



## **Ja de chanter en ma vie**

**(RS 1229)**

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## Anonymous

I

Ja de chanter en ma vie  
ne quier mais avoir corage,  
ainz aing mieuz qu'Amors m'ocie  
4 por faire son grant damage,  
que jamés si faitement  
n'iert amee ne servie;  
8 por ce chasti toute gent:  
moi a mort et li trahie.

II

Helas, je ai dit folie,  
ce sai de voir, et outrage,  
mais a mon cuer prist envie  
12 d'estre legier et volage;  
ha, dame, tant m'en repent,  
mais cil a tart merci crie  
16 qui atent tant que il pent;  
por ce ai mort desservie.

III

D'Amors me covient retraire  
por sa fause contenance;  
poise m'en, nen puis plus faire,  
20 qu'a son tort me desavance;  
mais tex est sa volentez  
que cil qui plus li doit plaire  
en est touz tens plus grevez;  
24 por c'est tricheresse vaire.

IV

Merci covient qu'i soit maire  
que jostice ne clamance;  
dame, ne poi mie taire,  
28 ne ne sai dont j'oi pesance;  
moult ai folement parlé,  
et Dex m'en devroit contraire  
comme fol desesperé,  
32 qu'en li n'ot ainz que refaire.

I

For the rest of my life I no more wish to have a heart disposed to sing, but prefer Love to slay me, to *her* own grave harm, because *she* will never again be so perfectly loved or served; so I declare to all: *she* has killed me and betrayed *herself*.

II

Alas, I realise full well that I have spoken foolishly and presumptuously, but my heart was moved to be frivolous and inconstant. Ah, lady, I repent of this so much, but it is too late to cry mercy once one is hanged [by the neck]; for this I have deserved to die.

III

I am constrained to renounce Love on account of *her* hypocritical conduct; I am sorry for it, [but] I can do no other, because *she* ruins me against *her* own interests; but *her* nature is such that the one who should please *her* most is always the most tormented by *her*; this is why *she* is a fickle traitress.

IV

Mercy ought to be greater than justice and law; lady, I have been unable to remain silent and I know not whence comes my impatience; I have spoken most foolishly, and for this God should punish me as the despairing fool that I am, for in *her* there has never been any imperfection.

V

Toz tens l'avrai escondite,  
mais or i voi qui m'esmaie,  
quant cil qui plus est siens quites  
36 tolt toz ses biens et delaie,  
por quant ne s'i doit fier;  
d'endroit moi soit ele maudite:  
la joie qui vient d'amer,  
40 que j'oi grant, or l'ai petite.

VI

A grant tort l'avrai sordite,  
dou monde la plus veraie;  
por ce me tieng a traïte  
44 et m'en met en sa menaie,  
qu'encore m'en puet grever;  
et Dex l'en rende merite,  
s'el me voloit pardonner  
48 la mençonge que j'ai dite.

VII

Cuens, Narcisus vuil mander,  
qui port ma chançon escrite  
dedanz son cuer outremer,  
52 par mi la terre d'Egypte.

VIII

Renaut, qui Amor avite  
puisse Dex grant mal doner!  
por li m'en vois en Egypte.

V

I have always defended *her*, but now I see in *her*  
what dismays me, when *she* deprives of all *her*  
favours the one who is most faithful to *her* and  
leaves him in suspense, hence is untrustworthy; as  
far as I am concerned, may *she* be accursed: of the  
joy that comes from love, which I once had in  
abundance, I now have very little.

VI

Most wrongly have I slandered the truest in the  
world; so I hold myself to be a traitor and place  
myself in *her* hands; *she* can always condemn me  
for this, but may God reward *her*, if *she* were  
willing to forgive me for the lie I have spoken.

VII

Count, I wish to send Narcissus to bear my song  
overseas, written in his heart, right into the land of  
Egypt.

VIII

Renaut, God bring great misfortune onto the one  
who dishonours Love! On *her* account I leave for  
Egypt.

## Notes

The song alternates between stanzas attacking love and stanzas expressing repentance and submission to the lady. The frequent use of feminine pronouns often generates ambiguity and leaves the reader unsure as to whether the addressee is Love (always feminine in Old French lyric) or the lady. In some places, especially in the attacks on Love in the odd stanzas, the presence of the noun *Amor* (vv. 3 and 17), the context and the recourse to well-known sources (see the commentary) seem to militate in favour of Love being concerned; in others, especially in the even stanzas, the vocative *dame* (vv. 13 and 27) seems to suggest otherwise. The ambiguity is probably intentional, so any explicit interpretation has been avoided in the translation and the feminine pronoun simply left in italics: the reader is thus alerted to the fact that all the feminine forms of the song may refer to either Love or the lady, as the case may be. Crusading references are limited to the two mentions of *Egypte* in the *envois*, analogously to the songs RS 1469 of Thibaut de Champagne and RS 1404 of Gontier de Soignies.

- 3 The personification *Amors* is the only subject of the line and the lady is not mentioned, so it is logical to apply to Love the content of the following lines. So it would be Love, and not the lady, that it is the noun to which the possessive son of v. 4 refers, and which is the object of vv. 5-6 and the subject of v. 8.
- 8 For the use of the pronoun *li* with reflexive force see Ménard § 46 2° b, p. 64 and Jensen § 350, p. 170.
- 12 For the coupling of the synonyms *legier et volage* see Chrétien de Troyes RS 121, 25: *Fols cuers legiers ne volages*. Beyond this particular echo, Chrétien de Troyes' whole song is interesting because it is one of the earliest Old French lyric examples of the representation of the war of Love, a theme picked up in several points in our text, as we shall see.
- 21-23 The readings *volentez* and *grevez* are morphologically correct but constitute an infraction of the -é rhyme. However this type of licence is fairly common, even in *trouvères* distinguished by their formal rigour; see for example Gace Brulé RS 687, 8 and 13 (*grevé-maleürez*).
- 22-24 The motif of Love waging war against its loyal subjects has been analysed by Rossi 1987, pp. 58-59 in Chrétien de Troyes RS 121, 1-5, and has its source in Ovid, *Amores*, II, 9, 1-6. See also Rossi 1994.
- 26 The reading *clamance* of O is a very rare form (a hapax in the *trouvères*), its only attested meaning being "declaration of sale, transfer" (God II, 144b) which does not fit the present context. However it could concern a form linked to the noun *claime* which can mean "quarrel, claim, legal action" (but see also the verb *clamer* which can mean "claim, demand recognition of a right").
- 28 The form *dont* can also mean "because"; see Ménard § 391, p. 317.
- 30 The form *contraire* at the rhyme shows once again the use of the author's individual vocabulary. The verb *contraire* is attested in TL II, 781, 30 ff. and FEW II, 119a in the sense of "contract, tighten" which does not really fit the present context; this seems rather to require the verb *contrarier*, in the sense of "reproach, castigate" (but a variant *contraire* of the infinitive is unattested).
- 35 The nominative *cil* can be explained as an anacoluthon probably induced by the following relative subject. On the other hand, since the text contains the imperfect rhymes *é/ez* (see above), nothing prevents us from supposing here as well an imperfect rhyme *ite(s)*, of a kind quite common in the *trouvères*.

- 43 The reading *traïte* is a variant with dissimilation of *traitre*, as Spanke suggested (reiterated by Petersen Dyggve and Lepage). This is accompanied by the morphological peculiarity of the imparisyllabic noun *traitre*, whose nominative form (see Zink, p. 37) begins to extend to the oblique case of the singular during the course of the 13th c..
- 49-50 Spanke's conjecture *cuens* is excellent, and is also compatible with the strange abbreviation *cū* of ms. O. Lepage tried to justify C's reading *com*, but his arguments do not appear entirely satisfactory. Among the trouvères, only Thibaut de Champagne compares himself to Narcissus (RS 1521, 36). This observation and the use of the noun *tricheresse* (v. 24), this also being otherwise attested only once, in the *jeu-parti* between the king of Navarre and Philippe de Nanteuil (RS 1111, 30), could suggest that the text may have been composed within the literary circle of Thibaut de Champagne and go back to the time of the Barons' Crusade of 1239-1240. The name of Philippe de Nanteuil could also fit the syllabic count and rhyme of Guillaume de Dole, in the place of the phantom-like Renaut de Sabloeil, but the date of the Barons' Crusade is incompatible with that of the composition of Jean Renart's romance; in addition Thibaut de Champagne's crusade only touches tangentially upon Egypt and could hardly account for the double reference in the *envois*.
- 53 The dedication to Renaut could be another indirect confirmation of the attribution to Gace Brulé, who addresses three of his songs to a person of this name. The address to a count in the first *envoi* would also be compatible with that attribution, Gace having sent numerous compositions to a count of Blois and a count of Brittany, but this interpretation would once again lead to a date too early to justify the mention of Egypt. – The verb *avite* is a hapax in trouvère lyric and is very rare in other texts. Petersen Dyggve suggests a spelling variant of *eviter*, but Lepage's idea of linking it to *avieuter* (*avilter*) in the sense of "avilir, mépriser" seems more convincing to me; see some examples of this form in in God I, 528c and FEW 14, 449b.

## Text

Luca Barbieri, 2014.

## Mss.

(4+5+1). version I = C 107r (112r; anonymous, but in the Gace Brulé group), M 38d ( *me sire Gasse* ), O 59c (anon., but in the Gace Brulé group; modern attribution *Renaud de Sabueil* ), a 88a ( *Blondiaus de Neele* in the Index); version II = H 220b (anon.), K 303b (anon.), N 144b (287b, anon.), P 158b (anon.), X 193b (anon.); u 89a (stanzas I and II, *Renaut de sabloeil* ).

## Versification and music

7a'b'a'b'ca'ca' (MW 1113,1 = Frank 349), *unicum* in trouvère lyric; version I: 6 *coblas doblas capcaudadas* with 2 *envois* of 4 (ca'ca') and 3 (a'ca') lines; rhyme a = -ie , -aire , -i(p)te(s) ; rhyme b = -age , -ance , -aie ; rhyme c = -ent , -é(z) , -er ; version II: 4 *coblas doblas capcaudadas* with one *envoi* of 4 lines with different rhymes from those of the full stanzas (ca'ca'); rhyme a = -ie , -ue , ( -oie ) ; rhyme b = -age , -ure ; rhyme c = -ent , ( -i ) (the rhyme c is fixed in the four full stanzas, but changes in the *envoi* ); in version I, rich rhymes vv. 1, 6, 11, 16 ( *vie-servie-envie-desservie* ), 13 and 15 ( *repent-pent* ), 19 and 32 ( *faire-refaire* , also derivative), 33, 38 and 48 ( *escondite-maudite-dite* , also derivative), 47 and 54 ( *pardoner-doner* ); identical rhymes in the *envois* vv. 52 and 55 ( *Egypte* ). Melody of version I in MO; melody of version II in KNPX (T 697); the melodic lines of the different witnesses do not present significant variants.



## Previous editions

Tarbé 1850, 49 (version II, text of P); Tarbé 1862, 33 (version I, stanzas I-IV); Brakelmann 1868, 347 (version I, diplomatic edition of C); Bartsch 1870, 164 (stanzas I-II, text of u); Servois 1893, 117 (stanzas I-II, text of u); Bertoni 1917, 362 (version II, diplomatic edition of H); Spanke 1925, 2 (versions I and II); Lejeune 1936, 90 (stanzas I-II, text of u); Petersen Dyggve 1944, 61 (versions I and II); Lecoy 1970, 119 (stanzas I-II, text of u); Dufournet 1989, 92 (version I); Lepage 1994, 424 (versions I and II).


## Analysis of the manuscript tradition

The manuscript tradition presents two distinct versions of this song, which have only the first two stanzas in common: the first version, composed of six stanzas and two *envois*, is found in mss. CMOa; the second, composed of four stanzas and one *envoi*, is in mss. HKNPX. Ms. u, the sole witness of Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole*, into which the song is inserted as a lyric quotation, records only the first two stanzas, and contains some individual readings of both versions. The reference to departure for the East is found only in the *envois* of CMOa. My edition is based on these mss. and disregards HKNPX and u, since it is impossible to demonstrate the existence of a single archetype of the different versions. Neither is it possible to establish a hierarchy among the mss. of the first version, even if in the second part of the song in particular some binary alternatives appear to divide mss. CO and Ma, in conformity with the stemmi outlined by Schwan 1886. O has been chosen as base ms., despite the scribe's tendency to rewrite, because it is the only ms. along with C to record the complete text and has the advantage of a high number of conservative and *difficilior* readings.

## Historical context and dating

The possibility of dating this song is bound up with its insertion into Jean Renart's *Guillaume de Dole* and to the double allusion to Egypt in the two *envois* of version I, but the two elements seem to contradict each other. The quotation contained in *Guillaume de Dole* seems to argue in favour of a relatively early date, if one accepts the date of 1208-1210 for Jean Renart's work suggested by Lejeune 1974 (though Lecoy 1961 proposes 1227-1228). In addition, the date of *Guillaume de Dole* can strictly only apply to the first two stanzas, the only ones cited by Jean Renart. Such an early date does not seem compatible with the allusion to Egypt. Petersen Dyggve 1944 (p. 72) believes the text must have been written at the time of the third crusade, but in reality no song of that period contains this geographical allusion, and the only two mentions of Egypt are found in songs RS 1154 and RS 1887 by Raoul de Soissons, both attributable to the period of the seventh crusade (1249?).

As far as authorship is concerned, the mss. present three distinct attributions: Gace Brulé (M), Blondel de Nesle (a) and Renaut de Sableuil (u). If the attribution to Blondel de Nesle is isolated and probably to be rejected, that to Gace Brulé is confirmed indirectly by mss. CO. However, this well-known name is *facilior* and may have been suggested by that author's fame and the presence of the name *Renaut* in the *envoi* (see the comment to v. 53), and in any case does not square with the late date apparently required by the context (there is no trace of Gace after 1212-1213). Nevertheless, given the by no means insignificant support of the manuscript tradition for Gace Brulé's name, it cannot be excluded that such an attribution may refer to an early version of the text, of which only the first two stanzas cited in *Guillaume de Dole* might remain, and this hypothesis would also agree with the earlier dating proposed for the composition of Jean Renart's romance. Petersen Dyggve on the other hand concentrates on the genealogy of the lords of Sabloeil (Sablé-sur-Sarthe, dep. Sarthe, in the Loire) and defends u's *difficilior* attribution. He assigns the song to Robert IV of Sabloeil, who is known to have taken part in the third crusade (p. 75), and corrects the name proposed by Jean Renart since the family tree shows no person having the name Renaut (p. 80); but the reliability of u's attribution is inevitably



weakened by this operation.

Because of the contradictory and partial elements of information found in the mss., it has been decided to leave the text as anonymous. As for the date, no elements in the text permit a precise dating, but the references to Egypt seem to speak in favour of a date after 1217, the year in which the fifth crusade set out, its first destination being indeed Egypt, even if the similarities with Raoul de Soissons' two songs might seem to argue more in favour of the time of the seventh crusade (1249-1250; see also the commentary to v. 49). These same chronological references had also been proposed by Spanke 1925, p. 352.