

Four Songs

La Comtessa de Dia

translated by Reitha Pattison

The twelfth-century Provençal trobairitz, La Comtessa de Dia, is described in her Vida as 'a good and beautiful woman, [who] was married to Guilhem de Poitiers. She was in love with Raimbaut d'Orange and made many fine songs about him.' Only four of her songs have survived.

I 'Ab joi et ab joven m'apais'

I feast on joy and youth; a piece
of both maps a courtly paradise.
Youth's ease of use, so good to eat
well on the young love of tangling
strays. My heart's rarely errant
so he stays a friend
steeped in an ichor of love.

Pleasure is mine. I desire the prime of his worth
valued exactly at the grand play I make for him.
Uncordial speech, free of good, is much in force.
I vet the strength of foes and find many sweep
a petard and are swept up into a petard-like maze.

Take my instruction in donations of love:
give it to all pros of knightly valence
as a pulsar, connoisseur of acumen,
seeking out the face of the earth.

My first choice largely shines adroit,
owns that waxen sheen,
rich in worldly common sense.
I make a prayerful reconnaissance
into other men's disbelief
to find presentiments of a dual betrayal.

Soapy amicability pleases good men
who queue for it and keep it safe.

A collective sexual fantasy about worth is generally considered the organizing principle, failure its gracious form. Or, according to G. Simmel, "we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them." The Comtessa preferred success and no resistance.

Although a broom (balais) isn't exactly a bomb (petard), the fusion of the clichés and the trace of metonymy hopefully work to show the right sign of the situation. As such, I've left out Floris, and will do so again, but for good reason. See note to III.

II 'A chanter m'ér de so qu'ieu non volria'

Volleyed from my inward chant by taunts
direct from his rank *sui juris* amity (*cui bono?*),
I, a rejectamenta in the cortège of love, roll along
the vale of small mercies, bound to a cheat.
Nemo dat etc. which is you, me, him, worse than perfidy.

What more could so connote a failed scene
of captive angst? Not loving you less
than one doomed *aimante* did another,
you ogle the parvenus while on my mettle
I vent, etched in superior Pyrrhic victory.

I'm ill-inclined to song, but rich in qualia
that recollect my savage ferrous core,
worthy of all men strangled by a charm.

—

Ignoring the evolved sense distinctions between charm, chant, and sing, I've gone for the jugular of etymology. The lovers referred to in the original are Seguin and Valensa, hero and heroine of a now-lost romance. This complex of amorous loss—within and without the canso—would be, in F. Schlegel's terms, a coarse irony, i.e., found in the real nature of things. Otherwise, why bother?

III 'Estat ai en greu cossirier'

Grey is the colour of the state I'm in.
My guts cavil love's conjured sobriquet.
Carmen et error! The sword lay a trap I failed:
I really slept, clothed, and stand in vestiges of regret.

Barest arms hold heady breasts so
call to all a hold on the chevauchee.
I'm handing you a form of life-like skull,
its grieving flesh, its orbits corded flame.

There's a kind of friend who rings you
like a jaguar. Know that power? It's mine
over you, who can grasp a predatory wish
or grandiose talent for consuming one after another.

—

The pair of lovers mentioned in the original are Blancaflor and Floris, heroine and hero of another lost romance. In the accumulation of two lost romances, and the obvious floral euphemism, we have an irony extra-fine.

Where I've displaced the vernacular, I've done a mild injustice to the Latin inheritance through the figure of the Knight, to keep things even.

IV 'Fin joi me don' alegranssa'

I've ingress to a double court of bliss, tho'
crosswise blow false adverse fans of knives.
Our non-potent honour code's gone pensive,
lousy with maledictions. The escalade merely
adds a truism to the heightened gaiety of love's strife.

Out, wretched confidantes, agents, spies
who so resemble puffed-up clouds
that steal Sol's authentic claim to shine!

Here comes a marital tornado:
No more 'Me Tarzan, you Jane.'
For cogent imagoes of youth + joy
I quit this parlous jail of rumours
whose pleasure bends one way
to doleful male refuse.

—

I surmise that a tornado (for tornada) was the kind of envoy the Comtessa wanted: twisting, quick, and deadly.