Visualization and Memory: The Illustration of Troubadour Lyric in a Thirteenth-Century Manuscript

SYLVIA HUOT
Northern Illinois University

Abstract

Pierpont Morgan Library, ms M.819 was made in northern Italy, probably Padua, in the late thirteenth century. Among other things, it contains a sizeable collection of trouvère lyric. In addition to historiated initials at the beginning of each troubadour’s corpus providing conventional “portraits” of the poets, it contains a remarkable series of marginalia illustrating individual songs, executed at the time that the manuscript was copied or shortly thereafter. The marginalia give visual representation both to people and events alluded to within the songs, and to striking images and metaphors used to express such sentiments as love, fear, and grief. This article focuses primarily on the illustrations of the songs of the troubadour Folquet de Marseille. By representing the lyric persona, his lady, and his patrons in a variety of situations, the marginalia suggest a narrative context for the songs; at the same time, by giving visual form to poetic metaphors, they reflect an impulse toward an allegorical reading of the songs. The marginalia can be compared to contemporary literary forms, such as the novella and the erotic allegory, which similarly develop the narrative and allegorical potential of the love lyric; they indicate, further, the importance of the visual imagination for medieval readers.

The troubadour chansonnier N (Pierpont Morgan Library, M.819) was copied and illustrated in northern Italy, probably Padua, in the late thirteenth century. In many respects it is typical of Italian manuscripts of the troubadours. The songs are arranged in author corpora, with rubrics identifying the author at the end of each song; the beginning of each author corpus is marked with an historiated initial showing a standardized “portrait” of the troubadour in question (Fig. 1). There is no music. Unlike many chansonniers, this one does not contain vidas—prose biographies of the troubadours—or razos, prose narratives that purport to explain the circumstances lying behind the composition of a song. It does, however, have an unusual feature that supplies a different sort of commentary: a series of marginal drawings that illustrate the songs of seven of the poets included in the collection. The marginalia are not by the same hand as the initials, although if not executed at the time the manuscript was made, they could not have been completed much later. The choice of which poets, which songs, and which passages to illustrate may well be an entirely personal one, reflecting the tastes and preoccupations of either the artist or the manuscript owner. These illustrations allow for an interesting insight into the life of troubadour lyric in northern Italy; they demonstrate, further, the importance of the visual imagination in the medieval appreciation of literature.

The artist—or the iconographer who conceived of the marginalia—clearly took inspiration directly from the songs themselves. Indeed, the close relationship between text and image is reflected in the frequent use of geometric signs—various combinations of dots, crosses, and lines—to link the drawings to the words they illustrate, making them truly a visualization of poetic language. As Maria Luisa Meneghetti has stated, these marginal images give visual form to the rhetorical topoi of troubadour lyric, presenting a pictorial “vocabulary of fin’amors.” The artist may, of course, have been familiar with the tradition of vidas and razos, but the illustrations are by no means limited to songs for which razos exist. In many cases, however, the marginal scenes suggest a method of reading that is analogous to that implied by the

FIGURE 1. Folquet de Marseille, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M.819, fol. 55, detail (photo: Pierpont Morgan Library).
prose narratives found in so many manuscripts. The razo picks up suggestive imagery in the song and develops it into a narrative, translating the metaphorical or allusive language of lyric into a concrete set of events. A visual counterpart to this literary process appears in a drawing for Ponz de Capdouill’s song “Humils e francs e fis soplei vas vos” (Humble and frank and loyal, I beseech you [PC 375.20]). In this song, the poet declares, “Nuill’aut’amors nom pot faire jojos, / si.m pregavon d’autras domnas cinc cens” (no other love can make me happy, even if five hundred other ladies begged me [vv. 17–18]); a few lines later, he asserts that “the sun shines on no nobler lady” than the one he loves (vv. 21–22). The artist accordingly represented a narrative scenario in which five ladies—standing in for the five hundred—gesture invitingly towards the man, who nonetheless turns away from them and towards the one lady that he loves (Fig. 2). Lest there be any doubt as to her identity, we see further that although the sun sheds its rays on all concerned, it directs its gaze at her alone. The hyperbolic claim that even a whole host of amorous ladies could not tempt the protagonist from his chosen love is translated into an implied narrative, a scene of judgment in which the choice is offered him and he makes his decision. She is, quite literally, the noblest lady on whom the sun is shining, and the sun itself even concurs in the judgment by imitating the admiring gaze of the lover. While no such razo is known to have existed, one could quite easily imagine one for this song that would recount precisely that story; the adjacent illustration depicting the lover addressing the lady could even be seen as the visual counterpart to the standard razo conclusion, “and so he made this song.” A similar impulse to visualize a narrative setting for the song, to ground its language in a concrete if fanciful “reality,” governs the production of both the narrative prose commentaries and the visual gloss.

Not all of the drawings lend themselves so readily to a narrative reading of the songs. For example, Giraut de Bornelh’s song “Be conve, pos ja baissal ram” (it is right, since already the bough bends down [PC 242. 25]) is illustrated with a series of drawings that correspond closely to images found in the song (Fig. 3). The poet’s protestations of powerlessness with regard to his lady—who, he says, holds him “pres el liam” (captured and bound [v. 49])—are represented by a scene in which he sits at her feet, bound hand and foot: one might say, the myth of courtly love


summed up in one vivid image. Here one could imagine a narrative reading, explaining some set of circumstances that led to the contrite poet being tied up and delivered to his lady for her judgment. Two images in the lower margin, however—a boat and a pair of deer—do not in any clear way contribute to a narrative setting for the poem. The boat is a direct visualization of a metaphor for the lady, of whom the poet states, “ela.m fo vel’ e rem/ de mans encombrers c’ai passatz” (she was sail and oars to me in the many obstacles that I have passed through [vv. 30–31]). Similarly, the deer illustrate the poet’s assertion that his pleadings with the lady are so forceful that the buck and the doe would be tamed if they heard it; but the illustration does not in any way explain the image or suggest, for example, that wild animals might actually have been affected by the lover’s song.

Similar examples of the literal visualization of words or images appear throughout the manuscript. Such illustrations do not have a narrative function. But they do vividly bring the poetic language to life, and could stimulate the reader to imagine narrative scenarios. Illustrations such as these also serve to identify the songs at a glance by highlighting important images; and they could help to fix the song in the mind of the reader by providing visual cues for key words and phrases. I will return below to the possible relationship between the marginalia and medieval mnemonic techniques. But first, I wish to examine the role of the images as a visual gloss—even a visual translation—of the poems, one that focuses the reader’s attention both on allusions to an implied narrative context and on striking images that express the qualities of the love experience.

In order to examine more closely the nature of the marginalia of M.819, I will focus on one set of images, those illustrating the songs of Folquet de Marseille. Folquet’s poetic activity ended around 1195; he entered the abbey of Le Thoronet around 1200, became bishop of Toulouse in 1205 and died in 1231. His eminent political status and active role in the Albigensian Crusade, still relatively recent at the time that M.819 was made and illustrated, strengthened his reputation among readers of troubadour lyric. Dante placed him in Heaven (Paradiso 9), making him the only vernacular poet so honored. Folquet’s songs were given pride of place in M.819, opening the lyric section of the manuscript; and they are the most heavily illustrated, having received thirty-seven of the manuscript’s seventy-seven marginal images.

We can form an idea of Folquet’s reputation from the material transmitted in the vida and razos accompanying his songs in other chansonniers. The vida was particularly widespread, appearing in ten manuscripts. It tells us that Folquet was a wealthy bourgeois who, as troubadour, enjoyed the patronage of Richard I of England, Count Raymond of Toulouse, and Lord Barral of Marseille. He was in love with Barral’s wife, the lady Azalaïs, but never received her love in return. At her death and the death of Barral, as well as that of King Richard, Count Raymond, and King Alfonso of Aragon, Folquet was overcome with sorrow and entered a Cistercian monastery; he subsequently became bishop of Toulouse. The four razos that have survived contribute an episode in which Folquet suffered a misunderstanding with Azalaïs; assert that he additionally fell in love with Eudoxia of Montpellier, daughter of the Byzantine emperor; elaborate on his relations with various aristocratic patrons; credit him with having promoted a crusade against the Moors; and reiterate his grief at the death of Barral, commemorated in the lament, or planh, “Si cum cel q’es tan greujatz” (Like the one who is so overwhelmed [PC 155.20]).

Some of the illustrations in M.819 do supply details that correspond to those recorded in the vida and razos. The historiated initial with which his songs open (Fig. 1) portrays Folquet as a bishop, in accordance with the standard “portrait” generally found for this poet in chansonniers. Numerous marginal drawings depict his sufferings in love as well as his activities as poet: he sits at his writing desk, striking an inspired pose (fol. 63), and holds a fiddle as he considers adopting the profession of jotglar (fol. 57v); he offers his lady a gift (fol. 61), kneels at her feet (fol. 63v), hangs his head (Fig. 6) or weeps in discouragement (fols. 56, 57, 63v). He is shown singing before the crowned figure of Eudoxia of Montpellier (fol. 58); another royal patron, Richard I, is also depicted on folio 60 (Fig. 5). The last illustrated song in Folquet’s corpus is his planh for the death of Barral de Marseille (fol. 64v–65), decorated with images of Folquet overcome by grief and praying to the Virgin and Christ (Fig. 4). These images, of course, correspond both to the razos that survive for this piece and to the events described at the end of the vida. To this extent, the arrangement of songs and illustrations does point to a biographical reading of the corpus as reflecting the experiences of an amorous troubadour turned bishop, who enjoyed relations with high-placed patrons but who was never successful in love, and whose decision to leave off making songs and embrace the religious life was occasioned by the death of his lord. Although the choice of details represented in the marginalia often differs from those selected by the author(s) of the razos, the overall effect is somewhat similar to that of a manuscript with vida and razos, in which the songs are accompanied by an ongoing commentary that grounds the lyric text in concrete events.

Nonetheless, the marginalia cannot be seen as deriving from the razos tradition. The illustrations are not an attempt to reconstruct those absent prose narratives, but rather result directly from a reading of the poems. Studied on their own merits, and viewed as independent of but comparable to the razos and other literary forms, the marginalia constitute important evidence for late thirteenth-century reception of troubadour lyric. Two fundamental impulses are
apparent in the marginalia of M.819, which one could broadly describe as allegorical on the one hand, and historical or biographical (if fictional) on the other. While these categories are not mutually exclusive, they are useful in sorting through the varied images of the marginalia and in interpreting their function as a visual gloss on the poems. Moreover, fictionalized biography and allegory respectively correspond to two literary forms—again, not always mutually exclusive—that have roots in the lyric tradition: the sentimental novella and what is sometimes referred to as the “erotic pseudo-autobiography” on the one hand, and erotic allegory on the other. Both forms are represented in late thirteenth-century Italy. An example of the former is Dante’s Vita nuova, which outlines its author’s youthful evolution as a lyric poet, providing narrative explanations for the genesis of individual poems along with stylistic commentary. An example of the latter is Il fiore, an adaptation of the celebrated French masterpiece of erotic allegory, the Roman de la rose. And both forms continued to be of great importance in the fourteenth century, exemplified by such well known works as Petrarch’s Trionfi and Boccaccio’s Amorosa visione and Fiammetta. In positing an analogy between such lyric-based literary forms and the marginal illustrations of M.819, I am not suggesting that the artist was necessarily influenced by specific literary texts other than the poems themselves. But the illustrations, by affording insights into the reading and appreciation of troubadour lyric, contribute, along with literary developments, to the overall picture of late medieval reception of this important body of literature.

I have already identified several images among the marginalia that correlate with details found in the vida or razos; these can be categorized as contributing to a biographical reading of the poems. Other illustrations as well suggest a possible narrative expansion of a poetic image. In “S’al cor plagues, ben for’ oimais razos” (If it pleased the heart, it would be time [PC 155.18]), for example, the poet compares his amorous plight to that of a man stuck in a tree:

enan no vau ni no puec remeran,
aisi quom sel qu’e mieg de l’albr’ estai,
qu’es tan piaitz que no sap tornar jos,
ni sus no vai, tan li par temeros.

(vv. 17–20)

I do not go forward nor can I stay where I am, like the one who is in the middle of a tree: he is so high that he cannot climb down, nor does he go higher, so much does it frighten him.

In response to this passage—and specifically cued to the word albr’ (tree)—the artist filled the entire side margin of the page with a splendid drawing of a man who has climbed halfway up a tree (fol. 57v). Such an image certainly invites the reader to imagine the remaining details of a narrative scenario. Perhaps, for example, the poet beheld his lady from a tree, and was afraid to climb down and confront her face to face; perhaps, fearing an encounter, he took refuge in the tree when he saw her coming.

Similarly, Folquet’s economic metaphors for love as analogous to the experiences of gamblers, those whose debts mount up, or those who are never paid back by their debtors, are illustrated quite literally, with scenes of gambling and of men confronted by their creditors. Again, such images could serve to inspire creative speculation on the part of the reader: did the unhappy lover prove unfortunate in his financial affairs as well? In particular, a cluster of three such images hints at the possibility of constructing a larger, composite picture out of the dispersed allusions in two different poems. First the persona is shown computing his debts with the aid of a checkerboard of the sort sometimes used for accounting (fol. 59v): this illustrates the poet’s claim that he will not regret his love even if his sorrows mount up in the same fashion as the multiplication of points on the checkerboard (PC 155.8, vv. 51–54). On the facing page...
page he loses all of his money in a dice game, while below a man is shown refusing to pay back his debts (Fig. 5). Both images illustrate the opening stanza of the poem “Sitot me soi a tart aperceubutz” (Though I have realized it belatedly [PC 155.21]), in which the poet adopts a different stance, declaring that he has finally—alas, too late!—realized the folly of love. The images are cued to the words here italicized:

Sitot me soi a tart aperceubutz,
aisi cum cel qu'a tot perdut e jura
que mais non joc, a gran bonaventura
m'o dei tener car me sui conogutz
del gran engan qu'Amors vas mi fazia,
c'ab bel semblan m'a tengut en fadia
mais de detz ans, a lei de mal deutor
c'ades promet mas re no pagaria.

(vv. 1–8)

Though I have realized it belatedly, like one who loses everything and then swears to gamble no more, still I must consider it a great fortune finally to have realized the great deception Love has perpetrated against me; for with a fair semblance, he has kept me waiting for over ten years, like a bad deutor who keeps promising but will never pay anything back.

Taken together, the three images of economic misfortune do suggest a narrative progression of sorts, in which the lyric persona first vows not to be dissuaded by mounting losses; then discovers what it means to lose everything; and finally, sobered, realizes the hopelessness of ever recovering his losses.

Nonetheless, such illustrations cannot be interpreted in a strictly biographical sense, for it is clear within the poems that tree climbing, gambling, and accounting are all metaphors for the love experience. Indeed, other illustrations for “Sitot me soi a tart aperceubutz” contribute not to the narrative of financial loss, but to the exposition, through a series of metaphors, of the lover’s folly. Three images of this kind occur on folio 60v. The poet admits that he was attracted by love’s fair appearance, “co.l parpailllos qu'a tant folla natura / que.is fer e.l foc per la clardat qe lutz” (like the moth, which has such foolish nature that it throws itself into the fire because of its shining brightness [vv. 11–12]); the artist depicts a candle with three moths fluttering around it. The poet’s claim that he has been mistreated by love like a horse too harshly managed (vv. 23–24) is illustrated with a drawing of a knight on horseback; and his comparison of his foolish hopes to those of one who hopes to turn whatever he touches to gold (vv. 39–40) is illustrated with a drawing of a man reaching out to touch three stones. Such illustrations focus attention on poetic imagery and encourage the reader to consider its significance; and what holds them together is an underlying theme of folly, which must be deciphered before we can construct the ultimate narrative of deception, loss, and regret. By expanding on the metaphorical language of the texts, the visual images suggest the possibility of a narrative reading of a different kind, one exploiting the allegorical potential of Folquet’s imagery. The dice game with its attendant scenes of indebtedness, for example, might lead us to imagine that the lyric persona has entered into an allegorical game, like the amorous chess game in which a young man loses his heart to a beautiful maiden in the fourteenth-century French poem Les échecs amoureux. Certainly the illustrations, by highlighting the economic and gaming imagery, draw the reader’s attention to this ongoing motif; the surrounding images guide us to the interpretation of the motif as an expression of self deception. Contemplating these pages, reading the poems and examining the illustrations, the medieval reader might recall that diceing, according to Isidore of Seville, is itself an allegorical activity that exemplifies the temporality of human existence. The lover as gambler, throwing his dice and benefit of his wealth, becomes an image of human frailty in a
world fraught with moral risk, where the pursuit of pleasure and excitement can lead so easily to loss and misfortune.

The visualization of metaphor is fundamental to allegory, which relies heavily on technique of description; much allegorical literature is presented as the record of a vision or the description of a work of visual art. Allegorical personifications—the embodiment of key words or concepts—are often described in striking visual detail. In this way the allegorical text transposes philosophical precepts, psychological states, or spiritual truths into an image, or series of images, that can be visualized and retained by the reader. In M.819, the visual mapping of poetic language likewise results in the creation of a unified sequence of images that presents an allegorical representation of the love experience. A striking example of this effect occurs with the illustrations of the song that opens Folquet’s corpus, “Ben an mort mi e lor” (They have killed me and themselves [PC 155.5]). In this song the amorous persona complains of the suffering caused by his eyes, noting that it is appropriate that they, in turn, be forced to weep; he identifies Love as the source of his woes, for it is Love that causes him to struggle for that which he cannot have; he bemoans his fate of having to flee that which pursues him, namely Love, and of having to pursue that which flees him, namely the lady. He compares this situation to that of a knight who faces along a battle with five hundred others.

This song is illustrated with a series of images across the lower margin and a final image in the upper right margin (Fig. 6). The latter, a single knight charging five other knights, stands apart from the rest and does not participate in the sequence that they form; it is a separate image for the lover’s predicament, one grounded in the language of military combat rather than that of psychology. The images across the bottom of the page, in turn, function together to create a visual mapping of the dynamics of the poem, transforming it into a sort of allegorical narrative. Again, geometric signs link each visual element to its corresponding word; the sequence of images is, quite literally, a visual translation of the text. At the far left is the lyric persona, weeping; this figure is cued to the word “eyes.” To the immediate right of the deserted lover is Love, personified as a crowned seraph, with six wings and three faces. Continuing from left to right, we again encounter the lover, who attempts to embrace his lady; she turns away. Love reappears and flaps his wings, creating psychic disturbance; the persona flees from Love in pursuit of the lady, who in turn flees him. These latter images perfectly capture the lyric persona’s dilemma of being caught between irresistible forces of attraction and repulsion: “so que m’encausa vau fugen / e so que.m fugh ieu vau seguen” (I flee that which pursues me and pursue that which flees me [vv. 17–18]).

We are provided here with a vivid recreation of the psychological construct presented in the poem: grief, desire, fear, frustration. We are also shown the paradoxical role played by Love, which both brings the couple together and drives them apart, and is the source of the lover’s conflicting emotions. Meneghetti has further suggested that the use of dark blue to color both the wings of Love and the dress of the fleeing lady indicates that the latter is less a real person than an emanation of the power that holds the lover in thrall: in attempting to flee the mysterious seraphic figure, the protagonist only succeeds in pursuing it in altered form.12

The personification of Love in the form of a seraph—an unusual iconographic motif—appears repeatedly throughout M.819.13 The God of Love commonly appears in medieval art and literature as a crowned and winged figure, but he ordinarily has only one pair of wings. The portrayal of Love as an angelic figure, seraphic or otherwise, is undoubtedly a means of representing its power as an abstract entity, an overwhelming spiritual force that can work for either good or evil. Just as the seraph can recall either the angelic transmission of Divine Intelligence or the fallen Lucifer, so human love may be either our closest approach to divinity or a stepping stone to eternal damnation. Such a striking image is well designed to encourage meditation on the part of the
reader, who must interrogate the text carefully in order to determine exactly what sort of love is at issue and how it is to be interpreted.

Certain of the marginalia in M.819, then, do contribute to an ongoing biographical reading of Folquet’s poems; others, to an ongoing allegorical representation of the psychological turmoil of love. The lover’s difficulties are expressed through his interactions not only with the lady, but also with the allegorical seraph, who at one point attacks him with a lance (fol. 64). His submission to love is reflected elsewhere in a drawing in which he is actually seated on the shoulders of the seraph, his head peering out from behind its wings (fol. 58v); this unforgettable image strongly suggests that the unhappy lover cuts a rather ridiculous figure. At the beginning of the song “Ja no és cug hom qu’ieu camje mas chansos” (Let no one think that I am changing my songs [PC 155.11]) is a balance tipped to one side, under which the seraphic Love, here endowed with hands, is holding a cord connected to the shoulder of the hapless lover, who crouches submissively and gazes up at his lord and tormentor (fol. 61v). This drawing illustrates the poet’s reflections on his situation of hope and despair: “qu’atressi m te quom se sol en balansa: / dezesperat ab alques d’esperansa” (thus he [Love] holds me as in a balance, despairing with a modicum of hope [vv. 5–6]). Again the drawing portrays the paradoxical quality of Love. And the attentive reader, upon meditation, might associate this balance with that appearing in so many medieval representations of the Last Judgment: another meeting of angelic forces, the archangel Michael and the fallen seraph Lucifer, who vie for possession of the human soul. The uncertain balance of hope and despair, the powerful but ambiguous angelic figure, again encourage a careful consideration of the moral and spiritual dimensions of human love.

Both the biographical narrative and the moral allegory reach their culmination in the poem in which Folquet’s corpus closes, the lament for the death of Barral (PC 155.20). First, we encounter the persona in bed (fol. 64v):

Si cum cel q’es tan greuatz
del mal que non sen dolor,
non sen ira ni tristor
de guisa.m sui oblidiatz.

(vv. 1–4)

Like one who is so overwhelmed by grief that he feels neither pain, anger, nor sorrow, thus have I lost consciousness.

Accompanying this image is a second scene illustrating the reason for this grief: the persona mourns at Barral’s deathbed. The illustration clarifies the historical context for the poem; at the same time, the representation of the lyric persona in bed suggests a parallel between him and his lord. We recall that the vida attributed Folquet’s cessation of poetic activity and entrance into religious life to the deaths of his various patrons, including Barral. The placement of the planh at the end of his corpus in M.819 suggests a similar reading of the significance of this poetic lament; the image of the poet in bed, like his dying lord, further hints that this event occasioned a parallel death of the amorous poetic subject, a dying to the world in preparation for a spiritual rebirth. As the poem continues on the facing leaf (fol. 65), we find a painting of a silvery magnet attracting metal bits, representing Barral’s magnetic effects on his friends (vv. 16–17); a flower-ering bush wilting in the rays of the sun, illustrating Folquet’s comparison of Barral’s demise to that of a flower that dies in full bloom (vv. 45–48); and finally the lyric persona on his knees before the Virgin and Christ, illustrating the poet’s prayers for Barral’s soul (vv. 62–64) (Fig. 4).

While each of these images is specific to the poem in question, each also contributes a sense of closure to the corpus as a whole, both literally and allegorically. The magnet, here revealed as a metaphor for Barral, reminds us that Folquet frequently addresses his songs to “N’Azimen” (Lord Magnet). We may now conclude, within the context of M.819, that this senthal referred to Barral, Folquet’s beloved patron; it is thus logical that his death might signal the end of Folquet’s poetic activity.14 The dying flowers, in turn, are a simple metaphor for the death of Barral; but in the context of Folquet’s corpus as a whole they may also be read as a representation of the death of the hope that had sustained the poet and inspired his songs. In an earlier poem, “Mout i fetz gran pechat Amors” (Greatly does Love sin [PC 155.14]), the poet expressed his hopes that his lady would reward his love with mercy, using a botanical metaphor:

Pero Esperars faï las flors
tornar frug, e de midons pes
qu’esperan la vensa Mercese.

(vv. 28–30)

But Hope causes flowers to become fruit, and as for my lady, I think that through Hope she will be conquered by Mercy.

This image is highlighted in a marginal depiction of a fruit-bearing tree, visual representation of the lover’s hopes (Fig. 7). At the end of the corpus, however, the wilted flowers suggest a different outcome: amorous hope is defeated by death, at least within the confines of this world. The poet’s new hope and the new sort of love to which he now devotes himself are depicted, finally, in the closing image of his prayer to the Virgin and Christ. As in the vida, the amorous troubadour realizes the futility of earthly existence and embraces the religious life. And the ongoing meditation on love—divine or satanic, salvational or destructive—culminates in the unveiling of an unambiguous love for the Heavenly Lady that the lyric persona now serves.
Was the designer of the marginalia consciously aiming to devise a visual gloss that would operate on two levels of signification, literal and allegorical, allowing us to read a lyric corpus simultaneously as the biography of a troubadour and as a series of teachings about love? In my mind, the marginalia are not systematic enough to suggest a fully developed plan. It is clear that the marginalia are far from random images, and that they do provide a thought-provoking series of glosses on the poetic texts. Latent in the images are two modes of reading, often related but ultimately divergent. One grounds the poems in concrete, narrative events, and can be compared to such literary forms as the razos, the novella, or the narrative with lyric insertions, such as the Vita nuova or the many Old French romances and dits built around songs and refrains. The other aims at the expansion of simple similes and metaphors into more extended allegory; gives visual shape to abstractions; and invites a more profound meditation on the possible moral or spiritual significance of the texts. However, the artist did not attempt to distinguish these two modes of reading and representing, nor was either one worked out to the fullest possible extent. What we can conclude is that both modes of reading entered into the reception of troubadour lyric in the later Middle Ages; and that the appreciation of poetry, whether on the literal or the allegorical plane, was in part a visual experience.

The visual imagination, in fact, is central to medieval literary and intellectual culture. Visualization was an important part of reading, reflected in illustrations of all kinds—everything from elaborate full-page miniatures to marginal doodles—that appear even in texts that the modern reader would not expect to find illustrated, such as law books or philosophical treatises. In one thirteenth-century manuscript of the works of Augustine, for example (Dijon, Bibl. Mun. 139), the scribe liberally ornamented the work with sketches that respond directly to the content of the texts he was copying: a crowned figure for a reference to kingship; a couple kissing for an allusion to concupiscence; an infant wearing a bonnet for an allusion to babyhood as the first stage of life; rabbits and various other animals as metaphoric representations of sin. Reading an abstruse treatise on original sin might not strike the modern reader as an engaging and intensely visual experience, but the medieval reader clearly encountered no such difficulty. Visualizing what one read not only made the experience more enjoyable, but also aided the reader in meditating on the important points of the text and in fixing these in his or her memory; as such it was an integral part of the reading process. As Gregory the Great stated in his famous letter to Bishop Serenus, “pro lectione pictura est” (picturing is the equivalent of reading).13

The importance of the visual imagination, indeed, is stressed in the marginal illustrations of two of Folquet's songs. In the first, “Mout i fetz gran pechat Amors” (Greatly does Love sin [PC 155.14]), the text has been mapped less as an allegorical narrative than as an allegorical landscape whose function, ultimately, is to be presented as an image by the poet to his lady (Fig. 7). Again we find the signs linking words and their visual representation. The poet expresses the wish that his hopes will bear fruit, like a flowering tree; he states that snow and heat respectively are present in the lady’s face, a blend of white and color; he explains that he can contain the powerful force of love in his heart just as a small mirror can contain the image of a large tower. These statements are visually expressed across the lower margin of the page, where we find a fruit tree; the hot sun beating down on a snow-covered mountain that is banded in silvery-grey, pink, and black; a tower; and the protagonist showing his lady that the tower is reflected in a mirror, while she indicates her acceptance of his arguments by placing her hand on her heart (fol. 59).16 In and of themselves, these would seem to present a disparate series of entirely unrelated images. Yet in the visual mapping that we find here, the images cohere into a single integrated land-

scape, infused with the color of passion: the red fruits that represent the lover’s hope of erotic success, the red sun that promises to melt the snowy resistance of the lady, the red tower that signifies love, and the red dress clothing the lady, object of desire. Although the poet is most immediately to be understood as showing his lady the reflection of the tower in the mirror, he can by extension be seen as showing her the entire scene—or, in other words, his song, translated into a visual environment that allegorically represents his passion, his hopes for her acquiescence, and his ability to capture the mysterious force of love in a single, focused image.

A drawing in the upper left-hand margin of the same page illustrates a line in the following song, “En chantant m’vean a membrat” (Singing causes me to remember [PC 155.8]), in which the importance of visualization is again stressed. Noting that singing causes him to remember the pains of love, the poet states, “ins e.l cor port, dona, vostra faisso / que.m chastia qu’ieu no vir ma razo” (in my heart, lady, I carry your image, which disciplines me so that I don’t change my intentions [vv. 9–10]); the drawing shows a man with the lady’s image on his chest (Fig. 7). We see here that, quite literally, the amorous persona carries a visual image of the lady’s face within his breast. The experience both of love and of song is identified with the faculties of memory and visual imagination. The lover beholds his lady in his mind’s (or heart’s) eye; he imagines other visual images to express the nature of his experience; through the power of poetry, he enables her—and us—to see these images as well. By meditating upon the resulting scene, we can be led to a greater understanding of his experience and of love in general; by committing the scene to memory, we too can carry this visual figuration of love in our hearts; and with the help of the striking marginal images, we can more easily commit to memory the songs themselves—particularly in a case like “Mout i fetz gran pechut Amors,” where one can recall each stanza in turn by progressing from left to right through the allegorical landscape of the poem.

The link between vision and memory is stressed in medieval treatises on memory, which emphasize the importance of visual images for the retention of text or information. These images might be realized through manuscript illumination, or they might be present only in the mind. Either way, memory was conceived in visual terms. Such an approach to the process of memory did not originate in the Middle Ages; it is already present in Cicero’s *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, where it is advised that one must select a “location” or “ground”—an architectural framework, for example—and then arrange within this space the individual images that will provide cues for the material that one needs to remember. Cicero’s text in turn influenced medieval treatments of the topic. Thus Thomas Bradwardine, in his treatise on the art of memory (ca. 1335), could state quite forthrightly: “For trained memory, two things are necessary, that is, firm locations and also images for the material.” These images, in turn, need to be “wondrous and intense . . . not average but extremes” since this will increase the ease of retention. There follows an elaborate exposition of the means by which one can create visual images to recall objects, sensory impressions, abstract entities, sounds, syllables, and numbers. Similar advice is given by other authors as well. And that it was put into practice is amply demonstrated by the existence of medieval texts in which abstract concepts or doctrines are indeed explained through recourse to elaborate visual images and diagrams, which may or may not have been intended for actual execution by artists.

Even if mnemonic images frequently remained in the mind, however, it is clear that such practices are related to textual illustration. The connection is such a natural one that it can be made in passing by Bradwardine, who more than once recommends the use of mnemonic images borrowed from contemporary iconography: “the sort that are depicted by manuscript decorators,” or “an image as the painters make of it.” It is well known that manuscript illumination can serve a variety of purposes beyond the purely ornamental, and that text and illustrations form an integrated whole. It has been shown, for example, that illustrations of Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Nichomachean Ethics* portray allegorical personifications of key concepts, whose various traits represent the important aspects of these concepts and thereby aid the reader in understanding and remembering the teachings of the text. Psalms are sometimes identified by historiated initials that provide a visual rendition of the opening lines; the illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter, though dating from an earlier period, are a stunning example of the visual mapping of key images into a unified scene. Bestiaries are typically illustrated with miniatures that may depict the animal in question, such as the pelican feeding her babies with her own blood; its allegorical significance—in the latter case, the crucified Christ; or both, presented in a two-part miniature that encapsulates the movement from text to gloss. In either case the reader is presented with a stimulating series of visual images for meditation and retention in the memory; these images are cues for moral and religious doctrine or, in the case of Richard de Fournival’s *Bestiaire d’amours*, love psychology. Indeed, the importance of the illustrations as memory devices is stressed in the Prologue to the latter text, where Richard explains that vision and hearing (veir et oir) are the two gates to memory, and that for this reason his treatise is constructed of both words and images (parole et painture). And even the seemingly gratuitous marginalia in Psalters and Books of Hours may turn out, on close study, to act as a visual gloss on the sacred text. Thus although the marginalia of M.819 are unique in the corpus of troubadour and trouvère chansonniers, they find many parallels in the larger context of medieval manuscript illumination.
Finally, the practice of remembering texts or information through the construction of a visual scheme can be related to the phenomenon of allegory.27 By presenting vivid visual imagery and narrative—replete with lavishly described buildings, strikingly beautiful or hideously ugly characters, violent combat, exotic gardens—the allegorical text provides the reader with a ready-made, easily remembered vehicle for the retention of moral or religious doctrine, love psychology, rules of social comportment, and so on. The medieval audience, for whom ethics and aesthetics went hand in hand in the appreciation of literature that aimed both to instruct and to delight, experienced no conflict between the artistic value of allegorical art or literature and its didactic and mnemonic function.28

The marginalia of M.819 make sense if we imagine them as the result of a reading by someone versed in the medieval allegorical tradition and trained in memory techniques, for whom reading included a visual component. Even though these vernacular poems would not be placed in the same intellectual category with the Psalms or an Augustinian treatise, they could still be read in the same way. We do not know who the original owner of M.819 was, but we do know that troubadour lyric was read by Italian poets and intellectuals, including no less than Petrarch and Dante, and that it was an important influence on Italian lyric poetry. There is ample evidence that troubadour poetry was studied—if informally—in late medieval Italy. The *vidas*, locating poets historically and geographically, are constructed on a model similar to that of the Latin *accessus* and contribute to the sense of the chansonnier as a sort of vernacular textbook.29 This impression is strengthened by the Provençal grammars and glossaries that sometimes appear in chansonniers. And of course Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* bespeaks a careful and serious study of lyric poetry in the various Romance vernaculars.

It is therefore entirely possible to imagine that M.819 could have belonged to an educated reader of vernacular poetry, someone experienced in reading and meditating upon texts with the aid of visual images. The pattern of illustration that we observe in M.819 would be the natural result of such training, even if the reader was not consciously attempting to devise a systematic visual scheme for rote memorization of the songs or for the exhaustive study of their didactic content. Moreover, the widespread interest in reconstructing a historical and biographical context for lyric poetry is reflected in numerous sources, both Latin and vernacular: the *accessus* tradition; *vidas* and *razos*; the proliferation of verse and prose texts with lyric insertions, whose composition or performance was described by the frame narrative; commentaries on the Psalter that sought to identify the sacred poet responsible for each Psalm and to relate the text to events in the life of its author.30 A reader with some degree of literary background would be quite likely to bring to a study of the troubadours the same sorts of concerns, and the same reading techniques, that he or she had learned in the study of other authors. Such a reader would note details that point to a narrative context for the poems; focus on striking images that provide a vehicle for moral and spiritual meditation; and devise visual images to support the complex process of reading and interpretation.

The Italian-made chansonniers suggest a social context in which troubadour songs were read and studied at least as often as they were heard; but the experience was clearly no less vivid for having moved from the stage into the book. In the absence of a performer supplying gestures, dramatic intonations, and narrative commentary, we find indications of a close reading that studies the songs as texts, dwells on the choice of imagery, imagines now a fanciful narrative setting, like the judgment between five hundred prospective ladies and the one lady who alone is worthy of love; now an allegorical drama, in which the lover is caught between the powerful force of Love and the ever-fleeing lady; now a historical event, like the death of Barral de Marseille. The marginalia are a powerful sign of the importance of the visual imagination for the medieval reader. Moreover, they reflect reading patterns that can be linked to the larger context of late medieval vernacular literature. One could remain on the surface of the poetic image, literalize and visualize metaphorical language, in a move that leads ultimately to the construction of allegory; or one could translate the poetic image into an underlying historical or biographical event, a move that leads ultimately to such forms as the sentimental novella. In their very diversity, the marginalia of M.819 bear witness to different and by no means mutually exclusive approaches to the reading of troubadour lyric in the later Middle Ages.

NOTES

1. The dating and provenance of M.819 (classified as ms N) is discussed by D’Arco Silvio Avalle, La letteratura medievale in lingua d’oc nella sua tradizione manoscritta, Studi e Ricerche, 16 (Turin, 1961). Avalle’s study provides an excellent survey of the troubadour manuscript tradition. For additional material on the reception of troubadour lyric and its manuscript tradition, see Maria Luisa Meneghetti, *Il pubblico dei trovatori: Ricezione e riuso dei testi lirici cortesi fino al XIV secolo* (Modena, 1984). The standard sigla for troubadour chansonniers are those established by Alfred Jeannot, *Bibliographie sommaire des chansonniers provençaux*, Classiques Français du Moyen Age (Paris, 1916; rpt. 1966).

2. On the illustration of troubadour lyric, see, in addition to the sources cited in note 1, Joseph Anglade, “Les miniatures des chansonniers provençaux,” *Romantica*, 1 (1924), 593–604; Angelica Rieger, “‘Ins e.i. cor port, dona, vostra faissi’: Image et imaginaire de la femme à travers l’énluminure dans les chansonniers de troubadours,” *CCM*
XXVIII (1985), 385–415. Anglade, while providing a useful survey of the standard troubadour "portraits," does not mention marginalia. Rieger, however, not only discusses M.819 but even provides a detailed table of all the marginal images, indicating the textual passage that each illustrates (406–15).


4. Marginalia appear on folios 56–61v; 63–69; 72v–73; 187–190; 211–212v; 214–218v. While many of the marginalia are painted in full color, many others are simple line drawings. I can discern no pattern to the distribution of painted versus non-painted images; it is likely that the artist's work was simply interrupted for some reason.

5. Meneghetti, Pubblico dei trovatori, 363.

6. All songs are identified by first line and by number from Alfred Pillet and Henry Carstens, Bibliographie der Troubadours (Halle, 1933; rpt. New York, 1968). The poetry of Ponc de Capdouill is cited from Leben und Werke des Troubadors Ponc de Capdouill, ed. Max von Napolski (Halle, 1879).


8. For the vida and razos pertaining to Folquet, see Boutiére and Schutz, Biographies des troubadours, 470–84. Folquet's vida appears in mss A, B, E, I, K, N², O, R, a¹, and a². Various combinations of razos appear in mss E, N², and R. I cite Folquet's poems from Le troubadour Folquet de Marseille: Edition critique, ed. Stanislaw Stroński (Krakow, 1910).

9. One more song, appearing on fol. 65v, completes Folquet's corpus. It may well have been left unillustrated in order to stress the sense of closure created by the planh and its images of death, grief, and religious conversion.


12. The illustrations of "Ben an mort mi e lor" are discussed by Rieger, "'Ins e.l cor port, dona, vostra faissso'," 401–3; Meneghetti, Pubblico dei trovatori, 353–57.

13. The seraphic Love appears on fol. 56, 58v, 61v, 64, 211, 212, 213. Rieger discusses possible sources for this image, which certainly derives from sacred iconography, in "'Ins e.l cor port, dona, vostra faissso'," 403. M.819 is not the only instance in which the God of Love is represented with six wings: he is so depicted in two illustrations in the principal manuscript of the Roman de la Poire (Paris, Bibl. Nat. fr. 2186, fol. 1v, 15), which was made in Paris ca. 1250–60. The miniature on fol. 1v is reproduced by Christiane Marchelhon-Nizia in her edition of Tibaut, Roman de la Poire, Société des Anciens Textes Français (Paris, 1984), Pl. 1. In the Poire miniatures, however, love has no crown and only one face. The chances of a connection between the Poire manuscript and M.819 are extremely remote; but the existence of this other, nearly contemporary example does show that the transfer of angelic imagery to Love was by no means foreign to the thirteenth-century imagination.

14. In reality, as Stronski has shown, Folquet's "N'Azimen" was probably Bertran de Born; see his edition of Folquet's songs, 39–41. It is possible, however, that the illustrator of M.819 believed the senhal to refer to Barral.


16. These images are discussed by Rieger, "'Ins e.l cor port, dona, vostra faissso'," 400–401.

17. On medieval arts of memory and the importance of visual images in mnemonic techniques, see Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge, UK, 1990).


19. Ibid., 282.


25. For a discussion of Richard de Fourival's treatment of language and picture as the gates to memory, and the illustration of this motif in manuscripts of the Bestiaire d'amours, see Huot From Song to Book, 138–40, 159–60, 164–73; Carruthers, Book of Memory, 223–24.


28. Medieval writings about literature, both Latin and vernacular, typically cite instruction and entertainment, profit and pleasure, as the twin purposes of the literary arts. In the Roman de la Rose, for
example, Jean de Meun identifies “profiz et delectation” [profit and
delight (v. 15211)] as the aim of poetry (Classiques français du
Moyen Age, vol. 2, ed. Félix Lecoy (Paris, 1973)). The primary Clas-
sical source for this topos is Horace's Ars poetica.

29. See Margarita Egan, “Commentary, Vita Poeta, and Vida: Latin
and Old Provençal ‘Lives of Poets’,” Romance Philology, XXXVII
(1983–84), 36–48. For comments about the contents and organization
of chansonniers and their relationship to such literary texts as the
Vita nuova, see the useful discussion by Poe, From Poetry to Prose,
83–95.

30. For an excellent discussion of medieval notions of authorship and the
construction of biographies of sacred and Classical authors, see
Alastair J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Liter-
ary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1988).