

A MUSICO-LITERARY COMMENTARY ON
BERNART DE VENTADORN'S "QAN VEI LA
LAUDETA MOVER"

Huw Grange

NOTE

When I sing Bernart de Ventadorn's "Qan vei la laudeta mover" (P-C 70, 43), remaining as faithful as my memory allows to editions of troubadour manuscript *G* (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, R 71 sup.), I add my own voice to that of a well-remembered composer and to those of long-forgotten medieval *joglars* and scribes.¹ The "intricate web of oral and written dissemination" that must have preceded the song's capture on the folios of songbook *G* continues to be woven, since my own voice cannot fail to echo those of modern *joglars* and scribes, the performers I have heard and the editors who necessarily mediate my contact with the manuscript page.² It is, of course, often impossible to unravel these disparate voices – sometimes in harmony with each other, sometimes discordant – with any degree of certainty. But this is by no means always the case.

¹ I use *joglar* as a generic term for the medieval performer of troubadour song, regardless of rank and status and whether or not he or she was also a composer. The text of "Qan vei" that follows is based on the diplomatic edition in Francesco Carapezza, ed., *Il Canzoniere Occitano G (Ambrosiano R 71 Sup.)* (Napoli: Liguori, 2004), pp. 319-20. I have silently expanded abbreviations, changed consonantal "i" and "u" to "j" and "v" respectively, and added minimal modern punctuation. All translations are my own. The melody is taken from Hendrik van der Werf, *The Chansons of the Troubadours and Trouvères: A Study of the Melodies and Their Relation to the Poems* (Utrecht: Oosthoek, 1972), pp. 91-93.

² Hendrik van der Werf, *The Extant Troubadour Melodies*, text ed. Gerald Bond (Rochester, NY: the author, 1984), p. 8.

§1. “Laudeta”³

1 Qan vei la lau - de - ta mo - ver

2 De joi sas a - las con - tra'l rai,

3 Per la dol - çor q'al cor li vai

4 S'ob - li - da e's lai - sa ca - der.

5 Ha, las! Com gran en - ve - ja'm ve

6 De cui que ve - ia jau - ci - on;

7 Me - ri - veil - las ai car de - se

8 Lo cor de de - si - rer no'm fon.

As the lark swoops downward in the sunlight, “forgetting itself” in the sweetness of the moment (“s’oblida,” 4), time and again modern listeners have heard the bird’s descent echoed in the downward motion of the melody. Even those who acknowledge that direct mimetic links between music and language were extraordinarily rare in the Middle Ages are sometimes willing to make an exception for the gently descending third melodic phrase of “Qan vei.”⁴ But for the scribe of Songbook *G* who copied the first stanza of “Qan vei” beneath the staves of music, as yet unfilled, the bond between the third line of text and the third melodic phrase

was far from unbreakable. Either he or a prior copyist swapped the third and fourth lines of poetry, producing a perfectly intelligible stanza, but one whose rhyme scheme (*abba*) is at odds with that of

³ “When I see the lark beat its wings | Against the (sun’s) ray out of joy, | For the sweetness which enters its heart | It forgets itself and lets itself fall. | Alas! Such great envy comes upon me | Of those whom I see rejoicing; | I marvel that at once | My heart does not melt from desire.”

⁴ See, for example, Leo Treitler, “The Troubadours Singing Their Poems,” in *The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry*, ed. Rebecca A. Baltzer, Thomas Cable, and James I. Wimsatt (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 15-48 (p. 27).

subsequent stanzas (*abab*). Perhaps this was an unwitting case of homeoteleuton, the text scribe jumping ahead to “s’oblida” after mistakenly reading “vai” (“enters”) for “rai” (“ray”). Or perhaps he was anticipating a more familiar rhyme scheme (*abba*) than the one used for the opening lines of “Qan vei” elsewhere (*abab*).⁵ But regardless of the exact reason behind the alteration to the text, by the time the music scribe came to enter notes on the stave, the falling lark was no longer set to the gentle descent of the third musical phrase.

As luck would have it, however, the end of the fourth melodic phrase also features a descent, not a gradual decline from the dizzy heights of d to F, but an altogether more abrupt plunge from c to the *finalis* of the melody, D. Does the lark come crashing down to the ground in the version of “Qan vei” preserved in manuscript *G*? Or does it instead become apparent that every single one of the eight melodic phrases of “Qan vei” comprises at least one ascending and descending figure that could be taken to be the musical rendering of a forgetful skylark?

The musical aesthetic of “Qan vei” is far removed from that of nineteenth-century program music. Its melodic rises and falls, some more rapid than others, most obviously echo the music of the medieval cloister. At its most elementary, a phrase of chant is made up of a rising intonation formula, recitation on a note of structural importance, and a concluding cadential formula, a model whose relevance to “Qan vei” is immediately evident from the opening melodic phrase.⁶ The song opens with the incipit D-F-G-a, firmly grounding the melody in the first ecclesiastical mode, with D as its *finalis*, before hovering around the note a, the recitation tone par excellence of the very same mode. With the end of the phrase, the melody falls to G, not a structurally important note in itself, but one which nonetheless ensures a smooth transition to the following musical phrase.

Chant as governed by the eight ecclesiastical modes represented a musical language which *joglars* and music scribes across medieval Europe could understand, in cloister or in court, in Occitania or in Italy. By drawing on the structures of chant, the

⁵ For the frequency of the two schemata, see István Frank, *Répertoire métrique de la poésie des troubadours*, 2 vols (Paris: Champion, 1953-1957), I, 38-87, 90-147.

⁶ See van der Werf, *Chansons*, p. 90.

melody of “Qan vei,” whether it was Bernart’s own composition or a borrowing from elsewhere, comes with a framework that performers, scribes and audiences knew before ever hearing or reading his song. When the music scribe of songbook *G* entered the final notes of the third melodic phrase, the slip made by a text scribe meant that he could not have imagined an enraptured skylark tumbling to the ground, but he would certainly have recognized a cadential formula borrowed from chant (a-G-F).

§2. “Tolt”⁷

The musical score consists of eight staves, numbered 9 through 16. Each staff contains a line of music in a single melodic line with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The lyrics are: 9 Ha, las! Qant cu - ja - va sa - ber; 10 D'a - mor e tant pi - tit en sai,; 11 Qeç eu d'a - mar no'm pos te - ner; 12 Sel - lei dund ja pro non au - rai.; 13 Tolt m'a mon cor e tolt m'a me; 14 E si me - teis - s'e tot lo mon,; 15 E cant si'm tolc no'm lai - sa ren; 16 Mas de - si - rer e cor vo - lon.

Surprised that he was able to remember the text of “Qan vei” so easily while singing, William Paden concluded that the melody of troubadour song must be “naturally memorable,” facilitating transmission of the text without a performer necessarily having recourse to the written word.⁸ But the notes of a melody, especially one governed by the rules and regulations of chant, do not give weight uniformly to the words of the poem. To gain an insight into the circulation of troubadour song in a memorial context, there is a need to investigate the relationship between the melodic syntax and

the text more closely.

In the second stanza of “Qan vei,” the first-person subject (“eu,” 11), conflating the personae of troubadour and lover, does not sacrifice himself to his courtly lady; his subjectivity is stolen. Not only has she taken his heart and his very being (13), but she has removed herself and the entire world (14), ensuring that the

⁷ “Alas! I thought I knew so much | About love and I know so little, | For I cannot stop myself loving | Her by whom I will never profit. | She has stolen from me my heart and myself, | And herself and the whole world, | And when she stole me she leaves me nothing | But desire and a wanting heart.”

⁸ William Paden, “What Singing Does to Words: Reflections on the Art of the Troubadours,” *Exemplaria* 17, no. 2 (2005), 481-506 (p. 505).

troubadour-lover, in the absence of external referents, has no hope of recovering a meaningful identity.

The musical line is complicit in the lady's wicked act of identity theft, binding key lexemes to notes that occupy privileged positions in the melodic phrase. In line 11 the performer arrives at his or her pitch goal, the highest note of the phrase (d), with the first-person subject pronoun ("eu"). It is similarly the troubadour-lover as subject that is stressed when the performer reaches the closed cadence of line 12 on the first-person future marker and rhyme sound *-ai*. The second half of the stanza, in contrast, emphasizes the troubadour-lover's objectification at the hands of his lady. At the end of line 13, where the first person is both the direct and indirect object of the lady's act of larceny ("tolt m'a me," "she has stolen me from myself"), the melodic line plummets through an interval of a fifth, from d to G, and from one "me" to another. Considering that the melody of "Qan vei" almost always progresses by stepwise movement, this sudden descent is remarkable enough to play a structural role. The group of notes, or melisma, attached to the first syllable of line 13, which causes the performer to linger on "tolt" ("stolen"), and the arrival at the pitch goal (c) in line 15 on "tolc" ("stole") also lend importance to the lady's destructive act.

There is some evidence among the extant troubadour songbooks to suggest that those key lexemes fortunate enough to be privileged by melodic leaps, pitch goals, and melismas were subject to less variation than words left unaccentuated by the melodic line. As "qeç" ("for") and "d'amar" ("loving") of line 11, for example, vary considerably from one codex to the next, "eu,"⁹ firmly anchored to its pitch goal, remains steadfastly the same. Rarely does the [m] of "m'a" disappear from the top of the melodic leap at the end of line 13, despite the host of different readings recorded in the songbooks for the line, particularly at the rhyme. "Tolt" ("stolen") is glued to the beginning of line 13 in the majority of the extant manuscripts. It is perhaps telling that songbook *R*, which, like *G*, preserves both the text and the music of "Qan vei," is one of the few manuscripts which dislodge "tolt" from its primary position and the only one to displace the melisma from

⁹ Only in songbook *O* is it lacking according to the variants listed in Carl Appel, ed., *Bernart von Ventadorn: Seine Lieder* (Halle an der Salle: Niemeyer, 1915), p. 251.

the beginning of the line: perhaps as the melisma was displaced, “tolt” went with it.¹⁰ If the tune of “Qan vei” acted as a mnemonic prompter for *joglars*, as Paden suggests, it seems likely that some notes were more “naturally memorable” than others.

§3. “Domnas”¹¹

17 De las dom-nas mi de-ses-per;

18 Ja mais in lor no'm fi-a-rai,

19 C'ai-si com las sol cap-ten-er

20 En-ais-si las des-cap-ten-rai.

21 Pois vei c'u-na pro no-mi-te

22 Veis lei q'i-m-des-trui e'm con-fon,

23 Tu-tas las domps e las mes-cre,

24 Qe ben sai q'al-tre-tals se son.

The lyric subject of “Qan vei” was not the first to condemn his lady; nor would he be the last. When the future looks bright, the troubadour-lover’s lady is the best of the best, but when the future looks bleak, she is as wicked as any other fallen female. It is in some ways fitting that a stanza in which one lady is accused of being identical to the next (24) should make ample use of lexical and melodic repetition. In relation to the text, an instance of syntactic-semantic patterning is not beyond the realms of plausibility, although lexical pairing in “Qan vei” is by no

¹⁰ Van der Werf, *Chansons*, pp. 91-93.

¹¹ “Of ladies I despair; | Never again will I trust them, | For just as I used to defend them | From now on I will denounce them. | Since I see that not one (lady) comes to my aid | Against her who destroys and confounds me, | I fear and distrust them all, | For I know for sure that they are all the same.”

means unique to this stanza.¹² In relation to the melody, however, a mimetic link between identical ladies and matching melodic motifs would be highly unlikely, as the plummeting skylark of the first stanza in manuscript *G* has shown.

If the aesthetic function of repetition in this stanza seems hazy at best, this need not be the case for repetition's mnemonic function. Whether lexical repetition is internal to the stanza or interstanzaic, whether words are repeated to the letter, share a common etymological root or are synonymous, the mnemonic potential is essentially the same: repetition links individual units, intensifying the experience of each unit and making performers and listeners aware of how those units fit into an overall structure. If the song which eventually reached the folios of songbook *G* was initially circulated without a written support, it seems likely that a *joglar* who revealed to his or her audience that the lady "destroys" the troubadour-lover ("destrui"), would have known that the next item on his list was to accuse her of "confounding" him ("confon," 22). That the troubadour-lover "fears" ladies ("las domps"), meanwhile, is likely to have reminded the *joglar* that the poetic persona should "mistrust" them, too ("las mescre," 23).

In manuscript *G*, the troubadour-lover's transition from fawning suitor to carping misogynist is neatly charted by the rhyme words of lines 19 and 20, "captener" ("to defend") and "descaptenrai" ("I will denounce"). Almost half of the songbooks containing "Qan vei," however, give the virtually synonymous "mantener" and "desmantenrai."¹³ Several scenarios could account for this variation: maybe Bernart himself sanctioned both readings; a scribe, whether intentionally or not, may have swapped "captener" for "mantener," or vice versa; or perhaps "captener" and "descaptenrai" are traces left by oral transmission. In the latter case, a lyric-learning *joglar* may well have privileged the macro-structure, the progression from positive to negative through the addition of the negative prefix, leaving the individual units, the exact words he once heard or read, subject to variation.

¹² See Erich Köhler's classic study on repetition in "Qan vei:" "Can vei la lauzeta mover: Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von phonischer Struktur und semantischer Struktur," in *Linguistic and Literary Studies in Eastern Europe*, ed. Peter Zima (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1981), 445-68.

¹³ Appel, *Bernart*, p. 251-52.

Repetition of small patterns of notes, or musical motifs, would no doubt have facilitated the transmission of troubadour melodies in a memorial context. The melody of “Qan vei” tends to be labeled *oda continua* (“through-composed,” or “without repetition”), usually represented schematically as *abcdefgh*. But this schema is misleading because it fails to take into account the repetition of entire musical phrases which occurs in songbook *R*, let alone the large amount of repetition of smaller motifs in all of the songbooks that preserve the melody.¹⁴ The penultimate phrase of the melody in manuscript *G*, for example, may not repeat the fourth phrase directly, as manuscript *R* does, but the two phrases certainly bear a striking structural resemblance. It rises to the same pitch goal as the fourth (c), before falling through the triad c-a-F to a cadential figure. The intonation formula of the seventh phrase, however, has been borrowed from elsewhere. Instead of echoing the beginning of the fourth phrase, it directly echoes the beginning of the second (G-a-b-c). Perhaps a *joglar* remembered the need for a repeated *incipit* at the beginning of the penultimate phrase, but it was less important for him or her to retain the exact notes that the motif contained. As the troubadour-lover exchanges one lady for the next, the *joglar* exchanged one musical motif for another.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Aubrey has criticized the use of reductive schemata for troubadour melodies in *The Music of the Troubadours* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996), p. 145; and “Word Refrains and Their Music: Considerations and Case Studies From the Troubadours,” in *Etudes de langue et de littérature médiévales offertes à Peter T. Ricketts à l’occasion de son 70ème anniversaire*, ed. Dominique Billy and Ann Buckley (Turnhout, Brepols: 2005), 519-30 (pp. 520-21).

§4. “Ha!”¹⁵

25 Mer - ces es per - du - t'et es ver

26 Et eu non o sau - bi anc mai,

27 Qar cel qe plus en deg - r'a - ver

28 No'n a ges, et on la qe - rai?

29 Ha, co mal sem - bla, qi la vel

30 A seis oillç, chai - tis jau - çï - on
[Que a - quest]

31 Qe ja ses lei non au - ra be

32 Las - se mo - rir, qe no'ill au - on.

The troubadour-lover ends the first half, or *frons*, of stanza 4 with a question: if his lady, of all people, is proving pitiless, then where can he possibly hope to find mercy (28)? His answer at the beginning of the second half of the stanza, or *cauda*, takes the form of a prolonged wail, echoing the lament heard at the beginning of the *cauda* of the opening stanza (5). The transition between *frons* and *cauda* in “Qan vei” is rarely a smooth one, and in this stanza words and melody combine to render it unforgettably tortured.

The mid-point of the stanza signals more than the shift from rhyme sounds *-er* and *-ai* to *-e* and *-on*; the troubadour-lover’s

exclamation marks a change in direction, or rather a moment of bifurcation.¹⁶ The “eu” that identified the troubadour-lover as he

¹⁵ “Mercy is lost, it is true, | And not once did I experience it, | For the one who should have it most | Has none, and where will I seek it? | Oh, how bad it must look to him who sees her! | In his eyes, a rejoicing wretch, | Who will have no good without her, | She allows to die, for she does not help him.”

¹⁶ Matthew Steel argues, in relation to the stanza order of “Qan vei” found in songbook *R*, that a shift of perspective takes place in every stanza between *frons* and *cauda*, from the lover to the lady in the stanzas preceding the “mirror” stanza and from the lady to the lover in the stanzas following it. See “A Case for the Predominance of Melody Over Text in Troubadour Lyric: Bernart de Ventadorn’s ‘Can vei la lauzeta mover,’”

begged for mercy in the *frons* splits into troubadour and lover in the *cauda*. The poetic voice draws the at once miserable and joyful lover (“chaitis jauçon,” “rejoicing wretch,” 30) to the attention of his spectators, or, rather, to the attention of the lady’s spectators (“qi la ve,” “he who sees her,” 29). He uses the third person to identify the lover who, it is claimed, will never prosper without his lady, especially now that she has left him for dead (“aura,” “he will have,” 31; “ill,” “to him,” 32). The departure from the unitary “eu” that had hitherto conflated the personae of troubadour and lover and the emergence of multiple third-person referents seem to have troubled one medieval reader enough to propose an alternative reading. But his marginal gloss, which would seem to replace “a seis oillç” (“to his eyes,” 30) with “que aquest” (“for this”), does little to restore the troubadour-lover to his prior unity.

As the troubadour-lover asks where mercy can be found, the melodic line arrives unambiguously at a major structural point, falling to the *finalis* (D) for the first time (28). With line 29 beginning on an a, the musical division between *frons* and *cauda* is further marked by a leap upward of a fifth, the first of only two intervals in the song that exceed a third. Then, at the beginning of the *cauda*, another surprise is in store: the fifth musical phrase opens with the last thing one would expect to find at the start of a phrase of a troubadour melody, the musical equivalent of the troubadour-lover’s exclamation, a melisma.¹⁷

The rhythmic hiatus caused by *exclamatio*, a first-syllable melisma and an unusually large melodic leap, all accompanying a perturbing change of perspective: a *joglar* learning the text and melody of Bernart’s song would not have struggled to remember what to sing at the beginning of the *cauda* of stanza 4, knowing that he should expect the unexpected.

Michigan Academician 14, no. 3 (1982), 259-71 (pp. 267-70). This elaborate mirror structure is less easily applied to the version of “Qan vei” found in manuscript G due to the later placement of the “mirror” stanza.

¹⁷ On the frequency of melismas on certain syllables in Bernart’s songs, see Gisela Scherner-van Ortmeressen, *Die Text-Melodiestruktur in den Liedern des Bernart de Ventadorn*, Forschungen zur romanischen Philologie 21 (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 1973), pp. 263-67.

§5. “Deus”¹⁸

33 Pos a mi - donç no pot va - ler

34 Deus mi mer - ces ne'l dreit q'eu ai,

35 Ni(s) a lei no ven a pla - çer

36 Q'ill m'am, ja mais no'l loi di - rai.;

37 Ais - si-m part de lei e-m re - cre;

38 Mort m'a e per mort li res - pon,

39 E vau m'en, sel - la no'm re - te,

40 Cha-tius, en e - sill, non sai on.

Never again will the troubadour-lover address his lady (36). As he heads off into self-imposed exile, calling out one last time from beyond his symbolic grave (38), his place begins to be filled by others. The extant songbooks present numerous variants for this stanza, the work of scribes, of *joglars*, or perhaps even of Bernart himself. Regardless of the identity of these contributors, however, it is noteworthy that variation occurs for the most part at the beginning of the line.

The first syllables of a verse of troubadour song are likely to be less stable in oral and written transmission than the final ones, which are, of course,

governed by the rhyme scheme. In “Qan vei,” moreover, the beginning of the line is a melodic weak-point. With the notable exception of the transition between the *frons* and the *cauda*, the melody bridges the gap between cadential figures and the subsequent pitch goal largely by stepwise motion. The result is a flowing melodic line that can perfectly accommodate enjambment (33-34; 35-36) but one which, judging by the extant manuscript witnesses of the melody, was subject to considerable variation at

¹⁸ “Since nothing works with my lady, | (Neither) God, nor mercy, nor the right that I have, | Nor does it please her | To love me, I will say (it) no more to her. | And so I leave and renounce her; | She has killed me and as a dead man I answer her, | And I depart, she does not retain me, | Wretched, into exile, I know not where.”

the beginning of the phrase, with one intonation formula readily exchanged for another.¹⁹

The start of line 34 in songbook *G* sees God intervene in the troubadour-lover's courtship. Not only does the lady defy prevailing ethical and legal systems; she is also said to ignore God's intercession on the troubadour-lover's behalf. Manuscripts *CEMRUVa* temper the bold assertion that God is fighting on the side of the suitor, preferring the less presumptuous "precis" ("prayers") to "Deus" ("God"). Perhaps a scribe, horrified at the thought of the Christian God defending a courtly lover with adulterous tendencies, sought to correct "Deus" to "precis" elsewhere. Or perhaps an optimistic performer, in the absence of a strong melodic line, disregarded the word he once learned ("precis") and filled the gap by answering the troubadour-lover's prayers ("Deus").

Two lines later, at the beginning of line 36, and another point of instability in the manuscript tradition is reached. Manuscript *G* is among the handful of songbooks that reverse the more frequently encountered arrangement of pronouns so that *she* withholds love from *him* ("ill m'am," "she loves me"). Given the lady's cold refusal to see sense in the first two lines of the stanza, this may initially seem to be the more logically satisfying reading. But the rest of the line relies on *him* being forced to withhold love from *her*. With the pronouns reversed, manuscript *G* leaves its readers wondering why the troubadour-lover has vowed never to tell her the obvious, that *she* does not love *him*.

Finally, at the start of line 40, manuscript *G* reads "chatius" ("wretched"), which recalls line 30 in the previous stanza. Among the other extant versions, "faiditz" ("exiled") is the most frequent variant, synonymous with "en esil" ("in exile") which directly follows.²⁰ In the absence of strong melodic features to jog his memory, perhaps a *joglar* turned to other mnemonic prompts: either he failed to recall "faiditz" and a borrowing from the previous stanza gave him a ready-made solution, or else he failed to recall "chatius" and a synonym for the following two words fitted the bill perfectly. With the troubadour-lover in exile, he himself would have had to decide.

¹⁹ Van der Werf, *Chansons*, pp. 91-93.

²⁰ Appel, *Bernart*, pp. 253-54.

§6. “Miralh”²¹

41 Anc no a - gui de me po - der

42 Ni no fui meus de l'or' en çai

43 Q'es lai - set de mois oillç ve - çer

44 En un mi - rail qe mult mi plai.

45 Mi - rail, pois me mi - rei en te,

46 M'an mort li sos - pir de pre - uon,

47 C'ai - si per - dei com per - det se

48 Lo bel Nar - chi - sus en la fon.

The mirror has often been understood to be the primary structural device governing the aesthetic unity of “Qan vei.” The reflective surfaces of the so-called mirror stanza, the lady’s eyes and Narcissus’s fountain, are said to find their sonic equivalents in perfectly balanced hemistiches and beautifully poised melodic lines.²² The alliterated consonants of this stanza, [m], [p] and [s], meanwhile, are said to ricochet off sound-mirrors in all directions.²³

Such readings are problematic in the case of songbook *G* for two reasons. Firstly, scholars are quick to note the central position of the mirror stanza in extant manuscripts. Bernart’s

mirror does indeed appear at the centre of the song in several songbooks (*KMORV*), but the most frequently encountered permutation (in *AGLPS*) places the stanza towards the end of the song. Manuscript *G* leaves the mirror until the penultimate full stanza, suggesting that, for some medieval listeners and readers of

²¹ “Never did I have power over myself | Nor was I mine from the moment | She let herself be seen by my eyes | In a mirror which pleased me greatly. | Mirror, since I looked into you, | Deep sighs have killed me, | For I have lost just as the fair Narcissus | Lost himself in the fountain.”

²² See, for example, Sarah Kay, “Love in a Mirror: An Aspect of the Imagery of Bernart de Ventadorn,” *Medium Aevum* 52, no. 2 (1983), 272-87 (pp. 275-77); and Steel, “Case for the Predominance,” pp. 267-71.

²³ Marta Segarra, “Can vei la lauzeta mover: une analyse rythmique,” *Revue des langues romanes* 95, no. 1 (1991), 139-46 (pp. 141-2, 145).

“Qan vei” at least, the mirror stanza was not always the central structuring motif of the song that modern listeners and readers have assumed it to be.

Secondly, the mirror is not so readily equated with the lady’s eyes and Narcissus’s pool in songbook *G*. The eyes here firmly belong to the troubadour-lover (“mois oillç,” “my eyes,” 43). Moreover, the troubadour-lover does not see *himself* in the mirror, as Narcissus does, but the image of his lady: he looks and he sees *her*, or, more specifically, she deigns to be seen by him through the mediating screen of a mirror (43-44). As Sarah Kay observes, the reflexive form in the following line (“me mirei,” “I looked,” 45) need not imply that the troubadour-lover is the subject and object of seeing, since the reflexive pronoun may simply have been employed for greater dramatic effect (“Love in a mirror,” 275). Considering that the troubadour-lover does not gaze at his own reflection in manuscript *G*, it is appropriate that the comparison subsequently drawn between the first-person subject and Narcissus lacks the directness of other extant versions. Whereas the troubadour-lover is said to have “lost” (“perdei”), with the object of loss left unspecified, Narcissus has “lost himself” (“perdet se,” 47).

In songbook *G*, then, Bernart’s mirror does not reflect a faithful copy of the troubadour-lover as he stares narcissistically into his lady’s eyes, but projects a distortion, an inversion, or perhaps an entirely different image. If the mirror of stanza 6 in manuscript *G* cannot provide the unifying aesthetic principle of “Qan vei,” it nonetheless serves as a reminder that, as modern readers look at a transcription of the manuscript page, they should not expect to see reflected back at them the image of an original song, free from the influence of oral and written transmission.

§7. “Case”²⁴

49  De ços(e) fai fe - mi - n'ap - pa - rer

50  Mi - don, per q'eu lo re - cre - rai,

51  Qe ço q'om vol no vol vol - er,

52  E ço c'om li de - ve - da fai.

53  Cha - uç sui en ma - la mer - ce,

54  Et ai ben faiç de fols un pon,

55  Ni no sai per qe me - de - us (?)
[me - ca - se]

56  Mas car po - jai trop con - tra mon.

Medieval theorists were perfectly aware of the mnemonic function of rhyme. Anonymous of St. Emmeram, to cite just one example from the thirteenth century, proposes to versify his material “because a poem put together in verse more easily stimulates the mind of those who are hearing it to remember.”²⁵

The tight structure imposed by the four rhyme-sounds repeated from stanza to stanza in the same position (*coblas unissonans*) would no doubt have greatly assisted a *joglar* in his or her memorization of “Qan vei.” In stanza 7 of manuscript G, however, the rhyme scheme has been interrupted. The other extant songbooks lead us to expect “m’esdeve” or

“m’edeve” (“is happening to me”) at the end of line 55, but manuscript G reads “med(eu)s,” which is not only nonsensical but conflicts with the versification schema. Given the importance of rhyme in memorization, a performer is unlikely to have been

²⁴ “In this my lady behaves just like (any) woman, | Which is why I will rebuke her; | For what one (/man) wants she does not want to want, | And what one (/man) forbids her she does. | I have fallen into mercilessness, | And I have made a bridge of fools; | And I do not know why it (is happening) to me, | Unless it is because I climbed too high.”

²⁵ Anonymous of St. Emmeram, *De musica mensurata*, ed. and trans. Jeremy Yudkin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 4. Cited in Anna Maria Busse Berger, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* (London: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 98-99.

responsible for the garbled end to the line. But a scribe, whether the text scribe of *G* or an earlier copyist, might easily have misread “medeue” as “medeus” and abbreviated the latter to “meds’,” producing the reading found in manuscript *G* today. This was not the solution chosen by a later corrector, however, who dispensed with “med(eu)s” altogether and restored the sense and rhyme of the line by penning “case” (“befalls”) in the margin.

If scribes were probably responsible for the variant reading in *G* at the end of line 55 and its correction, a number of variants internal to the line in stanza 7 could have occurred during oral transmission. In “Qan vei,” the repetition of phonic units in the middle of the verse leaves listeners “spellbound,” in the words of one modern reader, but it would also have played a role in memorization.²⁶ Because consonance and assonance are less strictly regulated than the rhyme scheme, however, they would often have provided conflicting mnemonic prompters for a *joglar*. In line 51 in *G*, for example, the vowel sounds alternate between open and closed “o,” [ɔ] and [o]: “E ço q’òm vøl nò vøl vøler” (“And what one wants she does not want to want”). Other manuscripts preserving this line record a similar pattern of sounds, but often present a different word order or substitute one word for another.²⁷ Perhaps it was more important for the medieval performer to retain the repeated vowel sounds than to reproduce the exact words he or she had learned. The alliterative [d] and [v] of lines 51 and 52, meanwhile, are present to varying degrees in the extant songbooks, coming together in “deveda” (“forbids,” 52), or, as manuscript *R* attests, the synonymous “vedeta.” Consonance may have helped a *joglar* to remember that the lady does everything she is forbidden from doing, but in this case the precise word was subject to variation.

Modern readers and listeners struggle with the obscure reference to the fool on the bridge in line 54, with Bernart’s editors tending to recognize a proverb without providing conclusive evidence in support.²⁸ Given the multiplicity of readings in extant manuscripts, it seems likely that medieval performers and scribes

²⁶ Patrick Michael Thomas, “Alliteration as Mantra in the Bernardian Canso,” *Tenso* 11, no. 1 (1995), 1-9 (p. 1).

²⁷ Appel, *Bernart*, p. 252.

²⁸ See discussion in *The Songs of Bernart de Ventadorn*, ed. by Stephen G. Nichols, Jr. and John A. Galm (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), pp. 187-88.

grappled with the sense of the image, too. But the alliterative [f] safeguards “faïç” (“I make”) and “fols” (“fools”), even as the other constituent words of the line are modified beyond recognition.²⁹ In manuscript *G*, the troubadour-lover does not admit to behaving like the fools of the adage but suggests instead that the fools lie elsewhere. The troubadour-lover himself is only responsible for choosing “fools” as his “bridge,” perhaps figuratively his “messengers” or “go-betweens.” Expecting his message to be corrupted by fools in transmission, the troubadour-lover of the *G* version of “Qan vei” would not have been surprised by the scribe who corrupted the rhyme of line 55.

§8. “Tristeça”³⁰

57 Tris - te - ça non a - veç de me

58 E vau m'en, ma - riç, non sai on;

59 De chan - tar me tuoill e-m re - cre

60 E de joi e d'a - mor m'es - con.

The *tornada*, or final half-stanza, of “Qan vei” stays true to its etymology by returning (*tornar*) to the previous stanzas of the song. The melodic line picks up from the top of the previous *cauda*, while the text goes further back to borrow the sounds and sentiments of the fifth stanza. The troubadour-lover leaves his beloved (“e vau m’en,” “and I depart,” 58), just as he did in line 39,

heading for the very same unknown destination (“non sai on,” “I know not where,” 58) he mentioned back in line 40. And as he once again gives up singing for good (“e-m recre,” “I renounce,” 59), he recycles the rhyme word previously used at the end of line 37.

In several of the extant songbooks (*ACEOU*), the *tornada* of “Qan vei” also functions as an *envoi*, providing the name and address of the recipient of the song in the guise of the *senhal*, or

²⁹ Appel, *Bernart*, p. 252.

³⁰ “You do not have sorrow for me, | And I depart, grief-stricken, I know not where; | I relinquish and renounce singing, | And hide from joy and love.”

pseudonym, “Tristan,” which appears in the place of *G*’s “tristeça” (57). The Tristan *senhal* provides a tantalizing clue about the song’s addressee, possibly shrouding the identity of a historical courtly lady in mystery, possibly alluding to one of Bernart’s fellow poets, Raimbaut d’Aurenga.³¹ Insofar as it situates “Qan vei” in its social and literary context, forging intertextual links between Bernard’s own songs and the songs of others, the *senhal* also functions as an elusive signature. By the time the song reaches the folios of manuscript *G*, however, the recipient’s address and the author’s signature have been altered beyond recognition. Whether it was a scribe who suppressed the Tristan *senhal* or a *joglar*, it seems probable that the complex web of fictional and historical personae hidden behind the pseudonym was of less relevance to their respective readers and listeners than the abstract noun “tristeça” (“sorrow”).

The address and signature may have disappeared, but as I sing the final words of the *tornada*, the voice of the troubadour Bernart de Ventadorn, however faint, sounds with mine. As the troubadour-lover announces the imminent end to his song, I announce the end to the very same song (59). For a few seconds more, the performance preserves the illusory unity of the lyric persona: troubadour, lover, performer, “eu.”

Huw Grange is finishing off a PhD at St John’s College, Cambridge on monstrosity in French and Occitan hagiography. When he is not reading stories about saints and dragons he fosters a keen interest in early music and in the songs of the troubadours in particular.

³¹ Walter T. Pattison, ed., *The Life and Works of the Troubadour Raimbaut d’Orange* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1952), pp. 24-25. Bernart also employs the Tristan *senhal* in “Can vei la flor, l’erba vert e la folha” (P-C 70, 42).

