

Bernart de Ventadorn [de Ventador, del Ventadorn, de Ventedorn]

(*b* Ventadorn, ?c1130–40; *d* ?Dordogne, c1190–1200). Troubadour. He is widely regarded today as perhaps the finest of the troubadour poets and probably the most important musically. His *vida*, which contains many purely conventional elements, states that he was born in the castle of Ventadorn in the province of Limousin, and was in the service of the Viscount of Ventadorn. In *Lo temps vai e ven e vire* (PC 70.30, which survives without music), he mentioned ‘the school of Eble’ (‘l’escola n’Eblo’) – apparently a reference to Eble II, Viscount of Ventadorn from 1106 to some time after 1147. It is uncertain, however, whether this reference is to Eble II or his son and successor Eble III; both were known as patrons of many troubadours, and Eble II was himself a poet, although apparently none of his works has survived. The reference is thought to indicate the existence of two competing schools of poetic composition among the early troubadours, with Eble II as the head and patron of the school that upheld the more idealistic view of courtly love against the propagators of the *trobar clos* or difficult and dark style. Bernart, according to this hypothesis, became the principal representative of this idealist school among the second generation of troubadours.

The popular story of Bernart's humble origins stems also from his *vida* and from a satirical poem by his slightly younger contemporary Peire d'Alvernhe. The *vida* states that his father was either a servant, a baker or a foot soldier (in Peire's version, a ‘worthy wielder of the laburnum bow’), and his mother either a servant or a baker (Peire: ‘she fired the oven and gathered twigs’).

After leaving Ventadorn, Bernart (according to the *vida*) entered the service of the Duchess of Normandy, Eleanor of Aquitaine, who received the title after her marriage to Henry Plantagenet in 1152, who in turn became Henry II of England two years later. There are a number of references in Bernart's poems to Eleanor, Henry and, probably, a trip to England with the royal pair. Bernart's association with Eleanor and his presence in England some time after 1150 thus seem plausible but the fact that he met Chrétien de Troyes there, as some scholars have maintained, cannot be documented. The *vida* states that after Eleanor and Henry II went to England Bernart entered the service of Raimon V, Count of Toulouse (1148–94). After the count's death, the troubadour is reported to have entered a monastery in Dordogne, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Bernart is remarkable among the early troubadours in that more of his melodies have survived than of any other 12th-century poet. Of 45 poems attributed to him, 18 are extant with their melodies complete, and one other survives with a fragment of melody (*Tuit cil que-m pregon qu'eu chan*). His influence on the subsequent history of medieval song is demonstrated by the fact that four melodies served as the basis for later contrafacta by French, Latin, Provençal and German poets (*Ara no vei luzir soleill*; *Be m'au perdut*; *Pos mi pregatz seignor* and *Quan vei la lauzeta mover*). *Quan vei la lauzeta mover* was probably the most widely known of all medieval melodies: it inspired at least six contrafacta in four languages. The great popularity of this song, together with his presence in northern France and possibly England in the 1150s, lends credence to the view that Bernart more than any other single figure was responsible for transplanting the poetic-musical art of the troubadour to northern Europe, thus stimulating the development of the trouvère tradition.

Although the majority of the extant troubadour melodies are through-composed (*oda continua*), those attributed to Bernart show a predilection for repeated sections, a characteristic shared with Jaufrè Rudel, Raimon de Miraval, Peirol and Giuraut Riquier. Of Bernart's 18 melodies, only three are through-composed; 12 are either in chanson form (*ABABX*) or derived from it. Scherner-van Ortmeressen has divided his output into the following categories: *oda continua* (PC 70.7, 19, 43); reduced *oda continua*, containing at least one repeated phrase (PC 70.8, 24, 42); chanson (PC 70.1, 17, 41); and the remaining nine, some variant of chanson. Later studies have shown instances of syntactical interplay between poetry and music in Bernart's melodies.

WORKS

Editions:

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Las cançons dels trobadors, ed. I. Fernandez de la Cuesta and R. Lafont (Toulouse, 1979) [complete edn]
The Extant Troubadour Melodies, ed. H. van der Werf and G. Bond (Rochester, NY, 1984) [complete edn]

Ab joi mon lo vers e·l comens, PC 70.1

Amors, e que·us es vejaire, PC 70.4

Ara·m conseillatz siegnor, PC 70.6

Ara no vei luzir soleill, PC 70.7 [contrafactum: 'Pour longue atente de merci', R.1057] (two melodies; 2nd only agrees with R.1057, printed in Gennrich, p.299)

A tantas bonas chansos, PC 70.8

Be m'au perdut lai enves Ventadorn, PC 70.12 [contrafactum: Quens de Bar, 'De nos, seigneur, que vos est il avis', R.1522]

Cornatz, ara sai eu be, PC 70.16

En consirier et en esmai, PC 70.17

Estat a com hom esperdutz, PC 70.19 (1st stanza, 'Ma dosne fu al commencer', is the 5th in other sources)

La doussa votz ai auzida, PC 70.23

Lanquan foillon bosc e garic, PC 70.24

Lanquan vei la foilla, PC 70.25

Non es meravilla s'eu chan, PC 70.31 (two melodies found in 1 MS)

Pos mi pregatz seignor, PC 70.36 [contrafactum: Friedrich von Hûsen, 'Deich von der guoten chiet']

Quan l'erba fresc e·l foilla par, PC 70.39

Quan par la flors josta·l vert foill, PC 70.41

Quan vei la flor, l'erba vert e la foilla, PC 70.42

Quan vei la lauzeta mover, PC 70.43 [contrafacta: Philip the Chancellor, 'Quisquis cordis et oculi' and 'Li cuers se vait de l'oïl plaignant', R.349; 'Amis, qui est li mieus vaillant', R.365; 'Plaine d'ire et de desconfort', R.1934; Deitmar von Eist, 'Der Winter waere mir ein zît'; 'Seyner, mil gracias ti rent', PC 461.218a]

Tuit cil que·m pregon qu'eu chan, PC 70.45 (only small frag. of melody)

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For further bibliography see [Troubadours, trouvères](#).

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