

ACQUIRING THE (M)OTHER TONGUE IN AVIGNON
AND TOULOUSE

THE PSYCHOANALYST MARIE BALMARY has argued that it is possible to use a long-established interpretation of Babel, in terms of Freud's writings on the dangerous collective aspects of monotheism, as a critique of monolingualism.¹ The narrative opens with the verse "The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (Gen. 11:1). At this point in history, the three sons of Noah (Japheth, Shem, and Ham [Gen. 9:18]) have already produced many lineages. Their reproduction produces diversity among individuals, peoples, and languages ("These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations" [Gen. 10:31]); Balmary notes that there are already more than seventy names. There is in fact no monolingualism before Babel, and the tale of the tower must contain a different message to one that celebrates an original linguistic uniformity. When the different lineages join forces to construct the tower, their diversity is lost in the cause of their impossible attempt to prevent their own tendency to disperse into lineages and idioms. They urge each other to work "lest we be scattered." Their language is "confounded"; the builders are struck by linguistic difference and scattered definitively across the world.²

This reading of the myth of Babel derives from parabiblical Jewish tradition. Flavius Josephus argued that the confusion of tongues was punishment for the refusal by the descendants of Noah to colonize other parts of the world (*Ant.* 1.4.1).³ From these men's fear of being weakened by territorial expansion springs their collective submission to the tyrant Nimrod and derives the foolhardy project of the tower reaching up to the skies. Balmary concludes that this slippage from harmonious cohabitation into a totalitarian project stems from the builders' distorted relationship with language, as if monolingualism were tantamount to a denial of the other's status as an autonomous subject. In Balmary's reading, linguistic uniformity destroys the relationship between self and other and denies the differences that are crucial to the construction of an autonomous individual. She calls this a

process of *désaltération*, the destruction of alterity in the fallacious pursuit of uniformity and power through the collective. As language is constructed by a system of differences, so speech can only be possible between differentiated subjects.⁴ Difference between subjects is the motor behind linguistic difference, and it is crucial to human communication. She notes that if “we” all speak the same language and articulate the same thoughts, there is a corresponding loss of awareness that the term *we* is no more than a temporary and illusory unit composed of individuals who will at some point seek to express themselves not as “we” but as “I.”

One Occitan manuscript of the early fourteenth century interprets Josephus’s account of the downfall of Babel as a positive moment for the constitution of both speech and human society. The manuscript is an Occitan translation of the *Compendium*, or *Chronologia magna*, composed by the Franciscan Paolino Veneto, or Minorita (c. 1270/75–1344),⁵ a universal history constructed on a visual model as an illustrated series of tabulated genealogies and lines of succession. Paolino’s vertical genealogical tables are interrupted almost at the start by a depiction of Noah’s ark above the *Turris Babel* (*sic*) and a *mappa mundi* (3r).

The glosses that comment on the images (citing both Josephus and Jerome) state that Nemroth (Nimrod) wanted to rule over three of the tribes that descended from Noah, so he persuaded them to build “una auta tor perral” on the plain of Shinar (*Ant.* 1.4.2). The tower is so high that even the winds and the rains do not reach beyond its middle, but it is so wide that it seems wider than its already considerable height (*Ant.* 1.4.3). Paolino’s scheme is visual, and there is a striking visual gloss on the tower’s impact on languages. Words are squeezed into the gaps that remain in the left-hand side of the column that has been assigned to the images of the bottom of the tower and the world, to the extent that they disintegrate into fragments (transcription mine):

Dieus cofō
det qui
las lengas
de lor.
E en
ayshi
coma dels filhs de
noe ero ys
hidas.

sen.ge
 nerati
 os.tot
 enai
 shi
 la
 lē
 =
 ga
 hu
 m
 nal
 es
 devi
 za en
 lxii.len
 gatges.

Dieus cofondet qui las lengas de lor. e enayshi coma dels filhs de Noe
 ero yshidas. sen. generatios. tot enaishi la lenga humānal es deviza en
 lxii.lengatges.

[God confounded their languages, and just as one hundred genera-
 tions have come from the sons of Noah, so human language has been
 divided into sixty-two languages.]

Visual scheme and glossing vernacular words are placed here in a striking dialogue. The Tower of Babel dominates the tiny, schematic world map. It is a solid object, four labeled stories high, with a sturdy base of three layers of stones. Far from being demolished by the “confounding” of tongues, vernacular words are compelled to weave and break up around the tower’s intact stones. There are no inhabitants or builders on this completed tower. The margins of the folio are damaged, but it is still possible to read on the far left column, a little below the image of the tower, a repetition of the story in which the number of the languages is given as the more conventional number of seventy-two.

As the manuscript’s scheme demands that a vertical alignment indicates direct lines of succession, the monstrous tower produces a world that is divided into three regions (Asia, Europe, and Africa). However, this small

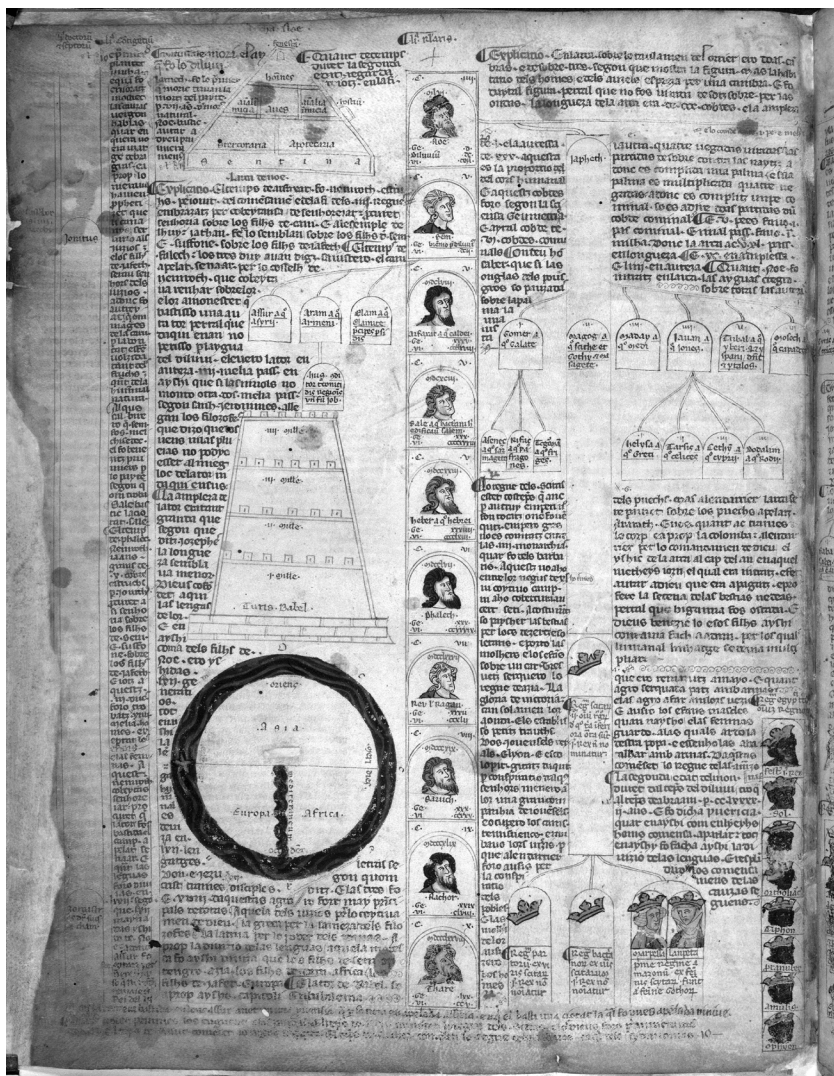


Fig. 3 Las Abreujamens de las estorias, MS British Library Egerton 1500, fol. 3v. © British Library Board. All rights reserved.

world is not dominated by its *predecessor*. Those three divisions are subdivided into provinces in a much later note (61r). Europe has fourteen geographical subdivisions. At the base of the same left-hand column, we find that this subdivided world has allotted a geographical location to the remains of the tower: “E la tor de babel. fo en babilonia” (The Tower of Babel was in Babylonia). It would seem that it no longer looms over the world with its extraordinary height and width. Why this should be the case may be explained by a gloss in red ink in the right-hand column (red rubrics in the text signal *explicatio*):

La seconda edat del mon. duret dal temps del diluvi troq al temps de Abraam. p. cc. lxxxx.ii. ans. E fo dicha puericia. quar enayshi com enleyhs homs comensa. a parlar. tot enayshy fo facha qyshi la divizio de las lenguas.

[The second age of the world lasted from the time of the Deluge to the time of Abraham, for 292 years. It was called childhood, for as every man begins to speak, so was made the division of the languages.]

The *Abreujamens* glosses the division of tongues as humanity's entrance into language in *pueritia*, the apprenticeship period of life that stretched from the age of seven to the entrance into a socially recognized maturity that might start at the marriageable age of fourteen or be delayed well into adult life.⁶ This is no longer a disaster, and there is no sense of an exile, for the tower's builders have been freed from the attempted tyranny of Nemroth and allowed to populate, name, and map the entire world. At this point, the text diverges quite markedly from Josephus, who gives a list of the peoples of the world and criticizes the Greeks for imposing alternative names on them (*Ant.* 1.5.1, 1.6.1–5). As the *Abreujamens* consists of a world history composed of genealogical tables, its binding of language, lineage, and human history appears to depend on the multiplication of tongues.

There are few hints of the manuscript's intended recipients; its frontispiece is lost and the prologue mentions no dedicatee. However, Paolino's later draft of the *Compendium*, now in Paris, was a luxury copy presented to Pope John XXII in 1328, and Degenhart and Schmitt conclude that the Occitan translation, being a richly illustrated work, may well have been produced at the same time. The Venetian author of the *Abreujamens* or an associate ensured that an illuminated Occitan version of the Latin text was made available within Avignonese papal court circles. This multilingual

environment appears to have persisted, because a number of later hands corrected the text in Latin, Occitan, and occasionally Italian. If the tower indicates the *pueritia* of humanity, it must be associated with the language acquisition that was enabled by education. The sketch of the Tower of Babel loosely resembles the mnemonic visual scheme of the Franciscan John of Metz's *Turris Sapientiae* (*Tower of Wisdom*, c. 1250), in which every stone is a mnemonic locus designed to teach an ethical or religious precept to a child.⁷ The *Turris Babel* in the *Abreujamens* is also a *turris sapientiae*. It marks the text as simultaneously a work of translation, translating words into visual schemes, Latin into Occitan.

Pueritia appears to be an entrance into many languages, rather than the primary acquisition of language, which was believed to coincide with the emergence of first teeth at the end of the infant's first year.⁸ It fits Giorgio Agamben's theory that infancy can be conceived of as the limit of language, a period before unmediated (prelinguistic) experience is destroyed.⁹ A reading of Babel as a dramatic entrance into multiple languages on a par with what the Occitan translators call *pueritia* underscores Balmay's emphasis on this version of the story of Babel as the abolition of monolingual tyranny. Here, the seventy-two languages (or sixty-two, or even fifty-seven, depending on how the faded words are read) are so many "sons" of a lost father, either the tower or their ruler Nemroth, who spoke a single language and who sought to keep his *pueri* locked in a single infertile and unproductive location. Languages and lineages are freed by the confusion (which is not ascribed to divine agency on this folio) to found their own families and idioms. Agamben interprets infancy as the site of a division between animalistic *langue* and the human *parole* that Aristotle identified as the foundation of both household and city. Ethical judgment, and according to Agamben, a sense of history, are associated directly with the primary acquisition of speech.¹⁰ Paolino's world history owes its inception to an extension into childhood of that division, as Agamben would have it: "It is infancy, it is the transcendental experience of the difference between language and speech, which first opens the space of history. Thus Babel—that is, the exit from the Eden of pure language and the entry into the babble of infancy (when, linguists tell us, the baby forms the phonemes of every language in the world)—is the transcendental origin of history."¹¹ Paolino's *pueri* have lost their original babble. Their acquired languages, like their later history, are strictly patrilinear, but have they swapped one first father (not God, but their self-appointed ruler Nemroth) for a series of fathers and sons? Medieval theories of infantile language acquisition placed the emphasis on

the child's mother or nurse, but here, there is not even the conventional feminine personification of Grammar to lead the *puer's* way into (not out of) the Tower of Wisdom.¹² It would seem that this original tongue is not the mother tongue, because the *Abreujamens* strives to suppress maternal agency. Paolino's genealogical tables run awry whenever they confront feminine succession or foundations, and they resort to complicated diagonal lines or to legal concepts such as adoption that restore patrilinear lineage through purely social means. An introductory note, probably composed by the translators, strives to explain the strange tabulation of the Virgin Mary's lineage (17r) on the grounds that "negus evangelista no *pauia* la genealogia de la vergena car no es costuma de la escriptura *pauiar* la genealogia de las femnas" (no evangelist gives [?] the genealogy of the Virgin because it is not the habit of the Scriptures to give [?] the genealogies of women) (1v–2r).

The hostility toward feminine genealogy evinced by Paolino may also be connected to Babel. In Honorius of Autun's *Imago mundi* (and its vernacular translations) the Tower of Babel is said to have been built with a mortar made of bitumen, a mineral that could be dissolved only by women's menstrual blood.¹³ Josephus is a source for the bitumen mortar, but not this detail (*Ant.* 1.4.3). Women's dissolving blood undermines the tower before God intervenes to sow linguistic confusion among its builders. The confounding of tongues leaves the tower incomplete, in the hope (however vain) of a return to unmediated communication. However, women's fertile blood has already undermined the building's stability. The empty structure is built out of a masculine fear of being scattered by the effects of procreation, and it risks being returned to its original state as a meaningless pile of rubble by women's contribution to that process. No such statement appears in the *Abreujamens*, but Paolino's genealogical fantasies in the service of Crusade ideology appear to be shaken by the intervention of maternal succession. His history depicts a patrilinear world irrevocably divided on religious, geographical, and political lines by firmly drawn borders, where women may occasionally play a disruptive role without undermining its essential workings. Yet the very basis of language, the very start of human history, is potentially compromised by feminine agency. It is a monument to the anxieties of both him and his patrons: a treatment of history and of disciplinary boundaries that constructs false certainties without making allowances for alternative voices or narratives. Were it in Latin alone, it could be described as monolingual, even monologic. As the *Abreujamens* furnishes a vernacular translation, it is at odds with its stated aim, but in harmony with its association of history with the division of one single speech into many.

Language choice is important, as Paolino's text is translated into an idiom that is not the "mother tongue" of its Venetian author. It is not obvious if the clumsy Middle Occitan of the several hands that wrote and expanded the *Abreujaments* between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries constitutes an attempt to emulate the literary koine of a previous generation, or if it seeks to reproduce the everyday speech of intended readers who were born and possibly educated in the geographical region of Avignon. As such, it illustrates the interpretation of Babel that was offered at the same time by Dante in *De vulgari eloquentia*, that the confounding of tongues was no more than evidence that languages, like all human actions, are subject to space and time. Dante proposed to read the poetic vernaculars as evidence that humans have reconstructed their languages after Babel to their liking, for the confusion of tongues was "no more than the forgetting of the previous language" (1.9.6–7). Daniel Heller-Roazen has proposed that Dante's remark should be read as a radical departure from conventional medieval views of language: "The great 'confounding' of Babel involved neither addition nor subtraction, creation nor destruction, but, instead, a loss of memory, which destined speaking beings to forget their 'one language, and . . . one speech' and, in their oblivion, to develop the many idioms in which they would henceforth be scattered." Heller-Roazen extends this to imply that "confusion" would remain a constitutive element of all human languages thereafter: "It would constitute the invariable core of the variable being we call a tongue, the inalterable kernel of every alteration of speech."¹⁴ This interpretation chimes perfectly with the treatment of Babel in the *Abreujaments* as the release of humanity from the tyranny of an infantile babble that is identified with a tyrannical first parent's attempt to wield localized power, into a "scattered" polyglot, procreative, and yet coherent world. Dante's builders forget a language that remains only as the trace of its confounding, the moment that it was lost. I would suggest that one missing element in this process of forgetting is the maternal. Paolino's builders are embedded in a text that works hard to forget the maternal and, by extension, it would seem, to erase the concept of the mother tongue.

The key to this problematic treatment of the mother tongue is furnished by Gary Cestaro's detailed work on Dante's treatment of language acquisition.¹⁵ According to Cestaro, medieval authors borrowed a classical view of language acquisition as the task not of the mother, but of the nurse: an enslaved, often foreign woman. Milk and language were delivered by a surrogate who would not necessarily (if ever) have been a "native" speaker of the Latin she taught the infant Roman citizen. For medieval and early

Renaissance writers, Latin was irredeemably “foreign,” but in such civic centers as Florence, Barcelona, or even Avignon, the wet nurse was often a poor woman, or even a slave who had acquired the vernacular she taught her charge through a painful process of losing her freedom, her religion, and her first language.¹⁶ Cestaro has made a persuasive argument for the *nutrix* tongue to be viewed not as “mother” tongue but as “other” tongue, associated explicitly with the abject, reflecting a “paradigm that dictates the rejection of the nursing body as a prerequisite to rational language and self-hood.”¹⁷ Dante’s *De vulgari eloquentia* (1.1.2–3) distinguishes between the mimetic acquisition of language in infancy and the more distant learned acquisition of grammar, but Cestaro points out that Dante also credits Adam (the first speaker) with neither a mother nor milk (1.6.1). The peaceful early language acquisition with the mother is forgotten (if it ever happened at all) as the child enters the violent, disciplinarian realm of the “quasi-mother” Grammar who offers milk while brandishing a governess’s scourge. As Valerie Fildes has commented, employers of wet nurses who did not share their language or religion were nervous about the linguistic imprinting of infants through lullabies, stories, or milk, but this tension reflects a broader association of nurturing femininity with “horror,” the abject physicality that demanded the nursing woman’s exclusion from the human (masculine) society of the schoolroom. Cestaro comments: “Lacan is, in a sense, very classical in his insistence on the barring and exclusion of maternal desire as constituent of the ego.”¹⁸ In this spirit, I would comment that when Agamben discusses a prelinguistic, infantile “experience” as something that precedes and is destroyed by language acquisition, he appears to be suppressing the maternal too, even by evading any mention in so many words of its role. The nursing mother who imparts language is both visible in medieval piety and invisible, even horrifying, in medieval society. Her milk is viewed as an altered form of menstrual blood, a source of considerable anxiety. Just as in the early modern period, the idealized dyad of nursing mother and her infant would be reversed into the blood-sucking vampire feeding on its adult victim, so the nurturing mother or nurse could be the reverse of the “venomous” menstruating woman whose presence could dissolve the mortar of the Tower of Babel.¹⁹ To return to Balmory’s critique of Babel, Balmory points out that although it enumerates the names of more than seventy descendants of Noah (Gen. 10), only three women are named between chapters 4 and 11 of the book of Genesis, and women appear to be absent from the story of Babel.²⁰

In the case of Paolino’s text of 1328, the transition from Latin to a vehicular Romance language involves not exactly forgetting, but a form of

resistance to the concept of a shared original language. At the same time, the *mantenedors* of Toulouse's nascent poetic school (its annual competition was officially founded in 1324) were engaged in the enterprise of "maintaining," safeguarding, and actively remembering a poetic language that they believed to be in decline. As the Toulouse Consistory sought to empty its poetic language of "foreign," corrupt, or heretical elements, it projected this process onto feminine personifications of Philosophy, and of the Virgin Mary, who are both described in implicitly maternal terms as fountains of (liquid) learning. While Avignon Occitan manuscripts such as that produced by Peyre de Paternas address female patrons, the Toulouse Consistory was for men only.

Luce Irigaray, whose work, like that of Balmary, reflects a critical engagement with the work of Lacan, has written on the energetic suppression of the feminine that characterizes much didactic and philosophical writing, to the extent that omissions may denote the site of the suppressed feminine.²¹ The suppressed or forgotten feminine may by extension be the (m)other tongue. Certainly, in the work of Irigaray, women's language is grounded both in women's corporeality and in their cultural position as other. Irigaray's theory has been criticized by some scholars on the grounds of biological determinism, but (as she herself has implicitly acknowledged in her writings about medieval representations of the lineage of the Virgin) it is very pertinent to the broad association that was made in medieval culture between femininity and the corporeal. The Toulousain poets' Marian verses drew on sources such as Richard de Saint-Laurent's *Mariale* (c. 1239), which plays extensive variations on what Jill Ross has described as "the corporeal imagery of metaphor and allegory as modes of enfleshing." Maternal body and (m)other tongue are closely connected through the association of body and its enclosure in words or space. Ross cites the association that is implicitly made in vernacular Marian poetry (Castilian and Galician-Portuguese) between *mater* and *materia*, both earthly "matter" and the *materia* necessary for the composition of a text.²² However, the maternal aspects of the mother tongue are singularly absent from the Toulouse Consistory's writings on language and poetics.

Pueritia and the (m)other tongue are directly connected to the tensions between Latin, Occitan, and French in fourteenth-century Toulouse. The Toulouse Consistory emerged from a sociopolitical situation that differed from the conditions in which Paolino's manuscript was translated in papal Avignon. Avignon in the 1320s had been the focus of intensive patronage by popes who were born and educated (at least in childhood) in Occitan-speaking lands. Two such instances have already been touched upon. There

were links between Avignonese textual production and that of Toulouse, but Avignon was a multilingual, highly hierarchized environment. It is the site of a fertile meeting between Italian, Provençal, Languedocian, northern French, and many other (mostly clerical) communities through the vehicular language of Latin. Toulouse, however, was a city with a strong linguistic identity. The relationships that obtained in Toulouse between Latin, French, and the local vernacular were scored through with political and historical tensions. The work of the Toulousain Consistory was only one facet of a strong civic identification with the Occitan language, one that continued well into the early modern era. The Consistory aimed to develop a poetic idiom modeled on the troubadour koine, but Latin was used for official proclamations in alternation with Occitan (both spoken and written), and while French influence is very strong in both everyday and literary usage, it was not an imposed or official language until the decree of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539.

In the fourteenth century, Occitan was still the dominant language for the city's politicians, and the Occitan tradition of vernacular charters predated those that were written in French; this should have appealed to a royal administration that was increasingly using French in documents and decrees. Serge Lusignan has noted that although the royal chanceries under Philip IV and Philip VI employed staff who were native to Occitan-speaking regions, documents destined for the Midi were issued not in French but in Latin, on the understanding that they would be translated "in romancio," probably orally, on their arrival. Those Occitan documents that were sent to Paris were not translated (unlike those written in Flemish), which implies that there was little sense of a linguistic barrier. French was not imposed in the Occitan-speaking regions for quite some time, but vernacular expression was still presented as something that was subordinate to Latin both politically and in religious usage.²³

The sociopolitical context of the Toulouse Consistory and its nascent Occitan linguistic identity has dominated much subsequent criticism, as the city and its leaders had experienced a century of repressive policing on the part of religious authorities, as well as its annexation by the French crown by force and ultimately by succession.²⁴ There has been much debate over the past two centuries over the perceived status of troubadour poetry in fourteenth-century Toulouse.²⁵ While it is now generally accepted that no attempts were made to repress either troubadour poetry or Occitan linguistic expression, it remains that the Consistory has been regarded as a public display of religious and civic conformity scored through, in its choice of language and genre, with cultural resistance. The Consistory produced

a vernacular *ars poetria* it called the *Leys d'Amors*, which survives in two drafts that are usually attributed to the *mantenedor* commissioned to write the *Leys*, Guilhem Molinier. Both redactions present an unusual example of the relationships between three forms of poetic expression in French, Latin, and Occitan.²⁶

The seven laymen poets of Toulouse who founded the *Consistori de la sobregaia companhia del gay saber* in 1323, with a view to holding an annual poetry competition marking Marian devotion and the feast of Holy Cross (from May 1 to 3), were engaged in a tripartite process of cultural resistance and assimilation.²⁷ They selected a Marian festival and civic ceremonies in emulation of northern French Puy poetry, a vernacular lyric genre that was at that time thriving in northwestern France and Paris, but attempted to use it as a vehicle for preserving the troubadour lyric tradition.²⁸ Their inaugural letter for the festival was sent out to “diversas partidas de la lenga d'Oc” (diverse parts of the region that speaks the language of Oc) (Anglade, I.i. 9), on the grounds that only poets using languages where the word *Oc* or *O* was used for “yes” could compete (II.ii.179).

According to Joseph Anglade, part of the institutional aspirations of the *Leys d'Amors* within Toulouse lay in the university's repudiation of the vernacular, an “Azotica lingua” (Philistine language) that had been forbidden within its schools by papal letter in 1245. Such policies were standard in a *studium generale*.²⁹ Elementary grammar classes, however, used the vernacular as a teaching medium, thus ensuring that boys acquired the rudiments of grammar and rhetoric with explanations, glosses, and examples in this allegedly rejected tongue.³⁰ The Consistory poet had to tread a fine line between his “native” use of the language of Oc, the acquired formal medium that he chose to use for poetic contests (and accessorially for Marian devotion), and the Latin basis for that acquisition. Here, his *pueritia* is made explicit, as he learns a specific poetic language in order to enter a masculine society of fellow practitioners of *trobar*. Education involves a twofold process: he acquires the refined poetic (vehicular) form of Occitan just as he rids himself of its less acceptable aspects. This process appears in the first draft of the *Leys d'Amors* as a strange rhetorical vice called *allebolus* (transcription mine):³¹

Lo ters vicis es allebolus. Et es allebolus estranha sentensa so es improprietatz de sentensa. laquals improprietatz de sentensa se fay en motas manieras. segon qu'om pot vezer en jos en las figuras de tropus.

E dizem estranha sentensa. so es improprietatz de sentensa. a significar e demostrar que per so non es dicha estranha perque sia dautru ni destranh lengatge quom no entenda comunalmen. Ans es be dun meteysh lengatge. mas que impropriamen es dicha. Quar una cauza ditz e pauza. et hom ne enten outra.³²

[The third vice is *allebolus*, and *allebolus* is an *estranh* (strange/foreign) sentence, that is, an impropriety of sentence. That impropriety of sentence is made in various ways, as one can see below in the figures of *tropus*. And we say *estranha sentensa*, that is, “impropriety of sentence,” in signifying and designating [it], because it is not called *estranh* because it comes from another [language], or a strange language that is not commonly understood. Instead, it comes from the same language, but it is spoken improperly, for it enunciates and posits one thing, but you understand another.]

There follows a short mnemonic poem:

Allebolus vol dir estranha
 Sentensa, perque s’acompanha.
 Tropus de luy. Que li desfassa.
 Lo vici ques am luy s’enlassa.
 Alleos grec es qu’estranh sona.
 E bole sentensa nos dona.
 Mas per estranh deu cascus prendre.
 Improphetat. Quar entendre.
 Fay comunalmen outra cauza.
 Qu’om ni pronuncia ni pauza.

[Allebolus means an *estranha* sentence because Tropus takes it as its companion, for it [Tropus] undoes the vice that winds itself about it. *Alleos* is Greek, it [designates that which] sounds *estranh*, and *bole* gives us “sentence.” But by *estranh* everyone must understand “impropriety,” for it commonly makes you understand something that differs from the thing it pronounces or states.]

By *sentensa* the *Leys* most probably designates a grammatical *sententia*, the precursor to our modern “sentence.” However, *sententia* might also have meant “a sententious or moral proposition,” and in this context an impropriety

may have had either a moral or theological dimension. In the second draft of 1356, it is noted that a prize poem dealing with theology should be censured “if its *sententia* is not clear and manifest, or [not] approved by the inquisitor” (si donx la sentensa no era clara e manifesta, o aproada per l’Enquiridor) (Anglade, II.23).³³ Meanwhile, in grammatical treatises, *improprietas* concerns unclear expression and difficulties of communication.³⁴ There is something provocative about the use of a pseudo-Greek neologism to describe the disruptive and “improper” impact of an unfamiliar word on an enunciation. *Allebolus* is a puzzling intrusion, as he is described in an allegorical narrative as the father of many rhetorical tropes such as metaphor and allegory, both of which are defined by their ability to create several meanings in a single utterance.³⁵

The term *estranh* is particularly tricky for the definition of *allebolus*. *Estranh* is glossed as a word or expression from the language shared by both speaker and audience (“un meteysh lengatge”), and it is defined neither by its foreignness nor by its rarity, but purely by its *improprietas*, its ability to garble the sense of an enunciation. Indeed, the text’s insistence on correcting the reader’s assumption that *estranh* signals foreignness or alterity is striking. *Allebolus* may be read, it seems, as either a disrupting insertion of a term in spoken expression, or simply an instance of clumsy or unusual expression, or (as its last feature) a device that creates double meanings beyond the literal sense of the words on the page. This clumsy definition points to innovation of a sort, for *allebolus* is in fact no more than a development of *soloecismus*, a mistake made in multiple words (as opposed to *barbarismus*, a mistake occurring in a single word). The *Leys* goes on to specify that the difference rests in the fact that *soloecismus* affects only *oratio* (speech), whereas *allebolus* affects *sentensa*, the sense arising from the discourse. *Barbarismus* affects *dictio*, and *allebolus*, again, affects only the *sentensa* (Gatien-Arnoult, III.18). However, as without *dictio* or *oratio* there can be no *sentensa* (as all expressions are products of speech), this definition would make the three vices more interdependent than the *Leys* claims.

Allebolus is an example of the pseudo-Greek learning that was in vogue in university grammars of the thirteenth century, and it specifically echoes etymologies provided in Uguccione da Pisa’s *Derivationes* (c. 1200), Everard of Béthune’s *Graecismus* (c. 1212), and John of Genoa’s *Catholicon* (a simplified version of Uguccione’s dictionary, dated 1286), all of which earn references in the second draft of the *Leys d’Amors* as, respectively, the “Derivayre”; the “Grecisme”; and, in the second redaction, the “Catholicon.”³⁶ More specifically, *allebolus* reads like a calque of *allotheta*, a figure of construction

that appears in the *Catholicon* between the categories of *schema* and *tropus*: “Allotheta est improprietas constructionis ex eo quod dictiones in ea posite construuntur in diversitate accidentum, ut ego Sortes, lego.” *Allotheta* (taken by John of Genoa from Uguccione, as *allon*, “other” and *thesis*, “position”) is an impropriety of construction, placing words together in confusing juxtapositions, such as “ego, Socrates, lego” (I, Socrates, read).³⁷ Unglossed copies of the *Catholicon* include a variation on the famous tale of the origins of *soloecismus*, and it provides a hint of what *allebolus*, a dissimilar twin of *soloecismus*, may represent in the *Leys d’Amors*.³⁸

The citizens of the city of Soloi spent some time living in Athenian homes in the hope of learning Greek, but all they did was corrupt both their own and the Athenian language. In disgust, the Greeks coined the phrase *soloecismus*, that is, “the custom and habits of the people of Soloi.” John of Genoa explains that they had a confused language (“linguam habebant confusam”) because of the geographical location of their city between two linguistic regions (“in confinio grece et barbare”) and because they sought to claim both the Greek and the Barbarian languages as their own. Undeterred, these intrepid if inept linguists traveled west to Rome and corrupted the Latin language to the extent that any mistake found in a sequence of words came to be named after them. They were incapable of stringing together a coherent sentence in Latin, and they infected Roman speech. John cites Donatus to emphasize that *soloecismus* is not *barbarismus*. *Barbarismus* is a mistake occurring within a single word, but *soloecismus*, far more damagingly, affects the order of all the components of a sentence and compromises communication.

John’s story may have had a variety of meanings for readers in the schoolrooms of western Europe, but for the authors of the Toulousain *Leys d’Amors* there was much promise in the idea of converting incoherent and uneducated prose into poetry not by banishing but by embracing *soloecismus*. A vernacular poet who chooses to formulate his extracurricular learning in the language and structures of Latin grammatical treatises is at risk of acting like the inhabitant of Soloi, forsaking his barbarian territory to seek fluency in the learning of both Greece and Rome, only to produce a horrible and unintelligible compromise.

Such confusions might well have occurred in the schoolroom, as grammatical treatises were taught through the vernacular rather than Latin, a technique recommended by Alexander de Villa Dei, who advises the student to learn the *Doctrinale* by heart, but tells the *grammaticus* to use the students’ vernacular as his teaching medium.³⁹ This implies that students

learned the rudiments of poetic rhetoric in Latin through the vernacular from tutors who emphasized the importance of versified expression. Movement between Latin and Romance vernaculars may consequently be envisaged as a pragmatic and relatively transparent process. There are signs, however, of a more complex picture. As opposed to the direct translation expressed as “romanssar lati,” the transferal of meaning and hermeneutical process of *translatio* appears as a key issue at other points of the text, especially in the allegorical treatise of the rhetorical vices that introduced *allebolus*, in book 4 of the first redaction (Gatien-Arnoult, III.112–321). John Marshall summarized this self-contained treatise as follows:⁴⁰

He [Guilhem Molinier] wished to show how the “vices” (of language or style) which may mar a literary work can also be seen to be connected with—even give rise to—a whole series of tricks of style which are acceptable and even laudable when used in their proper context and with a proper literary motive (when Rhetoric has “made peace,” in fact). He also wished to show connexions between these tricks of style and the traditional flowers of rhetoric (*flores rhetorici*). (III.40)

The narrative frame for this subsection is initially clear and tripartite. First comes a psychomachia, next a genealogy, and finally a depiction of a garden in which harmony is restored through the gift of flowers. The structure peters out as the treatise moves into examples and subcategories among the granddaughters of *allebolus*.⁴¹ There is a great war between three kings and three queens. King Barbarisme shoots ten arrows at Queen Dictio (the *vitia annexa*), and King Soloecisme shoots his ten arrows at Queen Oratio (further *vitia annexa*). Finally King Allebolus shoots only one arrow (Improprietas) at Queen Sentensia. “Madona Rethorica” makes peace by marrying each king to the sister of each queen, so that Barbarisme marries Dictio’s sister Methaplasma and begets fourteen *metaplasmi*; Soloecisme marries Oratio’s sister Scema (also known as “Alleotheca,” *allotheta*) and begets twenty-two *schemata*; and King Allebolus marries Tropus and begets thirteen *tropi*, who in turn produce fifteen daughters of their own.⁴² *Allebolus* gamely joins *barbarismus* and *soloecismus* in attacking clear speech, expression, and oratory, but he does not have ten arrows at his disposal. He is credited instead with only one function, that of disrupting the sense of a sentence with improper expression. However, once he is allied with *tropus*, he may in turn be fruitful and produce thirteen equally fertile forms of oratorical display. Allebolus’s

daughter Allegoria marries “Alexis, que vol dir estranh parlar” (“A-lexis,” which means *estranh*, “speech”), and produces seven daughters, including irony and sarcasm, which are all ways of saying something different from the literal sense of the words (Gatien-Arnoult, III.22–24).

Fruitful marriages are not necessarily happy, and Soloecisme and his wife, Scema, are continually at odds because she rails against her husband’s outrageous treatment of her sister Oratio (III.20–22). Peacemaking Madona Rethorica picks flowers from her garden to console the offspring of the unhappy marriage of Soloecisme and the harmonious union of Allebolus. For example, the flower of rhetoric Translatio is allotted the role of soothing and cheering Allebolus’s daughter Metaphora. As the verse summary of the text neatly says: “Metaphora s’alegra trop, / Quan ve Translacio de prop” (Metaphor cheers up enormously when she sees Translatio close by) (*Flors del Gay Saber*, lines 4333–34). Metaphor even seems to be subordinate to her, as Translatio has an enhancing function, “Qar es flors plazens agradiva, / Aquesta forma transsumptiva” (for this “transsumptive” form of speech is a pleasing, agreeable flower) (*Flors del Gay Saber*, lines 5937–39). *Transumptio* is yet another term for metaphor.

Translatio is lifted from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, book 4, § 21, and *metaphora* from the same source (§ 45) noting that they are synonyms: “Methafora es transumptios o translatios duna dictio que representa altre significat” (Metaphor is the *transumptio* or transposition of an enunciation so that it represents another meaning) (Gatien-Arnoult, III.194), and that both are to be constructed identically, “e fay se Translatios per aquela meteyssha manera que Metafora” (III.200).⁴³ Marshall claimed that taking the Greek and Latin synonyms and treating them as different but complementary objects was innovative. In fact, it is simply lifted from glosses on the *Graecismus*, which established connections between words, such as *transumptio* and *metaphora*: “Concordat autem metaphora cum quodam colore rethorico qui dicitur transumptio.” Crucially, one commentator on the *Graecismus* also mistakenly identified *translatio* with the transferal of meaning from one language to another (the term used for this was *interpretatio*) and established yet another connection between two separate terms (*Graecismus*, bk. 10, line 72).⁴⁴

Metaphora’s impropriety is glossed in terms of linguistic diversity. To speak poetically of birds singing in their diverse languages is deemed inappropriate, for languages are spoken only by men and women, but it may be appropriate because languages are diverse (Gatien-Arnoult, III.198–200). However, *Translatio* rests on apparently “improper” connections that may

be made between human and animal sounds. A young woman, Berta, is so frail that she barely meows, “Ta freols es, qu’apenas miula” and only cats are able to use that particular language (III.202). Metaphor draws attention to the diversity of tongues, and *translatio* may transpose the languages of animals into the human realm. Metaphor and *translatio* in the first redaction of the *Leys d’Amors* appear to be complementary, for *translatio*’s ability to transfer and to gloss its object from one idiom or context to another is helpful to Metaphor’s transpositions of meaning. The *Flors del Gay Saber* add that *translatio* breathes new life into dead words (*Flors del Gay Saber*, lines 5953–54), a sentiment that hints at a less than flattering view of Latin. *Translatio* in other texts preserved its other sense of a transfer of power or a usurpation, and it follows that the vision in the *Leys* of transferal of meaning among the offspring of *allebolus* is surprisingly peaceful.⁴⁵

In this allegory of rhetoric (within which Allegoria is married to *Alexis*, representative of *estranh* speech), metaphor appears to depend not on rhetorical effects alone, but on a heightened awareness of the relationships between styles of expression and languages. *Translatio* may be *transsumptiva* because it also stands for the hermeneutical activity of both performer and audience, as they transpose words into their own subjective and linguistic contexts. Elsewhere, the *Leys d’Amors* also attempt to reconcile vernacular usage with Latin proscriptions, for example, saying that tautology may not be well regarded, but that it is commonly used in the vernacular.⁴⁶ In these sections, it is evident that there is a more flexible interlinguistic policy at work, aiming not to bend vernacular usage to Latin models, but rather to create a rhetoric in which several registers and several languages may work together to produce new poetry.

There is no *allebolus* in the second redaction of 1356, for book 4 was cut. Yet *allebolus* is implicitly identified and banished in several parts of the revised work. The *Leys* appears to apply a dynamic perception of the relation between Latin and vernacular, as well as between vernaculars. It rules on the irregular orthography and grammar of troubadours of the previous two centuries, declaring that the usage of the past can be supplemented by regional or colloquial variations in the present (Anglade, III.iii.113). There remains one problem, however, and that concerns the vulnerable status of the Occitan koine itself (III.iii.113–14). If the poet turns to local usage, he may be unpleasantly surprised:

E si per aquel manera hom no s’en pot enformar, deu recorre a la manera de parlar acostumat cominalmen per una dyocesi; et aysso es

la cauza mas greus cant a dictar en romans que deguna autre que puscam trobar, quar .I. mot que yeu entendray tu no entendras; et aysso es per la diversitat d'u meteysh lengatge quar tu que seras d'una vila, laquals es en Tolza, hauras acostumat .I. mot et yeu que seray d'autra vila laquals sera yshamens en Tolza n'auray acostumat .I. autre et enayssi serem divers.

[And if one cannot find it out that way, one should turn to the speech commonly used in a diocese. And that is the hardest thing of any that may be found, concerning reciting poetry in *romans*, because I might understand one word, and you won't understand it. That is because of the diversity of a single language, because you, being from one district [*vila*] in Toulouse, will be used to using one word and I, being from another district, also in Toulouse, will use another, and so we will differ.]

In the first redaction, *allebolus* only arose within *meteysh lengatge*. Here, *meteysh lengatge* is indeed deeply *estranh*. If the Toulousain audience can understand only part of a Toulousain poet's words, it means that even a poem composed in the koine, adhering to the rules of rhetoric and versification, must be infected by *allebolus*. According to the second redaction, *estranh* refers strictly to vernacular words (Anglade, III.iii.106–8), which means that *allebolus* may be found in action in troubadour poetry. However, the concept of *estranh* has altered slightly, for the revised *Leys* declares those languages *estranhs* that are not allowed to compete in the poetry contests and do not contain the word *Oc* or *O* for “yes,” such as French, Norman, Picard, Breton, Flemish, English, Lombard, Navarrese, Castilian, or German. The competition admits all the dialects of “la lenga d'Oc” with a single exception: “Pero de nostra leys s'aluenha / La parladura de Gascuenha” (But the speech of Gascony is distant from our laws) (Anglade, II.ii.178–79). The inhabitants of Toulouse include many who have picked up strange linguistic habits from neighboring Gascony (Anglade, III.iii.163–64). Toulouse is like Athens or Rome after the arrival of the inhabitants of Soloi, those students whose intent pursuit of second-language acquisition can only lead to the corruption of local speech. Despite its resonant borrowings of university learning, the second redaction hints at a fallen city similar in its confusion to the aftermath of the Tower of Babel, and the *Leys d'Amors* starts to look like a pointless monument to the aspirations of its inhabitants.

The *Leys* of 1356 mentions in passing that *nostre lengatje* suffers from a limited vocabulary, so the aspiring poet should turn to Latin for such useful words as, they suggest, *soloecisme*, *scema*, and *allotheta* (Anglade, III.iii.108). Lying unacknowledged behind more well-established technical terms, *allebolus* is built from fragments of an unfamiliar language to refer to the confusing effects of linguistic obscurity. In that process, language that is *estranh* is allowed into literary expression via the marriage of metaphor and translation. *Allebolus* highlights the tensions between rhetorical rules and vernacular expression. It also allows the aspiring poet to consider the extent to which he may or may not own the language that he may consider naively to be his mother tongue. Modern writers on diglossia have noted such moments of tension and inconsistency as evidence that literary composition may be placed in between the concepts of mother tongue and other tongue, in a realm of learned and authoritative expression that is always seeking official approval.⁴⁷ In “making strange” (or “making foreign”) both Latin and the vernaculars, the *Leys* also allows them to exist side by side, to fertilize each other and to produce new and rich flowers of rhetoric.

In conclusion, the *Leys d’Amors* may be viewed as an enterprise that sought to explore and to develop a sense of the fertile multiplicity of languages, but that was marked by moral anxiety over the confusion of tongues. It is a text that transplants the (m)other tongue into the masculine preserve of the schoolroom and finds it wanting, full of impropriety. In nearby Avignon, language acquisition was celebrated as the liberation of the *puer* from the confines of a (m)other tongue that was represented as neither maternal nor *nutrix*, but as a masculine tyranny. Gary Cestaro glosses the linguistic pessimism of John of Salisbury, who concluded, he suggests, that “in a postlapsarian world, the arts are our only hope.”⁴⁸ Both Avignon and Toulouse found different ways of imagining the hope that the arts curriculum could bring when the local vernacular seemed to be losing its literary prestige.