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Robert de Reims: Songs and Motets

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ROBERT DE REIMS

EGLAL DOSS-QUINBY | GAËL SAINT-CRICQ | SAMUEL N. ROSENBERG

SONGS &
MOTETS

ROBERT DE REIMS

Songs and Motets

EDITED, TRANSLATED, AND INTRODUCED BY

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Introduction

Robert de Reims, also known as “La Chievre de Rains,” was a poet-composer from Champagne, in the northeast of France, active sometime between 1190 and 1220. He appears to have been influential in the literary circles of Arras, in the region of Artois. Little else is known about Robert, beyond the fact that he was among the earliest *trouvères*. Thirteen compositions set to music may be attributed to him: nine songs (*chansons*) and four polyphonic motets.¹ Despite their quite limited number, these pieces show broad distribution in thirteenth-century sources, with as many as forty-seven occurrences—thirty-six as chansons preserved in songbooks and eleven as polyphonic compositions in liturgical books or motet collections. Such distribution, moreover, persists through the thirteenth century and beyond, from the oldest stratum of the *Chansonniere* de Saint-Germain-des-Prés (manuscript *U*), copied in the early 1220s, to manuscripts *a*, *O*, and *R*, produced at the beginning of the fourteenth century. A critical edition of Robert’s songs was last published in German in 1899 by Wilhelm Mann. This edition does not present the motets; it does not include translations from the Old French or, more significantly, the music transmitted in the medieval sources. The present volume fills this gap and takes a fresh look at the work of this neglected *trouvère*.

The corpus of Robert de Reims is exceptional on a number of fronts. First, Robert composed both conventional and farcical love songs. He is the earliest *trouvère* known to have composed a *sotte chanson contre Amours* (or “silly song against Love”), a lyric countertext whose parodic-comedic features allow for the simultaneous subversion and celebration of the traditional courtly love song. His participation in this playful mode pushes back the accepted origins of the genre by several decades.²

Robert’s corpus also poses the intriguing question of *trouvère* participation in the development of the polyphonic repertory. His work was clearly at the nexus of monophonic song and polyphony, with no fewer than four of his nine songs also appearing as upper parts of polyphonic motets elsewhere and two of them, moreover, transcribed

as *clausulæ* in liturgical sources. Robert's production thus allows us to discover the role of a recognized *trouvère* in the interplay of composition and recomposition of works through their various monophonic and polyphonic recastings. Critically, it reveals not only that some *trouvères* took part in the development of polyphony but also that their involvement occurred very early in the history of the motet, even influencing the enrichment of liturgical corpora. The case of Robert de Reims jostles and tempers the standard history of the *chanson* and motet, and it also contributes to filling in the blanks in our knowledge of the compositional and cultural background of these genres.

Robert de Reims was a master of not only conjoining two historically different treatments of vocal music—monophonic and polyphonic—but also writing verse for such settings. Robert was practiced at the art of versification: he lavished particular care on the phonic harmony of his words. Acoustic luxuriance and expertise in rhyming, grounded in the play of echoes and variations, constitute the stylistic hallmark of his poetry: rhymes of the sort called *rich*, *leonine*, *derived*, *paronymic*, *equivocal*, *annexed*, or *echoing* abound in his poetry, along with other sound patterns, such as *alliteration*. Indeed, the first specimens of intensive echo rhyming are found in Robert's lyrics, and the quality of his echoed rhymes has long been highlighted by literary historians. His poetic skill is a convincing companion to his musical artistry.

Robert de Reims, dit La Chievre: What We Know, What We Can Surmise

As his name indicates, Robert de Reims, surnamed "La Chievre,"³ came from the cathedral city of Reims. His dates are not certain; there continues to be scholarly debate surrounding Robert's presumed relations with his southern counterparts, the *troubadours*, and the probable dating of the manuscript sources of his compositions.

Whereas his first editor, Wilhelm Mann (1898), situated the *trouvère's* career at the end of the twelfth century, the French philologist Alfred Jeanroy (1899) argued for the middle or even the end of the thirteenth, particularly citing the poet's language and the versification of his songs. According to Madeleine Tyssens, the witness of the *Chansonnier de Saint-Germain-des-Prés* strongly suggests assigning Robert's corpus no earlier a date than the end of the thirteenth century, due to the fact that the first part of the collection—a repertory comprising the great classics of the late twelfth century and poets associated with the first half of the thirteenth, as well as later figures, such as Colin Muset—cannot be earlier than 1240 (Tyssens 1991, 391, 396; Tyssens 2015, xix–xx). Aurelio Roncaglia has countered that Robert's songs include "toute une série de dérivations directes, et très proches, de Marcabru" (a whole series of direct, and very close, derivations from [the troubadour] Marcabru), which would argue in favor of the first half of the thirteenth century rather than the second (Tyssens 1991, 397).

Marie-Geneviève Grossel (1994, 485) situates the literary production of Robert de Reims beginning in 1213, the date of a song to the Virgin by Moniot d'Arras, *De haut liu muet la cançons que je cant* (RS 304), which, as Holger Petersen Dyggve (1938, 60–62, 66) has demonstrated, is a contrafact of Robert de Reims's *Plaindre m'estuet de la bele en chantant* (RS 319, 320; our song no. 2). Moreover, she associates Robert de Reims with Audefroï le Bastart and Conon de Béthune, whom she considers more or less contemporaries.

The evidence of the Chansonnier de Saint-Germain-des-Prés corroborates such dating and might even allow us to place Robert's activity somewhat earlier, although nothing points to before ca. 1190, as Robert Lug has argued.⁴ The main section of this manuscript, copied in Metz in 1231 (Lug 2000), constitutes the earliest compilation of troubadour and trouvère songs (*U*, compositions nos. 1 through 177). It includes three chansons by Robert de Reims (nos. 53, 56, 63), all three occurring in the subdivision of this early part that Lug (2012, 470) calls the "Proto-Chansonnier" (nos. 1–91), which he posits was gathered ca. 1223. The second half of the proto-chansonnier (nos. 40–91) offers a collection of "old rarities"—numerous songs not encountered elsewhere, others recorded only in the closely related manuscript *C*, whose composers we know solely by way of attribution in *C*. It is among these "old rarities" that we find Robert's three chansons, works that place their composer among Lug's "pioneers" and "old masters." Lug advances the hypothesis that Robert de Reims was the earliest known "town trouvère," and it appears that he enjoyed a certain popularity, since no fewer than thirty-six manuscript versions of his nine chansons have been preserved. In her recent edition and analysis of manuscript *U*, Tyssens (2015, xx–xxii) remains noncommittal regarding the early date of gathering advocated by Lug.

Grossel (1994, 485) mentions the possibility that our trouvère was in contact with northern courts, "l'inspiration et le ton de Robert de Reims [ayant] peu à voir avec les habitudes des cercles champenois" (the inspiration and tone of Robert de Reims having little in common with the ways of Champenois circles). Lug also supposes that Robert had an influence on the trouvères active in and around the city of Arras (poets who are not represented in the proto-chansonnier; 2012, 457).

The Corpus and Its Manuscript Tradition

Nine songs are attributed to "Robert de Rains" or "La Chievre de Rains," depending on the manuscript. Although small quantitatively, this corpus enjoyed a wide and lasting reception in medieval sources. As detailed in tables 1 and 2, thirty-six occurrences of Robert's nine chansons⁵ and eleven occurrences of his four polyphonic compositions (nine as motets, two as clausulæ) are extant. These forty-seven occurrences and their different settings range across the entire spectrum of poetico-musical sources—from

U at the very beginning of the thirteenth century to *a*, *O*, and *R* at the start of the fourteenth.⁶

The precise attribution of the songs appears variously in trouvère chansonniers as *Robert de rains* for songs nos. 1 (*NPX*), 2 (*N^rX*), 3 (*KNPX*), 4 (*KNPX*), 5 (*X*), 6 (*X*), 7 (*X*), and 8 (*X*), or as *la (le, li) chievre (chevre, kievre) de rains (reims)* for songs nos. 1 (*K*), 2 (*KP*), 3 (*CMT*), and 9 (*MTU*). Attributions to *Blondelz* for song no. 1 (*C*) and *monnios* for no. 3 (*R*) have been rejected.⁸ It would appear that the rubricators of *NPX* favored the name *Robert*, and those of *MTU* favored *la chievre*, whereas the rubricator of *K* used both names interchangeably. Motets and clausulæ are recorded anonymously, as is normal in those repertories.

Gaël Saint-Cricq (2019) has made the case elsewhere that four songs attributed to Robert de Reims (nos. 4a, 5a, 7a, 8a) originated as motets that were later adapted (that is, stripped of their tenor) and augmented with one or more stanzas by an anonymous continuator. From the point of view of their distribution in the manuscript sources, the five “genuine” chansons and four chansons/motets exhibit clearly different treatments. Among Robert’s five “genuine” chansons (nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 9), three (nos. 1, 3, 9) appear in the first stratum of manuscript *U*, which contains the oldest surviving trouvère compositions, stemming from the years 1200–1220. Unlike most other works in *U*, Robert’s songs were copied repeatedly throughout the century. Indeed, the three songs copied in *U* were then recopied in *H* in the middle of the century, *F* in the second half, *MT* sometime around 1260–70, and *C* in the last quarter of the thirteenth.⁹ On the other hand, there is no trace in these chansonniers of the chansons derived from motets. It is known, however, that these four works already existed, for *Quant voi le douz tens venir* (4b), *L’autrier de joste un rivage* (5b), and *Main s’est levee Aëlis* (8b) were copied in the 1250s in their motet form in *MüA* and *W₂*,¹⁰ and as early as the 1240s as clausulæ in *F* in the case of the first two. In fact, except for the group *KNPX*, the sources maintain a generic distinction between Robert’s chansons and his motets—the former transmitted in songbooks and the latter in polyphonic collections—a separation that was traditional in the transmission of these two musical genres until the end of the thirteenth century.

As Saint-Cricq (2019) has demonstrated, thirteen chansonniers preserve the full set of five chansons, but none, apart from *KNPX*, includes any of the four chansons/motets, whether in the chanson or motet version. It is only in the “mega-compilation” *KNPX*, apparently created from one and the same large anthology in the decades 1270/1280,¹¹ that the motets are presented in the form of songs. In other words, songs first conceived as motets to which stanzas were added later are peculiar to *KNPX* and the years 1270/1280, and thus considerably past the time of Robert’s death. Robert obviously was active in the making of the four chansons/motets, but as the poet-composer of the initial stanzas, that is, of the motet text and, presumably, of the motet music as well. If, as Saint-Cricq has argued, he was not the author of the supplementary stanzas



Songs and Motets

1 Bien s'est Amors honie

Chanson

Bien s'est Amors honie

Quant el m'a si traïs

Qu'el m'a fet sans amie

Amer, tant con sui vis.

1.4

Mort sui, ce m'est avis,

Por ce que je n'aim mie.

Ne ja més en ma vie

Ne serai fins amis.

1.8

La grant joie est faillie

Que me faisoit touz dis

Amors, par tricherie,

Qui tout m'avoit conquis.

2.4

Las! je m'estoie mis

Dou tout en sa baillie;

Or s'est de moi partie.

Ja més n'i serai pris.

2.8

Pris? Por quoi i seroie,

Quant g'en sui eschapés?

Ne sai; més tels foloie

Qui puis revient assés

3.4

La dont il est grevés.

Deus! se je ce faisoie,

Plus douce amor avroie;
Més trop m'en sui blasmés. 3.8

Tost m'en repentiroie
Se j'estoie apensés,
Par foi! que ge-l disoie
Come hons desesperés: 4.4

“Amors, si m'ociés,
Certes, car ge-l vodroie!
La force n'est pas moie,
Vers vos, bien le savés.” 4.8

I



Love has dishonored itself
by so betraying me
that it has made me love with no one
to love, for the rest of my life. 1.4

I am dead, it seems to me,
because I live without love.
And never in my life
will I be a true lover. 1.8

Gone is the great joy
I experienced day after day
from Love, which, with deceit,
had conquered me utterly. 2.4

Alas! I had placed myself
utterly under its power—
and now it has abandoned me.
Nevermore will I be caught in its trap! 2.8

Trapped? Why again would I be,
now that I've made my way out?
I don't know; but a man is a fool
if he hurries back to a place 3.4

where he is tortured.
God! If I did that,
I would have a sweeter love,
but I have blamed myself too readily. 3.8

I would soon have regrets
if I were inclined—
my goodness!—to say,
like a man without hope: 4.4
“Love, come kill me,
for I would truly like you to!
I don’t have the strength [it would take],
unlike you, as you well know.” 4.8

I



Amour s’est bien déshonorée
quand elle m’a tant trahi
que, sans que j’aie même d’amie, elle m’a contraint
à aimer pour le restant de ma vie. 1.4
Je suis mort, me semble-t-il,
parce que je n’aime point.
Et jamais de ma vie
je ne serai un fin amant. 1.8

La grande joie n’est plus
que m’apportait à tout moment,
par tricherie, Amour,
qui m’avait entièrement conquis. 2.4
Hélas! je m’étais soumis
entièrement à son pouvoir;
or, voilà qu’elle m’a abandonné!
Plus jamais je n’y serai piégé! 2.8

Piégé? Pourquoi le serais-je,
ayant enfin échappé à son emprise?

Je ne sais, mais il est fou, celui qui persiste à revenir là où il a été maltraité.	3.4
Dieu! si j'agissais de la sorte, je connaîtrais une amour plus douce; mais je m'en suis déjà trop blâmé.	3.8
Je m'en repentirais assez vite, si j'étais enclin— mon Dieu!—à m'exprimer en homme désespéré:	4.4
“Amour, tuez-moi donc; c'est en effet ce que je voudrais! Je n'en ai pas la force, contrairement à vous, vous le savez bien!”	4.8

I

Bien s'est A - mors ho - ni - - e
 La grant joie est fail - li - - e
 Pris? Por quoi i se - roi - - e,
 Tost m'en re - pen - ti - - roi - - e

II

Quant el m'a si tra - is
 Que me fai - soit touz dis
 Quant g'en sui es - cha - pés?
 Se j'es - toie a - pen - sés,

III

Qu'el m'a fet sans a - mi - e
 A - mors, par tri - che - ri - e,
 Ne sai; més tels fo - loi - e
 Par foil que ge-l di - soi - e

IV

A - mer, tant con sui vis.
 Qui tout m'a - voit con - quis.
 Qui puis re - vient as - sés
 Come hons de - ses - pe - rés:

V

Mort sui, ce m'est a - - vis,
 Las! je m'es - toi - e mis
 La dont je il est gre - - vés.
 "A - mors, si m'o - ci - - és,

VI

Por ce que je n'aim mi - - e.
 Dou tout en sa bail - li - - e;
 Deus! se je ce fai - soi - - e,
 Cer - tes, car ge-l vo - droi - - el

VII

Ne ja més en ma vi - - e
 Or s'est de moi par - ti - - e.
 Plus douce a - mor a - vroi - - e;
 La for - ce n'est pas moi - - e,

viii

Ne se - rai fins a - mis.
 Ja més n'i se - rai pris.
 Més trop m'en sui blas - més.
 Vers vos, bien le sa - vés."

CATALOGUING

Raynaud-Spanke 1163, 1215, 1217; Linker 231-2; Mölk-Wolfzettel 860,124 [1123]

MANUSCRIPTS

X 133^v-134^r ♪ (*Robert de rains*), *C* 30^v (*Blondelz*), *K* 188 ♪ (*la chievre de rains*), *N* 89^v-90^r ♪ (*Robert de rains*), *P* 71^v-72^r ♪ (*Robert de rains*), *U* 33^v-34^r (empty staves)

PREVIOUS EDITIONS

Tarbé 1850, 101; Tarbé 1862, 15; Hofmann 1867, 492; Brakelmann 1868b, 241; Mann 1898, 28; Mann 1899, 106; Lachèvre and Guégan 1914, 3^f; Lachèvre et al. 1917, 27, 49 ♪ (French translation); Jeanroy and Långfors 1921, 27; Lepage 1994, 365; Bahat and Le Vot 1996, 89 ♪; Tischler 1997, 8: no. 664 ♪; Tyssens 2015, 1:140

VERSIFICATION AND MUSICO-POETIC FORM

4, *coblas doblas* in *oda continua*; *rime annexée* (2/3), *rime léonine* (2), *rime paronyme* (1)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
6a'	6b	6a'	6b	6b	6a'	6a'	6b
1/2	3/4						
a'	ie	oie					
b	is	és					

REJECTED TEXTUAL READINGS

1.3 Qu'el m'a fet *missing* (-3) (*reading from KNP*) — 2.5 mis *missing* (-1) (*reading from CKNP*) — 3.6 Deus] dex — 4.2 ie estoie (+1) (*reading from CKNP*) — 4.4 home (+1) (*reading from KNP*)

TEXTUAL VARIANTS

1.1 s'est] cest *C*; amors *followed by expunctuated* trai *P*; honie] trichie *C*, traie *U* — 1.2 elle mait ocis *CU* — 1.3 Qu'el] ki *CU* — 1.5 mors *CKU*; ce] se *C* — 2.1 granz *U*; La ioie mest f. *C* — 2.2 Ke mait faite *C*, Qui ma fointe *U* — 2.3 par sa t. *N* — 2.4 Ke tout

auoit *C* — 2.5 mestoie *followed by expunctuated* tot *P* — 2.7 s'est] cest *C* — 2.8 James copied twice in *N*, with second iteration *expunctuated*; n'i] ne *C*; ni serai iamais pris *U* — 3.1 Pris ie por coy s. *C*; Ge por qoi pris s. *U* — 3.2 g'en] ie *C* — 3.3 tels] teil *CNP*; foloie] folie *C*, missing *N* — 3.4 Qui] ke *C* — 3.7 douce amor] douce mort *C*, dolcemant *U* — 4.1 Tost] tot *P*, ie *CU*; m'en] me *U* — 4.2 apensés] apassez *N*, eschaipeis *CU* — 4.3 ie parloie *CU* — 4.4 Com hom *CU* — 4.5 si] sei *with expunctuated* e *P*, cor *C*, car *U* — 4.6 car ge.l] ie le *CU*

Manuscripts *CU* record two additional stanzas (presented here based on *U*):

Dame, si dolz martire
 Doi je bien endurer,
 Ne jamais Nostre Sire
 Ne-l me puisse amender 5.4
 Se ja m'en quier oster!
 Se me volez ocire,
 Je ne sai pas eslire
 Meillor mort, ne trover. 5.8

D'Amors ne sai que dire:
 Qant plus i voil panser,
 Une hore me fait rire,
 L'autre me fait plorer. 6.4
 Ja ne l'en doi blasmer,
 Mais maltalenz et ire
 Me fait dire et desdire
 Et folement parler. 6.8

Lady, I must indeed endure
 such sweet martyrdom,
 and may Our Lord never
 let me make amends 5.4
 if I ever seek to free myself of it!
 If you want to kill me,
 I can't think of choosing—
 or finding—a better death. 5.8

I don't know what to say about Love:
 the more I try to think about it,

[the more I find that] one moment it makes me laugh
 [and] the next it makes me cry. 6.4
 I mustn't ever blame [Love] for this,
 but ill will and anger
 make me say one thing, then another,
 and speak like a fool. 6.8

Dame, je dois bien endurer
 un si doux martyre—
 que Notre Seigneur
 ne me le pardonne aucunement 5.4
 si je cherchais jamais à m'en libérer!
 Si vous voulez me tuer,
 je ne saurais choisir,
 ni trouver, meilleure mort. 5.8

Je ne sais que dire d'Amour:
 plus j'y pense,
 [plus je trouve que] tantôt elle me fait rire,
 tantôt elle me fait pleurer. 6.4
 Je ne dois jamais l'en blâmer,
 mais le dépit et la colère
 me font dire des choses contradictoires
 et parler comme un fou. 6.8

Versification

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
6a'	6b	6a'	6b	6b	6a'	6a'	6b
a'	ire						
b	er						

Textual Variants

5.1 si] cest C — 5.4 Ne·l] ne C — 5.5 ja] ie C — 5.6 me deuies C — 5.7 sai] puis C
 — 6.2 plus] muels C — 6.3 Lune h. C — 6.5 ne men doit C — 6.6 malz talens C

NOTES TO THE MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTION

III first three pitches added in the margin without text — III *tractus* added after last pitch as at the other phrase closures — V *tractus* added after last pitch as in *K* — VII *tractus* added after last pitch as in *N* — VIII triple *tractus* signaling end of stanza after last pitch and syllable

MUSICAL VARIANTS

I a unplicated (“ni-”) *KNP* — VI c/b (“n’aim”) *KNP* — VII a (“ma”) *K* — IX c (“ne”) *N*

COMMENTARY

This composition opens the first group of songs by Robert in manuscript *X*; it appears under the rubric “Ci comencent les chançons robert de rains.” In manuscript *C*, whose rubrics are “généralement de peu de valeur” (Lepage 1994, 371), this song is ascribed to Blondel de Nesle. In manuscripts *KNPX*, this song is always first within a group of three (*P*) or four (*KNX*) songs ascribed to Robert de Reims (see table 1). Consequently, in his edition of Blondel de Nesle, Lepage characterizes the attribution to Blondel in *C* as “douteuse.” — 1.5, V Declensional variation in manuscript *X*, especially with *mor-* and *amor-*, is sufficiently frequent to lead us to conclude that the apparently erroneous form *mort* probably stems from early case-system deterioration. For that reason, we have opted to respect this manuscript reading rather than introduce a correction. See also song no. 4a, line 3.14, XI.

