

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 81:
LOVE SONGS AND TROUBADOURS**

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 81: Love Songs and Troubadours. In this episode, we're going to our attention south to southern France. Some important developments were taking place there, and those developments were destined to shape the political and literary history of Europe. A new type of courtly culture was developing in southern France, and that culture was about to spread northward to northern France and beyond. And when that culture crossed the English Channel in the mid-1100s, it set the stage for a political and cultural revolution within England itself. That culture brought new rulers, new standards of behavior, new words, and a new type of literature. So this time, we'll explore the origins of the troubadours, courtly love, romance, and Eleanor of Aquitaine.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. I'm also on twitter at [englishhistpod](https://twitter.com/englishhistpod).

So let's turn to this episode. And this time, I want to explore several important developments which shaped the history of England and the history of English literature. In this podcast, I try to take a very broad approach to the history of English. I like to explore the history of words, and the evolution of English grammar and phonetics. And I like to examine how political and cultural events helped to shape the language we speak today. But I also like to keep an eye on literature – the way the language was actually being used at the time from chronicles, to poems, to histories. You can't really explore the history of English without considering the history of English literature. So this time, we're going to shift our focus back across the Channel to France where a new type of poetry and literature was starting to take shape. This literary revolution was part of a larger culture that was about to make its way to England thanks to one of the most important women in Medieval history.

As we explore these developments, one of the underlying themes is going to be 'love,' and especially the role of 'love' in song and literature. So a good place to begin is with the word *love*. It's an Old English word – *lufu* (/loo-voo/). And that may actually be a little surprising. We usually think of French as the language of love. And most of our words associated with love come from French. That includes words like *desire*, *cherish*, *affection*, *romance*, *attraction*, *passion*, and many others. But *love* pre-dates all of those words in English because it was part of the original Anglo-Saxon vocabulary.

But, if we were to go back to that original vocabulary, we would find that the word *love* – or *lufu* – didn't necessarily mean romantic love. It often had a broader, more general sense. And that sense can still be found in Modern English. *Love* originally meant 'any type of strong affection.' So knights loved war. Kings loved power. Merchants loved money. And clerics loved God. So *love* didn't necessarily mean romantic love.

We get a sense of this more general sense of the word *love* in the Peterborough Chronicle. In fact, this is a good place to pick up where we left off a couple of episodes back. Back in Episode 79, we looked at the Anarchy in England, and we examined the accounts recorded in the Peterborough Chronicle. The entry for the year 1137 contains the famous passage where the scribe says that Christ and his saints were asleep.

Well, immediately following that passage, the scribe shifts his focus to mention the Abbot who was in charge of the Peterborough Abbey during those trying days. The Abbot was named Martin – also known as Martin of Bec. And the scribe includes the following passage about Martin. He writes:

‘He was a good monk, and a good man; and for this reason he was loved by God and good men.’
“7 wæs god munec 7 god man. 7 forþi ham luueden God 7 gode men.”

So the Peterborough scribe uses the word *loved* – or *luueden* – but he uses it in that more general sense of ‘a strong feeling or affection for something.’ He was loved by God and good men.

Now, a survey of Old English manuscripts reveals that the word *love* could be used to mean romantic love. Occasionally, there are references to a man’s love of a woman, or vice versa. So that was a sense of the word *love*, but it wasn’t necessarily the primary sense of the word. In fact, romantic love was rarely addressed in Old English literature.

Unfortunately, most people during this period couldn’t read and write, so we don’t really have private diaries or personal letters where we might expect to find someone expressing their love for someone else. If any such diaries or letters were actually written, none of them have survived.

In terms of the surviving literature, all we really have are the surviving documents written by scribes who were mostly trained in church schools. Many of them were monks. They wrote about church matters. They prepared government documents. They maintained histories and chronicles. But they didn’t really write about romance.

Now there were also traveling minstrels and scopos. They recited poems and told stories about people. And some of those stories and legends were written down by scribes. So that provides us with a body of more secular literature. But again, those stories weren’t really about romantic love. They were epic poems – poems about great heroes who fought great battles or faced great challenges. They were about bravery and loyalty. Think Beowulf, or the Wanderer, or the Battle of Maldon. Again, those poems weren’t really about love and romance.

In fact, if we want to find poems about love and romance, we would have to go back over a thousand years from the current point in our story. We would have to go all the way back to Classical Greece and Rome. The last great period of romantic poetry or literature before the current point in our story was around the 1st century BC. That poetry was composed in Rome around the time of Julius Caesar by the great Roman poet Ovid. That was right at the end of the Roman Republic, which soon gave way to the Roman Empire. And once the Roman Empire was in place, a new set of morality laws were enacted in Rome which were intended to encourage

marriage and discourage adultery. The punishment for adultery was severe, and it appears that one of the victims of those morality reforms was this type of love poetry. It was thought that erotic poetry tended to promote adultery.

As I noted, poetry did survive, but it survived in other forms. It survived as traditional epic poetry, laments and dramatic poetry. These poems were composed by minstrels and Germanic scopos. English was actually one of the first local vernaculars to capture this type of poetry in written form. Again, we have *Beowulf*, and *Widsith*, and the *Wanderer*, and the *Seafarer*. It is generally thought that all of those were written down for the first time in very early Old English.

That tradition of epic poetry was also found in France, but for the most part, poetry and other literature in France wasn't actually recorded in French. It was still being written in Latin. French was still a relatively new language, and it was still seen by many as just a local vernacular not really fit for literature. But all of that changed around the year 1100 when epic poetry was finally composed in French for the first time. That poem was called 'The Song of Roland.' I've mentioned this poem before. It was set during the time of Charlemagne a few centuries earlier, and it describes a great battle during an invasion of Muslim Spain by Charlemagne's forces.

This new type of epic poetry composed in French was called the 'chansons de geste' – literally 'the songs of great deeds.' They were very much in the epic tradition. They were stories about great warriors of the past who performed heroic acts.

So at this point in our story, we have a well-established tradition of epic poetry in Old English going back several centuries, and we have this new type of epic poetry in French, but we still don't really have poetry about romantic love. But all of that was about to change. And to follow those changes, we have shift our focus south a little bit – to the south of France.

So far in the podcast, I've spent quite a bit of time discussing events in France because they had a significant impact on the history of England and the history of the English language. But almost all of that discussion has been focused on events in the north – from Paris to Normandy to Brittany to Anjou – all of those regions are located north of the River Loire which runs through the middle of France. But south of the Loire, the culture was quite different, and so was the language.

First, let's focus on the language. Way back in Episode 44, I looked at the development of French from Latin. And I noted that there was this basic north-south divide in France. The dialects of northern France were called the *langue d'oïl*, and the dialects of southern France were called the *langue d'oc*. And those names were based on differences in the pronunciation of the French word for 'yes.' In the north, *oïl* eventually became *oui*. In the south, the word for 'yes' was pronounced *oc*, so those dialects became known as the 'langues d'oc' – literally the 'languages of oc.'

The word *oc* also produced another name for some of these dialects – *Occitan*. That term can have slightly different meanings, but it is often used to refer to these southern dialects.

Another term that is sometimes used as a synonym is *Provençal* (/PRO-vahn-sal/) – or *Provençal* (/PRO-ven-sal/) – depending on your pronunciation. It was once used more as a general term for these southern dialects, but today it tends to refer to the specific dialects spoken in the region of Provence. But anyway, I will just refer to these dialects as the ‘Southern French Dialects’ to keep it simple and to distinguish them from the various Northern French dialects.

As we know, most of the dialects spoken in the western part of continental Europe derived from Latin. They were the product of regional differences that developed over time. As you might expect, there weren’t really any sharp dividing lines between these dialects. So as you traveled south from Paris, you gradually encountered accents that were more and more unique. And those differences continued deep into southern France, and then continued across the Pyrenees into northern Spain. So there was this continuum of change. And that meant that the dialects of southern France had more in common with those of northern Spain than they did with those of northern France. And in fact, the differences were so great, that people from southern France could barely communicate with speakers in northern France. In fact, many people in northern France considered those dialects to be a separate language altogether.

Beyond the linguistic differences, there were also some basic cultural differences. Whereas the north of France had been the scene of more-or-less constant battles and sieges, southern France had experienced much less violence. It had been more peaceful. In the south, life was more laid-back and relaxed. That’s not to say that warfare was unknown in the south, but it was nothing compared to the constant state of war in the north.

Since the counts and dukes in the south of France were not engaged in constant warfare, their courts reflected that difference in lifestyle. They had time and energy to spend on other matters. So a completely different type of courtly life developed in the south – more laid-back, more refined, more cultured. The south was closer to Italy, so it had a more traditional Roman and Latin influences. It also had a close connection to northern Spain. And as we know, Spain was controlled by Muslim armies from northern Africa for many centuries, so Arabic influences also filtered across the Pyrenees into southern France. All of these influences contributed to a very distinct culture in the south.

Much like the north, southern France was divided into a series of counties and duchies – each ruled by a distinct count or duke. But by the 11th century, most of the western part of the region had coalesced into a massive duchy called Aquitaine. It encompassed the entire southwest quadrant of France. It was a sprawling region. And it included cities like Poitiers and Bordeaux. It was warm and it had very fertile land. The countryside was dotted with vineyards, and it had an active trade in wine.

The importance of the wine trade in the region is evidenced by the fact that the word *funnel* comes from this region. It is a French word, but it is more specifically a southern French word. Funnels were used in the wine trade to pour wine into bottles and other containers. It is actually related to the word *futile* which originally referred to a leaky container. A leaky container was unreliable. And that sense of being unreliable led to the modern sense of *futile* as something

hopeless and not worth the effort. So *futile* referred to any kind of container with a hole in it, and in southern France, *funnel* referred to a cone-shaped container with a hole in it used for pouring.

I should also note that *funnel* is related to the word ‘*refund*.’ Sometimes, you might pour wine or another liquid into one container, and then pour it back into the original container. To describe the process, the Latin prefix *re-* was added to the word *fund* meaning ‘to pour,’ and that produced the word *refund*. So refund and funnel have the same Latin root, but *funnel* comes specifically from the wine trade in southern France.

So wine was a valuable commodity, and so was salt. The region also had a lucrative trade in salt. Over time, the region grew wealthier and wealthier. The courts at Aquitaine were luxurious compared to those in the north. People dressed in fancy, colorful clothing made with quality fabrics. The words *velvet* and *velour* come from the dialects of southern France. Women wore make-up and perfume. Again, the word *perfume* comes from these southern dialects, though the original sense of the word may have been more literally ‘fumes’ like burning incense.

The evidence also suggests that personal appearance was very important in the courts of Aquitaine. That included an emphasis on hygiene. Nail and ear cleaners were commonly used. Drawings and paintings from the region commonly depict combs, which suggest that people were concerned about the appearance of their hair. Other descriptions indicate that dining was cultivated and elaborate. And there was an emphasis on proper manners both at the table and elsewhere at court.

With more time to spend on leisure, the southern courts spent a lot of time on entertainment. Minstrels found lots of work in the south. And this is probably a good point to look at the etymology of the word *minstrel* because it reveals a lot about the evolution of minstrels over time.

As you might expect, *minstrel* is a French word, and it ultimately comes from Latin. In the early Middle Ages, kings and other nobles were surrounded by a variety of servants and officials. There was also a basic division in their roles. There were the ‘major’ officials and the ‘minor’ officials. *Major* and *minor* are both Latin words. A ‘major’ official was an important or superior official, and he was sometimes called a *magister*, based on the word *major*. A ‘minor’ official was a more lowly official like a household servant, and he was sometimes called a *minister*, based on the word *minor*. So you had *magisters* and *ministers*.

Over time, the words *major* and *magister* produced lots of other words, and several of those words passed into English. They gave us words like *majestic* and *majesty*, as in ‘your majesty.’ They also gave us the word *magistrate*, which was an important government official. The word *major* also gave us the word *mayor*, ultimately the person in charge of a city. And when the [g] disappeared from *magister*, it gave us the word *master*. So those were the major officials.

But then there were also the minor officials – the *ministers*. These were people of lower authority, very often the bureaucrats and household servants. From *minister*, we get words like *administer* and *administration*, referring to the more mundane day-to-day activities of civil

servants. The word *minister* has survived within British English to refer to certain government officials. Of course, the leading *minister* or government official is the *prime minister*.

Within the Church, the word *minister* took on a secondary meaning. Originally, it referred to an attendant of a priest or high ranking cleric. But over time, the sense of the word expanded within the Church to refer to any cleric or priest. So that is how we got the sense of the word *minister* as a religious leader.

But let's go back to those medieval courts, which were full of ministers or household servants. Those servants had lots of different responsibilities, and for some of them, those responsibilities included entertainment. They were expected to sing and dance and provide music at mealtimes or special events. These singing ministers soon became known as *minstrels*. So *minstrel* is derived from the word *minister*.

Now as I just suggested, minstrels were much more than just singers. They danced, they played music, they told stories and recited poetry. They told jokes, performed magic and juggled. Some of them were acrobats who performed tumbling routines. So they were all-around entertainers.

Again, these performers were called *minstrels*, but another word developed to describe these minstrels. And that word was the French word *jongleur*. The Modern French 'j' sound (/ʒ/) hadn't developed yet. So in Old French, the word was *jogleor* (/jo-gee-ur/). And that word did pass into English. In early Middle English, a *jogleor* was basically another word for a *minstrel*. It meant an all-round entertainer.

That word *jogleor* eventually became our modern word *juggler*. So over time, the word became restricted to someone who tosses and catches objects. But originally, it was just another word for a minstrel.

In fact, it might surprise you that the word *juggler* was one of the first words borrowed from French after the Norman Conquest. We expect to find French terms associated with the government or the feudal system, but as early as the year 1100, we find this word rendered as "geogelere" in a handwritten Old English translation of a Latin religious text. So it actually pre-dates most of the government and feudal terms borrowed from French. And that reflects the important role of minstrels and entertainers in the culture at the time.

Since *juggler* was such an important job – and word – in the Middle Ages, let's look a little closer at that word. Before English *juggler*, we had Old French *jogleor*. And the Latin root word that gave us *jogleor* also gave us the words *joke* and *joker*. So *joker* and *juggler* are actually cognate. Over time, one version of the Latin root word has come to mean 'a person who tells funny stories,' and another version of the root word has come to mean 'a person who juggles.' But we can see that the original root word included both activities and referred to a general entertainer.

So if *joker* and *juggler* both come from the same Latin root word meaning an entertainer, you might be wondering about the word *jester*, as in a 'court jester.' In fact, if you ever look at a deck

of playing cards, the *joker* is usually depicted as a jester. And if someone is ‘jesting,’ they are usually being funny and joking around. So surely, *joke* and *jest* must be related. Right?

Well, no. The word *jest* comes from a different root. In fact, it’s a root that we’ve already explored in this episode. Remember those French epic poems like the Song of Roland. Remember what they were called? They were the ‘chansons de geste.’ That word *geste* (/ʒest/) – or /jest/ in Old French – meant ‘deeds or actions.’ Remember that it gave us the word *gesture*. And it also gave us the word *jest* and *jester*. A *jester* was someone who recounted these *gestes* or ‘great deeds.’ So a *jester* was originally more of a poet and singer. So all of these words – *jester*, *juggler*, and *joker* – were basically synonyms for a minstrel or courtly entertainer, but over the centuries, each has acquired a more specific meaning. And *joker* and *jester* both came to mean ‘an entertainer who makes people laugh.’ *Juggler* came to mean ‘a person who tosses and catches objects in the air.’ And *minstrel* came to mean ‘a person who plays music and sings.’

Now one other quick note about the words *joker* and *juggler* before we move on. I noted that those words originally had a more general sense as an entertainer. And I should note that the root word that produced *joker* and *juggler* also produced the French word *jeu*, which means a ‘game.’ So this root word produced words related to telling funny stories, throwing objects in the air, and playing games.

By the way, one type of game in early French which I’ve mentioned before was the *jeu de paume* – literally the ‘game of the palm,’ but it was sort of like handball, and it developed into the sport of tennis. And if you ever watch tennis, you know that the starting point in scoring is *love*. Then it goes to 15, then 30, then 40. So you might have ‘love-15,’ then ‘love-30,’ then ‘love-40.’ So since ‘love’ is one of the themes of this episode, you might wonder what tennis has to do with love? Well nothing really. In tennis, the word *love* comes from the French word for ‘egg.’ So it’s similar to how we say ‘*goose-egg*’ for zero today. The French word for egg is *œuf*. So when you put the article ‘la’ in front of it, you get *l’œuf*. And that became Anglicized over time as *love*. So in tennis, *love* is basically the French word for a ‘goose-egg.’ Anyway, since we’re talking about fun and games, let’s return to fun and games in the medieval courts of Europe.

As I noted, entertainment was a fundamental part of the medieval court. Minstrels were in demand everywhere, but nowhere more so than in Aquitaine. The wealth, relative peace, and leisure time in the south meant there was a lot more time for entertainment. And we get a sense of that culture from the southern French words that have survived into English. Many of those words have to do with courtly entertainment.

For example, many words for musical instruments have southern French origins. Minstrels played the *flute*, as well as stringed instruments like *viola* and the *lute*. Many scholars think all three words have origins in the dialects of southern France. Of course, *viola* also gave us the word *violin*.

The minstrels of Aquitaine sometimes performed songs that were intended for dancing – the type of songs that might be performed at a ball. In the southern French dialects, it was called a *ballada*, and that gave us the word *ballad*.

Of course, the minstrels didn't just play music, they also sang songs. And in southern France, they had a word for a short song. It was called a *sonet*. It came from the same Latin root as the word *sound*. Over time, the word *sonet* passed from southern French into Italian, and then into English as the word *sonnet* meaning a short poem. And today, we often think of sonnets as a very particular type of poem – one having fourteen lines with a certain meter and rhyme scheme and usually having themes of romantic love. So once again, this takes us back to our theme of love.

I started this discussion by noting that poets wrote about romantic love in Classical Greece and Rome. But that tradition largely died out with the rise of the Roman Empire, and it hadn't been seen in most of western Europe for over a thousand years.

Minstrels performed epic poems about great heroes. They also sang short songs about famous people and events. They performed political satires and May Songs about happiness and glory of Springtime. They sang about going on Crusades. But they didn't really sing about love – at least not until the 11th century. And that's when everything started to change. And it started to change in those courts in Aquitaine.

By the 1080s, Aquitaine had come under the rule of a Duke named William. As we've seen before, William was a very common name by this point. In fact, this particular William was the ninth duke named William to rule Aquitaine, so he is known to history as William IX of Aquitaine. William came to the throne in 1086, and to put that into some perspective, that was around the time that William the Conqueror died in Normandy.

Now as the Duke of Aquitaine, William's political accomplishments were very modest. He fought with his vassals. And he even led an army in the Crusades, but they were soundly defeated. He also spent a lot of time fighting with the Church. But despite being a very mediocre ruler, he is actually a very important historical figure, especially for those interested in Western literature because his contribution to history was not as a ruler, but as a poet. He was one of the first persons in Western Europe to compose songs about love and the pursuit of women since the time of the Romans. It was a new style of performance. And a southern French word was coined to describe these types of romantic poets. That term was *troubadour*. And William IX of Aquitaine is considered to be the person who started that tradition. Now it is very likely that there were other poets performing similar songs around this time in Aquitaine, but William's songs are the oldest to have survived the centuries. So that makes him the first known troubadour. And he is sometimes called the 'Troubadour Duke.'

Now William of Aquitaine is a fascinating figure, and in order to understand his role as a troubadour, we need to take a closer look at William as a person. Let's just say that William was a lover, not a fighter. And maybe 'lover' is giving him too much credit. He was really more into 'lust.'

He apparently kept a large number of mistresses, and he loved to sing songs about them and his pursuit of them. A later *vida* – or short biographical poem – about William recalls that he was "one of the greatest courtiers in the world and one of the greatest deceivers of women. He was a

good knight at arms, liberal in his womanizing, and a fine composer and singer of songs. He traveled a long time through the world, seducing women.”

We don’t know how many songs William composed, but eleven of his songs have survived the centuries. Some of the songs show a reverent view towards women, but most of them were bawdy, erotic, and perhaps even blasphemous. They were also composed in his native southern French dialect, so that meant they were intended for everyone at the court to hear, not just those who spoke and understood Latin. This was around the same time that the epic poem ‘The Song of Roland’ was composed in the north of France. And you might recall that it was also composed in the local French vernacular. So this was a period when French was just starting to be used for poetry and literature.

In one of William’s songs, he compares two of his mistresses to horses. He says that he has two horses that he loves to saddle and ride, but he can’t keep them both because they can’t stand each other. He wishes to tame them, so he can keep them because he would be mounted better than anyone else.

In another song, he writes that he once met the wives of two knights. And he pretended to be someone else. When they addressed him, he pretended to be deaf and mute. He says that one of the ladies told the other,

"We have found what we were looking for:
sister, by all means, let's host him,
since he is dumb,
and nobody will know our purpose from him."

He says that they led him back to their room for a night’s entertainment. But they weren’t sure if he was lying about being mute. So they brought out their cat, and had the cat scratch him repeatedly to see if he would speak – but he didn’t. He writes:

“Suddenly, she pulled the cat by the tail
and it scratched me:
they gave me more than a hundred sores
but I wouldn't have budged, even if they had killed me.”

Thereafter the one lady told the other:
"He is dumb, it is clear:
sister, let's get ready for merriment
and pleasure."

He says that he stuck around and enjoyed their pleasures for forty-one days.

The poem gets more graphic after that. After describing his merriment with the women in some detail, he concludes with a stanza directing his servant to deliver his poem to the two women. He writes:

“Monet, you shall go in the morning,
bringing my verse in your purse,
straight to the wife of Ser Guari
and of Sir Bernat,
and tell them, for the love of me, to kill that cat.”

So as you can see, this isn't exactly Beowulf, or the Illiad and the Odyssey, or the Song of Roland. These were graphic – and some times erotic – poems set to music and intended to be sung with musical accompaniment in front of an audience, usually a courtly audience.

Within a short period of time, this type of song flourished in southern France. The troubadours were the rock stars or pop stars of their day. Many of their songs were bawdy, risque and erotic. It started a revolution which completely changed the songs of the minstrels, but more importantly, it changed the history of western literature. If you want to look for the origins of Western romantic literature from Shakespeare's sonnets to Harlequin Romance novels, it really begins here in Aquitaine with the troubadours.

As I noted earlier, the word *troubadour* comes from those southern French dialects. The names of over 400 troubadours have survived the centuries, and many of their songs have also survived. There is no doubt that they were patronized by the prominent nobles of Aquitaine. And the troubadours were an important part of the courtly culture there.

Most of these songs celebrated love and the pursuit of women. But to be fair, most were not as bawdy as William's songs. Rather than focusing on sex, many of the songs tended to focus on romantic love. Usually, the troubadours sang about the beauty and excellent qualities of noble ladies of the court. The songs were often about the wife of a lord or superior. She was depicted as beautiful and distant with proper manners and an expert in courtly customs. The songs were often about a young knight who was in love with a noble woman, but the knight was considered inferior and unable to requite his love. So there was often a theme of unfulfilled longing and adoration and worship at a distance. The knight tries to prove his worth and his love through his actions – through his bravery and through his courtly behavior. So love was really the motivating force to make him a better and more noble person – to become worthy of the love of the lady.

And I think you can start to see the emergence of something here that I alluded to in the last episode about knights. What we see emerging here is a basic notion of chivalry. A type of knightly behavior that is proper, and noble, and courtly. These notions will soon get added to the concept of the crusading knight which we explored last time. In fact, this is really the point where we can start to combine some of these themes. Most of these troubadours were actually knights and nobles. Troubadour poetry required a certain basic amount of literacy and knowledge of literature. And the sons of nobles and knights were typically receiving a formal education by this point. And those classical poets like Ovid were part of that curriculum. So most scholars agree that the young knightly troubadours were influenced by the writings of those classical poets.

It is also important to keep in mind that Aquitaine had a relaxed culture with a laid-back court. There was more leisure and free time, so those young knights didn't spend much time at war. They also tended to be unmarried. So the court at Aquitaine had an abundance of these young, single, educated knights familiar with classical authors like Ovid. They were hanging around the court looking for something to do to pass the time. It was a court dominated by these young men and relatively few women. Other than the small number of noble ladies who were usually married and a few of their female attendants, there weren't a lot of women at court. So this starts to explain the development of the troubadour culture. They were young literate knights longing after women that they couldn't really have and looking for ways to entertain each other.

What was emerging in Aquitaine was not only a new type of musical performance, but also a new type of knighthood. Rather than focusing on fighting, these knights were focusing on their personal feelings and emotions, and they were focused on proper gentlemanly conduct and courtly behavior. That was the way to win the love of a woman, even if that love was forbidden.

By this point, you will have noticed that all of this activity was taking place in the same general place – the courts of Aquitaine. That's where the knights were, as well as the troubadours and minstrels, and the noble ladies. That's where proper manners were expected, and that's where songs of love filled the air. That was also where political business was decided. It was the center of political and cultural activity, so it shouldn't really be surprising that the word *court* has survived in lots of words which reflect these various activities.

I should note that the Peterborough scribe was the first known person to use the word *court* in the English language. He used it in his final entry for the year 1154 where it is rendered as *curt*. Of course, it was a French word, and the original meaning was 'the place where the attendants of the king or a prominent noble gathered, usually at the residence of the noble.' It was a place where important political and legal decisions were made. And that legal sense of the word *court* has passed into Modern English, so you might have to go to court at the courthouse.

But the medieval court was also a place where proper behavior was expected. That was especially true at a place like Aquitaine where knights were expected to have good manners, respect women, and treat other knights fairly and honestly. A specific word for that type of courtly behavior soon emerged. That word was called *curteisie*. And it eventually passed into English as the word *courtesy*. The word for 'court' also produced the word *courteous*. It also produced the word *curtsy* – a show of respect and deference to a superior.

So the court was a place for making political decisions, and it was a place where proper behavior was expected, but it was also a place where troubadours sang love songs and knights expressed their love for the ladies of the court. And that type of activity is expressed in another version of the word *court* – when a man 'courts' a woman. It's a bit old-fashioned today – but it was once common to term for dating. You probably know the song 'Froggy went a courtin,' and that folk song that dates from no later than the 1500s. So when we speak of *courting* or *courtship*, we're harkening back to the courtly romance that was first made famous in the songs of troubadours and other minstrels.

Another related version of the word *court* is *courtesan*. It was literally ‘a woman of the court,’ but as we’ve seen, there were relatively few women at court. Most were noble ladies, and most of them were married. So a *courtesan* came to mean ‘a kept-woman.’ It then acquired the sense of an escort or prostitute, especially one catering to wealthy men.

By the way, the word *court* is also related to the word *chorus* and *choral* and *carol*, as in a Christmas carol. And if you want to find out how those words are connected, check out the most recent bonus episode at [Patreon.com](https://www.patreon.com).

So the court was the place where all of our themes came together – politics, law, poetry, songs, knighthood, proper manners, love and romance. The court was the place where all of these aspects of medieval culture blended together. And that blend of ideas ultimately produced the concept of chivalry, which was being forged in the courts of places like Aquitaine.

But how did those concepts spread from Aquitaine to rest of Western Europe? Well, that’s where we have to return to the man who kick-started it all – the first known troubadour, William IX of Aquitaine. William’s reputation as a womanizer was based in part on his songs, but it was also based on his personal life. And about thirty years into his reign as the Duke of Aquitaine, he sealed that reputation.

William was married, but when his wife went away on a charitable mission, he pursued the wife of one of his vassals. And when I say that William ‘pursued’ her, I mean he literally pursued her. He went and abducted her from her bedchamber and took her back to his palace at Poitiers. The woman’s name was, appropriately enough, Dangerosa. And to be fair, it appears that Dangerosa was a willing party to the abduction. So she stuck around the palace. When William’s wife returned from her mission, she was shocked to find Dangerosa there. There wasn’t much the wife could do about it, so she went to the church officials to get them to intervene. They did intervene, but to no avail. They threatened to excommunicate William but he had already been excommunicated by the Church for another offense. So when the church officials threatened to excommunicate him for a second time, William didn’t really care. After his second excommunication, William had Dangerosa’s portrait painted on his shield announcing that ‘it was his will to bear her in battle just as she had borne him in bed.’ William’s wife eventually gave up, and the marriage was annulled. William then turned around and married Dangerosa.

William and Dangerosa each had children of their own. William had a son named William, and Dangerosa had a daughter named Aenor. And Dangerosa suggested that their two children should marry each other. The Duke agreed, and the marriage between the two step-children was soon arranged. After the marriage, the younger William and Aenor had a daughter named Eleanor. One theory is that Eleanor was named after her mother Aenor. In Latin, the phrase *Alia Aenor* meant ‘the other Aenor.’ So there was the mother *Aenor* and the daughter *Eleanor*, literally the ‘other Aenor.’ It was apparently a very unique name at the time, but it soon became a very common name throughout Europe. And that’s because Eleanor was about to become the most famous and powerful woman in all of Europe.

When Eleanor was born, her grandfather – the Troubadour Duke – was still alive and kicking. But when she about five years old, he died. Then her father – the younger William – became the Duke of Aquitaine.

It doesn't appear that Eleanor's father was the womanizer or troubadour that her grandfather had been, but he did continue to patronize the troubadours, and in fact, there appears to have been an explosion of troubadour culture during this period. It also appears that the laid-back courtly culture continued to be on full display during Eleanor's childhood.

She was educated in both Latin and the southern French dialect of Aquitaine. And based on her later history, it also appears that she could also speak and communicate in a northern French dialect. So she was very literate.

Eleanor was soon joined by a younger sister and a younger brother, but the brother died in childhood. So by the mid-1130s, that left Eleanor and her younger sister as the heirs to the Duchy of Aquitaine. In the year 1137, Eleanor's father went on a pilgrimage to Spain. He fell ill during the trip, apparently from drinking contaminated water. And he soon realized that he wasn't going to survive, so he named Eleanor as his heir shortly before he died.

He knew that she would face certain challenges as the Duchess. As we know from the story of Matilda that women didn't generally act as sovereign during this period. And to put this into some context, the Anarchy was just getting underway in England when Eleanor's father died. So he would have been aware of Matilda's succession problems there. So he tried to secure Eleanor's position by naming the French king Louis VI as her guardian. Of course, the Duke or Duchess of Aquitaine was a vassal of the French king, so it made sense to make the king her guardian. But that arrangement posed its own problems. He didn't want Aquitaine to be swallowed up by the French crown, so he stipulated that Aquitaine should not be incorporated into the king's royal domain. The region was to remain independent and could only be inherited by Eleanor's children.

As expected, Eleanor's father soon died, and Eleanor became the Duchess of Aquitaine. The real question at this point was whether she was going to be able to hold on or whether Aquitaine would fall into Anarchy as England had done when Matilda was named as her father's heir.

It was at this point that Louis, the French king, stepped in. He was now Eleanor's guardian, and he saw an opportunity to bring the massive region of Aquitaine under his control. He had a 16-year old son, also named Louis, and he quickly arranged a marriage between his son and Eleanor.

Now this marriage was awkward from the start. By all accounts, Eleanor was one of the most beautiful women in all of Europe. She was rich, she was powerful, and she was accustomed to the opulent court at Aquitaine. She was confident and out-spoken and self-reliant. So it was going to take a strong, powerful man to live up to her expectations. And the younger Louis was just not that man.

Louis had an older brother who everyone expected to succeed his father as king. And young Louis had actually been sent away to train as a monk. He was destined for a life in the Church. But his older brother died, so young Louis was brought back from the monastery to become the designated heir to the throne. He was pious and monkish – more acclimated for a life in the Church than a life in the royal court. And he was not a good fit for the head-strong Eleanor.

But as we know by now, love and affection were largely irrelevant when it came to royal marriages. Marriages were arranged to create political alliances. And the marriage of the younger Louis to Eleanor was a shrewd move by the French king. If Eleanor and Louis got married and they had a son together, that son would be destined to inherit both the royal lands around Paris and the entire duchy of Aquitaine. That would bring Aquitaine under direct royal control.

King Louis dispatched his son down to Aquitaine where a quick marriage ceremony had been arranged. The king was in very poor health at the time, so he stayed behind in Paris. The younger Louis and Eleanor were married in Bordeaux in July of 1137. At that point, Eleanor had only been Duchess for a few weeks, and now she was about to be the queen.

Immediately after the marriage, the newlyweds headed back to the royal court at Paris, but while on their journey, the king died. When the younger Louis and Eleanor arrived in Paris, they arrived as the new King and Queen of France.

When Eleanor made that trip to Paris, she was accompanied by many of her attendants from Aquitaine. And when the Aquitainians arrived in Paris, they received a frosty reception.

Not only were Eleanor and Louis very different people, they also had very different courts. The Aquitainians spoke a southern French dialect that was hard to understand in Paris, so communication was a problem. Eleanor dressed and behaved extravagantly, and she enjoyed a rich palace life. She enjoyed minstrels and entertainment. The French court was more accustomed to war, and their idea of entertainment just wasn't quite the same.

Eleanor's troubadours sang songs at the court in Paris – songs that had never been heard by the more prudish northerners. They were more accustomed to epic poems like the Song of Roland. But over time, the northerners started to accept this new form of poetry. It found an audience there, just as it had in the south. Over the next few decades, minstrels in the north started to compose their own songs about love. The troubadours of the south started to be called 'trouveres' in the north. But it was the same basic idea, it was spreading northward, and that spread was due in part to the minstrels brought to Paris by Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Around this same time in the mid-1100s, poets started to combine these two types of songs. The troubadour love songs of the south were blended with the epic poems of the north – the chansons de geste. And the result was a new type of poetry and a new type of literature. These new stories combined the heroic themes of epic poetry with the love themes of the troubadours. The stories were often about great and brave knights, especially those of Charlemagne's court or King Arthur's legendary court. They were brave and loyal, but they were also consumed by love and

passion. Some aspect of the knight's character was tested, but he usually succeeded in the end. Love was an important motivating factor as the knight tried to prove that he was worthy of his lady's love. In traditional epic poetry, the hero was a warrior. In this new style, the hero was more of a lover. In epic poetry, the hero sought the praise of his lord or comrades. In this new style, the hero sought the love and approval of his lady. So all of these themes that we've been exploring were getting mixed together. Think Lancelot and his love for Guinivere. That was one classic story which developed from this new style of literature. But what do you call this new type of story?

It wasn't troubadour poetry; it was more epic. And it wasn't epic poetry, because there was an emphasis on love. The name for this new style came from the language used by the poets who composed those stories. Almost all of this new type of poetry was composed in local French dialects, just as the troubadours had composed their songs in their southern French dialects. Those local French vernaculars were sometimes called the *roman*z – the rustic languages derived from the Romans.

That term had been around for a while to distinguish those local vernaculars from the formal Latin. So you might speak Latin, or you might speak a local vernacular derived from the language of the Romans, and those local vernaculars were therefore called *Roman*z. And that's where we get the term *Romance languages* for languages derived from the Romans.

And since this new type of epic love literature was being written and composed in the local vernaculars – the so-called *Roman*z – these works started to be called *Roman*s. And that gave us the term *romance* as a type of literature. So that explains the connection between a 'romance language' and a 'romance novel.' And this is really the beginning of romantic literature in Western Europe.

So southern troubadour poetry and northern epic poetry had a happy marriage in the north, and it led to the advent of romantic literature. But that happy marriage wasn't duplicated with Eleanor and Louis. Their relationship was more like oil and water. By all accounts, the two argued constantly. We're told that Louis loved Eleanor, but the feeling wasn't mutual. The marriage did produce a child – a little girl. But there was no male heir, and French custom required a male heir to inherit the throne.

The marriage was especially tested during the Second Crusade. Louis decided to embark on the Crusade making him the first king to take part directly in the Crusades. Eleanor accompanied him, as did all of her luggage and attendants. Louis's French troops were joined by German troops from the Holy Roman Empire, but they all suffered massive defeats. Lots of men were lost. Several thousand even remained behind in the Near East and converted to Islam. It was a military disaster.

The marriage of Louis and Eleanor was falling apart during the course of that Crusade. She challenged his decisions. And it was even rumored that she had an affair with another military commander in the region who happened to be her uncle. That rumor may not have been true, but

the couple reached the point where they were barely speaking to each other. In April of 1149, Louis and Eleanor boarded separate ships to take them back to France.

When Eleanor returned to Paris, she famously proclaimed that she had married a monk not a king. The marriage was hanging by a thread, but she was pregnant. She had already given birth to a daughter, so there was a hope that the second child would be the male heir that Louis so desperately wanted. But Eleanor gave birth to another daughter. This was a time when women were routinely blamed for failing to give birth to a son, so Louis apparently blamed Eleanor for failing to produce a male heir – a son that would bring Aquitaine under direct French control. This seems to have been the breaking point in the marriage.

Divorce was not permitted by the Church in the 12th century, but a marriage could be annulled, especially if the husband and wife were closely related to each other. And there were so many marriage alliances between the members of the French nobility that everybody was related to everybody else. And that included Eleanor and Louis. They were actually cousins. So plans were made to proceed with an annulment of the marriage on that basis.

As those plans were proceeding, the court at Paris received a visitor – a young handsome prince from Anjou. His name was Henry, son of Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou and Empress Matilda of Normandy and England. Henry was pursuing his mother's claims to the Anglo-Norman kingdom. Though civil war continued to rage in England, he had a potential claim to England, Anjou and Normandy through his parents. If all of that worked out for him, he might one day become the most powerful ruler in Western Europe. So this appeared to be just the man that Eleanor had been looking for. And he might even be a king himself one day if everything worked out in England. And if all of the land claimed by Henry was combined with Eleanor's homeland of Aquitaine, it would give them control of most of France, as well as England. That would make them the most powerful couple in all of Europe. So for a couple of young and ambitious people and like Henry and Eleanor, it was love at first sight – well, political love if not romantic love.

Next time, we'll see how Eleanor's ambitions were soon fulfilled. The consequences will be far-reaching. It will shape the future of England and France. This political marriage also shaped the English language by reinforcing the French influences in England and introducing French as written language beside Latin. It also pushed English completely out of the picture as a written language for several decades. It also introduced romantic poetry to England. A new era of romantic literature quickly emerged, composed in French, but dominated by stories of King Arthur and his court. And in keeping with the romantic tradition, these stories usually involved themes of love and chivalry. So all of these changes were about to reach the English shores. Next time, we'll explore all of these developments.

But before I conclude, let me remind you that you can support this podcast as Patreon.com. Just go to the historyofenglishpodcast.com and link from there. A \$5 monthly donation gets access to all of the bonus content there. And the latest bonus episode there focuses on the ultimate origins of love poetry in Greece and the numerous words which those Greek poets contributed to English.

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