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MEG BOGIN

The Women Troubadours

An introduction to the women poets of 12th-century Provence and a collection of their poems



Countess of Dia

born c. 1140

88

THE WOMEN TROUBADOURS

III

Estat ai en greu cossirier
per un cavallier qu'ai agut,
e vuoil sia totz temps saubut
cum ieu l'ai amat a sobrier;
ara vei qu'ieu sui trahida
car ieu non li donei m'amor,
don ai estat en gran error
en lieig e quand sui vestida.

Ben volria mon cavallier
tener un ser en mos bratz nut,
qu'el s'en tengra per erebut
sol qu'a lui fezes cosseillier;
car plus m'en sui abellida
no fetz Floris de Blancaflor:
ieu l'autrei mon cor e m'amor,
mon sen, mos huoills e ma vida.

Bels amics avinens e bos,
coraus tenrai en mon poder?
e que jagues ab vos un ser
e qu'ieus des un bais amoros;
sapchatz, gran talan n'auria
qu'ieus tengues en luoc del marit,
ab so que m'aguessetz plevit
de far tot so qu'ieu volria.

THE COUNTESS OF DIA was probably from Die, northeast of Montelimar. She was descended from seigneurial families of the Viennois and Burgundy and was married to the lord of Die. Four of her poems have survived.

THE WOMEN TROUBADOURS

89

III

I've lately been in great distress
over a knight who once was mine,
and I want it known for all eternity
how I loved him to excess.
Now I see I've been betrayed
because I wouldn't sleep with him;*
night and day† my mind won't rest
to think of the mistake I made.

How I wish just once I could caress
that chevalier with my bare arms,
for he would be in ecstasy
if I'd just let him lean his head against my breast.
I'm sure I'm happier with him
than Blancaflor with Floris.††
My heart and love I offer him,
my mind, my eyes, my life.

Handsome friend, charming and kind,
when shall I have you in my power?
If only I could lie beside you for an hour
and embrace you lovingly –
know this, that I'd give almost anything
to have you in my husband's place,
but only under the condition
that you swear to do my bidding.

* Some scholars see in this line a classic reference to the *épreuve*, or test of chastity, which required the lovers to sleep together naked with a sword between them.

† Literally, "in bed and when I'm dressed."

†† Heroine and hero, respectively, of a lost popular romance.

Azalaïs de Porcairages
born c.1140

Ar em al freg temps vengut
quel gels el neus e la faingna
e.l aucellet estan mut,
c'us de chantar non s'afrangna;
e son sec li ram pels plais –
que flors ni foilla noi nais,
ni rossignols noi crida,
que l'am e mai me reissida.

Tant ai lo cors deseubut,
pe qu'ieu soi a totz estraingna,
e sai que l'om a perduto
molt plus tost que non gasaingna;
e s'ieu faill ab motz verais,
d'Aurenga me moc l'esglais,
per qu'ieu m'estauc esbaïda
e 'n pert solatz en partida.

Dompna met mot mal s'amor
que ab ric ome plaideia,
ab plus aut de vavassor;
e s'il o fai, il folleia,
car so diz om en Veillai
que ges per ricor non vai,
e dompna que n'es chauzida
en tenc per envilanida.

AZALAIS DE PORCAIRAGES was from the modern town of Portiragnes, just outside Béziers. Nothing definite is known about her life, but she appears to have moved in courtly society.

Now we are come to the cold time
when the ice and the snow and the mud
and the birds' beaks are mute
(for not one inclines to sing);
and the hedge-branches are dry –
no leaf nor bud sprouts up,
nor cries the nightingale
whose song awakens me in May.*

My heart is so disordered
that I'm rude to everyone;
I know it's easier to lose
than gain; still, though I be blamed
I'll tell the truth:
my pain comes from Orange.†
That's why I stand gaping,
for I've lost the joy of solace.

A lady's love is badly placed
who argues with a wealthy man,
one above the rank of vassal:
she who does it is a fool.
For the people of Vélay††
say love and money do not mix,
and the woman money chooses
they say has lost her honor.

* This line recalls the May songs of the popular tradition.

† Perhaps a reference to Raimbaut d'Orange.

†† Corresponds to the southern part of the Auvergne.

Amic ai de gran valor
que sobre toz seignoreia,
e non a cor trichador
vas me, que s'amor m'autreia.
Ieu dic que m'amors l'eschai,
e cel que dis que non fai,
Dieus li don mal' escarida,
qu'ieu m'en teing fort per guerida.

Bels amics, de bon talan
son ab vos toz jornz en gatge,
cortez' e de bel semblan,
sol no.m demandes outratge;
tost en venrem a l'assai,
qu'en vostra merce.m metrai:
vos m'avetz la fe plevida,
que no.m demandes faillida.

A Dieu coman Bel Esgar
e plus la ciutat d'Aurenza,
e Gloriet' e.l Caslar,
e lo seignor de Proenza
e tot can vol mon ben lai,
e l'arc on son fag l'assai.
Celui perdiei c'a ma vida,
e 'n serai toz jorns marrida.

Joglar, que avetz cor gai,
ves Narbona portatz lai
ma chanson ab la fenida
lei cui jois e jovens guida.

I have a friend of great repute
who towers above all other men,
and his heart toward me is not untrue,
for he offers me his love.
And I tell you I reciprocate,
and whoever says I don't,
God curse his luck –
as for myself, I know I'm safe.

Handsome friend, I'd gladly stay
forever in your service –
such noble mien and such fine looks –
so long as you don't ask too much;
we'll soon come to the test,
for I'll put myself in your hands:
you swore me your fidelity,
now don't ask me to transgress.

To God I commend Bel Esgar
and the city of Orange,
and Gloriet' and the Caslar,
and the lord of all Provence,
and all those there who wish me well,
and the arch where the attacks are shown.*
I've lost the man who owns my life,
and I shall never be consoled.

*Joglar, you of merry heart,
carry my song down to Narbonne,
with its *tornada* made for her†
whose guides are youth and joy.*

* The Roman arch of Orange was one of the outstanding monuments of medieval Provence (see illustration, p. 42). The other references in the stanza are to now unknown landmarks, presumably also in the area of Orange.

† Probably the Viscountess Ermengarda of Narbonne, a major political and cultural figure over a period of fifty years.

Castelloza
born c.1200

I

Amics, s'ie.us trobes avinen,
humil e franc e de bona merce,
be.us amera, quan era m'en sove
que.us trob vas mi mal e fellon e tric;
e fauc chanssos per tal qu'ieu fass' auzir
vostre bon pretz, don ieu non puosc sofrir
que no.us fassa lauzar a tota gen,
on plus mi faitz mal et adiramen.

Jamais no.us tenrai per valen
ni.us amarai de bon cor e de fe,
tro que veirai si ja.m valria re
si.us mostrava cor fellon ni enic;
non farai ja, car non vuoill poscatz dir
qu'ieu anc vas vos agues cor de faillir,
qu'auriatz pois quelque razonamen,
s'ieu fazia vas vos nuill faillimen.

Ieu sai ben qu'a mi estai gen
si bei.s dizon tuch que mout descove
que dompna prei a cavallier de se
ni que.l teigna totz temps tan loc prezic;
mas cel qu'o ditz non sap ges ben chausir,
qu'ieu vuoill proar enans que.m lais morir
qu'el preiar ai un gran revenimen
quan prec cellui don ai greu pessamen.

CASTELLOZA was from the Auvergne, from the region of Le Puy.
She was probably the wife of a nobleman who fought in the
Fourth Crusade. Three of her poems have survived.

I

Friend, if you had shown consideration,
meekness, candor and humanity,
I'd have loved you without hesitation;
but you were mean and sly and villainous.
Still, I make this song to spread your praises
wide, for I can't bare to let your name
go on unsung and unrenowned,
no matter how much worse you treat me now.

I won't consider you a decent man
nor love you fully nor with trust
until I see if it would help me more
to make my heart turn mean or treacherous.
But I don't want to give you an excuse
for saying I was ever devious with you;
something you could keep in store
in case I never did you wrong.

It greatly pleases me
when people say that it's unseemly
for a lady to approach a man she likes
and hold him deep in conversation;
but whoever says that isn't very bright,
and I want to prove before you let me die
that courting brings me great relief
when I court the man who's brought me grief.

Assatz es fols qui m'en repren
de vos amar, pois tan gen mi cove,
e cel qu'o ditz no sap cum s'es de me;
ni no.us vei ges aras si cum vos vic
quan me dissetz que non agues cossir
que calqu'ora poiri' endevenir
que n'auria enqueras jauzimen:
de sol lo dich n'ai ieu lo cor jauzen.

Tot' autr' amor teing a nien,
e sapchatz ben que mais jois no.m soste
mas lo vostre que m'alegr' e.m reve,
on mais en sent d'afan e de destric;
e.m cuig ades alegrar e jauzir
de vos, amics, qu'ieu non puosc convertir,
ni joi non ai, ni socors non aten,
mas sol aitan quan n'aurai en dormen.

Oimais non sai que.us mi presen,
que cercat ai et ab mal et ab be
vostre dur cor, don lo mieus noi.s recre;
e no.us o man, qu'ieu mezeissa.us o dic:
que morai me, si no.m voletz jauzir
de quelque joi, e si.m laissatz morir,
faretz peccat, e serai n'en tormen,
e seretz ne blasmatz vilanamen.

Whoever blames my love for you's
a fool, for it greatly pleases me,
and whoever says that doesn't know me;
I don't see you now at all the way I did
the time you said I shouldn't worry,
since at any moment I might
rediscover reason to rejoice:
from words alone my heart is full of joy.

All other love's worth naught,
and every joy is meaningless to me
but yours, which gladdens and restores me,
in which there's not a trace of pain or of distress;
and I think I'll be glad always and rejoice
always in you, friend, for I can't convert;
nor have I any joy, nor do I find relief,
but what little solace comes to me in sleep.

I don't know why you're always on my mind,
for I've searched and searched from good to evil
your hard heart, and yet my own's unswerving.
I don't send you this; no, I tell you myself:
if you don't want me to enjoy
the slightest happiness, then I shall die;
and if you let me die, you'll be a guilty man;
I'll be in my grave, and you'll be cruelly blamed.