A la fontana del vergier,
on l’erb’ es vertz josta·l gravier,
a l’ombra d’un fust domesgier,
en aiziment de blancas flors
5 e de novelh chant costumier,
trobey sola, ses companhier,
selha que no vol mon solatz.

So fon donzelh’ ab cors belh
filha d’un senhor de castelh;
10 e quant ieu cugey que l’auzelh
li fesson joy e la verdors,
e pel dous termini novelh,
e quez entendes mon favelh,
tost li fon sos afars camjatz.

15 Dels huelhs ploret josta la fon
e del cor sospiret preon.
“Thesus,” dis elha, reys del mon,
per vos mi creys ma grans dolors,
quar vostra anta mi cofon,¹
20 quar li mellor de tot est mon
vos van servir, mas a vos platz.

Ab vos s’en vai lo meus amicx,
lo belhs e·l gens e·l pros e·l rícx;
sai m’en reman lo grans destricx,
25 lo deziriers soven e·l plors.
Ayl mala fos reys Lozoicx
que fay los mans e los prezicx
per que·l dols m’es en cor intratz!

¹The capture of the Holy City in 1147, the occasion of the crusade led by Louis VII, King of France.
10

By the fountain in the orchard,
where the grass is green down to the sandy banks,
in the shade of a planted tree,
in a pleasant setting of white flowers
5 and the ancient song of the new season,
I found her alone, without a companion,
this girl who does not want my company.

She was a young girl, and beautiful,
the daughter of a castle lord.
10 And just as I reckoned the birds
must be filling her with joy, and the green things,
in this sweet new time,
and she would gladly hear my little speech,

suddenly her whole manner changed.

15 Her eyes welled up beside the fountain,
and she sighed from the depths of her heart,
"Jesus," she said, "King of the world,
because of You my grief increases,
I am undone by your humiliation,"
20 for the best men of this whole world
are going off to serve you, that is your pleasure.

"With you departs my so
handsome, gentle, valiant, noble friend;
here, with me, nothing of him remains but the great dis-
tress,
25 the frequent desiring, and the tears.
Ail! damn King Louis,
he gave the orders and the sermons,
and grief invaded my heart."
Quant ieu l’auzi desconortar,
30 ves lieys vengui josta·l riu clar:
   “Belha,” fi·m ieu, “per trop plorar
afolha cara e colors;
e no vos cal dezesperar,
   que selh qui fai lo bosc fulhar,
35 vos pot donar de joy assatz.”

   “Senher,” dis elha, “ben o crey
que Deus aya de mi mercey
   en l’autre segle per jassey,
quon assatz d’autres peccadors;
40 mas say mi tolh aquelha rey
don joys mi crec; mas pauc mi tey
   que trop s’es de mi alonhatz.”

11

D’aisso lau Dieu
 e saint Andrieu
   c’om non es de major albir
qu’ieu sui, so·m cuig,
5 e no·n fatz brug
   e volrai vos lo per que dir;

   C’assatz es lait
s’intratz en plait
don non sabretz a lutz issir,²
10 e non es bo
   jutgetz razo
si non la sabetz defenir.

De gignos sens
sui si manens

² Or: “He cares little for me.”
¹ Text: Aurelio Roncaglia, *Studi Medievali*, 17 (1951), 46–70. Most of the following notes are based on Roncaglia’s edition, introduction, and notes.
² That is, when you can’t argue your way to the conclusion. In this case, the
When I heard how she was losing heart,
I came up to her beside the clear stream.
"Beautiful one," I said, "with too much weeping
your face grows pale, the color fades;
you have no reason to despair, now,
for He who makes the woods burst into leaf
has the power to give you joy in great abundance."

"Lord," she said, "I do believe
that God may pity me
in the next world, time without end,
like many other sinners,
but here He wrests from me the one thing
that made my joy increase. Nothing matters now,²
for he has gone so far away."

For this I praise God¹
and Saint Andrew:
no man has more sense
than I have, that's what I think,
and I'm not just making noise.
And I'll tell you why.

It is very unpleasant
when you get involved in arguing something
and you can't reach the light at the end,²
and it is not good
to make judgments on any subject
you can't explain.

I am so rich
in brilliant ideas,
speaker's "argument" is that he's the best man around. This entire gap
(boasting song) should be compared to Guillaume's Ben vuelt que sapchon
li plusor (no. 5), the obvious model for this song. Compare, for example,
the "two dogs and the third" with Guillaume's "two dice and the third."
que mout sui greus ad escarnir;
lo pan del fol
caudet e mol
manduc, e lais lo mieu frezir: ³

Tant quant li dur
li pliu e·il jur
'om no·m puosca de lui partir,
e quan li faill
mûs e badaill
e prenda del mieu lo dezir;
Qu'ieu jutg'a drei
que fols follei
e savis si gart al partir,
qu'en dobl'ês fatz
e dessenatz
qui·s laiss'a fol enfolletir.

D'estoc breto
ni de basto
no sap om plus ni d'escrimir:
qu'ieu fier autrui
e·m gart de lui
e no·is sap del mieu colp cobrir.

En l'autrui broiI
chatz cora·m voiI
e fatz mos dos canetz glatir,
e·l tertz saIIs
eis de rahus
bautz e ficatz senes mentir.

Mos alos es
en tal deves
res mas ieu non s'en pot jauzir:
³That is, I store mine up (Kurt Lewent).
I am very hard to make a fool of;
I eat the bread
of the fool while it is soft
and warm, and let my own cool down.  

As long as his bread lasts
I swear to him, I pledge
that nothing could ever make me part from him,
and when he's out of his,
let him stare at mine with his mouth open
and long for it;

because I think it is right
that a fool act like a fool
and a wise man watch out for what he can come away
with;
for he is doubly stupid
and brainless
who lets a fool make a fool of him.

With a Breton stick
or any weapon
or a sword, no one's better:
because I hit the other man
and keep him from hitting me,
and he—he can't take cover from my blow.

In another man's woods
I go hunting every time I feel like it,
and I set my two little dogs barking,
and my third, my hound,
thrusts forward,
all bold and fixed on the prey.

My own private place
is so safe
no one can enjoy it but me:
aissi l'ai claus
de pens venaus
qué nuills no lo·m pot envazir.

Del plus torz fens
50 sui ples e prens,
de cent colors per mieills chauzir; ⁴
fog porti sai
et aigua lai
ab que sai la flam' escantir.

55 Cacun si gart,
c'ab aital art
mi fatz a viure e morir;
qu'ieu sui l'auzels
c'als estornels
60 fatz los mieus auzellos noirir.⁵

12

Estornel, cueill ta volada:
deman, ab la matinada,
iras m'en un'encontrada,
on cugei aver amia;
5 trobaras
e veiras
per que vas
comtar l'as;
e·ill diras
10 en eis pas
per qu'es trasalía.

No sai s'aissi·s fo fadada
que no m'am e si'amada;
c'ab una sola vegada

⁴ Colors: literally, "colors"; figuratively, "lies, pretexts."
⁵ The cuckoo, who lays its eggs in other birds' nests: the nobleman who
I've got it so locked up
and barricaded,
no one can force his way in.

I'm teeming
with the snakiest tricks,
with a hundred false colors to choose the best from.
I carry fire here,
water there,
that I can use to put out the flame.

Let everyone watch out,
for with such art
I play at living and dying.
I am the bird
that gets the starlings
to feed my little ones.

Starling, take flight:
tomorrow at daybreak
you go to a land
where I thought I'd have a friend.

You will find her
and see her—
here's why you go:
you will tell her,
spell out to her,
right on the spot
why she goes beyond all bounds.

I don't know, maybe she was fated
to get my love without loving me;
but one single time,

fills the ranks of his class with his bastards.
fora grans la matinia,
si·ll plagues
ni volgues
qu'o fezes;
per un mes
n'agra tres,
a qui es
de sa companhia.

Ài! com es encabalada
la falsa razos daurada:
“Denan totas vai triadal!”
va! ben es fols qui s'hi fia;
de sos datz
c'a plombatz
vos gardatz,
qu'enganatz
n'a assatz,
so sapchatz,
e mes en la via.

Per semblant es veziada,
plus que veïlla volps cassada;
l'autrier mi fetx far la bada
tota nueg entruesc'al dia.
Sos talans
es volans
ab enguans;
mas us chans
fa·n enfans
castians
de lor felonia.

Selui fadet gentils fada
a cui fo s'amors donada;
no fo tals crestianada
de sai lo peiron Elia; ¹

¹Mount Horeb: see I Kings 19, 8–9 (Lewent).
what a great day,
if it pleased her,
if she wanted
me to do it;
for one month
is worth three,
to the man
who breaks bread with her.

Ail how convincing it is,
this falsehood covered with gold:
“She is chosen among all women”:
he is crazy who puts his trust there—
watch out
for the dice
she has leaded,
she has taken
in so many,
I tell you,
and left them on the road.

You can look at her and tell she has more tricks
than an old fox being chased.
The other day she made me wait around with my mouth
open
the whole night long till day.
Her desire
is flighty
and full of devices,
but every child
makes songs of her,
punishing such
women for their cruelty.
The man to whom her love was given—
a pagan fairy marked him out;
no baptized woman was ever like her
between here and the cave of Elijah.
vol'e vai
50 tot dreit lai,
e·l retraí
qu'ieu morrai,
si no saí
consi jai
55 nuda o vestia.

Sa beutatz fon ab lieis nada
ses fum de creix ni d'erbada;
de mil amicx es cazada
e de mil senhors amia.
60 Marcabrus
ditz que l'us
non es clus;
bad e mus
qui·ll vol plus
65 c'a raüis
part de la traïa.

De fin' amor dezirada
az una flor pic vairada
plus que d'autruna pauzada.
70 Paucs fols fai tost gran folia.
Perdo·l grat
de l'abat
Saint Privat; ²
m'ai pensat
75 ses cujat
si·m ditz: Mat,
que l'amors embria.

Del deslei
que me fei
80 li fauc drei,
e·il m'auatrei,
mas sotz mei
aplat sei,
qu'ela·m lass'e·m lia.³

² An obscene pun.
Fly, go
straight there,
tell her
I will die
unless I know
how she lies
down at night, naked or dressed.

Her beauty was born when she was,
without vapors of cress, or fomentation of herbs.
She has a thousand friends on supply,
and of a thousand lords is the friend.

Marcabru
says the door
is never closed.
Let him gape and waste his time
who looks for more in her—

he'll back off
and walk away from that treacherous bitch.

She has one many-colored flower, always changing,
of perfect love long desired,
better placed with her than any other woman.

A little fool soon commits great foolishness.
I forgive her the thanks
of the Abbot
of St. Privat.²
I figured,
surely
when she tells me Checkmate,
love will quickly swell forth.

The wrong
she did me

I forgive
and hand myself over;
only, underneath me
let her lie down on her back
and bind me and tie me up.³

³ The song of the starling has two parts. The second part follows.
Ges l’estornels non s’oblida;¹
quant ac la razon auzida,
c’ans ha sa vida cuillida
del dreg volar no s’alensa.

5 Tant anet
   e volet
   e seguet,
   e trobet
   lo devet;
10 orguanet,
   a chantar comensa.

Sobr’una branca florida
lo francx auzels brai e crïda;
tant ha sa votz esclarzida
15 qu’ela n’a auzit l’entensa.
   L’us declui,
   lai s’esdui
   truesc’a lui.
   “Auzels, ui
20 ditz, per cui
   fas tal brui
   o cals amors tensa?”

Di l’estornels: “Part Lerida
a pros es tan descremida,
25 c’anc no saup plus de gandida,
   plena de falsa crezensa.
   Mil amic
   s’en fan ric:
   per l’abric
30 que us servic,

¹This is one of Marcabru’s most difficult songs, its obscurity increased by a poor manuscript delivery. The following translation owes much to the
The starling did not hesitate
once it heard its mission,
didn’t even take its food,
just flew straight ahead without stopping,
so fast
it flew,
it sought
and found
her retreat,
twittered
and began to sing.

On a flowering branch
the trusty bird bawls out and cries,
lifts his voice so clear
she has heard his great effort,
opens her door,
comes over
to him.
"Now, Bird,
tell me, what’s
the racket for,
or is it love that’s driving you?"

The starling says, "There’s a valiant man out there
beyond Lérida you’ve been so vicious to,
he never found any defense
against you, you full of bad faith.
A thousand friends
brag about you in public:
but the discretion
with which he served you—

ingenious suggestions and reconstructions of Kurt Lewent.
lo meric
del chastic
n’aura ses faillensa.”

“Auzels, a tort m’a’nvaçida;
mas pos amor no·m ressida,
mas qu’ieu no sui sa plevida,
en cuç aver m’entendensa.
L’autr’amiu
no vueill ieu,

e badiu
ses aisiu
don m’eschiu
tug de briu
ses far contenensa.

“Az una part es partida
ma fin’amistatz plevida,²
son joc revit, si·l m’envida.
Auzels, per ta conoissensa,
so·l diguatz:

qu’en un glatz³
lev’e jatz
desiratz
er l’a atz
ans asatz

que n’ajam lezensa.

“La cambr’er de cel guarnida,
d’un ric jauzir per jauzida,
c’ab dous baizar s’es sentida
desotz se plan de plazensa.

Vai e·l di
qu’el mati
si·aisi,
que sotz pi

² That is, I do not have such love, I prefer changing partners.
he will get
his reward
for such restraint, make sure of that."

"Bird, this attack of his is unkind.

35 But since your man cannot arouse my lasting love,
and provided I'm not bound to be his alone,
he can count on enjoying my inclination now.
I don't want
some courtly lover,
some simpleton
who's no fun—
such a one
I shake off fast
without further ado.

45 "My sworn and loyal love
has taken off somewhere;²
but I'll put some life into your man's game, if he wants
me to play.

Bird, as you can talk to him,
tell him this:

50 before the shout is over³
desire
rises and dies;
now calm him down,
go quickly

55 while the moment for our pleasure lasts.

"Our chamber will be furnished with the sky,
a place of rich rejoicing for this joyous woman
who felt herself, once, with a sweet kiss
beneath him, overcome with pleasure.

60 Go, tell him,
be here
in the morning;
under the pine tree

³ Literally, "in one shout," in an instant.
farem fi,
65 sotz lui mi,
d’esta malvolensa.”

Gent ha la razón fenida,
estornels cui l’aura guid’a
son senhor vas cui s’escrida:
70 “Vos ai amor de valensa;
c’als mil drutz
ha rendutz
mil salutz
e pagutz
75 per condutz
ses trautz
de falsa semensa.⁴

S’al matí
l’es aquí
80 on vos di
e·us mandi,
qu’el ardi
del jardi
e que·us mat e·us vensal”

14

L’autrier jost’ una sebissa
trobei pastora mestissa,
de joi e de sen massissa,
si cum filla de vilana,
5 cap’ e gonel’ e pelissa
vest e camiza trelissa,
sotlars e caussas de lana.

⁴Literally, “without tributes of false seed.” The bird is telling its poor master what he wants to hear, that she is faithful and virtuous, not a two-
we will end,
65 I beneath him,
all the bad blood between us.”

This mission was handled with great tact
by the starling, now guided by the breeze
to its master, whom it shouts to:

70 “I’ve got you a precious love:
to a thousand admirers
she has rendered
a thousand greetings,
and sated them

75 with dinners,
ever granting
them the rotten fruit they crave.  

“In the morning
if you go
80 where she tells
and sends you,
in the struggle
in the garden
may she checkmate and beat you.”


The other day, beside a row of hedges,
I found a shepherdess of lowly birth,
full of joy and common sense.
And, like the daughter of a woman of the fields,
5 she wore cape and cloak and fur,
and a shift of drill,
and shoes, and woolen stockings.

timer, or thousand-timer, with an open door.
BERNART de VENTADORN

(fl. 1150–1180)

Nothing certain is known about Bernart’s life. The absence of any verifiable biographical information has spurred the invention of many stories about him, beginning with the vida. According to these stories, he rose from his low birth as the son of a serf and a baker in the castle of Ebles II of Ventadour to become the great lover of three noble ladies, including Eleanor of Aquitaine; and, after the death of his protector, ended his days in the monastery of Dalon. It is clear that these stories originated in a literal-minded response to a strophe in Peire d’Alvernhe’s playful poem about the troubadours (see below, no. 31), and to some passages in Bernart’s lyrics. The only certain fact about him is that he was one of the most popular poets of his own day, judging from the numerous manuscripts of his songs, and from the many poets who allude to, or imitate, his work. He wrote songs about love exclusively; apart from three tensos, all his poems are cansos.

With Bernart, the troubadour technique of playing on the perspectives of an audience reaches a level that was never to be surpassed. What began to take shape in the songs of Guillaume IX is now completely developed.

We have seen how Guillaume, in his new song, continually acknowledges the powerful presence of his old companions, and thus of his own carnality, all during his lyric vow of service to the lady. That was how he saved his song from the jeers and snickers of those who had Agnes and Ermessen in their minds. The lyric audience of Bernart de Ventadorn contains this same element: the gens vilana, the vulgar ones. They keep their place, for no poet, especially one who values refinement, would ever want to dislodge them.
Non es meravelha s’eu chan
melhs de nul autre chantador,
que plus me tra·l cors vas amor
e melhs sui faihz a so coman.

5 Cor e cors e saber e sen
e fors’ e poder i ai mes.
Si·m tira vas amor lo fres
que vas autra part no·m aten.

Ben es mortz qui d’amor no sen
10 al cor cal que dousa sabor;
e que val viure ses valor
mas per enoi far a la gen?
Ja Domnedeus no·m azir tan
qu’eu ja pois viva jorn ni mes,
15 pois que d’enoi serài mespres
ni d’amor non aurai talan.

Per bona fe e ses enjan
am la plus bel’ e la melhor.
Del cor sospir e dels olhs plor,
20 car tan l’am eu, per que i ai dan.
Eu que·n posc mais, s’Amors me pren,
e las charcers en que m’a mes
no pot claus obrir mas merces,
e de merce no·i trop nien?

25 Aquest’ amors me fer tan gen
al cor d’una dousa sabor:
 cen vetz mor lo jorn de dolor
e reviu de joi autras cen.
Ben es mos mals de bel semblan,
30 que mais val mos mals qu’autre bes;
e pois mos mals aitan bos m’es,
bos er lo bes apres l’afan.
Of course it's no wonder I sing
better than any other troubadour:
my heart draws me more toward love,
and I am better made for his command.

Heart body knowledge sense
strength and energy—I have set all on love.
The rein draws me straight toward love,
and I cannot turn toward anything else.

A man is really dead when he does not feel
some sweet taste of love in his heart;
and what is it worth to live without worth,
except to irritate everyone?
May the Lord God never hate me so
that I live another day, or even less than a day,
after I am guilty of being such a pest,
and I no longer have the will to love.

In good faith, without deceit,
I love the best and most beautiful.
My heart sighs, my eyes weep,
because I love her so much, and I suffer for it.
What else can I do, if Love takes hold of me,
and no key but pity can open up
the prison where he has put me,
and I find no sign of pity there?

This love wounds my heart
with a sweet taste, so gently,
I die of grief a hundred times a day
and a hundred times revive with joy.
My pain seems beautiful,
this pain is worth more than any pleasure;
and since I find this bad so good,
how good the good will be when this suffering is done.
Ai Deus! car se fosson trian
d'entrels faus li fin amador,
35 e·lh lauzenger e·lh trichador
portessonorns el fron denan!
Tot l'aur del mon e tot l'argen¹
i volgr'aver dat, s'eu l'agues,
sol que ma domna conogues
40 aissi com eu l'am finamen.

Cant eu la vei, be m'es parven
als olhs, al vis, a la color,
car aissi tremble de paor
com fa la folha contra·l ven.
45 Non ai de sen per un efan,
aissi sui d'amor entrepresa;
e d'ome qu'es aissi conques,
pot domn' aver almorna gran.

Bona domna, re no·us deman
50 mas que·m prendatz per servidor,
qu'ei·us servirai com bo senhor,
cossi que del gazardo m'an.
Ve·us m'al vostre comandamen,
francs cors umils, gas e cortes!
55 Ors ni leos non etz vos ges,
que·m aucizatz, s'a vos me ren.

A Mo Cortes, lai on ilh es,
tramet lo vers, e ja no·lh pes
car n'ai estat tan lonjamen.

22

Tant ai mo cor ple de joya,
tot me desnatura.

¹Literally, "I would like to have given . . ." Appel remarks that this tense reflects the poet's impatience and anger.