Arnaut de Carcassès

Tale of the Parrot
(Novas Del Papagai)

translated by
Ross G. Arthur

In parentheses Publications
Old Occitan Series
Cambridge, Ontario 1999
In a garden enclosed by a wall
in the shade of a leafy laurel,
I heard a parrot discoursing
on the subject I will relate to you.
He had come before a lady
and brought her greetings from afar.
“My lady,” he said to her, “God save you!
I am a messenger, and may it not displease you
if I tell you why I have
come here to you in this garden.
The best knight who ever lived,
the most distinguished and full of joy,
Antiphon, the son of the king
who gave a tournament in your honor,
sends you a hundred thousand greetings,
and prays you, through me, to love him.
For without you he cannot be cured
of the lovesickness which makes him languish;
no doctor can help him at all,
but you have it in your power.
You can cure him, if you are willing;
if you will only send to him, by me,
a jewel which he may wear for your love,
then you will release him from his sorrow.
By my faith, I will tell you more
about why you ought to grant him your mercy:
for, if it please you, he would rather die for you
than live happily for another.”
With that, the lady replied to him
and said, “Friend, from where have
you come here, and what do you seek?
You seem too eloquent to me!
When you dare to say that I should give
a jewel, or offer one
to any Christian man at all,
you exert yourself in vain.
But since I find you so amiable,
you may, in this garden,
speak to me and say what you wish,
for you will not be attacked or captured.
But I am very sorry, for love of you,
since you are so noble and good,
that you dared to give me such advice.”
“And I, my lady, am astonished
that you do not love him with a good heart.”
“Parrot, I would have you know
that I love the most capable man in the world.”
“And who is that, lady?” “My husband.”
“It is never right for the husband
to be all powerful:
You may certainly love him, openly,
but then, in secret, you should
love the man who, loving, dies
for your love, without deception.”
“Parrot, you are far too good a speaker.
It seems to me that if you were a knight
you would know very well how to entreat the ladies.
But still, that won’t prevent me
from asking you the reason why
I should commit such treason against
the man to whom I’ve pledged my faith.”
“Lady, I will surely tell you:
Love has no respect for oaths,
and the will follows desire.”
“You speak very well, God help me,
but, for all that, I have defeated you already;
I love my husband more than anything
there is in all the world, in good faith,
and I don’t want any other lover.
How could you dare advise such impropriety,
saying that I should love where my heart is not?”
“Lady, I am not saying anything improper.
It seems to me that you are getting angry.
Still, if you wish to listen to me,
you cannot reasonably defend
yourself from loving Antiphanor.
I grant you, it is right and proper
that you should, in public,
love your husband more than all others;
but then you should have mercy
on the man who is dying for your love.
Do you not remember Blancaflor,
who loved Floris, without deception,
or Iseult, who loved Tristan,
or Thisbe, when she went to the
gates to speak with Pyramus,
and no one could dissuade her?
You may find a model in any of these.
What good would it do you if Antiphanor
should languish and die for your love?
The god of Love and his power—
I know that they will repay you ill,
and I myself, I will say
all the evil I can about you,
if you will not grant me soon that
if he loves you, you love him.”
“Parrot, may God advise me,
again I tell you that I am astonished,
for you know how to speak so well.
And since you want so much to entreat me
on behalf of Antiphanor, your master,
I beg you, by the god of Love,
go away, you have been here too long,
and I pray you to tell him
that I will soon agree
and that I will reveal my desires to him.
If he still wants so much to love me,
you may give him this much encouragement,
that, through your prayers, I will love him,
and that I will never separate from him.
Take him this ring for me; there is
none more beautiful in the world, I think,
with this ribbon embroidered with gold,
and let him receive it, for my friendship.
Be sure that you don’t delay,
and you will find me again in this garden.”
With that, the parrot replied, saying,
“Lady, may God reward me,
it is an excellent gift,
and I will take it to him, truly.
Since you are so well disposed toward him,
I will greet him on your behalf.
Lady, may God, Who never lied,
grant you Antiphanor as your love,
and let me see, within a year, that you
love him with all your heart, without deception.”
With that, they ended their conversation.
Then, since he cared greatly
for the lady and Antiphanor,
he went from the garden of joy,
without delay, straight to his master
and told him all that he had done.
He began first to speak
of the great worth and beauty
of the lady, may my faith assist me,
and in that, he acted with courtesy.
Then he said, “My lord, no one
will ever raise a parrot
who will speak as well for his master’s
as I have done, for your love.
I went secretly into the garden;
I didn’t want any one to be
able to follow my tracks,
for I would rather be free than a captive.
I found the lady, truly,
and I offered your love to her,
and she sends you this ring,
the most beautiful in the world, I think,
with this ribbon embroidered with gold, so you
would take it for her friendship.
Take it for her love,
and may God give you benefit and honor from it.
But I have no idea why
we don’t carefully take the opportunity
to make our way into the garden:
I’m not sure what advice to give you about this:
but my idea would be to set fire to the tower
and to the roof, for your love.
Once the fire has been lighted,
you can enter easily,
make your approaches to your lady,
hold her in your arms and embrace her.”
Antiphonor replied quickly,
“First return to the meeting-place,
and please, speak with her;
then, reveal these plans to her.”
With that, the two of them separated.
The parrot is certainly a loyal
and sincere friend to him.
He flies toward the garden,
finds the lady under a pine tree,
and greets her in his language:
“Lady, may God Who created you
grant you what you most desire
and preserve you from evil and difficulties,
that is, if you are willing
to love your knight as loyally
as he loves you, without fail.”
“Parrot, may God advise me,
if all the world were mine,
I would give it all, with a willing heart,
for the love of Antiphanor.
But this garden is too well enclosed,
and the guards never rest.
They must watch until the morning,
and they do not relax, all night long.”
“Lady, do you have no plan?”
“I do not, and I am not surprised
that you don’t either.”
“But, lady, I do! Hear me out.
I will return to my master,
whom I left, lost in thoughts of love.
Before nightfall, I will bring him here
and lead him to the foot of the wall.
I will bring, if it please you, Greek fire,
with which I will set fire to the belfry,
the tower and the roof.
And when the fire has caught,
they’ll all come running at once,
for they’ll want to put it out at all costs.
Then you must not delay!
Prepare for him, and let him in,
and then you will be able to speak with him.
If this seems to you to be a good plan,
in spite of what the jealous man may think,
you may have delight with him,
and lie together with him, in one bed.”
With that, the lady said, “It pleases me.
Go now to get him at once."
With that, the parrot went
to Antiphanor, who was waiting for him.
He found him on his horse,
all equipped with his armor;
he wore his helmet and his hauberk,
and his iron greaves as well;
he had on his spurs of gold,
and his sword was fastened at his side.
The parrot came before him.
"Lord," he said, "in my opinion
tonight you will see that which
you most love, in good faith.
Your lady requests, through me,
that you come to her directly.
Be off! And ride quietly
so that no man may hear you as you pass,
and no one may know anything
about your plans, unless they guess.
But still we need the Greek fire
in an iron or steel pot.
I will take it in my claws—
give me some right away."
On the spot, Antiphanor
gave him as much of it as he wanted.
They rode so hard that
by nightfall that were near the tower.
The watchmen cried out from the belfry:
one went to look, and passed the news along:
they would keep watch until the morning,
and not relax, all night long.
With that, Antiphanor dismounted
and took off all his equipment,
putting it near the horse,
keeping only his steel sword,
which he wanted to keep fastened to his side:
but there was no need, you may believe me.

Fearlessly, securely,
he moved toward the foot of the wall.
The parrot, from the other side,
went into the garden, for he was anxious to start the fire, since he had left his lord alone, but fearless.

First he came before the lady,
as if he was a sparrowhawk;
he stopped right at her feet,
and then said to her at once, "Lady, I have left my lord disarmed, at the large gate.
Prepare for him, and let him in, while I go set fire to the castle."

"Parrot, in my prudence, I have made all the preparations. I have the keys of the castle with me, here, on this cushion.
Go, set fire to the castle!"

I do not believe that any bird ever performed such a daring exploit as this, or even attempted it.

And the parrot, without being seen next to the tower, near the terrace,
went to set fire to the roof. The fire took hold in four corners, and the cry rose up at once: they all cried “Fire!” with one voice.

The lady came to the gate, and opened it, without the permission of the watchmen, and against their will. Antiphonar came into the garden, and in a bed beneath a laurel he lay down with his lady.
No one could possibly tell
what delight there was between those two,
nor which enjoyed the other more.
It was their belief, it seems to me,
that this was their paradise.
There was ecstasy in their engagement,
and the fire was quickly extinguished:
they doused it with vinegar.
The parrot thought he would die,
he was so afraid for his master.
He came to them as quickly as he could,
and stopped quite near the bed,
and said, “Why don’t you get up?
Come on now, you must separate,
for the fire has been completely extinguished.”
Antiphanor was heartbroken.
He rose, and then he said,
“Lady, what do you wish to command me?”
“Lord, that you exert yourself
to behave as valiantly as you can
in this world, as long as you live.”
She went toward him and kissed him three times.
Antiphanor departed quickly,
like the son of a king, on his charger.
So says Arnautz de Carcassès,
who has addressed many an entreaty to ladies,
to teach a lesson to husbands
who want to keep a watch on their wives.
Let them follow their own ways:
that would be better, for in that case
no one will be at fault.