

12/18/00 Monday's Rock, Sandro Lingam

If this group of friends shares certain obscurities, composing for one another in a more private idiom than was Old Occitan itself, than they participate in a partially “closed system” of poetry that readers can only unlock by initiating themselves into the “code” of these poets.

Amelia E. Van Vleck
“The Lyric Texts,” from A
Handbook of the Troubadours

In the fabled land of *Oc*, ascending from a nearly inaccessible pinnacle, rises the Abby of Saint-Martin-du-Canigou, its church and crypts and crenellated tower sequestering the souls of females, their gross forms secluded for the burning love of Christ, their ardent souls aflame. These cloisters, hewn from rugged local stone, peer over the edge of a jagged, dread ravine, their prisoners mercifully protected from the tumult of a too-licentious world, and awaiting, all and each, the embrace of Christ in the arms of death or prayer. The remote enclave houses women who bath their mortal chancres day and night in the milky fountains of devotion, some drawn by the love of the Cross, but others sent to assuage some familial shame. All kneel on stone and eat the hard bread of celibacy and obedience, and this evening, as the shadow of Mount Canigou creeps across the valley and fills it with early frost, all feel the remorseless chill of their martyred lives.

After Vespers, Sister Amadée did not return to her cell, but walked instead the precarious ramparts, anxiously musing. After a time, demurely, she sat where she often did, near the verge, on a concave, weathered stone. ‘This morning, after the melting of last night’s flurries, what did it mean, when I looked at my face in the water-mirror cupped in this cold stone, and saw an image that was not my own? Who is this strange, beast-like man who whispers to me from the reflections?’ The silence rose around her from the mountains. ‘Ah, so many, many peaks, but just one cold. I had foolishly thought that I might see a dove.’ The novitiate’s mind, freed for the moment from the Abbey’s cloisters, wandered the courts of the past, adrift through the halls of Toulouse and lost in the intricate sumptuousness of her father’s fineries. The austere landscape disappeared, replaced by silver threaded embroideries, Cordoban leathers, linens from the land of the Ptolemies, Moorish carpets intricately woven, gold ornaments cunningly fashioned, falcons, high-bred horses, even books. Poets there were, and music, and even the clerics, relaxing their stern demeanors, laughed at the gay refinements that they shared. How she had loved the rose entangled battlements and moss-greened archways, the secret assignations, the dances where she danced the cold nights warm and the promises given with no intent to keep them.

For numerous are the sins by which we daily afflict God, night and day, in thought, in word, in deed, wittingly and unwittingly despoiling his Holy gifts, and especially by our desires do the evil spirits bring pollution to the flesh by which we are clothed. Benedicite, Parcite Nobis.

He had come from Spain and the shining Courts of the Infidel, but he was Gasçon, a foundling, some asserted, but reared in a nobleman's court. Each word he sang had another hidden behind it, his *vers* like woven gossamers — meaning after meaning, unveiling themselves as he stripped them to naked beauty. His voice was sweet, but his phrases were sharp as barbs. The hypocritical clergy, obese with the fatlings of the poorest shepherds, fled cravenly before him, vowing vengeance. 'Oh, God, but his eyes were blue, and his skin was white.'

Whereas we are taught by God's Holy Word as well as by the Holy Apostles and the preaching of our spiritual brothers to reject all fleshly longings and all uncleanness and to do the will of God by doing good — we, unworthy servants that we are, not only do not do the will of God as we should, but more often give way to desires of the flesh and the snares of the world, to such an extent that we wound our spirits.

'And he spoke of women in the Courts of the Infidels who wafted the scent of lavender and orange blossoms, and were honored, not only for their beauty, but for their learning, draping the luscious evenings with perfumed words.'

'And he said that among all those exquisite beauties, with all of their allures, not one could match the magic of my grace. And he said that I, even I, the humblest of my weak sex, yet the daughter of the Comte, even I, would henceforth be his *fin'amor*.'

We go with those who are of the world, mixing with them, talking and eating with them, and sinning in many things so that we wound our brothers and sisters.

'And his words were shinning like unto a sumptuous feast, an Eucharist of chaste and distant love.'

By our tongues we fall into idle words, vain talk, mockery and malice, detraction of our brothers and sisters whom we are not worthy to judge nor condemn their faults. Among Christians, we are sinners. Benedicte, Parcite Nobis.

'And he talked of holy men and of holy women, too, the *Parfaits* who traveled and lived in pairs, freed from all carnal taint, and from the taint of owning things. *Bon hommes*, were they yclept by the unworthy whom they served. And these chaste ones held that women were equal unto men, that serfs and peasants bound unto the land were equal to the Lords whose liege they pledged, that it was untoward to hunt or to partake in any manner the flesh of innocent animals, our brethren, our former loved-ones — how did he say it? — *transmigrated*. And his eyes flamed as he spoke of these perfections, twin sapphire gems afloat in crystalline pools!'

The penance which we have received we have not observed as we ought to have done, neither the fasting nor the prayer. We have wasted our days and hours. While we are saying the Holy Prayer our senses are diverted to carnal desires and worldly cares, so at this moment we hardly know what we can offer the Father of the Just. Benedicte, Parcite Nobis.

Like the remembered hard embrace of a cold, cruel father, the cold of the night clamped down around her habit. A starling in a shrub below the ledge, ruffled its feathers, cocked a wary eye. Long screaming falls of incest-begotten children returned to her in vision, her child crying as she fell to hell. She turned to the bird in the less-than-burning bush: "Father, hear my confession, before you fly away to Africa, relieve my burden." But the confessor only darted his black glances. 'Oh, where are lover's lips, his skin, his dazzling sapphire eyes!'"

In the first place, they say they are good Christians, who do not swear, or lie or speak evil of others; that they do not kill any man or animal, nor anything having the breath of life, and that they hold the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel as the apostles taught. They assert that they occupy the place of the apostles, and that, on account of the above mentioned things, they of the Roman Church, namely the prelates, clerks, and monks, and especially the inquisitors of heresy persecute them and call them heretics . . .

'And, Oh, how he did sting the fat Bishop, devising wit from the chancres on his face, and from his love for meat and drink, insinuating, too, with thinly damasked words, of the Holy Primate's sins with altar boys.'

Moreover, they talk of the evil lives of the clerks and prelates of the Roman Church, pointing out and setting forth their pride, cupidity, avarice, and uncleanness of life, and such other evils as they know.

'And he told me that this world was made by a devil, and that the things of the flesh were devils' things, his voice all honey and fire, his eyes all pure desire. And that the clergy were this demiurge's minions, incestuous cannibals proffering empty words and wallowing in their robes as swine in filth, eating the substance of the humble poor.'

Then they attack and vituperate, in turn, all the sacraments of the Church, especially the sacrament of the Eucharist, saying that it cannot contain the body of Christ, for had this been as great as the largest mountain, Christians would have entirely consumed it before this.

She picked at a yet green straw along the cliff, marveling how it survived the bitter frost. The last of the day flamed up on Mount Canigou, but the shadow of that flame iced her bare heart.

They assert that the host comes from straw, that it passes through the tails of horses, to wit, when the flour is cleaned by a sieve of horse hair . . .

'And the prelate reviled him to the courtiers, saying that he was an infidel, a Moor, and they threatened harm to him and to those that loved him, forging the gospel's phrases like brutal cudgels. And they claimed even that the horse that he rode, the Comte's own gift, was a protecting demon assuming an earthly shape.'

. . . that, moreover, it passes through the body and comes to a vile end, which they say could not happen if God were in it.

‘And we met together, and rode this dapple-gray, Oh blessed beast to bear such blessedness. And we lay by the stream, and kissed, but purely, sweetly, promising always to honor distant love.’

Of baptism they say that the water is material and corruptible and is therefore the creation of evil powers, and cannot sanctify the soul, but that the churchmen sell this water out of avarice, just as they sell the earth for the burial of the dead, and oil to the sick when they anoint them, and as they sell the confession of sins as made to the priest.

‘And I confessed my love unto him, and he likewise confessed his unto me.’

Hence they claim that confession made to the priests of the Roman Church is useless, and that, since priests may be sinners, they cannot loose or bind, and, being unclean in themselves, cannot make others clean.

‘And he dipped his cloak in the stream and wiped my tears.’

They assert, moreover, that the cross of Christ should not be adored or venerated, because, as they urge, no one would venerate the gallows upon which a father, relative or friend had been hung.

‘And that night, the friends of the prelate, Oh!, not the fath. . . came with instruments to do him bodily harm, and hurry him into the waiting arms of Christ . . .’

They urge further, that they who adore the cross ought, for similar reasons, to worship all thorns and lances, because as Christ’s body was on the cross during the passion, so was the crown of thorns on his head and the soldier’s lance in his side.

‘And the next day the sheriff and several puissant, but impoverished knights, scoured the countryside in search of him, his head targeted, like our dear Lord’s, with a bounty of tainted silver, but the dapple-gray had carried him to safety. Far, far away he hied, hidden in the mountainous folds of the land, but followed where he fled by my heart’s blood. And yet, and yet, I kept a calm demeanor. Accepting as bridegroom the hand of the Lord Christ’s church, as my fath . . .no! Not the fa . . .not his words . . .’

Moreover, they read from the Gospels and the Epistles in the vulgar tongue, applying and expounding them in their favor and against the condition of the Roman Church.

“. . . and the Church has been my father, mother, husband, in all these long and lonely years.”

She looked at the starling and the bird looked back. And the shadow of the mountain made a black stain in the deep ravine where she saw the baby fall to cleanse her sins.

‘Somewhere, someone has taken her, the Compte is too proud to allow his blood to perish.’ But this thought did not lift the leaden grief in her heart.

From the Chapel, the Abbess watched her wayward ward. She saw the Sister absorbed in contemplation, saw how she viewed the golden, flaming mountain, saw how she picked at straws, and talked to birds. The Abbess smiled, her heart also golden with love for the little Sister, for her quiet, modest ways. So sweet she was, in her distracted holiness, living, as the Mother deemed, in two different worlds. ‘One world down here among the mountain’s stones, another above in the light that lights the clouds. She seems so gaily pallid, lightly sad. The picture of our Lord, bless’d with the pleasure of a life-long wound.’ And then the Abbess saw the miracle, the horror — the Sister stood up and walked across the chasm. She perched above the shadows like a bird. Then, the Abbess, in a frenzy called her name — and as those three notes sounded “Am-a -dée,” light turned to flesh once more and fluttered down.

1/22/01 Monday's Rock, Sandro Lingam

Closing time: 10:58 p.m., C.S.T.

They so influenced the images of the heart, that now when we desire, our words take on a collage-like character, some theirs, some ours, a layering of excerpts torn and tattered by the passing centuries, but visible still to the sincere lover, and ready to speak when he or she most needs them.

Lovernius Razos
*The Troubadours: Love's
Revenants Among Us*

Digging for Dirt

‘Well, well, lookee hehr what we got, the blind sow sniffs hersef a A-corn.’

The Honorable Mrs. Sherman R. Helm, her immaculate white head bowed as she read, was appalled by the contents of the manuscript that she found in her husband’s gigantic antique rolltop. Passed down it was from her great Granddaddy, and a prize piece, too, solid Hill Country Oak, which the Judge never ceased to sully with his usual disrespect for everythin’ Kuykendall, though he didn’t mind tradin’ on the name when it came to gettin’ a leg up on his career. She found the file inside of another file, an obvious attempt at subterfuge, a kind a’ sneakiness that fit in with his recent shadowy Be-havior, which began, near as she could figure it, Sunday last when she caught him in that confab with that trailer trash clerk a’ his and her sullen-eyed husband. “Banged up she was, too. Hit on a-gin with the ugly stick by her War HEE-ro Lord and Master, for some sort of A-Dul-try, no doubt.” These suspicions were what had sent the Honorable Mrs. huntin’ in the Judge’s usually strictly off-limits office — because he said — “of politically sensitive material”. ‘Sherman always was a duplicitous man, a characteristic that I fear Ricah May has inherited from the Helms side, since that kind a’ thang is unknown in our family. Thanks be to Jesus that Stephan Abner has escaped that taint, and is as guileless as he is

honest and proud.’ The Honorable Mrs. stopped for a moment when she thought she heard a car drive up, but peering through the curtains, she saw that it was only her reprobate neighbor’s hoofty Japanese AutoMOBILE slipping behind the bright red flowers of the great General Pershing Oleander that divided their two long driveways. ‘Lord, but they are suspicious people, with them heathen TIE-betan squatters in the back servant’s cottage performin’ Lord knows what kind a’ heathen ritShalls under their wild blanket a’ honeysuckle.’ The Honorable Mrs. rerolled the rolltop and carefully replaced the manuscript where it had originally been hidden, but she marveled greatly at its strangeness. ‘No doubt it come from Sister-in-Law Shirley’s odd duck of a husband, that PRO-fessor. My, oh my, didn’t she shuddered to think of all the tragedies that had overwhelmed her dreadful in-laws, ‘justly, no doubt, on account a’ the En-tire family havin’ strayed away from Jesus and the right readin’ of the Christian Gospel, a fate that often befalls them with too much book-learnin’ in the domain a’ the apostate HU-manists. ‘Well they’s all burned up now, and years ago,’ she sighed, relieved to be shut of ‘em. But it warn’t only the strange, no doubt grief-begotten pages written by Lovernius that had set her true-blue-daughter-o’-Texas heart a pumpin’ a gusher, no. It was also the newspaper clippin’ attached to it, from way back in the early Reagan days, yellin’ with age, the short obit on the questionable Dee-mise of her husband’s niece. ‘Now that would a got blow’d way out-a-proportion by the press if I hadn’t got that devious varmint to intervene.’ Though why it was stuck here with this claptrap was a conundrum, shore. But more oily yit was the remarks penciled on it by Mr. Helm — he warn’t Judge back then — and underlined with heavy black emphasis: “Blowback! Keep as insurance!” ‘My, oh my,’ thought the Honorable Mrs., ‘fingering’ anxiously for a moment one spray-fixed white forelock, ‘What in Sam Hill could that mean?’

Inquisitor’s Candle

Prior to my flight, I was called Amedée de Joi. These words contain no stigma for me now. I repeat them only because my benefactress tells me that the sound of the syllables emits vibrations of medicinal value to those souls who are still in bodily or mental torment, as I once was.

Since my flight, I have come, or perhaps I was brought, to this place of sweetness, and here I am tended by my benefactress, whose name is Sister Grace. She is very kind, and although she is a woman, I have confessed to her all that I can recall of my mortal and venial sins. She always listens attentively, and with great tenderness and compassion, pronounces absolution, without requiring — oh my — I have forgotten the word. This is happening more and more frequently here. It is as if my mind were being gently cleansed of all of those phrases that precipitated my flight.

Here, there is great comfort and beauty — and music. Oh, such music! ‘Though I am often left alone. I do not mind. At Saint-Martin-du-Canigou I learned how to be happily alone. Grace says that this is the cornerstone of my salvation. In my pleasant little cloister, I “read,” as the Sister calls it, and try to comprehend. This reading is not done from a book, but rather I seem to be privy to certain events, some I remember from my former life, and some that are new to me. And yet, somehow all seem intimately my own. These scenes have the furtive quality of dreams, arising and dispersing beyond my

conscious will. And yet, they cannot be dreams, because of their intensity and solidity. The best I can say is that they are things I “witness.” I should say, too, that in this witnessing, I am sometimes only an observer, but sometimes I am a participant as well, or even — I cannot say how — more than one participant. In this place, as the power of forgetfulness is strong, these forgotten things are replaced by other powers. One power is this ubiquity of being — the gift of living inside of many bodies. I will transcribe a few of my readings, some of which, I must admit, seem very disturbing to me now, although at one time, I took them to be a natural part of living. Perhaps you will find that one of these readings belongs to you, the evesdropper (like myself, another evesdropper!), and that by “claiming” it, as Sister says, “without remorse or pride,” you also may also be cleansed and freed, at last, to fly.

A young girl with a pretty name and white skin is delousing her father. He is kind to her now, but sometimes he is severe. She loves him and she fears him. He asks her to message his feet, and as she does so, he explains the difference between a venial and a mortal sin. He says that God does not count it sin when two give pleasure to each other. “This,” he says, “is a forthright and fair exchange, most comely in God’s eyes.”

And that is one bundle of sticks.

In those days it pleased me, and it pleased the priest that he should know me carnally, and be known by me; and so I did not think I was sinning, and neither did he. But now, with him, it does not please me any more. And so now, if he knew me carnally, I should think it a sin.

And that is one bundle of sticks.

In the summer, the priest came to my mother’s house while she was out harvesting, and was very pressing. “Allow me,” he said, “to know you carnally.”

And I said: “All right.”

“At that time, I was a virgin. I think I was about fourteen or fifteen years old. He deflowered me in the borde in which we kept the straw. But it wasn’t rape at all. After that, he continued to know me carnally until the following January. It always took place in my mother’s ostal; she knew about it and was consenting. It happened chiefly during the day.

The priest gave me as wife to my late husband, and after he had given me to this man, the priest continued to know me carnally, frequently, during the remaining four years of my husband’s life. And my husband knew about it and was consenting. Sometimes he would ask me: “Has the priest done it with you?”

And I would answer: “Yes.”

And my husband would say: "As far as the priest is concerned, all right! But don't you go having other men."

And that is one bundle of sticks.

A young girl was helping her father with his shirt. "Papa," she says, "do you know how God was made?"

"Yes, my child," he laughed, "God was made by fucking and shitting." And when he said these words he moved his fingers together suggestively.

"Papa!" she cried, those are wicked words!" You could be burned like the lepers for saying such things!"

And that is one bundle of sticks.

At the time they were burning lepers, one day I 'did it' with a prostitute. And after I had perpetrated this sin my face began to swell. I was terrified I had caught leprosy; thereupon I swore in the future I would never sleep with a woman again; in order to keep this oath, I began to abuse little boys.

And that is one bundle of sticks.

"Hey, what happened,? Did your husband beat you?" "No," she answered, "there's just something wrong with my eye."

"You don't get on well with your wife. You are harsh and cruel to her; and in that you are acting against scripture, which bids man to peaceful, gentle, and tender."

"She is bad tempered and a gossip. And take care yourself not to be caught by the jaw, because of your heretic's long tongue."

And that is one bundle of sticks.

A man is worth nothing if he is not his wife's master.

And that is one bundle of sticks.

Women are devils.

And that is two bundles of sticks.

The soul of a woman and the soul of a sow are one and the same.

And that is three bundles of sticks.

We used to quarrel often. We only stopped quarreling the day each of us found out the little heretical secrets of the other, which put us in a position to betray one another before the Inquisitor. So then we stopped quarreling.

And that is one-half bundle of sticks.

If you go to the homes of those who welcome the good men, I will kill you or drive you out.

And that is three bundles of sticks.

“How do you know,” asked the Bishop, “that Amadée, when she is grown up, will have the understanding of the good?”

“The little girl’s father will bring her up so well that, with the help of God, she will have the understanding of the good.”

And that is one bundle of sticks.

When a man steals away someone else’s possessions or commits evil, that man is none other than an evil spirit which enters into him: this spirit makes him commit sins and makes him abandon the good life for the wicked. Everything is full of souls. All the air is full of good and evil spirits. Except when a spirit has been dwelling in the body of a dead person who when he was alive was just and good, the spirit which had just escaped from a dead body is always anxious to be reincarnated. For the evil spirits in the air burn that spirit when it is among them; so they force it to enter some body of flesh, whether of man or beast; because as long as a human spirit is at rest in a body of flesh, the evil spirits in the air cannot burn it or torment it.

And that is a wooden stake.

When the spirits come out of the fleshy tunics, that is, a dead body, they run very fast, for they are fearful. They run so fast that if a spirit came out of a dead body in Valencia and had to go into a living body in the Comte de Foix, if it was raining hard, scarcely three drops could touch it. Running like this, the terrified spirit hurls itself into the first hole it finds free! In other words into the womb of some animal which has just conceived an embryo not yet supplied with a soul; whether a bitch, a female rabbit or a mare. Or even the womb of a woman.

And that is a deposition.

A man had been wicked and a murderer, but when he died, his spirit entered into the body of an ox. This ox had a harsh master who did not feed him properly and who covered him with pricks from a big goad. But the spirit of the ox remembered that he had been a man. When the ox died, the spirit entered into the

body of a horse. This horse was the property of a great lord, who fed him well. One night, the lord was attacked by his enemies; he got on his horse and rode across some rough rocky ground. At a certain moment, the horse caught his hoof between two stones; it had great difficulty in getting it out again, and lost its shoe, which remained caught between the two stones. Then the lord went on riding throughout part of the night. As for the spirit of the horse, it still remembered that it had once dwelt in a human body. When the horse died, its spirit entered into the body of a pregnant woman and was incorporated into the embryo of a child she was carrying in her womb. When the child grew up, he achieved an understanding of good. Later he became a parfait. One day, he passed the very place where the horse had lost its shoe. Then the man, whose spirit had been in a horse, said to his companion: "When I was a horse, one night I lost my shoe between two stones, and I went on unshod the whole night. They both began to search between the two stones, and they found the shoe and took it with them.

And that is rope bindings.

It was hot and he was on the roof of his house, being deloused in the sun by his daughter. I was passing by and heard them talking. The girl was saying to her father, "How can people manage to bear the pain when they are burning at the stake?" To which the father replied, "ignorant creature, God takes the pain upon himself of course!"

And that is the sentence.

In the past I did not believe in the resurrection of human bodies after death, although I had heard it preached in church. And still do not believe it! For the body of a dead person is dissolved and transformed into earth and ashes. But I do believe in the survival of the soul. . . the souls of the wicked will go "by rocks and precipices," demons will throw them down the cliffs from the rocks.

And that is a torch of flame.

Forced Choice

It is possible to so pressure and split
A sincere love that the lover dies because of it,
To make the stakes so high, the weights of the balance so even,
As say, when a young girl, seeing a sunlit mountain,
Thinks of a young man's eyes, an old man's imprecations,
And lies on a bed split wide with oscillations —
A pair of birds on a branch, one flies, one dies.
It is possible to see the mountain rise,
But rise as heaviness that buries flesh.
It is possible to kill innocence, or worse,
To maim it, to crucify the flesh with words of spirit.

