



Comtessa (Beatriz?) de Dia

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Introduction

The period from the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries witnessed the high point of troubadour activity. Troubadours were poet-musicians, largely based in the south of France, who were often of noble birth or high status. Writing in Provençal, a dialect of Occitan or the *langue d'oc*, they generally spoke of the pleasures and pains of courtly love, a literary convention in which the narrator, usually male, expressed his devotion to a woman beyond his reach as a means of demonstrating the nobility of his character. Over 450 of these troubadours are known today. Yet more than twenty female troubadours, called *trobairitz*, have also been identified, and undoubtedly still other women composed some of the myriad anonymous works that survive in our extant manuscript sources. Of the 2,500 songs left from this tradition, fewer than 50 are known to have been composed by *trobairitz*. Of these, only one song survives with both text and music: the *canso* (or love song) “[A chantar m'er de so qu'eu no volria](#)” by the Comtessa de Dia (fl. late twelfth/early thirteenth century).

Life

Little is known about the Comtessa de Dia, and what is known must be taken with a very large grain of salt. Brief biographies, or *vidas*, of troubadours are found alongside their works in several manuscripts (see Figures 1–2); however, far from being factual accounts of the real lives and times of these composers, they can be fanciful and inaccurate, as they were often written much later and based upon literary or fictional ideas found in the songs themselves. The *vida* for the Comtessa, which is found in four manuscripts, gives us a few wispy clues to her identity:¹

La comtessa di Dia si fo moiller den Guillem de Peitieu. Bella donna e bona, et enamoret se de Raimbaut d'Aurenga. E fez de lui mantas bonas cansos.

The Countess of Dia was the wife of Lord Guillem de Poitou, a beautiful and good lady. And she fell in love with Lord Raimbaut d'Aurenga and composed many good songs about him.²

¹ The Comtessa's *vida* is found in the manuscripts A, B, I, and K (abbreviations that scholars use for their full *sigla*, or shelfmarks); altogether, her works are found in seventeen manuscripts. All of these sources are listed in the bibliography, along with links to those that are digitized.

² Margarita Egan, [The Vidas of the Troubadours](#) (New York: Garland Pub., 1984), 28.

Figure 1. Miniature of the Comtessa de Dia accompanying her *vida*, [Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 854](#) (Manuscript I), fol. 141.



Figure 2. Another Miniature of the Comtessa de Dia, with partial text of her *vida*, in [Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fr. 12473](#) (Manuscript K).



Elizabeth Aubrey has neatly laid out several possibilities for the Comtessa's identity, as follows.³ A Guillem I of Poitiers was count of Valentinois from 1163–89 and owned property in [the diocese of Dia](#), an area in northern Provence; he was married to a woman named Beatritz, but it seems unlikely that she would have been referred to as a Countess of Dia, as Guillem did not hold that title there. The actual Count of Dia, Isoard II, had a daughter named Isoarde who might have been called "Countess." Lastly, a "Beatrix comitissa" is mentioned in a document from 1212 dealing with the widower of one of Count Isoard's daughters, who could be this Beatrix herself. If the Comtessa is either of Isoard's daughters, then she likely would have been too young to have been involved with [Raimbaut d'Aurenga](#), even in courtly fashion, since he died around 1173; however, the Raimbaut of the *vida* might be a younger relation to the famed troubadour. She also would have been too young to have been married to Guilhem de Peitieu ([William IX of Aquitaine](#)), who was one of the first troubadours, as he died around 1126.

In any case, the identification of two of the three possible candidates for the Comtessa as Beatritz, Beatrix, or Beatriz explains the common use of that name in modern resources, and although her true identity remains hazy, she most likely lived in southern France in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.⁴ Four *cansos*, or love songs, are attributed to her, and she might also have written one *tenso*, or debate song.⁵

Historical and Musical Context

Southern France of this period was part of a larger region bordered on the east by the Italian Alps and on the west by parts of Catalonia and the Pyrenees. In the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, the height of troubadour activity, this area (called the Midi or Occitania) was united by a common culture and the shared language of Occitan, one of the primary poetic languages of Europe. While there were other contributors to the literature of the time, the bulk of what we know today is the product of the troubadours. In fact, the amount of literature that they left is unprecedented in scope; no other western European body of work prior to their songs is as substantial. Given how destructive the [Albigensian Crusade](#) was in southern France in the early part of the century, it is equally amazing that any of the sources containing their songs survived. Toward the latter part of the thirteenth and into the mid-fourteenth centuries, the songs continued to be copied, if not newly composed, and many of the manuscript sources for troubadour literature (and also their *vidas*) date from this time period.

³ Elizabeth Aubrey, "La Comtessa de Dia (ca. 1175)," in [New Historical Anthology of Music by Women](#), edited by James Briscoe, 21–24 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁴ Marianne Shapiro offers another intriguing possibility: apparently, "Comtessa" was also a Provençal first name. The manuscript sources might in fact be identifying her by name, much like in the modern case of singer-actress Countess Vaughn, and not designating noble status at all. See Shapiro, "[The Provençal Trobairitz and the Limits of Courtly Love](#)," *Signs* 3:3 (Spring, 1978): 560–71, at 562 fn. 5.

⁵ The *tenso* (or debate song) "Amics, en gran cossirier" is attributed to Raimbaut d'Aurenga in its three manuscript sources, but given that the Comtessa's *vida* links her to him, several scholars have suggested that she is the lady he addresses in the dialogue, or even that she wrote or co-wrote the *tenso* herself. See Matilda Bruckner, Laurie Shepard, and Sarah White, [Songs of the Women Troubadours](#) (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2000).

A troubadour's song was both poetry and music; the texts and melodies were often composed specifically for one another. Of the over 2,500 extant songs, though, only 246 survive with music. 195 of these are *unica*, meaning each is the only known version of itself. The remaining 51 texts have multiple documented versions of their melodies, or even more than one melody, giving us 260 distinct melodies for the 246 poems—approximately 10% of the known troubadour repertory. Despite how few melodies remain, these songs were both popular and influential, even beyond the borders of Occitania, their fairly simple forms leaving plenty of space for the texts to speak volumes.⁶

The songs tell of political quarrels and local news, share moralizing tales, or offer satirical glimpses at their world. But the theme over half of them share, and for which they are best known today, is love. More specifically, many of the songs depict what in modern parlance is often called “courtly love,” but which in their own time was referred to as *amour honestus* (honest love), *fin' amor* (refined or fine love), or, more rarely, *amor cortez* (elegant courtship).⁷

This idea of refined love developed in part due to exposure to the courtly life and love poetry of Islamic Spain to the west, and also in part to the particulars of the not-quite-feudal system in place in Occitania, whereby metaphors of feudal homage, vassalage, and fealty could be transferred from the political to the personal. *Fin' amor* called for an idealized relationship between the typically male author/narrator and an unnamed or otherwise disguised woman, who was usually of higher social status and often married to another man. In such songs, there is an emotional, intellectual, spiritual, even erotic desire for this woman, but her position renders her unattainable, and so the goal is not to win her but to prove one's nobility of character through fealty and devotion. This woman thus has the power to reject or accept the devotee, yet in many songs she is rendered silent and passive: she is a judge, not a participant. More importantly, she is a literary conceit, not necessarily a real person.

While troubadours came from various backgrounds, all of the identified *trobairitz* were aristocratic women, perhaps themselves the recipients of chivalric affection. They flourished later in the high period of troubadour activity, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. In economic and legal terms, aristocratic women fared decently in Occitania until this point, inheriting and owning property, acting as administrators especially in the absence of men who died or joined the Crusades, and receiving training in music similar to that of noble men. In fact, as amateur musicians, women would have performed just as frequently.⁸ If the Comtessa were part of the nobility, as her title implies, she would likely have received a solid education in music as well as in other social and economic matters.

⁶ F.R.P. Akehurst and Judith M. Davis, eds., [A Handbook of the Troubadours](#) (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 13.

⁷ The phrase “courtly love,” or “*amour courtois*,” was invented by Gaston Paris in 1833. See Jennifer G. Wollock, [Rethinking Chivalry and Courtly Love](#) (Denver, CO: Praeger, 2011), 31.

⁸ See Maria V. Coldwell, “*Jouglers* and *Trobairitz*: Secular Musicians in Medieval France,” in [Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950](#), edited by Jane M. Bowers and Judith Tick, 39–61 (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 41.

Yet around the same time as the trobairitz flourished, the overall position of aristocratic women declined; men often married women of lower, instead of higher, status, and toward the later thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, their rights to property and inheritance were gradually stripped. The songs of the trobairitz might thus reflect aristocratic women seeking new ways to express themselves as their traditional means faded. And yet these songs operated very much within the same social and cultural circles as troubadour literature. They portrayed the same proper, codified social hierarchies and displayed similar, though not identical, approaches to the idea of *fin'amor*.

Works and Compositional Style

In some cases, the female composers wrote from the perspective of the noble lady in the troubadour song, giving voice to an otherwise silent figure and depicting herself as the object of desire. In other cases, they swapped roles with the typical male narrator, becoming themselves the devotees seeking love or acknowledgment from their loved ones. The Comtessa wrote from both of these perspectives in her four known *cansos* (see Table 1), simultaneously drawing on a host of popular female genres.

Table 1. Known Songs by the Comtessa de Dia.

Title:	Manuscripts & Sources (see Bibliography):
“A chantar m’er de so qu’eu no volria”	Manuscripts A, B, C, D, G, I, K, L, M, N, R, W, a, b
“Ab ioi et ab ioven m’apais”	Manuscripts A, B, D, H, I, T, a
“Estat ai en greu cossirier”	Manuscripts A, D, I, K; Chansonnier de Béziers
“Fin ioi me don’alegransa”	Manuscript D

Content

In “[A chantar m’er](#)” and “Estat ai,” the Comtessa portrays herself as a jilted woman. Her beloved knight leaves her in “Estat ai” because she has refused to sleep with him, but she describes in detail how very much she would prefer that he take the place of her husband in bed. It is due to songs such as this that the trobairitz are thought of as more sensual than their male counterparts; the Comtessa has not simply stepped into the shoes of the typical male narrator but has far surpassed in desire both chivalric speech and female social norms.⁹ In this fashion, this *canso* is reminiscent of the earlier *chanson de la mal mariée*, or “song of the bad marriage,” in which women trapped in a loveless marriage might engage in escapist fantasy.¹⁰ And yet, as Aileen Ann Macdonald points out, the Comtessa still retains the control of the noble lady of troubadour

⁹ Aileen Ann Macdonald, “[A Refusal to be Silenced or to Rejoice in any Joy that Love may Bring: The anonymous Old Occitan canso, ‘Per ioi qui d’amor m’avegna,’](#)” *Dalhousie French Studies* 36 (Fall 1996): 3–13, at 8–9.

¹⁰ For more on this genre, see Peter France, ed., [The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 150.

poetry at the end, for the errant knight can only approach her now if he promises to fulfill her desires.¹¹

In “A chanter m’er,” the singer’s beloved has once again left her, perhaps for another woman. The Comtessa, far from confessing her own role in her lover’s abandonment as in “Estat ai,” says instead that she takes comfort in knowing she has done nothing wrong, but in a later section acknowledges that she might have said something to send him into the arms of another. In this *canso*, the Comtessa more fully takes on the role of the noble lady. She is aggrieved that the one who swore to be faithful to her has reneged on his promise, listing her ideal attributes that demonstrate her worth and that should have warranted his loyalty. And yet, through her protests of unfulfilled love and her reiteration of her own faithfulness, her narrative voice also resembles that of the male troubadour.

Of the forty-odd songs attributed to the trobairitz, only two offer stories of mutual fidelity and joy: the two remaining *cansos* by the Comtessa, “Ab ioi” and “Fin ioi.”¹² In both songs, the Comtessa places herself and her beloved on equal footing. She states in “Ab ioi” that because she is always faithful to her lover, so shall he always be faithful to her, and as long as that remains so, her love will not diminish. Here, it seems that the unnamed man is a highborn knight, worthy of her noble status and recognition; both are attractive, merry, and joyful. She is equally joyous in “Fin ioi,” where love arouses the happiest of emotions. Yet their love, and love in general, is threatened by the *fals lauzengier truan*, the enemies of love frequently mentioned in troubadour lyrics. The Comtessa scorns those who would gossip so maliciously about those in love with an air of superiority, her ability to ignore them a sign of her inherent noble character.¹³

With regard to content, then, the Comtessa’s *cansos* clearly resonate with the social and cultural milieu found in troubadour song, and yet simultaneously they challenge that world to a level unprecedented in other trobairitz literature. In some ways the general hierarchy between man and woman is upheld, but in others the Comtessa portrays herself as sensual, full of erotic desire, and most atypically, as the equal to her beloved.

Form and Structure

Cansos of this period are fairly simple poetic structures, with a number of strophes followed by a *tornada*, or half a strophe. The most common number was five strophes, but the rest of the details, such as meter, rhyme scheme, the number of lines per strophe, and the number of syllables per line, were up to the composer. The pattern for the song is set in the first strophe, with every successive strophe operating the same way, but there is still flexibility in the overall

¹¹ Macdonald, “[A Refusal to be Silenced](#),” 9.

¹² Merritt Blakeslee, “La Chanson de femme, les *Héroïdes*, et la *canso* occitane à voix de femme: considérations sur l’originalité des *trobairitz*,” in [Hommage à Jean-Charles Payen: “Farai chansoneta novele.” Essais sur la liberté créatrice au Moyen Âge](#), 67-75 (Caen: U de Caen, 1989), 71–73.

¹³ Ingrid Kasten, “The Conception of Female Roles in the Woman’s Song of Reinmar and the Comtessa de Dia,” in [Medieval Woman’s Song: Cross-Cultural Approaches](#), edited by Anne L. Klinck and Ann Marie Rasmussen, 152–67 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

rhyme scheme of the song, allowing for strophes to share or alternate rhyme sounds in a variety of ways.

“Fin ioi,” for example, is a fairly short *canço*, consisting only of two strophes of eight lines each and a *tornada*. The strophes share the same rhyme scheme (ababccdd), as well as the same rhyme sounds (-ansa, en, an, aia); here, the closing *tornada* follows the pattern of the second half of the strophe.

“Fin ioi me don’alegransa”¹⁴

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | <p>Fin ioi me don' alegransa
per qu'eu chan plus gaiamen,
e no m'o teing a pensanssa
ni a negun penssamen,
car sai que son a mon dan
li fals lausengier truan,
e lor mals diz no m'esglaiia,
anz en son dos tanz plus gaia.</p> | <p><i>Fine joy brings me great happiness
which makes me sing more gaily,
and it doesn't bother me a bit
or weigh my spirit down
that those sneaky rivals and gossips
are out to do me harm.
Their evil talk doesn't dismay me.
It just makes me twice as gay.</i></p> |
| 2 | <p>En mi non an ges fiassa
li lauzengier mal dizen,
c'om non pot aver honranssa
qu'a ab els acordamen,
qu'ist son d'altrestal semblan
com la nivo/ que s'espan
qe.l solels en pert sa raia,
per qu'eu non am gent savaia.</p> | <p><i>Those nasty-worded enemies
won't get an ounce of trust from me.
For no one will find honor
who has anything to do with them.
They are like the cloud that grows
and billows out until
the sun loses its rays:
I have no use for such as them.</i></p> |
| 3 | <p>E vos, gelos mal parlan,
no.s cuges qu'eu m'an tarçan
que iois e iovenz no.m plaia,
per tal que dols vos deschaia.</p> | <p><i>And you, gossiping jealous [husband]
don't think I'm going to hang around
or that joy and youth don't please me:
beware, or grief will bring you low.</i></p> |

¹⁴ Original text from Angelica Rieger, [Trobairitz: Der Beitrag der Frau in der altokzitanischen höfischen Lyrik](#) (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1991), 605; English translation by Meg Bogin, [The Women Troubadours](#) (New York: Paddington Press, 1976), 91.

“Estat ai” is only slightly longer; it has three eight-line strophes, each of which shares the rhyme scheme *abbacddc*. The first two strophes share the same rhyme sounds (*-ier, -ut, -ida, -or*), while the last strophe shifts to a different set of rhyme sounds (*-os, -er, -ia, -it*).

“Estat ai en greu cossirier”¹⁵

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | <p>Estat ai en greu cossirier
per un cavallier qu’ ai agut,
e vuoil sia totz temps saubut
cum ieu l’ ai amat a sobrier;
ara vei qu’ ieu sui trahida
car ieu non lie donei m’ amor,
don ai estat en gran error,
en lieig e quand sui vestida.</p> | <p><i>I’ve lately been in great distress
over a knight who once was mine,
and I want it known for all eternity
how I loved him to excess.
Now I see I’ve been betrayed
because I wouldn’t sleep with him;
night and day my mind won’t rest
To think of the mistake I made.</i></p> |
| 2 | <p>Ben volria mon cavallier
tener un ser en mos bratz nut,
qu’ el s’ en tengra per ereubut
sol qu’ a lui fezes cosseillier,
car plus m’ en sui abellida
no fetz Floris de Blancaflor:
ieu l’ autrei mon cor e m’ amor,
mon sen, mos huoills e ma vida..</p> | <p><i>How I wish just once I could caress
that chevalier with my bare arms,
for he would be in ecstasy
if I’d just let him lean his head against my breast.
I’m sure I’m happier with him
than Blancaflor with Floris
My heart and love I offer him,
my mind, my eyes, my life.</i></p> |
| 3 | <p>Bels amics avinens e bos,
cora.us tenrai en mon poder?
e que jagues ab vos un ser
e q’ ie.us des un bais amoros;
sapchatz, gran talan n’ auria
q’ ie.us tengues en luoc del marit,
ab so que m’ aguessetz plevit
de far tot so qu’ ieu volria.</p> | <p><i>Handsome friend, charming and kind,
When shall I have you in my power?
If only I could lie beside you for an hour
and embrace you lovingly –
know this, that I’d give almost anything
to have you in my husband’s place,
but only under the condition
That you swear to do my bidding.</i></p> |

“Ab ioi” is a fairly typical *canso*: it has four strophes, each of which has eight lines of eight syllables each, and a concluding *tornada*. Its rhyme scheme and rhyme sounds are more elaborate than those of “Fin ioi” or “Estat ai;” the scheme remains constant (*ababbaab*), but the rhyme schemes alternate every other strophe. Moreover, the Comtessa uses masculine word endings (*-ais, -en*) for the a verses and feminine endings (*-aia, -enssa*) for the b verses throughout.¹⁶ She further complicates the poem by linking verses together through derived rhymes, or the use of cognate words in pairs of verses.¹⁷ For example, examine the first two lines of the *canso*, in which virtually every word is a cognate of a word in the other line.

¹⁵ Original text and English translation by Meg Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*, 88–9.

¹⁶ Bruckner, Shepard, and White, *Songs of the Women Troubadours*, xiv; 141–43. Nouns in Occitan, as in many other older and modern languages, are classified as either masculine or feminine depending on their word ending, and the Comtessa would have understood them in this gendered fashion.

¹⁷ A good explanation of this poetic device is in Elizabeth Aubrey, *The Music of the Troubadours* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), x, 194ff.

Ab ioi et ab ioven m'apais
E iois e iovens m'apaia

I content myself with joy and youth
And joy and youth content me

Not only does this poetic device create a sense of alliteration, it also links together the verses with the masculine and feminine endings, emphasizing the textual conceit that the lovers the Comtessa describes stand on equal footing.¹⁸

“Ab ioi et ab ioven m'apais”¹⁹

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Ab joi et ab joven m'apais,
e jois e jovens m'apaia,
<i>que</i> mos amics es lo plus gais,
per q'ieu sui coindet' e gaia;
e pois eu li sui veraia,
be.is taing q'el me sia verais
c'anc de lui amar non m'estrais
ni ai cor que m'en estraia.</p> | <p><i>I content myself with joy and youth
and joy and youth content me,
for my lover is the most joyful,
so that I am charming and joyful;
and since I am true to him
it is quite fitting for him to be true to me
for I have never ceased loving him,
nor have I any intention to cease.</i></p> |
| <p>2 Mout me plai car sai que val mais
sel q'ieu plus desir que m'aia,
e cel que primiers lo m'atrais
Dieu prec que gran joi l'atraia;
e qui que mal l'en retraia,

no.l creza, fors so qu'ie.l retrais
c'om cuoill maintas vetz los balais
ab q'el mezeis se balaia.</p> | <p><i>I am delighted, for I know he is the worthiest,
the one that I most desire to possess me,
and as for the one who first brought me to him,
I pray God to give him great joy;
and whoever speaks ill of my lover to him [this
intermediary],
let him not believe it, except what I've told him;
for a man often picks the rods
with which he himself is beaten.</i></p> |
| <p>3 E dompna que en bon pretz s'enten
deu ben pausar s'entendenssa
en un pro cavaillier valen
pois <i>qu'</i>ill conois sa valenssa,
que l'aus amar a presenssa;
<i>que</i> domna, pois am'a presen,
ja pois li pro ni.li valen
no.n dirant mas avinenssa.</p> | <p><i>So a lady who cares for good reputation
surely ought to set her affection
on a worthy, noble knight,
once she recognizes his worth.
Let her dare to love him openly,
for once a lady loves openly,
never again will the worthy or the valiant
speak anything but praise of her.</i></p> |
| <p>4 Q'ieu n'ai chausit un pro e gen,
per cui pretz meillur'e genssa,
larc et adreig e conoissen,
on es sens e conoissenssa.
Prec li que m'aia crezenssa,</p> | <p><i>I have one [who is] worthy and noble
by whom merit improves and is ennobled,
generous and adroit and discerning,
in whom there is wit and wisdom.
I pray him to believe me,</i></p> |

¹⁸ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “[Fictions of the Female Voice: The Women Troubadours](#),” *Speculum* 67, no. 4 (Oct. 1992): 865–91 at 878; see also Sarah Kay, “Derivation, Derived Rhyme, and the Trobairitz,” in *The Voice of the Trobairitz*, edited by William D. Paden, 157–82 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); Laurie A. Finke, *Feminist Theory, Women's Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 58–59.

¹⁹ Original text from Rieger, *Trobairitz*, 586–87; English translation by Sarah Kay in “[Derivation, Derived Rhyme, and the Trobairitz](#),” 176–77.

ni hom no.il puosca far crezen
q'ieu fassa vas ni faillimen,
sol non trob en lui faillensa.

*and not let people make him believe
that I would commit a disloyalty toward him—
provided that I not find disloyalty in him.*

- 5 Amics [Floris], la vostra valenssa
sabon li pro e li valen,
per q'ieu vos qier de mantenen,
si.us plai, vostra mantenensa.

*Lover [Floris], the worthy and valiant
recognize your valor,
and for this reason, I ask straightaway,
if you please, for your protection.*

“[A chantar m'er](#)” is by far the Comtessa’s best known *canso*. It survives in fourteen manuscript sources, and in one of them it has musical notation, the only song by a trobairitz to have surviving music. As a result, this piece has been recorded frequently and a short discography is included in the reference materials at the end of this chapter.²⁰ “[A chantar m'er](#)” has five strophes, each of which has seven ten-syllable verses, and a concluding *tornada* of two verses. Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner states that in this type of structure, the rhyme scheme (here aaaabab) remains constant while the rhyme sounds change, yet the Comtessa uses the same b rhyme sound (-ens, which is masculine) in every strophe.²¹ In her opinion, this might be a metaphor for the Comtessa’s appeal to her betraying lover to return to faithfulness, while the predominantly feminine rhyme sounds signal the centrality of the Comtessa’s persona.

The music as notated in the *Manuscrit du Roi* is quite similar to those of the troubadours: it has a range of an octave, though the majority of the song is sung within a sixth; it is entirely diatonic; it uses predominantly stepwise motion; and it is largely syllabic, with short melismas on important words or syllables. Each strophe repeats the melody in its entirety, with the exception of the closing *tornada*. The first two pairs of verses in each strophe share the same A phrase, while the closing three verses have a separate B phrase; the same concluding melodic verse occurs in both A and B phrases.

²⁰ The Comtessa’s other songs have also been recorded, either to newly composed melodies or by contrafacting, or fitting another pre-existing melody to her words. Her fourth *canso*, “Estat ai ...,” has also been reconstructed as a contrafact using a melody from a song by the troubadour Raimon de Miraval in Martha Furman Schleifer and Sylvia Glickman, eds., *Women Composers: Music through the Ages*, Vol. 1 (New York: G.K. Hall, 1996).

²¹ Matilda Tomaryn Bruckner, “[Fictions of the Female Voice: The Women Troubadours](#),” 882.

Figure 3. [Transcription of "A chantar m'er..."](#)²²



Text:	Poetic Structure	Musical Form
A chantar m'er de so q'ieu no volria	a	A (a)
Tant me rancur de lui cui sui amia	a	(a')
Car eu l'am mais que nuilla ren que sia;	a	A (a)
Vas lui no.m val merces ni cortesia,	a	(a')
Ni ma beltatz ni mos pretz ni mos sens,	b	B (b)
C'atressi.m sui enganad'e trahia	a	(b')
Cum degr'esser, s'ieu fos desavinens	b	(a')

While the masculine b rhyme sounds only occur in the B section of the melody, the fact that the last verse combines a masculine rhyme and a melodic phrase from the A section that has heretofore only occurred on a feminine rhyme might also suggest a deliberate strategy on the part of the Comtessa to remind her estranged lover of just to whom he should offer his loyalty.

²² <http://troubadourmelodies.org/melodies/46002>

“A chantar m’er ...”²³

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 A chantar m'er de so q'ieu no volria,
tant me rancur de lui cui sui amia;
car eu l'am mais que nuilla ren que sia:
vas lui no.m val merces ni cortesia
ni ma beltatz ni mos pretz ni mos sens,
c'atressi.m sui enganad' e trahia
Com degr'esser, s'eu fos desavinens</p> | <p><i>I have to sing of what I would not wish,
so bitter do I feel about him whose love I am,
as I love him more than anything there is;
with him, grace and courtesy are no avail to me,
nor my beauty, merit, or understanding,
for I am deceived and am betrayed as much
as I would rightly be had I been unwelcoming.</i></p> |
| <p>2 D'aisso.m conort car anc non fi faillesa
Amics, vas vos per nuilla captenensa;
anz vo am mais non fetz Seguis Valensa,
e platz mi mout uez eu d'amar vos venssa,
lo mieus amics, car etz lo plus valens;
mi faitz orguoill en digz et en parvenssa,
et si etz francs vas totas autras gens.</p> | <p><i>Friend, comfort me in this: that I never failed you
through any behavior of mine;
rather, I love you more than Seguis loved Valensa,
and it delights me that I vanquish you in loving,
my friend, for you are the most excellent.
To me you show arrogance in words and presence,
and are well-disposed toward everybody else.</i></p> |
| <p>3 <i>Be.m meravill</i> cum vostre cors s'orgoilla,
Amics, vas me, per q'ai razon q'ie.m duoilla;
non es ges dreitz c'autr'amors vos mi toilla,
per nuilla ren qe.us diga ni.us acuoilla.
E membre vos cals fo.l comenssamens
de nostr'amor, ia Dompnidieus non vuoilla
q'en ma colpa sia.l departimens.</p> | <p><i>It amazes me that your being turns to proudness
with me, friend—and for this I am right to grieve;
it is not fair that another love takes you from me,
however she may address or welcome you;
and remember how it was at the beginning
of our love... God forbid
that the separation should be fault of mine!</i></p> |
| <p>4 Proeza grans, q'el vostre cors s'aizina
e lo rics pretz q'avetz, m'en atayna,
c'una non sai, loindana ni vezina,
si vol amar, vas vos no si'acлина;
mas vos, Amics, etz ben tant conoisens
que ben devetz conoisser la plus fina;
e membre vos de nostres covinens.</p> | <p><i>The great merit that shelters in your person
and the rich worth you have, disquiet me—
since there's no woman, far or near,
who, if she would love, does not submit to you;
yet you, my friend, have enough discernment
to know who is the loyalest.
And remember our understanding</i></p> |
| <p>5 Valer mi deu mos pretz e mos paratges
e ma beutatz e plus mos fins coratges;
per q'ieu vos mand lai on es vostr'estatges
esta chansson que me sia messatges:
e vuoill saber, lo mieus bels amics gens,
per que vos m'etz tant fers ni tant salvatges;
no sai si s'es orguoills o mal talens.</p> | <p><i>My worth and my nobility must speak for me,
and my beauty, and still more my loyal heart,
and so I send you, where you are staying,
this song, which shall be my messenger;
and I want to know, my fair gentle friend,
why you are so hard and strange with me.
I don't know if it is pride or evil spite.</i></p> |
| <p>6 Mais aitan plus vuoill li digas, messatges,
q'en trop d'orgoill an gran dan maintas gens.</p> | <p><i>But I also want you to tell him, messenger,
that many suffer great loss through too great pride.</i></p> |

²³ Original text from Rieger, *Trobairitz*, 592–93; translation from Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 103. Note that the text as it is copied into the *Manuscrit du Roi* is somewhat different.

The music for “[A chantar m’er](#)” is found in the [Manuscrit du Roi](#) [King’s Manuscript], a fascinating source unto itself. Compiled in the late thirteenth century, a hundred years or more after the Comtessa’s lifetime, it is the only source from its time period to transmit sacred motets, instrumental works, and repertory from both the troubadours and trouvères. In fact, one of those trouvères was also a woman: [Maroie de Dregneau of Lille](#), who composed the song “Mout m’abelist quant je voi revenir.” Within the manuscript, the trouvère repertory far outweighs that of the troubadour songs at 404 to 61. The musical notation is the typical square notation of its time, largely in longs and ligatures. This type of notation does not clearly indicate either rhythm or meter, so most modern editors transcribe the melody in undifferentiated note values, such as in the score here. As a result, performances of this piece, including the ones in this discography, vary widely.²⁴

Reception, Influence, and Conclusions

Though precious little is known about the Comtessa de Dia as a person, her contributions to musical and poetic literature of her time are invaluable. She is the sole musical witness to a small but thriving tradition of female aristocratic performance, and both her texts and music speak to what the remainder of that tradition might have sounded like.

Yet the dearth of information on the Comtessa means that, in different times and to different people, she has meant different things. She has both been lost to time and fixed in her era as a token of her kind. We do not even know her name, let alone the specifics of her status, social context, and personal relationships. For years, she was treated as the only female composer of her time, a belief exacerbated by the stubborn but slowly changing view that texts alone (such as the other surviving trobairitz texts, for example) were not evidence of musical practice. Recent scholarship has expanded musicological investigations into text-only sources, allowing for a deeper understanding of not only trobairitz but also other types of medieval music and music-making for which no notated music survives. A medieval female composer was for some time a curiosity, but over the last several decades the Comtessa and her fellow trobairitz have been revisited from a feminist perspective, opening up broader discussions about women and music in aristocratic society and focusing more specifically on the female voice within both troubadour and trobairitz song.

The Comtessa uses the common musical and poetic structures of the day, and her texts clearly reflect a culture imbued with the ideals of *fin’amor* and lingering metaphors of feudalism and vassalage. Yet she also surprises us with her willingness to be personal, to actively desire, and to portray herself as equal to her unnamed lover. Further research into this time period, into the trobairitz, and into the Comtessa herself, whoever she might have been, will surely continue to surprise us as well.

²⁴ The recordings in the discography are widely varied for reasons other than rhythm, as well; since the songs are notated monophonically, some performers sing them unaccompanied, but others choose to add instrumental and/or vocal accompaniment, or to perform them instrumentally.

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