similar sensibilities who were connected by the circulation of poets and poetry;
- and beyond...

Universality

Raimon Vidal (*Razos de trobar*):

Tota gens Crestiana, Juzeus et Sarazis, emperador,
princeps, rei, duc, conte, vesconte, contor, valvasor,
et tuit autre, cavailler e clergues, borges e vilanz,
paucs et granz, meton tots jorns lor entendiment en
trobar et en chantar...

Universality

Haribhadra (*Daśavaikālikāṭīkā*):

*bāla-strī-mūḍha-mūrkhāṇām nṛṇām cāritrakāṅkṣiṇām
anugrahārthaṃ tattvajñaiḥ siddhāntaḥ prākṛtaḥ kṛtaḥ*

Programmatic beginnings

Participants in these literary cultures were self-conscious of its *newness* (cf. Geoffroy de Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* in 1210) and of its constitutive *publicity*.

The first poems often announce the “name of the game” and the key-words of the genre.

Programmatic beginnings

Saptaśatī 2, the “declaration of independence” of (Prakrit) *kāvya*:

amaaṃ pāuakavvaṃ paḍhīuṃ souṃ ca je ṇa āṇaṃti
kāmassa tattatattiṃ kuṇaṃti kaha te ṇa lajjaṃti

Programmatic beginnings

Guilhem de Peitieu, the “first troubadour” (one of several programmatic poems):

Companho, farai un vers qu'er covinen,
et aura.i mais de foudatz no.y a de sen,
et er totz mesclatz d'**amor** e de **joy** e de **joven**.

E tenguatx lo per vilan qui no.l enten,
o dins son cor voluntiers non l'apren:
greu partir si fai d'amor qui la troba a talen.

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

- Opening questions and definitions
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- Courtly vernacular lyric in India

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Another approach to courtliness

What would it mean for language practices themselves to be “courtly?”

- the ethics of courtly life are deeply imprinted on the aesthetics of this new poetry, and *vice versa*; *in particular*
 - literature defines and gives meaning to a code of sexual ethics; and
 - the courtly public and the literary public come to have a similar set of norms for language use.

A culture of *kāma*

- Prakrit lyric poetry develops at a time of unprecedented prosperity in the Deccan, and various forms of evidence (the Amarāvātī sculptures, the *Kāmasūtra*) points to the development of a “culture of *kāma*” among the elites.
- The *trobar* movement takes place at a time when the landowning classes were “free to develop an ideology of love, a code of secular ethics, a sinless joy of living” [Lazar 1995]

Interpreting the culture of *kāma*

- Poetry does not simply mirror contemporary sexual mores.
- Certain kinds of sexual relationships are constantly stereotyped, abstracted, inverted, and revalued.
- It is quite clear (in Prakrit poetry at least) that eroticism has metaliterary significance.

Two versions of the same conceit

Gāthāratnakośa 255/Vajjālagga 284/3:

*vaṃkabhaṇiyāiṃ katto katto addhacchipicchiyavvāiṃ
ūśasiyaṃ pi muṇijjaī chaīllajaṇasaṃkule gāme*

Gāthāratnakośa 28:

*addhakkharabhaṇiyāiṃ nūṇaṃ saviḷāsaaddhahasīyāiṃ
addhacchipecchiāiṃ vi gāhāhiṃ viṇā na najjaṃti*

Language values of the *trobar* movement

Cortezia, *eloquentia* and *politia*:

“The matter of good behaviour in the households of the nobility, cortesia, was becoming an art form. A man needed tact, charm and discretion; he had to be elegantly dressed, cheerful, urbane, and skilled in managing the sensibilities of other members of the household, including his superiors. Body-language and language itself became vitally important: the careful use of eloquence characterised the courtier, along with an agreeable public mask.” [Harvey 1999: 13]

Language values of the *prākṛta* movement

- Concealment and manipulation through the clever and indirect use of language (*chekokti*, *vakrokti*).
 - “Savoir dissimuler est le savoir des rois.” (Richelieu)
- The ability to read through these strategies (the clever person or *chaïlla*).
- Is *prākṛta* the language of the poets, or of the people the poets represent?
 - Or is it a way of going between the subject and the object?
- In any case, authenticity and composing in one’s “mother language” are emphatically *not* valued.

Oppositions

	social	ethical	aesthetic
<i>cortes</i>	seigneurial	self-restraint	polished and eloquent
<i>vilans</i>	peasant	the opposite	the opposite

Guilhem de Peitieu

Per soïn joi pot malaus sanar,
a per sa ira sas morir,
e savis hom enfolezir
e belhs hom sa beutat mudar
e-l plus cortes vilanejar,
e-l totz vilas encortezir.

Oppositions

	social	ethical	aesthetic
<i>agrāmya</i>	urbane	self-care	clever and oblique
<i>grāmya</i>	rustic	the opposite	direct and artless

Generative contradiction of the *prākṛta* movement

Bāṇa, *Harṣacarita* 14:

avināśīnam *agrāmyam* akarot sātavāhanaḥ
viśuddhajātibhiḥ kośaṃ ratnair iva subhāṣitaiḥ

Table of Contents

1 Introduction

- Opening questions and definitions
- Courtly vernacular lyric in Europe
- Courtly vernacular lyric in India

2 Problems of historicization

- Formation and manifestation
- Manifestation is not an accident

3 Ethics is aesthetics

4 The language question

- What are the language questions, anyway?
- Regionality
- Grammaticality

What are the language questions, anyway?

Traditionally *la questione della lingua* refers to the question of which language a certain practice (especially literature) should be conducted in. But there is a deeper question: how do we know what the options are? How are languages presented to us as possibilities?

More language questions

- If *lingua oc* and Prakrit are *literary languages* (*Kunstsprachen*), what is meant by this word?
- How were these languages defined and conceptualized by the people who actually used them? How were they related to “the general language of daily life” (*Umgangssprache*)?
 - Prakrit is always *prākṛta* as far as I know.
 - *lingua oc* is also *lingua romana*, *lati* (ironically?), *limousin*, *proensal*, etc.

What makes languages literary?

“A literary language is distinguished from the general language of daily life by its selectivity, homogeneity, and conservatism.” [Auerbach 1993 [1958]: 249]

The paradoxes of regionality

- These are stable literary languages that are cultivated across a wide area;
- nevertheless they are not “transregional” in the same sense as Sanskrit and Latin are,
- but rather “regional” in some vague sense.

The regionality of Prakrit

Daṇḍin, *Kāvyādarśa* 1.34:

mahārāṣṭrāśrayāṃ bhāṣāṃ prakṛṣṭaṃ prākṛtaṃ viduḥ
sāgaraḥ sūktaratnānāṃ setubandhādi yanmayam

N.B. that the classical texts do more work than the region in defining the language.

Supraregionalism

A characteristically Dantean concept: the vernacular that is truly suited for literary art (*vulgare illustre*) is an abstraction from local vernaculars (*patrium vulgare*).

He says of Sordello:

qui, tantus eloquentie vir existens, non solum in poetando sed quomodocunque loquendo *patrium vulgare* descriuit.

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- Prakrit and *lingua oc* both define themselves against a rigorously grammatical standard.
- Nevertheless they possess grammatical regularity of their own.
- As Abhinavagupta put it: *ko niyamo 'pabhrastānām?*

Alloglossy

Are grammars of the poetic language for non-native speakers?

- *Razos de trobar* of Raimon Vidal (the first grammar of a “Romance” language), ca. 1190–1213: rules of “Limousin” composed by a Catalanian troubadour.
- *Donatz proensal* of Uc Faidit, ca. 1240: composed at the court of Frederick II in Palermo, and immediately translated into Latin.
- *Prākṛtaprakāśa* of Vararuci: date and place unknown, but written in order to allow Sanskrit-educated poets to compose *gāthās* in the style of the *Saptaśatī* [Nitti-Dolci 1972 [1938]]

At the moment that these languages were “grammaticized,” they were already cultivated by people far outside their notional place of origin.

Alloglossy

What about *before* this moment?

- Option 1: People composed poetry in the regional languages that they spoke natively.
- Option 2: There was no “before”; the *Kunstsprachen* were necessarily and qualitatively different from the *Umgangssprachen*.
 - Guilhem de Peitieu, the “first troubadour,” composed in a language (*lingua oc*) that was distinct from the language of the region in which he lived (*lingua oil*) → displaced origins
 - Pādalīpta, one of the earliest Prakrit authors, is said to have come from Kauśambī but obtained his reputation at Pratiṣṭhāna in the Deccan.
 - “From the moment they started writing in Prakrit, the authors were prisoners of the literary and grammatical tradition.”
[Bloch (1970 [1914]: 15)]

Alloglossy

Option 2 demands an explanation of the differences between the *Kunstsprache* and the *Umgangssprachen* (is such an explanation possible?).

The sociocultural implications of Option 2 are important: **the poetic languages were nobody's "native language."** This means that the vernacular was originally conceived along very different lines than the primordialist–indigenist discourses of nationalism.

Is Dante right?

“The most recent work on the origin of the poetic languages of the Romance-speaking peoples has established...that the languages in question were anything but direct emanations of a given natural dialect; from the very first they bear the mark of at least a potential unity and of artificiality; moreover, in relation to their spoken substrates they show some degree of abstraction.”

[Zumthor 1992 [1972]: 50]

This seems exactly right for literary Prakrit.

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