



Bele Yzabeaus, pucele bien aprise

(RS 1616)

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Audefroï le Bastard

I

Bele Yzabeaus, pucele bien aprise,
ama Gerart et il li en tel guise
4 c'ainc de folor par lui ne fu requise,
ains l'ama de si bone amor
que miex de li guarda s'onor.

II

8 Quant plus se fu bone amors entr'eaus mise,
par loialté affermee et reprise,
en cele amor, la damoisele ont prise
si parent, et doné signor,
oultre son gré, un vavasor.

III

16 Quant sot Gerars, qui fine amors justice,
que la bele fu a signor tramise,
grains et maris fist tant par sa maistrise
que a sa dame, en un destor,
a fait sa plainte et sa clamour.

IV

20 «Amis Gerart, n'aiés ja covoitise
de çou vouloir dont ainc ne fui requise!
Puis que jou ai signor ki m'aime et prise,
bien doi estre de tel valour
que je ne doi penser folor».

V

28 «Amis Gerart, faites ma conmandise:
ralés vos ent, si ferés grant franchise.
Morte m'avriés s'od vos estoie prise!
Mais metés vos tost el retour,
je vos conmant au Creator!».

I

Fair Isabel, a well-brought-up maid, loved Gerard,
and he loved her in such a way that he never
requested any impropriety, but rather loved her
with such pure love that he protected her honour
more than himself. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

II

When pure love had been faithfully confirmed again
and again, in that love her parents took the young
lady and gave her in marriage to a lord, a vavassor,
against her will. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

III

When Gerard, who was ruled by *fin'amors*, came to
know that the fair one had been handed over to a
lord, he became so angry and upset by his tyrannical
treatment that in a secluded place he complained
and protested to his lady. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks
joy.*

IV

«Dear Gerard, do not now be so greedy as to want
what was never requested of me! Since I have a
husband who loves and honours me, I must behave
so virtuously as to avoid thoughts of folly».
Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.

V

« Dear Gerard, do as I bid: go away; this will be a
most noble act on your part. You would be the
death of me if I were caught with you! Go back
quickly to where you came from, I commend you to
the Creator! ». *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

VI

32 «Dame, l'amor k'aillors avés assise,
deüsse avoir par loialté conquise!
Mais plus vos truis dure que pierre bise,
se n'ai au cuer si grant dolor
c'a biau samblant sospir et plour».

VII

«Dame, pour Dieu!», fait Gerars sans faintise,
«aiés de moi pitié par vo franchise!
La vostre amors me destraint et atise,
40 et par vos sui en tel error
que nus ne poet estre en gregnor!».

VIII

44 Quant voit Gerars, qui fine amors justise,
que sa dolours de noient n'apetise,
lors se croise, de doel et d'ire esprise.
Et pourquiert ensi son ator
que il puist movoir a brief jor.

IX

Tost moet Gerars, tost a sa voie quise.
Devant tramet son esquier Denise
a sa dame parler par sa franchise.
52 La dame iert ja par la verdor,
en un vergier coillir la flor.

X

56 Vestue fu la dame par cointise,
molt iert bele, graille et grasse et alise,
le vis avoit vermel conme cerise.
«Dame», dist il, «que tres bon jor
vos doinst Cil qui j'aim et aour!»

VI

«Lady, the love you have settled elsewhere should be mine, I have won it through loyalty! I find you much harder than a dark rock and feel such pain in my heart that beneath a cheerful appearance I sigh and weep». *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

VII

«Lady, in God's name!», says Gerard in all honesty, «be generous and have pity on me! My love for you tortures and inflames me, and because of you I am in such confusion that no man could be in a worse!». *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

VIII

When Gerard, who is ruled by *fin'amors*, sees that nothing soothes his pain, he takes the cross, driven by sorrow and anger. And he sets about procuring his equipment so that he can set out in a few days. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

IX

Gerard makes haste, he wants to set out quickly on his way. But first he sends his squire Dennis to talk candidly to his lady. The lady was out in the open, picking flowers in an orchard. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

X

The lady was elegantly dressed, very beautiful, slim and shapely and smooth, her cheeks were cherry-red. «Lady», he said, «The One whom I love and worship give you a very good day!». *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

XI

«Dame, por Dieu!», fait Gerars sans faintise,
«D'outremer ai por vos la voie emprise!».
La dame l'ot, miex vausist estre ocise!
⁶⁴ Si s'entrebaisent par douçour
c'andoi caïrent en l'erbour.

XII

Ses maris voit la folor entreprise.
⁶⁸ Por voir, quide la dame morte gise
les son ami. Tant se het et mesprise,
k'il pert sa force et sa vigor
et moert de doel en tele error.

XIII

De pamison lievent, par tel devise
que il font faire au mort tot son servise.
Li deus remaint. Gerars, par sainte Iglise,
⁷⁶ a fait de sa dame s'oïssour.
Ce tiesmoignent li ancissor.

XI

«Lady, in God's name!», Gerard says sincerely,
«because of you I have set out for Outremer!». The
lady heard him: she would rather have been killed!
Then they kiss each other so sweetly that both fall
slipping onto the grass. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks
joy.*

XII

Her husband sees the folly happening. In fact he
believes the lady is lying dead next to her lover. He
so hates and despises himself that he loses his
strength and vigour and dies of grief in this
illusion. *Meanwhile Gerard seeks joy.*

XIII

They arise from their fainting fit, in such a manner
that they have all due funeral honours performed
for the dead man. Mourning is over. Gerard, in the
name of the holy Church, has made his lady his
wife. This the ancients testify. *Now Gerard has joy.*

Notes

- 1 *bele Yzabeaus* is a name in vogue in the mid-13th-c. poetic environment of Arras: besides the anonymous *chanson de mal-mariée* *An halte tour se siet belle Yzabel* (RS 586), it is found in v. 33 of the anonymous song of separation *Por joie avoir perfite en Paradis* (RS 1582), datable to 1235-1239, on the eve of Thibaut de Champagne's expedition to the Holy Land, and in the lyric lai on the death of *belle Isabelle* (RS 81) by Andrieu Contredit, *miles ministerellus* of Arras († 1248), who was also a member of Thibaut's crusading entourage.

pucele bien aprise. The same formula recurs in Chrétien de Troyes' romances: *Erec*, v. 1657: *qu'ele estoit bele et bien aprise*; *Yvain*, v. 5476: *Que mout est bele et bien aprise*, *Cligès*, vv. 941-943, where Soredamor declares herself to be *mout bien aprise* in Love's service. For Chrétien de Troyes, see Poirion 1994.
- 3 *folor*: 'dishonourable action, infraction of the rules of *bone amor*'; but compare how Paulin Paris interpreted this term: «*amoureuse merci*; ce que les Anglais comprennent sous le nom de criminal conversation» (Paris 1833, p. 5). For the *folie amoureuse* in the northern lyric tradition see Dragonetti 1986, pp. 127-136.
- 33 *plus dure que pierre bise*. The image of hardness and firmness, here referring to the lady, is found in Chrétien, but in the description of a tower's strength; see Perceval, vv. 3046-3048: *L'an ne trovast jusqu'a Barut / si bele ne si bien asise. / Quarree fu, de pierre bise*. For the formula *pierre bise*, compare also the interpretation of Paris who, after understanding *maistrise* in v. 15 as «art, habilité» (evidently in his view referring to the lady's cunning), plays on the idea of female fickleness: «Les joailliers appellent encore biseaux les angles ou facettes des pierres précieuses. Je croirais assez que ce mot s'est dit pour à double reflet» (Paris 1833, p. 7).
- 45 *lors se croise*. Here in v. 49 (*tost a sa voie quise*) and v. 62 (*d'outremer ai pour vous la voie entreprise!*) is the only crusading reference in the whole corpus of the twenty-odd *chansons de toile* and *d'histoire* in Old French. The use of this rhetorical device, a determinant of the plot, seems clearly parodic in its evocation of women's songs through the motif of departure on crusade, circulating in the Arras milieu at around this time. Compare the songs RS 21 *Chanterai por mon corage* of Guiot de Dijon, RS 191 *Jherusalem, grant damage me fais*, and RS 1659 *Douce dame, cui j'ain en bone foi* (all on the website). For the context, it is worth noting that the *Jeu de saint Nicolas* of Jean Bodel of Arras is also pervaded with the epic atmosphere of crusading and has been considered a work of propaganda on the eve of the Fourth Crusade: see Payen 1973 and Heller 2003, I, pp. 598-612.

- 69 *Tant se het et mesprise*. Death from fury associates the *mari* of this song with characters of 12th-c. Medieval Latin comedy, in particular the *Lidia* (esp. vv. 13-16 and 514-515, ed. Gualandri-Orlandi 1998), and the fabliaux (with the canonical characters of wife, husband, lover, and go-between, the *esquier* Denise. But even clearer is the possible link with Chrétien's *Cligès*, especially the second part where the playful comedic material is developed: see in particular vv. 6604-6609, which recount the death of Alis who goes mad with rage when he realises he has been tricked by Fenice and Cligès: *Morz est, mes vos ne le savez, / vostre oncles del duel que il ot / por ce que trover ne vos pot. / Tel duel ot que le san chanja, / onques ne but ne ne manja, / si morut con huem forssenez*. Paris, the first editor, and Jeanroy make humorous comments. The former notes the husband's convenient death: «Certes, parmi les maris passés et présent auxquels justice semblable a jamais été faite, on en trouve peu d'aussi commodes que le vavassour, époux de belle Isabeaus. Ils ont en général la vie plus dure» (Paris 1833, p. 10). Jeanroy evokes the spirit of a French drama from the Second Empire, *Monsieur de Camors* (1867) by Octave Feuillet: «Le mari s'y trompe et croit que sa femme est tombée morte aux côtés de son ami (ces sortes d'aventures sont fréquentes dans les chansons de geste), et cet époux trop sensible expire aussitôt de douleur: cette attaque d'apoplexie si opportune nous rappelle malgré nous celle qui frappe le général de Campvallou dans Monsieur de Camors; mais le mari d'Ysabiaus a au moins, en mourant, la consolation de se faire illusion sur la vertu de sa femme» (Jeanroy 1889, p. 224, n. 1).
- 76 *a fait de sa dame s'oissour*. Formisano 1993, 187, also writes of a «conclusionone degna di un Chrétien», especially as this line recalls *Cligès*, v. 6633: *De s'amie a faite sa dame*.
- 77 *Ce tiesmoignent li ancissor*. Here too *Cligès* may have prompted the final line of the *chanson*: compare vv. 18-27: *Ceste estoire trovons escrite, / que conter vos vuel et retraire, / en .i. des livres de l'aumaire / Monseignor saint Pere a Biauvez; / de la fu li contes estrez / qui tesmoingne l'estoire a voire, / por ce fet ele mialz a croire. / Par les livres que nos avons / les fez des anciens savons / et del siegle qui fu jadis*.

Text

Anna Radaelli, 2015.

Mss.

(3) . M 148r-v (*Audefrois*), T 57r-v (*Audefrois li Bastars*), C 33r-v (*Adefrois li Baistairs*).

Versification and music

10'aaa 8bb 6C (MW 237,1); 13 *coblas unissonans* + 1 refrain; rhyme a: -ise; rhyme b: -our; rhyme c: -ars; melodic structure AA'BCD/E (T 930) . Decasyllables *a maiore* : vv. 21, 38, 57, 62. Lyric caesura: vv. 14, 45, 51, 56, 68; Italian caesura: v. 73; elision at the caesura: v. 74. The song is a *unicum* among Old French versification; its essentially musical nature is demonstrated by the juxtaposition of the fixed form of the *rondeau* *C'est la jus, la jus desouz la coudroie* (B 165 = MW 237,2) with a different syllabic formula. For the possibility of seeing in the *refrain* of *bele Ysabeaus* the equivalent of a *vers orphelin* , a short last six-syllable line with an isolated rhyme concluding the *laisses* of many epic poems, see Radaelli 2016.

Previous editions

Paris 1833, 5; Leroux de Lincy, I, 94; Bartsch 1870, 57; Brakelmann 1913, 107; Cullmann 1914, 99; Gennrich 1955-1956, I, 41; Saba 1955, 92; Zink 1978, 107.

Analysis of the manuscript tradition

The two manuscripts MT have essentially the same text, with minimal variants at most (vv. 45, 56, 58, 69, 71, 73, 74). MC's reading is followed in v. 2 (*et il li*) as opposed to T (*per amors*), and in v. 41, where T has an extra syllable. C does not transmit the whole of st. VI (vv. 31-36), and in v. 45 reads *lors sen retorne* as opposed to M *lors se croisa* and T *lors se croise* . In both cases it is necessary both to preserve the stanza, which maintains the symmetry of the text in the central part, from st. III to st. VIII (III *Quant sot Gerars* ; IV *Amis Gerart* ; V *Amis Gerart* ; VI *Dame* ; VII *Dame* ; VIII *Quant voit Gerars*), and the reference to the taking of the cross which forms the necessary anticipation of v. 62. C's reading is adopted solely in the final refrain, in stanza XIII, since it amounts to a variation of the *t* repeated final formula that functions as a turning-point in the dramatic narrative (MT repeat the refrain *Et ioie atent Gerars*). The edition essentially follows the readings and graphy of T, which as usual presents a greater number of northern features than M.

Historical context and dating

Audefroï's activity took place in the first third of the 13th c. in Arras. In the songs *Pour travaill ne pour painne*, vv. 47-48 (RS 129) and *Amours de qui j'esmuef mon chant*, v. 46 (RS 311), Audefroï alludes to the *seigneur de Neele*, identified with Jean II, lord of Nesle from 1202 to 1241; and the *envoi* to *Com esbahis* (RS 729) is dedicated to *mon seigneur a Harnes*, identified with Michel III, lord of Harnes 1180-1231 (see Culmann 1914, 3-5; Saba 1955, 13-14 and Petersen Dyggve 1942, 198, 225, 235). In addition, the stylistic choice of re-using the formal features of the recent past (the *vers orphelin*, a 12th-c. epic innovation, and the use of the decasyllable), together with the reference to the crusade (vv. 45, 49, 62) which is used as a rhetorico-dramatic but also parodic device, and also the 'theatricality' of the text, all contribute to framing the Arras poetic context with the early experiments in theatre in vogue in Arras in the first quarter of the 13th c.. Rather than a long and out-moded *chanson de toile*, *Bele Yzabeaus* appears to be a short modern musical *jeu*, a little comic poem in dialogue form, in which the meeting of music and the literary clichés of epic and romance is played out on the edge of parody (for the comic-parodic interpretation of the song see Radaelli 2016).