



Dame, ensint est qu'il m'en covient aler

(RS 757)

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Thibaut de Champagne

I

Dame, ensint est qu'il m'en covient aler
et departir de la douce contree
ou tant ai malx apris a endurer:
4 quant je vos lais, droiz est que je m'en hee.
Dex! pour quoi fu la terre d'outremer,
qui tant amant avra fait dessevrer
dont puis ne fu l'amours reconfortee,
8 ne ne porent la joie remembrer?

II

Ja sanz amor ne porroie durer
tant par i truis fermement ma pansee;
ne mes fins cuers ne m'en lait retourner,
12 ainz sui a lui là ou il velt et bee.
Trop ai apris durement a amer,
por ce ne voi coment puisse durer
de joie avoir de la plus desirree
16 c'onques nuns hons osast merci crier.

III

Je ne voi pas, quant de li sui partiz,
que puisse avoir bien ne solaz ne joie,
car onques riens ne fis si a enviz
20 con vos lessier, se je jamés vos voie!
Trop par en sui dolanz et esbahiz;
par maintes foiz m'en serai repantiz
quant j'onques vos aler en ceste voie,
24 et je recort voz debonaires diz.

IV

Beau sire Dex, vers vos me sui guenchiz,
tot las por vos ce que je tant amoie:
li guierredons en doit estre floriz,
28 quant por vos per et mon cuer et ma joie.
De vos servir sui touz prez et garniz;
a vos me rent, beau pere Jhesu Criz,
si bon seignor avoir je ne porroie:
32 cil qui vos sert ne puet estre traïz.

I

Lady, it is destined that I should leave and depart
from the sweet land where I have so much learned
to endure sufferings: since I am leaving you, it is
right I should hate myself for it. God, why did the
Holy Land ever exist? It will have separated so
many lovers whose love has never since been able
to recover its strength, and who were never able to
revive their joy.

II

I could never live without love, so very firmly
[fixed] on it do I find my thoughts; and my faithful
heart does not let me turn away from it: instead I
belong to it, wherever it wishes or desires. I have
learned to love in great privation, so I cannot see
how to [hope to] obtain joy of the one most desired,
from whom no man ever dared implore pity.

III

Since I am separated from it/her, I cannot see how
I can have any comfort, happiness or joy, for I have
never done anything so reluctantly as to leave you -
and if only I may be allowed to see you again one
day! This makes me utterly griefstricken and
broken-hearted. I shall repent time and time again
of ever wishing to undertake this journey, and
[when] I call to mind your gracious words.

IV

Dear Lord God, I have turned towards You; for You
I leave all that I used to love so much. The reward
must be exquisite since for You I lose my heart and
my joy. I am quite ready and equipped to serve
You; I give myself to You, dear father Jesus Christ. I
could not have a better lord: the one who serves
you cannot be betrayed.

V

Bien doit mes cuers estre liez et dolanz:
dolanz de ce que je part de ma dame
et liez de ce que je sui desiranz
³⁶ de servir Deu, qui est mes cuers et m'ame.
Icestes amors est trop fine et poissanz:
par là covient venir les plus saichanz;
c'est li rubiz, l'esmeraude et la jame
⁴⁰ qui touz garit des viez pechiez puanz.

VI

Dame des ciels, granz roïne poissanz,
au grant besoing me soiez secoranz!
De vos amer puisse avoir droite flame!
⁴⁴ Quant dame per, dame me soit aidanz.

V

My heart must surely be happy and sad: sad
because I leave my lady, and happy because I am
full of the desire to serve God, to whom belong my
heart and soul. This love [divine love] is most pure
and powerful; the wisest must perforce arrive at
this; it is the ruby, the emerald and the gemstone
which cures all from vile and stinking sins.

VI

Lady of the heavens, great and powerful Queen, be
my support in my great hour of need! May I feel the
proper fervour to love you! When I lose a lady, may
a lady be my aid.

Notes

In the first more traditional part of this *chanson de départie*, which presents the theme of the pain of separation and the necessity of departure, following a pattern initiated by Conon de Béthune but perfected by the Châtelain de Couci, Thibaut exploits the latter's pessimistic approach (see song RS 679), according to which the crusade is an unavoidable duty to be faced with scant enthusiasm since it takes the lover away from love. The present piece also contains some allusions to the song RS 1575 of Gautier de Dargies (also attributed by some mss. to the Châtelain de Couci). In stanzas IV and particularly V the text changes register and develops in an innovative way the attempt to reconcile love for the lady with crusading values, an attempt also present in a song of the Châtelain of Arras RS 140, 25-40, where love for the lady makes the knight valiant and courageous, and his exploits allow him to win love (a motif perhaps already touched on in Conon de Béthune RS 1125, 13-16). Thibaut arrives at a more mystical interpretation which is rarely found in this type of song, according to which earthly love is surpassed or absorbed into divine love (see also the religious song RS 1410).

- 1 Sánchez-Palomino 2005, p. 181 draws attention to the unusual substitution of the vocative *Seignor*, an appeal to the French nobility with which the song of exhortation RS 6 begins, with *Dame*. This is the only OF crusade song beginning with this vocative, underlining the individuality of the text which immediately presents its character as a piece of reflection addressed to the beloved lady; note also the emphatic symmetry with the final line, which contains the noun *dame* twice.
- 4-5 Scant love for the Holy Land is a theme generally exploited in the *chansons de femme*, in which the lady reproaches Jerusalem or more generally the Holy Land for separating her from her lover; see for example RS 191, 1-4.
- 6 *tant amant*: a singular used in collective expressions, probably analogous to *maint baron* attested by Thibaut de Champagne himself in RS 757, 5.
- 13-15 The archetype reading is probably corrupt and the problem is likely to reside in the verb *durer*, already found at the rhyme in the same stanza in v. 9 and preceded by *durement* in v. 13. The other occurrences of the phrase *de joie avoir* confirm that this is prevalently found at the beginning of a line as the syntagmatic prolongation of the preceding line, but never with the verb *durer*. Here we would expect a verb with the sense of "desire, believe, hope". One might think of *cuidier*, according to the graphy adopted by Gace Brulé in numerous similar cases, but in Thibaut de Champagne we always find *cuidier*, especially at the rhyme.
- 16 For the use of generic relative *que* as a dative see Ménard, § 71.
- 17 The personal pronoun *li* most probably refers to love, as in v. 12. If it referred to the lady, the change from direct apostrophe to the following *vos* in v. 20, also reflected in the variant readings *voz/ses* in v. 24, would need to be explained as a rhetorical device.
- 20 According to Bédier this hortatory formula is the equivalent addressed to the lady of the swearing formula *se je ja mès Dieu voie* (or *se Dieus me/vos voie*).
- 25 For the reflexive use of *guenchir* see TL IV, 732, 24-47, with examples mainly attesting the sense of "to turn aside, deviate, avoid", whereas here it seems to take on the meaning "to switch direction, turn towards, deviate towards" (cfr. FEW XVII, 555), underlining the dramatic nature of the speaker's decision and his sense of "rupture" with the first part, all the more so since the preceding lines (17-20) the tension between love and duty had emerged more strongly, with the poet declaring he was leaving against his will (*a enviz*) and with the certainty of losing joy for ever. This rupture mirrors and stands in reverse symmetry to the one found in the song of exhortation RS 757, whose final two stanzas return penitentially to the love theme.

- 27 The rich reward to which the speaker refers is clearly paradise; the adjective *flori* often refers to the description of the heavenly world, as is demonstrated by the expression *camp flori* used in this sense in the Occitan crusade song of Falquet de Romans *BdT* 156.12, 19 (other examples in *TL* III, 1945, 22-33 and God 8, 629bc).
- 30 *pere Jhesu Criz*: even though this may seem strange, this formula is amply attested in medieval French literature. It is unlikely to represent an assimilation of God the Father and the Son of the Trinity, and probably concerns a use of *pere* in the sense of “paternal friend”, “protector” which is quite common in medieval speech.
- 33-40 As already shown, this stanza is omitted by mss. PV; but the specific characteristics of the final stanza, in the light of re-reading this composition in the context of the entire production of the King of Navarre, incline me to accept the attribution to Thibaut proposed by the *Liederbuch* mss. Duty towards God becomes the desire to serve Him and develops into the declaration that love of God is superior to love of the lady, in tones that are decidedly more religious than at the beginning and at times even clerical. So it is no longer a question of a conflict between love and duty, but of the transition from one type of love to another, higher, one. There are few parallels to this in OF lyrics and in particular crusade songs, which at most attempt to reconcile love for the lady with departure on crusade, as has already been emphasised. Independently of any question of attribution, it seems clear that the PV version does not envisage this radical innovation, this poetic syncretism which seems to correspond to the literary personality of the King of Navarre.
- 36 The reading accepted into the text seems to indicate that opting for divine service is a radical move and also implies the speaker’s emotional involvement, even if this seems to contradict what has previously been affirmed in v. 28. – The relative *qui* is certainly a dative (Ménard, § 67), as the variants *cui* of M^tT show.
- 37 Although the formula may appear ambiguous, it seems obvious to me that the love of which the speaker speaks is in this case divine love, which is preferred to human love.
- 38 The impersonal form *covient* appeared already in v. 1, but here indicates a genuine benefit rather than a duty imposed and endured. From the syntactic point of view this verb can be followed by a noun in the oblique case, as here, even in the absence of the subject pronoun *il* and even if the noun functions as the logical subject of the infinitive (see Ménard § 124, p. 123 and the examples in *TL* II, 981, 33-50). Here *là* refers to *iceste amor* of v. 37 and underlines the preference accorded to divine love in the dilemma which gnaws at every “crusader in love”, according to Hughes de Berzé’s well-expressed formulations for example (see RS 1126, 25-32 and RS 1729, 1-4). The expression *venir par là*, literally “to pass through”, does not indicate mere transition in this case, but rather an obligatory point of arrival, as is suggested by the impersonal *covient*.
- 40 The expression *pechiez puanz*, typical of moralising texts, is also found in the song RS 273, 44.
- 41-44 Here, as in the earlier songs RS 6 and RS 273, the *envoi* is addressed to the Virgin Mary, for whom Thibaut shows particular veneration.
- 44 The symmetry of this synthetic formula is extremely effective in summing up the transition from courtly to divine love: the loss of an earthly lady is remedied by another, celestial, lady.

Text

Luca Barbieri, 2014.

Mss.

(9). K 19b-20b (*li rois de Navarre*), M^t 64bc (anon.), O 34bd (anon.), P 154d-155c (anon.), S 315bc (anon.), T 8r (*li rois de Navare*), V 75ab (anon.), X 20c-21a (*li rois de Navarre*), za 141rv (anon.).

Versification and music

10ab'ab'aab'a (MW 627,3 = Frank 216); the crusade song RS 985 of the Châtelain de Couci uses a very similar metrical shape, 10a'ba'bbba'6b, virtually producing a mirror image of this one; 5 *coblas doblas* (2+2+1) with a 4-line *envoi* (aab'a); rhymes a = -er , -iz , -anz ; b = -ee , -oie , -ame ; identical rhyme *durer* in vv. 9 and 14, *joie* in vv. 18 and 28, *poissanz* in vv. 37 and 41 (the latter in the *envoi*); equivocal rhyme *voie* in vv. 20 and 23; lyric caesura in v. 8; melody in KM^t OPVX, with three different melodic lines: the first is found in mss. KM^t OX, while mss. P and V have individual melodic lines (van der Werf 1979, II, p. 120; Tischler 1997, V n° 443).

Previous editions


La Ravallière 1742, II 137; Auguis 1824, II 8; Boutteville 1835, 11; du Méril 1844, 755; Tarbé 1850, 115; Bédier-Aubry 1909, 189; Wallensköld 1925, 186; Brahney 1989, 230; Dijkstra 1995a, 206; Sánchez Palomino 2005, 177.

Analysis of the manuscript tradition

Analysis of the readings shows a division between the *Liederbuch* mss. (M^t TKOX+za) and the chansonniers PV, whose text is essentially an editorial variant (lacking the last stanza and the *envoi*); ms. S oscillates between the two groups, but seems closer to M^t TKOX. No significant error permits the subdivision of the *Liederbuch* mss. into smaller groups, but its characteristic variants confirm the traditional division M^t T vs. KOX, with za constantly following these last mss. The fluctuations of S and the relative independence of PV make the the *Liederbuch* version the compulsory base and is here presented in the graphy of O. The attribution, direct or indirect, to Thibaut de Champagne, is unanimous in mss. M^t TKOX+za; however, alone among the *Liederbuch* mss. V excludes this song from the corpus attributed to Thibaut de Champagne and like P includes it in a group of songs of uncertain attribution alongside other texts which the group KNOVX attributes to the Châtelain de Couci. It therefore seems clear that the tradition headed by these mss. rejected the attribution of the text to Thibaut de Champagne. The hypothesis may therefore be advanced, on the basis of the manuscript tradition, that a four-stanza version of the text circulated in an anonymous form or was attributed to the Châtelain de Couci, and was subsequently reworked by Thibaut de Champagne and integrated into his *Liederbuch* .

Historical context and dating

Lines 1-3 indicate that the author's departure is imminent, and Bédier 1909 (p. 190) maintains that vv. 17-20 seem to have been written after separation from the beloved has already taken place; if so, the date of composition could fall just before embarkation for the Holy Land. Thibaut probably left Champagne for Lyon on 24 June 1239 and embarked at Marseille in the first few days of August. If the allusions contained in the first stanzas are taken as autobiographical and grounded in reality, the text must have been written between these two dates, probably closer to the first than the second. This scenario has remained unchallenged and essentially accepted by all previous scholars, and the text lacks historical references that might help to make the date of composition more precise. But since the song is not an exhortation to take part in a crusade but rather takes the evocation of a crusade as the



starting-point for the depiction of a conflict between two kinds of love (love of a lady and love of God), the possibility remains that we are dealing with a fictitious situation which would make any attempt at dating unfounded.