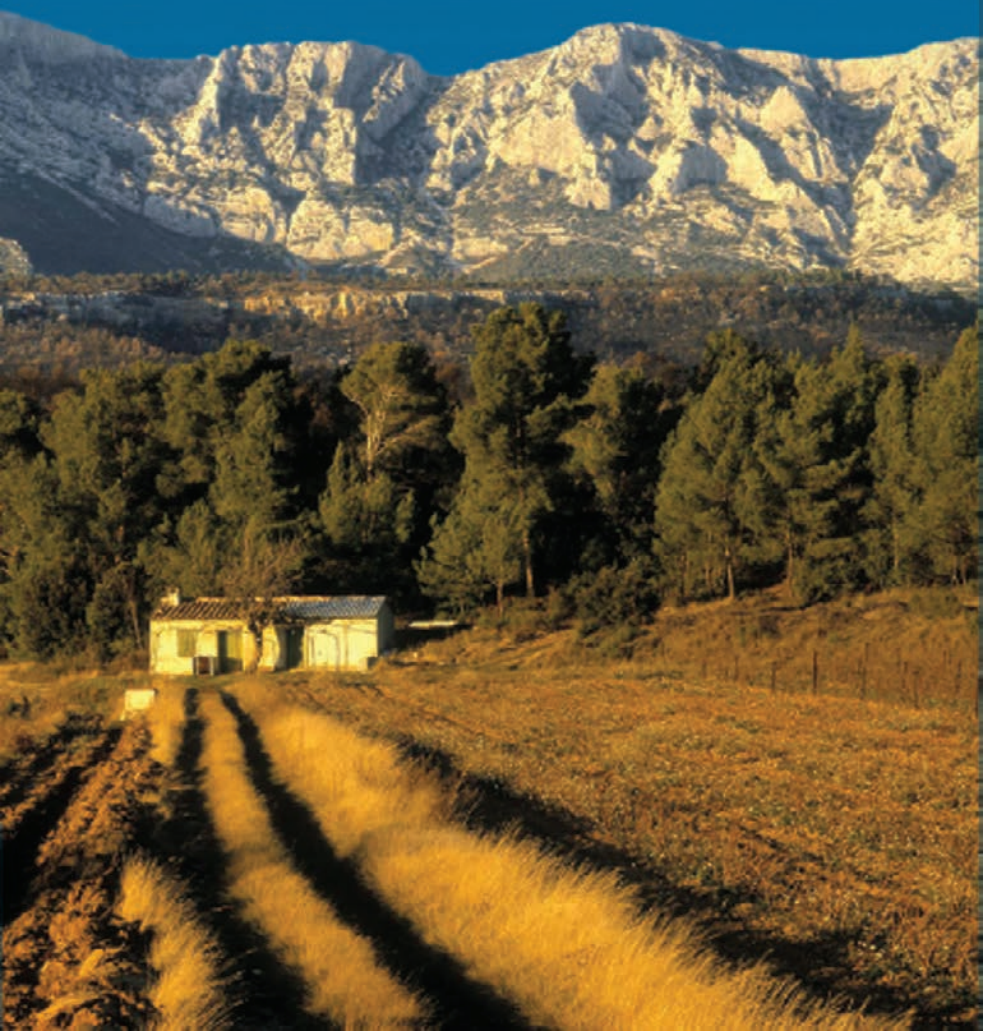


Landscapes OF THE IMAGINATION

MARTIN GARRETT

PROVENCE

A CULTURAL HISTORY



Contents

Front Matter.....	6
<i>Title Page</i>	6
<i>Publisher Information</i>	7
<i>Landscapes Of The Imagination</i>	9
<i>Preface</i>	10
<i>Introduction</i>	13
<i>Landscape</i>	14
<i>The Rhône And The Durance</i>	16
<i>The Mistral And The Cicada</i>	19
<i>“Their Fervid Temperament.</i>	20
<i>Occitan And The Troubadours</i>	22
<i>That Detestable Corruption</i>	25
<i>Restoring The Language: The Félibrige</i>	26
<i>The Rational, Right And Proper Food</i>	29
<i>For A Beaker Full Of The Warm South</i>	33
 Provence	 36
<i>Chapter One</i>	36
<i>The “Babylonian Captivity”</i>	37
<i>The Palace of the Popes</i>	40
<i>The Grand Tinel; Pope Clement’s Feast</i>	42
<i>Painting The Palace</i>	44
<i>Notre-Dame Des Doms</i>	47
<i>“Sur Le Pont d’Avignon</i>	48
<i>The Petit Palais And The Musée Lapidaire.</i>	51
<i>The Musée Calvet</i>	52
<i>The Avignon Festival</i>	54
<i>Villeneuve-Lès-Avignon</i>	55
 <i>Chapter Two</i>	 59
<i>Mont Ventoux</i>	62

<i>Fontaine-De-Vaucluse</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>L'Isle Sur La Sorgue.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Salon-De-Provence.....</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Orange.....</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Vaison-La-Romaine.....</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Grignan</i>	<i>77</i>
 <i>Chapter Three.....</i>	 <i>81</i>
<i>Van Gogh's Arles.....</i>	<i>83</i>
<i>The Arena.....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>The Theatre.....</i>	<i>88</i>
<i>Place Du Forum And The Cryptoportiques</i>	<i>90</i>
<i>Les Alyscamps.....</i>	<i>91</i>
<i>The Musée De L'Arles Antique.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Saint-Trophime.....</i>	<i>95</i>
<i>The Musée Réattu & The Museon Arlaten..</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Montmajour.....</i>	<i>100</i>
 <i>Chapter Four.....</i>	 <i>104</i>
<i>Saint-Paul-De-Mausole.....</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Les Antiques</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Glanum</i>	<i>112</i>
<i>Saint-Rémy-De-Provence</i>	<i>113</i>
<i>Les Baux.....</i>	<i>115</i>
 <i>Chapter Five.....</i>	 <i>119</i>
<i>The Plaine De La Crau</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>The Camargue</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>Les Saintes-Maries-De-La-Mer</i>	<i>126</i>
<i>Saint-Gilles</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Aigues-Mortes</i>	<i>133</i>
 <i>Chapter Six</i>	 <i>136</i>
<i>Le Bon Roi René</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Saint-Sauveur.....</i>	<i>141</i>

<i>The Burning Bush</i>	142
<i>The Musée Des Tapisseries</i>	144
<i>The Houses Very High</i>	145
<i>The Hôtel De Forbin</i>	148
<i>Aix-La-Somnolente</i>	150
<i>Zola's Plassans</i>	151
<i>Cézanne</i>	156
<i>The Musée Granet</i>	158
<i>Saint-Maximin And La Sainte Baume</i>	160

<i>Chapter Seven</i>	162
<i>Massalia: "Turning Towards The Greeks"</i>	166
<i>Vestiges</i>	169
<i>Passing Through</i>	171
<i>Royal Arrivals</i>	174
<i>Plague</i>	176
<i>Pagnol's Vieux-Port</i>	178
<i>The Holocaust</i>	181
<i>Galley's And Prisons</i>	182
<i>"Black Docker"</i>	185
<i>Churches And Cathedrals</i>	186
<i>Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation</i>	189
<i>Aubagne And La Treille</i>	190
<i>Souvenirs D'Enfance</i>	193
<i>Cassis</i>	196
<i>L'Etaque</i>	197

<i>Chapter Eight</i>	200
<i>Roussillon</i>	202
<i>Lourmarin</i>	204
<i>Lacoste</i>	206
<i>Ménerbes</i>	210
<i>Céreste</i>	212
<i>Manosque And Jean Giono</i>	213
<i>Le Contadour</i>	215

<i>Chapter Nine.....</i>	<i>217</i>
<i>The Maison Carrée And The Carré d'Art.....</i>	<i>219</i>
<i>The Arena And Le Charroi de Nîmes.....</i>	<i>221</i>
<i>Seething With Heresy.....</i>	<i>223</i>
<i>The Tour Magne.....</i>	<i>226</i>
<i>The Pont Du Gard.....</i>	<i>228</i>
<i>Tarascon.....</i>	<i>230</i>
<i>Tartarin De Tarascon</i>	<i>233</i>
<i>Tarascon.....</i>	<i>237</i>
<i>Beaucaire.....</i>	<i>239</i>
<i>Fontvieille</i>	<i>242</i>
<i>St.-Michel-De-Frigolet</i>	<i>245</i>
<i>Maillane</i>	<i>248</i>
<i>Uzès.....</i>	<i>250</i>
 Back Matter.....	 <i>255</i>
<i>Appendix.....</i>	<i>255</i>
<i>Further Reading.....</i>	<i>265</i>
<i>Also Available</i>	<i>267</i>

PROVENCE

A CULTURAL HISTORY



By
Martin Garrett

Signal Books

Publisher Information

First published in 2006 by
Signal Books Limited
36 Minster Road Oxford OX4 1LY
www.signalbooks.co.uk

Digital edition converted and
Distributed in 2012 by
Andrews UK Limited 2012
www.andrewsuk.com

© Martin Garrett, 2006

The right of Martin Garrett to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Design and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. The whole of this work, including all text and illustrations, is protected by copyright. No parts of this work may be loaded, stored, manipulated, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information, storage and retrieval system without prior written permission from the publisher, on behalf of the copyright owner.

Cover Design: Baseline Arts
Cover Images: John Heseltine Photography; Catriona Davidson;
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Design & Production: Devdan Sen

Photographs:
© Rémy Cantin, pp.x, xxix, 2, 14, 24, 35, 66, 77, 80, 138, 142,

158, 174, 207

© Catriona Davidson, pp.86, 93, 96, 170, 180, 201

© iStockphoto.com/Jan Tyler, p.61, p.210; iStockphoto.com/John Said, p.64; iStockphoto.com/Fredrik Schjold, p.105; iStockphoto.com/Josep M. Peñalver, p.120; iStockphoto.com/Luc Gillet, p.154; iStockphoto.com/Virgil Huston, p.160

Landscapes Of The Imagination

The Alps by Andrew Beattie

Flanders by André de Vries

The Thames by Mick Sinclair

The Basque Country by Paddy Woodworth

Catalonia by Michael Eaude

Preface

Roughly speaking it was diamond-shaped, pinpointed in the north by Montélimar and in the south by Marseille, and it followed the whole romantic valley of the Rhône... In the west it stretched beyond Nîmes, in the east as far as Apt.

This map of Provence was tattooed across the conveniently substantial chest of Pepe the bull-owner, or so Lawrence Durrell claims in a piece reprinted in *Spirit of Place* (1969). I have adopted much the same definition of Provence as Pepe's: an area that includes places beyond the Rhône that are technically in Languedoc, but traditionally part of Provence—Nîmes, the Pont du Gard, Beaucaire, Aigues-Mortes—and does not include the Côte d'Azur and its hinterland.

This Provence is a rich and varied one, which is why there is no room for the riches of the Riviera. It contains the "edge of the garrigue, windy forlorn and rather Brontë" where Durrell once lived; less forlorn orchards, olive-groves and lavender-fields; the Papal Palace in Avignon—the Versailles of its day; and metropolitan Marseille. All this can also be perceived in many different ways: the essentially optimistic Marseille of Marcel Pagnol, for instance, or the more troubled and complicated modern city of Robert Guédiguian. Perceptions can be affected by sunny or sodden memories (the Alpilles hot and cicada-loud or wet and silent in autumn fog), the maps and books you read and the pictures you look at. Maps may be read from bull-owners' chests, followed on site, savoured at home as a souvenir or aide-mémoire, or used more coldly as a necessary reference tool. It is much the same, tattooing aside, with books and paintings. If you have read Zola's account of the Aix-inspired Plassans and then go to Aix, how far do you see the city through his eyes, and how far do you alter Plassans to fit with Aix—

or the modern city to fit with that nineteenth-century version? Is it different if you read the book in England or France, Normandy or Provence, French or English? Paintings by Van Gogh and Cézanne condition our sense of Provençal colours, light and forms and may in turn be conditioned by our memories of Provence. It is difficult, too, to see Fontaine de Vaucluse with an “innocent” eye: tourists and the tourist-trade have endlessly relived and reinterpreted what Sir Philip Sidney, in the late sixteenth century, could already call “Petrarch’s long-deceased woes”.

The true Provence, natives and others have often insisted, does exist, as does the ideal inhabitant. But there are competing versions of the ideal. Is the Provençal talkative or dour by nature, a member of a race apart or perfectly integrated with modern French life—or both? (Cézanne intensively painted his native environment but feared that people who paid too much attention to regional traditions would “embalm” Provence.) Various “true” Provinces are to be encountered in this book. They have been experienced or constructed by a great range of people: troubadours and mediaevalists, sun-seekers and nineteenth-century poets in felt hats, Petrarch and Laura, the Marquis de Sade and Virginia Woolf, novel-readers, film-goers, cooks and wine-growers, connoisseurs of Roman ruins and Cézanne and Bouillabaisse.

As usual I have received a great deal of support from Helen, Philip and Ed. I should also like to thank Christine L. Corton, John Edmondson, James Ferguson, Robert Inglesfield and Gillian Rogers for their valuable questions, suggestions and practical help. I am grateful, too, to Yvette Souliers of the Maison de Tartarin in Tarascon, the staff of the Musée de l’Empéri in Salon-de-Provence, and the man from Carpentras whose wine I tasted, and with whom I talked about Petrarch, in the summer of 1998, long before working on this book.



Provençal landscape: “the grace of Italy, the harshness of Spain; la grandeur et la mesure” (Pierre Girieud, 1926).

Introduction

Continuities

If Plutarch's *Life of Marius* is to be believed, local people developed a practical, if rather macabre, approach to recycling after the Romans' great victory near Aix in 102 BC: they fenced their vineyards with the bones of slain Germanic warriors.

Continuity—rearranging bones rather than discarding them—has always been a feature of the history of Provence. The name Provence itself derives from the region's period (temporarily threatened by the invading Teutons) as a *provincia romana*. And that period did not represent a complete break with the way of life of the Ligurians, Celts and Greek colonists who were there before the Romans. Many already lived in towns and were more easily assimilated to Rome than were the more northerly inhabitants of “long-haired Gaul” who were not conquered until sixty years later. Pliny the Elder, in the first century AD, felt that Provence, with its admirable people and ample resources, was more like Italy itself than a mere province.

After the collapse of Roman power Visigoths, Arabs and Franks struggled for control of southern France. But here, where the influence of Rome had been so powerful, people continued to speak a more strongly Latinate language than in other parts of France. Later in the Middle Ages troubadour poetry increased the prestige of the more literary form of the language. Even after Provençal was superseded by northern French in formal and official contexts in the sixteenth century, related dialects survived in everyday use; from the 1850s Frédéric Mistral and the *félibres* drew both on oral tradition and the language of the troubadours in their successful campaign to restore Provençal language and Provençal confidence. (On the language see further pp. xviii-xxiv)

In architecture, too, there has been a good measure of survival and continuity. Roman work both influenced, and was sometimes incorporated in, Romanesque. To go back to bones, this time in a mercifully less literal sense, Gustave Flaubert compared the surviving Roman monuments of Arles to the bones of a skeleton, protruding, here and there, from the earth. Parts of the skeleton are still buried, parts have been exposed for archaeological inspection, but many pieces have had a more eventful history: after centuries as fortresses and shanty-towns, the amphitheatres at Nîmes and Arles resumed their ancient function as places of entertainment—gladiatorial sports then, not completely dissimilar bull-fights and bull-games now as well as opera. The Maison Carrée in Nîmes has served as an imperial temple, Christian church, stable, museum, and by-word for architectural harmony. It remains central to the design and the image of the city, enhanced by its symbiotic relationship with Norman Foster's 1990s Carré d'Art. (See pp.172-3)

On a larger scale, the Rhône has remained a central artery of Provençal commerce, industry and art since prehistoric times, and the distinctive qualities of light on hill and stone which have attracted Cézanne, Van Gogh, and many a less celebrated painter, must surely have had some appeal to much earlier settlers and inhabitants.

Landscape: “Infinitely Complex Chiselling”

In September 1644 John Evelyn and his party came to Aix through a “tract” where “all the heaths or commons are covered with rosemary, lavender, lentisks, and the like sweet shrubs, for many miles together.” Travellers also marvelled at the fertility of more cultivated areas. Approaching Marseille, Evelyn noticed vines, olives, oranges, myrtle and pomegranate, as well as the villas or bastides “built all of freestone, and in prospect showing as if they were so many heaps of snow dropped out of the clouds amongst those perennial greens.” Another seventeenth-century traveller, Mildmay Fane, Earl of Westmorland, found that the same countryside, “deserving the

name of gardens rather than of fields, and abounding with golden, russet and purple apples, almost stole away my senses altogether.”

Less smiling aspects of the landscape might surprise outsiders: Murray’s 1892 *Handbook to the Riviera, from Marseilles to Pisa*, warns, before going on to more practical matters, that

the Englishman who knows the S. of France only from books—who there finds Provence described as the cradle of Poetry and Romance, the paradise of the Troubadours, a land teeming with oil, wine, silk, and perfumes—has probably formed in his mind a picture of a region beautiful to behold, and charming to inhabit ... [But, for the most part,] Nature has altogether an arid character;—in summer a sky of copper, an atmosphere loaded with dust, the earth scorched rather than parched by the unmitigated rays of the sun. The hills rise above the surface in masses of bare rock, without any covering of soil. Only on the low grounds, which can be reached by irrigation, does any verdure appear. In summer the aching eye in vain seeks to repose on a patch of green.

To the northerner, says Murray, “neither the bush-like vine nor the mopheaded mulberry... nor the tawny green olive... will at all compensate in a picturesque point of view for forests of oak, ash, and beech.”

Provence contains both “perennial greens” and “masses of bare rock”; Jean Giono, in an essay of 1954, stresses how few miles separate mountain moonscapes from fertile plains, Colorado from Corot. There are also marshes, salt-pans, wild stony garrigue, and deep creeks or calanques. Virginia Woolf, in her diary for 8 April 1925, writes about the fields between Cassis and La Ciotat, like “little angular shelves cut out of the hill, and ruled and ribbed with vines”. The “bare rocks and heaths” at L’Estaque move Emile Zola to nostalgic tears but, he fears, will seem merely “arid and desolate” to

his correspondent Léon Hennique. The poet Guillaume Apollinaire registers a more extreme bareness while, in February 1915, on military exercises near Nîmes: country “like a skeleton. It’s just like a graveyard. Nothing but sharp stones, similar to bones.” In less desolate mood as well as more hospitable landscape near Saint-Rémy, Roger Fry appreciated instead, according to Woolf’s book about him, “the infinitely complex chiselling of the limestone hills and the intricacy of the squares made by the almond and the olive.”

The Rhône And The Durance: “Poor Bunbury”

Freddy Tondeur, in his book on the Camargue and Arles of 1968, maintains that the Rhône was “just as important as the Nile, the Euphrates or the Yangtse in the history of ancient civilization”. Certainly it was an important organ of trade and culture, if at times a dangerous one. Downstream travel involved the perils of too much speed, especially at Pont Saint-Espirit, where General Jean-Antoine Marbot and his companions would have drowned on a windy day in the autumn of 1799 had they not, at the last moment, seized boat-hooks and thrust them against the bridge-pier they were about to crash into; the unhelpful boatmen, no true children of the Revolution, had panicked and “fallen to their prayers instead of working.” (Marbot was on his way to take command of a division in Italy. He was travelling on the river, with two carriages awkwardly loaded onto the boat, only because his ever more dominant colleague, General Bonaparte, had commandeered all the post-horses while he inspected the fortifications of Lyon.) Going upstream, on the other hand, was slow and difficult work, in places requiring haulage by horse or man.

In the 1840s an English traveller, Selina Bunbury, experienced the dangerous force of the river. In *My First Travels* (1859) she recalls how she separated from her friends in order to visit Arles, intending to rejoin them in Avignon. She boarded the diligence for Avignon in the rain and was somewhat puzzled as to why other passengers kept, amid some agitation, getting off and cutting

their journey short. Asked by the conductor if she would keep her place, she replied, "Without doubt; I am going to Avignon" and was hailed, she did not yet know why, as a brave Anglaise. She discovered the answer when she realized, as they went along by the Rhône in the dark, that "all that was visible of the six white horses... was just the top of their broad flat backs, rising above the water their feet dispersed." She could hear the deep anxiety in the voices of the driver and conductor. At one point she thought they had finally plunged into the river, but at last there came a cry of joy and they began to climb up out of the water.

They made it through the gates of Avignon. Even here, however, the water was already knee-deep in places. The conductor lifted the dazed and wet Miss Bunbury, "ran across the street, kicked open the door of a house, and dropped me into the passage within it." A woman reluctantly received her, but could provide neither fire nor food. In the morning the building was evacuated as the flood approached. "Where are the hotels?" she asked, and was told "In the waters". There was no hope of finding her friends. Fortunately a young man helped by taking her to a higher part of the town. Eventually she found lodgings at the foot of the Rocher des Doms. Here she was safe from the waters but could obtain provisions and fire-wood only by much flattery and persuasion. Having got the wood, Bunbury could not light the fire with the few matches available.

She called the landlady. In retrospect it was clearly enjoyable to render the Frenchwoman's scornful incredulity, and her own resourceful wheedling, into English with a slight French intonation:

"What unheard of ignorance! Is it in that manner that you lay the wood? It is my belief you know nothing; no, you know nothing at all." "Ah! the French are so clever! It is not in our education to learn to make wood fires."

“And yet you travel, you will see all: the English, they say, love to instruct themselves: they spend time and money, and lose their lives on the high roads, because they will instruct themselves. Yet you do not know how to make a fire!”

“But I think I should like to learn. See now, Madame, we have not the advantages of wood fires in England; only dirty coals; and not made, as in France, on an open hearth like this. Ah! if you come to England one day, I should like to make you a coal fire in our grates, just as you would like to show me how you make a wood one.”

“Well, if you wish to learn; it is necessary to instruct strangers. Look then, once for all, and be ignorant no more, for when all the world is in the waters...”

In the end the old lady came every day to demonstrate the technique. Things looked up greatly when Bunbury found a market nearby where she bought delicately flavoured lamb and bunches of violets. At last, after a fortnight, the waters receded, leaving much mud and misery. She found her friends at the hotel where they had been marooned, and soon they were travelling on to drier and less landlady- dependent Grenoble.

Such happenings were, the young man who had helped Bunbury assured her, no fault of the Rhône: “It is not our river... that is to blame, but that very ill-natured one, the Durance.” Swelled by melting snows in the mountains of Dauphiné, it becomes torrential; “then it meets our river, that is good enough by itself, but when it is charged with these bad neighbours, you see, Mademoiselle, it grows very mischievous.” The Durance could indeed, as Murray’s Handbook for the Traveller in France (1843) warned Miss Bunbury’s generation, be a “turbulent and injurious stream”. But eventually it was brought largely under control by projects including the building

of a side-canal (completed in 1851) and, a century later, damming.

The Mistral And The Cicada: “I Hear The Symphonist More Than I Could Wish”

The chirp of the cicada dominates Provence in summer, and the howl of the Mistral at other seasons. According to Murray's *Handbook for Travellers in the Riviera* (1891) the Mistral “or piercing N.W. wind... is beneficial in purifying the atmosphere.” But it may not feel so beneficial: “it often affects the action of the liver”; Thomas Cook's *Traveller's Handbook for the Riviera and the Pyrenees* (1912) adds that it is “injurious to pulmonary sufferers”.

John Ruskin recorded his impressions of the wind in his diary on 20th October 1840. He was travelling between Avignon and Aix and had

a horrible day for weather: dust like a plague of Egypt, raised by a tremendous north wind which blew up the small stones like hail, and covered not merely the road, but the whole extent of country, with a mist of limestone—the sky darkened, all distant objects invisible for a long time together, the peasants wearing leather masks, with large round hobgoblin glass eyes.

A more local nineteenth-century sage, the entomologist Jean-Henri Fabre, studied the cicada's “strange music-box”. Here are some of the less technical results of his investigation:

When the weather is calm and warm the song of the cicada sub-divides into strophes, each lasting several seconds and separated by brief silences. A new strophe begins quite suddenly. As the abdomen oscillates more and more quickly, the song rapidly reaches its maximum volume; it stays at

its peak for several seconds, then gradually weakens and becomes a mere rustle ...Once the abdominal pulsations have ceased silence obtains, lasting variable periods depending on the state of the atmosphere. Then suddenly a new strophe begins: a monotonous repetition of the first. And so on indefinitely.

Cicadas of a sort can now be heard at all seasons: shops in Arles, Les Baux, Saint-Rémy and doubtless many other places sell battery-operated versions with names like “La cigale carillon” or “La cigale qui chante”—shaped as large cicadas and presumably not meant for the southern market since, redolent of summer though the sound may be, natives must surely have heard quite enough of it in season. “I hear the symphonist more than I could wish,” as Fabre puts it.

“Their Fervid Temperament Knows No Control”: Dissident Southerners.

Murray’s *Handbook to the Riviera, from Marseilles to Pisa* (1892) says that “the character of the people appears influenced by the fiery sun and soil”:

their fervid temperament knows no control or moderation; hasty and headstrong in disposition, they are led by very slight religious or political excitement, on sudden impulses, to the committal of acts of violence unknown in the North. They are rude in manner, coarse in aspect, and harsh in speech, their patois being unintelligible, even to the French themselves... From the loudness of tone and energy of gesture, they appear always as though quarrelling when merely carrying on an ordinary conversation.

The people thus patronized had various ways of asserting their Provençal identity. There were, according to some calculations, more than 350 rebellions (many, of course, small-scale) in Provence between about 1600 and 1715. Many were still to come. Protestantism took and retained a firm hold on many parts of the region in spite of savage repression of the sort visited on the Vaudois villages of the Luberon (see pp.153-5). More recent dissidence has rather different causes, including changes in the ethnic mix of Provence. As well as people of local ancestry there are now many people from North and other parts of Africa; *pieds noirs* and their descendants—white settlers who left Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s; internal immigrants from the rest of France; and a good number from other European countries—workers, retired, second-home owners. Tensions between different groups go some way to explain the strong performance of the extreme-right in some municipal elections—and the strong reaction against these gains. (In 1995 Front National candidates won Toulon, Orange and Marignane with 36-37 per cent of the vote. Jean-Marie Le Pen fared well in much of Provence in the first round of the presidential election of 2002.)

The Provençal of literary tradition is usually too exuberant or comical to join rebellions or vote for extremists. He (more often than she) shows his dissidence or his difference from the northerner by loudness of tone and energy of gesture. Alphonse Daudet was one of his main originators. The passionate, gesticulating, fabulating, sun-struck Provençal appears not only in his comic novels and stories but in the more serious *Numa Roumestan* (1881), which concerns the varied fortunes of a politician of southern origin in Paris, inspired in part by the republican leader Léon Gambetta. Daudet saw himself, particularly when young, as full of southern vitality and jest. (His career nearly ended in the Rhône when, in 1863, he poetically saluted, and drunkenly threw his arms round, a bride who was crossing the boat-bridge between Arles and Trinquetaille. She was accompanied by a substantial and unamused wedding-party. A local man, “le Patron Grafet”, rescued him and his fellow-revellers

just in time, according to Frédéric Mistral's Memoirs.)

For Jean Giono, by contrast, the true southerner is dour and taciturn and very unlike the characters in Daudet: no doubt the stereotypical figure "who brags and plays boules and drinks pastis does exist," but the majority of Provençaux are "much more Latin [in other words Roman], much more human, much more secretive"; people like Daudet's Tartarin de Tarascon (see pp.184-8) simply do not exist. But perhaps the Provençal Quiet Man is almost as much of a myth as the loveable braggart: a distortion of the variety of human nature but as useful for Giono the story-teller as Tartarin was for his creator.

Occitan And The Troubadours

In the Middle Ages southern France spoke a language often called Provençal and known more recently as Occitan (pronounced Oxitan) because it stretched, and in modern versions stretches, far beyond Provence. "Occitan" derives from *Langue d'Oc*, as, of course, does the regional name *Languedoc*: the language of the land where the word for "yes" was *oc* as distinguished (first by Dante) from the northern French *oïl*, which later became *oui*. It is—in its various dialects—a Romance language like French, Italian, Catalan, Spanish, Portuguese or Romanian. It stayed closer to Latin than French did because the south, especially Provence, was romanized earlier than the rest of Gaul and remained so longer: Occitan has *amar* for French *aimer*, *saber* for *savoir*, *ora* for *heure*. Occitan survives not only as a language still known by about two million people, and partly known by many more, but in the traces it has left in the way French is traditionally spoken in the Midi.

The great literary achievement of medieval Occitan or Provençal is the poetry of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century troubadours. A popular image persists of the troubadour bouncing and singing through the countryside rather like the minstrels in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Certainly many of them seem to have moved around from court to court, or with a court as it travelled; famous

practitioners were much in demand. Contrary to the popular image a number were themselves aristocrats or rulers and their verse was highly sophisticated, intricate and often difficult—qualities which partly explain its attraction for Ezra Pound.

A troubadour or, originally, trobador, was one who “found” poems or songs, a lyric poet who would usually compose and sing his own musical accompaniment. (We tend to think of the pieces as poems rather than songs partly because music has survived for only about ten per cent of the poems.) The first known troubadour was Guilhem IX, Duke of Aquitaine and Count of Poitou (died 1126). Other early twelfth-century exponents came from Poitou and Limousin but by mid-century troubadour poems were being written and heard in many of the courts of Languedoc, Provence, Catalonia and northern Italy. Such was the prestige of Occitan that Alfons II of Aragon, partly in support of his political involvement in Provence, himself composed troubadour verse as well as employing and encouraging others to do so. Later Dante thought it the most lyrical of languages and considered using it rather than Tuscan. This rapid diffusion was helped by the poets’ use not of local dialects but of a common literary language or *koiné*. (Much the same blend was used in southern administrative documents until the fifteenth century.) And the use of a shared but specialized language encouraged the troubadours’ tendency to address each other or to refer to each other’s work, praising, parodying, echoing, varying. This kind of literary interest, rather than lovelorn or seductive addresses to an actual lady, is often at the centre of their work; it would be a mistake to take too literally the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn’s proclamation that songs are of little worth if they do not come *d’ins dal cor*, “from within the heart”.

About half the surviving lyrics are *cansos* or love poems. (Many others are satirical or political *sirventes*.) They work within the conventions of *fin’ amor* or “courtly love”, widely seen as what Sarah Kay, in *A Short History of French Literature* (2003), calls “an imaginary corrective to the marriages dictated by dynastic and territorial interest” in aristocratic society. Courtly love is concerned

with unfulfillable aspiration and longing, often with amor de lonh: “distant love”, taken to the extreme in the case of the poet Jaufré Rudel who is supposed to have fallen in love with the Countess of Tripoli before he had even seen her. Kay suggests how invigorating the theme of fin’ amor can nevertheless be: it is part of “an ongoing debate” whose agenda includes

To what extent is love sensual or spiritual? Rational or irrational? Socially productive or isolating? Pleasurable or agonising? Morally elevating or degrading? How can one aspire to realise a love that is sustained by aspiration, or seek to overcome the very distance between oneself and the beloved that makes her desirable? Is the lover committed or ironic, delicate or obscene, ecstatic or self-controlled? Is his lady cruel or gracious, monstrous or sublime? In troubadour songs such questioning is not so much answered as amplified.

The most interesting troubadour from Provence itself is Raimbaut (c.1144-73), Count of Aurenga (Orange). He was a champion of trobar clus—”closed”, hermetic or difficult song: vers plu greu/fan sorz dels fatz (“more difficult verses make fools deaf “). As this remark suggests, his work is also noted for its humour and its unusual perspectives. Escotatz, mas no say que s’es, begins one poem: “Listen, but I don’t know what it is.” He “wants to begin” but can find no name for the sort of song he wants to sing. Only some lines further on does it become apparent that this state of uncertainty is connected with a lady’s slowness to grant the love she promised.

The mediaeval Vida or life of Raimbaut claims he was in love with the Countess of Dia, which is assumed to be Die, north of Provence on the River Drôme. The link between them is generally doubted, but she is worth mentioning as one of the finest of the trobairitz or female troubadours, who seem to have been aristocrats

who enjoyed a freedom of expression rarely granted to other women. In her four extant cansos she explores love and jealousy and talks more directly about sexuality than most troubadours—an intentional contrast, perhaps, with their more abstract and exclusive approach. *Ben volria mon cavallier/tener un ser en mos bratz nut*: “I should like to hold my knight one evening naked in my arms.” “When will I have you in my power?” The question, again, will not be answered.

“That Detestable Corruption Of Italian and French”

Soon after his arrival in Uzès in 1661 Jean Racine wrote to La Fontaine about the linguistic vicissitudes experienced on the journey down. In Valence he had asked a serving-woman for a chamber-pot; only when overtaken by his “night necessities” did he discover that she had instead delivered a portable stove. “You can imagine the consequences.”

Communication was even more difficult in Uzès, where “I swear to you that I have as much need of an interpreter as would a Muscovite in Paris.”

People from different regions of France had always had problems deciphering what each other were saying. Perhaps too they had regarded each other’s speech as inferior. But writing—or elite literary singing—had been a different matter; the troubadours and their idea of courtly love had great influence on later literature outside the Midi. What had changed by Racine’s time was that written Occitan had virtually disappeared. It had rapidly lost status as the French crown took over the regions where it was used. Louis XI gained Provence in 1481 and within a generation or so almost all writing was in French. (Exceptions include the *Obras et rimas provençals* of Louis Bellaud de la Bellaudière (d.1588), poet and fighter in the wars of religion.) The story of the language for the next four hundred years was one of progressive marginalization.

Occitan, and southern, Occitan-influenced French, became mainly oral and so subject to greater regional variations and less esteemed by the educated and the powerful. There was no possibility that, even if he had stayed longer than a year in Uzès, Racine would have started composing tragedies in the local language. For him it was not even a single tongue but, he was soon “beginning to realize”, a “mixture of Spanish and Italian”. Sometimes, he tells La Fontaine, he has recourse to those languages. Many travellers went on making much the same point about what James Boswell, in his journal in December 1765, condemns as “that detestable corruption of Italian and French”.

Restoring The Language: The Félibrige

French, in Provence as in other regions, went from strength to strength. National life was centred increasingly on Paris, especially after the Revolution. In the nineteenth century state schooling arrived, teaching French and often dismissing or even punishing the use of local dialects and languages. Mass communications also played an important part in spreading standard French and reducing difference. French is now, of course, the normal, everyday language of most people in Provence, even if some speak with distinctive local accents. But a good number of people today know Occitan or have some acquaintance with it, perhaps knowing traditional songs or expressions and having some sense of how the language works. This situation results in no small part from the activities of the group who took the name Félibrige and set out, in the mid-nineteenth-century, to re-establish the high status of what they called Provençal. The group originated in Provence and promoted a version of the Occitan which had survived there, but stimulated similarly vigorous activity in Languedoc and elsewhere in the Midi. Essentially they combined the language as they heard it being spoken, especially in the countryside, with elements of the medieval literary koiné. Frédéric Mistral (1830-1914), who emerged as the most important of the félibres, produced not only poetry but Lou

Tresor dóu Felibrige (1878-86), the dictionary which established meanings, spellings and variations and staked the claim of the language once more to be taken seriously.

Joseph Roumanille (1818-91), Mistral's teacher in Avignon and early encourager, was the father of the movement. In the early 1850s Roumanille and Mistral were associated with several other young poets beginning to write in Provençal, most notably Théodore Aubanel (1829- 86). In 1854, at the Château de Font-Ségugne near Avignon, seven of the poets formally established the Félibrige, which took its name from a reference, in a traditional poem Mistral knew, to *li sèt felibre de la Lèi*, "the seven Doctors of the Law". The best-known writings of the félibres include Mistral's long poems beginning with *Mirèio* (1859) and lyrical pieces by Aubanel like "La Venus d'Arle". They sought not only to practise and promulgate the traditional tongue but to spread awareness of, and pride in, Provençal customs and legends and identity. They went to traditional festivals around Provence, promoted them or revived them through their writing, and themselves introduced new processions, fêtes and presentations. Much happened in the open air—in the Provençal sun, at the ancient sites, they celebrated. Aubanel's play *Lou Pan dóu pecat* (The Bread of Sin) was performed at Les Alyscamps in Arles, for instance.