

# Johannes Ockeghem

## *Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay / Fors seullement l'actente a 3*

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June 2016, revised June 2017

<http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH558.html>

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This edition is extracted from the online project *The Copenhagen Chansonnier and the 'Loire Valley' chansonniers*, which consists of linked html-files and a great number of single PDF editions. It can be accessed at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/>.

Each html-file about a song contains lists of sources, and edition and translation of the poetic texts, discussion of the main sources and comments on text and music. Separate files hold lists of contents and descriptions of the sources. Other files contain papers and notes on related topics. The online edition offers many cross references and links to online facsimile editions. These links had to be simplified in the present edition.

Each version of a song is regarded as a valid performance by a scribe/musician, and therefore they are published separately. In most cases there will be no attempts to imagine the intentions of the composer or to reconstruct exactly what the composer had written when the music left his pen. Rather the aim is to interpret the written music in largely the same way as 15th century performers may have read it. Many details, which in one source are different from other sources, must be accepted by the editor as valid elements in a performance of the actual source. Sources marked by an asterisk \* are included in the edition.

## Sigla

### *The related 'Loire Valley' chansonniers*

Copenhagen	Copenhagen, The Royal Library, MS Thott 291 8° <a href="http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/702/dan/0+recto/">http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/702/dan/0+recto/</a>
Dijon	Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, Ms. 517 <a href="http://patrimoine.bm-dijon.fr/pleade/img-viewer/MS00517/viewer.html">http://patrimoine.bm-dijon.fr/pleade/img-viewer/MS00517/viewer.html</a>
Laborde	Washington D.C., Library of Congress, MS M2.1 L25 Case (Laborde Chansonnier) <a href="https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200152631.0/?sp=1">https://www.loc.gov/resource/ihas.200152631.0/?sp=1</a>
Leuven	Leuven, Alamire Foundation, Manuscript without shelf number (Leuven Chansonnier) <a href="http://depot.lias.be/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9381778">http://depot.lias.be/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE9381778</a>
Nivelle	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. Vmc. ms. 57 (Chansonnier Nivelle de la Chaussée) <a href="http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55007270r/f1.image">http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55007270r/f1.image</a>
Wolfenbüttel	Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Codex Guelf. 287 Extravag. <a href="http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=mss/287-extrav">http://diglib.hab.de/wdb.php?dir=mss/287-extrav</a>

### *Other sources*

Copenhagen 1848	København, The Royal Library, MS Ny Kgl. Samling 1848 2°
Florence 2439	Firenze, Biblioteca del Conservatorio Luigi Cherubini, Ms. Basevi 2439
Paris 1596	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. f.fr. 1596
Paris 1597	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. f.fr. 1597
Paris 2245	Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. f.fr. 2245
Sankt Gallen 461	Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Ms. 461

### *Text sources*

Berlin 78.B.17	Berlin, Staatsliche Museen der Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Ms. 78.B.17 (Chansonnier Rohan)
London 380	London, BritishLibrary, MS Lansdowne 380
Paris 1719	Paris,, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. f.fr. 1719
Paris 1722	Paris,, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. f.fr. 1722
Jardin 1501	<i>Le Jardin de plaisance et fleur de rethorique</i> , Paris, [Antoine Verard, 1501]

### *Literature*

Françon 1938	Marcel Françon (ed.), <i>Poèmes de transition (xve-xvie siècles): Rondeaux du Ms 402 de Lille</i> . Paris & Cam. Mass. 1938
Löpelmann 1923	M. Löpelmann (ed.), <i>Die Liederhandschrift des Cardinals de Rohan</i> (Gesellschaft für romanische Litteratur, Band 44) Göttingen 1923

## Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay / Fors seullement l'actente 3v · Ockeghem

### Sources:

Copenhagen 1848 p. 427 »Fort seulement« 3v

Florence 2439 ff. 52v-53 »Fors seulement l'actante que je meure« 3v J Ockeghem

Paris 1596 ff. 7v-8 »Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay promis« 3v

\*Paris 2245 ff. 16v-17 »Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay / Fors seullement l'actente« 3v okeghem

Sankt Gallen 461 pp. 4-5 »Fors solament« 3v Ockengem

*Text:* Rondeau cinquain; double chanson; the text for the upper voices is complete in Paris 1596 and Paris 2245. In Paris 2245 the contra has the refrain text of Ockeghem's rondeau cinquain "Fors seulement l'attente que je meure"; this text is also used in Florence 2439. "Fors seulement l'attente" appears complete in Dijon, Laborde, Leuven, Wolfenbüttel and Paris 1597; and is also found in Berlin 78.B.17 f. 69, ed. Löpeltmann 1923, p. 89; London 380 f. 251; Paris 1719 f. 34, ed. Françon 1938, p. 269; Paris 1722 f. 72v; Jardin 1501 f. 115.

### After Paris 2245:

Fors seullement contre ce qu'ay promys  
et en tous lieux seray fort entremis (1)  
et acquerray une belle aliance.

J'en ay desir voire dez mon enfance, (2)  
point ne voudroye avoir nulz enemys.

Mon vouloir j'ay tout en cela soubmis  
et hors de la ja ne serai transmis. (3)  
Garder ny veul ordre, sens ne prudence (4)

fors seullement *contre ce qu'ay promys*.

Se cuide avoir en terre des amys (5)  
et que en eulx ay ma fiance mis, (6)  
on doit scavoir que n'ay nulle doubtance,  
ou autrement querroye ma deffiance, (7)  
car je sceray de tout honneur remis (8)

fors seullement *contre ce qu'ay promys*.

### Contra:

Fors seullement l'actente que je meure  
en mon las cueur nul espoir *ne demeure*, (9)  
car mon malheur *si tresfort me tourmente*  
qu'il n'est douleur qui par vous *je ne sente*,  
pource que suis de vous perdre bien seure.

*Vostre rigueur tellement me court seure*  
*qu'en ce parti il fault que je m'asseure,*  
*dont je n'ay bien qui en rien me contente*

fors seullement *l'actente que je meure*.

Except only for what I have promised  
I will be well received everywhere,  
and I shall obtain a beautiful alliance.  
I have desired this from my childhood,  
and I really do not wish to have any enemies.

I have submitted my wishes entirely to this,  
and from that I shall not be moved.  
I do not want to preserve order, sense nor prudence  
except only for what I have promised.

If I believe that I have some friends in the land  
and that I have placed my trust in them,  
you must well know that I have no doubt about it,  
for otherwise I would seek my disgrace,  
because I would have renounced all honour  
except only for what I have promised.

### Contra:

Except for solely the expectation that I shall die,  
no hope remains in my weary heart,  
for my misery torments me so harshly  
that there is no sorrow I do not feel because of you,  
because I am very sure of losing you.

Your strictness torments me so much  
that I must protect myself in this relationship  
where I do not have anything at all to be to be content with  
except for solely the expectation that I shall die.

*Mon desconfort toute seulle je pleure  
 en mauldissant, sur ma foy, a toute heure  
 ma loyauté qui tant me fait dolente.  
 Las, que je suis de vivre mal contente  
 quant de par vous n'ay riens qui me sequeure  
 fors seullement l'actente que je meure.*

I lament all alone my distress  
 cursing, by my faith, at all times  
 my faithfulness, which has made me so unhappy.  
 Alas, how I am sorry to be alive,  
 when because of you I have nothing left to comfort me  
 except for solely the expectation that I shall die.

- 1) Paris 1596, line 2, "entre tous ..."
- 2) Paris 2245, line 4, "... desir voir dez ..." (a syllable short); Paris 1596, "J'en ay dessus voyre de ..."
- 3) Paris 1596, line 7, "... sera soubmys"
- 4) Paris 1596, line 8, "garder je veul ordre, sens et prudance"
- 5) Paris 1596, line 10, "Je cuide"
- 6) Paris 1596, line 11, "... fiance remys"
- 7) Paris 2245, line 13 missing, supplied from Paris 1596.
- 8) Paris 1596, line 14, "Car je seroye ... desmys"
- 9) Paris 2245, contratenor, lines 2-4, the line endings are missing. The missing words as well as *couplet* and *tierce* are supplied after the Leuven chansonnier.

#### *Evaluation of the sources:*

It is most probable that the version in the earliest source, the French MS Paris 2245 from the 1480s, represents the original concept of the chanson. Here it appears as a double chanson, which combines the tenor tune as well as the rondeau text from Ockeghem's »Fors seullement l'actente que je meure«<sup>1</sup> with a new poem in the upper voices. Paris 2245 alone combines the two poems. The slightly younger MS Paris 1596 (1490s) has "Fors seullement contre ce qu'ay promys" in all three voices; in comparison with the upper voices, the text is copied quite cursorily below the lowest voice. The northern MS Florence 2439 has the refrain only from "Fors seullement l'actente" in the highest voice (the lowest voice has text incipits for both sections of the refrain), while the remaining sources have the first two words only.

Moreover, in its "Contra" voice Paris 2245 notates its quotation of the original song in the same high range, *c'-f'*, as in the model's tenor. All the later sources notate this voice as it sounds in the low range of *F-bb*. However, compared with the tenor of "Fors seullement l'actente" as it appears in the MSS Dijon, Laborde, Leuven and Wolfenbüttel, the original C1 clef has in Paris 2245 been changed into a G3 clef. This allows for an easy visual transposition a fifth downwards by just exchanging the G3 clef with a C3 clef. That the performer has to go down an extra octave soon becomes evident when fourths begin to crop up between the contra and tenor parts. On the other hand, it seems probable that it was known in the milieu where Paris 2245 originated that the original tenor might be thought of an octave below the notated pitch (see further the comments on "Fors seullement l'actente"). A warning has been added in the upper voice, where the word "Canon" has been entered to the left of the painted initial. Just above the initial we furthermore find the word "Royal". These words seem to have been added after the decoration of the manuscript; this also applies to the composer attribution added in clumsy letters above the music.

1 Cf. the edition at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH056.html>.

Basically, the MSS Paris 2245 and Paris 1596 bring the same version of the music; there are many differences in the use of ligatures, coloration and decorative figuration, but few real variants (for example, in the superius b. 19.2, Paris 1596 has *a'* instead of *c''*). The main difference consists in the transposition of the *cantus prius factus* by removing the ambiguity of the canon, transforming it into the low “Basis”-part, and of the adding of a new final note, *G* (bb. 63), which does not belong to the model. In bars 15-17 the Paris 2245 version adheres closely to the original tenor part as presented by the Leuven and Wolfenbüttel chansonniers, with three repeated top notes and the two *semiminimae* in bar 17, which produce parallel fifths with the upper voice. In Paris 1596 the repeated notes have been combined into a dotted *brevis*, and the *semiminimae* have been replaced by a *minima e*, which eliminates the parallels. This, too, points at Paris 2245 as the original concept, while the version in Paris 1596 represents a revision; the errors in its Basis – bars 33 and 48 are missing – make a performance after Paris 1596 difficult.

The rondeau cinquain of the upper voices in Paris 2245 lacks a line in the *tierce*. This line can be supplied from Paris 1596, and it appears to fit into the poem. The two versions of the poem are quite different (see above), and also in this case Paris 1596 seems to represent a revision of the earlier version. For example, Paris 1596 reverses the meaning of line 8 by changing two small words “garder *je* veul ordre, sens *et* prudence” (I do want to preserve order, sense and prudence) thereby eliminating the apparent inconsistency of this line.

*Comments on text and music:*

The double chanson juxtaposes two poems. The contra sings the high tenor from Ockeghem’s »Fors seullement l’actente que je meure«, a rondeau cinquain in which a woman deplores her fate with an unfaithful lover (“Except for solely the expectation that I shall die, no hope remains in my weary heart ...”). However, it changes completely the female tenor’s sound and expression by indicating that it has to be sung an octave and a fifth lower than notated. This brings the unhappy woman into the bass range, *F-bb*. The two upper voices in normal ranges (*d'-d''* and *d-f'*) sing another rondeau cinquain, “Fors seullement contre ce qu’ay promys”, in which a man rather ambiguously declares that he has good friends, will be well received everywhere and shall obtain a “belle aliance”, but that he do not want to preserve order, sense nor prudence, all except only for what he has promised.

The poet has put himself into a difficult spot – he is most likely identical with the composer. The job he has set for himself incorporates, while creating an answer to the female complaint, to reuse the opening words “Fors seullement”, and he has to apply a different set of rime words in *rimes léonines* in order to live up to his model; here he uses the syllables “mys/mis” and “ance/ence” as the two sets of rimes. Writing within these restraints, the meaning of the poem has become quite opaque.

In particular it is difficult to understand the meaning of the poem, if we presume that it was intended for a normal rondeau performance, that is with a repeat of the first half of the refrain after the *couplet*, and a complete repeat of the refrain at the end. If we instead propose that the song was created with short refrains of only one line in mind, in the same manner as much artful poetry, the opening line changes its meaning during the poem in a refined way: The fateful promise (of love/marriage or a political commitment) keeps him from all the good prospects enumerated in lines 2-7, but it restrains him from

disorder, madness and shame (lines 8-9), and acknowledging his friends and their advise, he concludes that he would have renounced all honour except only for what he has promised (lines 10-16).

Richard Wexler proposed that this poem was penned by the duke Louis d'Orléans in 1484, and that it was set to music by Ockeghem with a "Canon royal" (transposition at the twelve) as a tribute to the future king Louis XII.<sup>2</sup> However, as mentioned, the words "Canon" and "Royal" as well as the name of the composer are later additions to the pages of Paris 2245, and the few lines quoted by Wexler as indicative of the duke's authorship do not reflect the complexity of the text. Therefore it seems safer to assume that the words were designed for this song by its composer, and that it happened a couple of decades earlier, in the 1460s.

In his original setting of "Fors seullement l'actente que je meure" Ockeghem avoids any disruptive formal cadences in the setting of the tenor's first three poetic lines (bb. 10-36) keeping up the flow until the medial cadence. The composer of the double chanson, conversely, introduces a full stop in the upper voices after the first line (bb. 9-10), which the pre-existing tune on its part ignores. If the first lines alone of both poems are performed as the song's recurrent short refrain, this refrain will end in bar 10 with a two-part perfect cadence on the mode's finalis – the lowest voice having ended earlier (see the edition). This is an exact parallel to the two-part ending of a performance of the music of the full refrain music according to the MS Paris 2245; this is what we hear it in the song's opening refrain and its tierce. The music does support an interpretation with short refrains.

The upper voices, superius and tenor, are composed as counter voices to the pre-existent low contra. They are clearly dependent on the cantus firmus, but still give the impression of being elegantly and freely flowing. However, the main occupation of the composer seems to have been the slightly grotesque performance of the "Fors seullement l'actente" tune and text at a very low pitch and the juxtaposition of the poems. If the rondeau cinquain by Busnoys, »Joie me fuit et douleur me queurt seure«, was an ingenious response to Ockeghem's »Fors seullement l'actente que je meure«,<sup>3</sup> in which Busnoys demonstrated that a wider palette of sound was possible within the framework set out by Ockeghem, then this double chanson may be Ockeghem's answer to the game of Busnoys. Here the female song does not sound as a regular tenor an octave lower, but sings in a real bass voice. The fascination with the combination of "Fors seullement" and a low range sound comes into full flowering in Ockeghem's impressive five-part *Missa Fors seullement*.

2 Richard Wexler, 'Ockeghem and Politics', *Tijdschrift van de Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis* 47 (1997) pp. 5-32, at p. 23.

3 See further the discussions of the two songs at <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH057.html> and <http://chansonniers.pwch.dk/CH/CH056.html>.



Paris 2245 no. 15

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. f.fr. 2245, ff. 16<sup>v</sup>-17: Okeghem

Ockeghem, *Fors seulement contre ce qu'ay promis / Fors seulement l'actente*

Royal  
[Superius] Mensura =  $\bullet$

Canon 1. Fors seul - le - ment con - tre ce qu'ay pro -  
3. Se cui - de\_a - voir en ter - re des a -

Tenor 1. Fors seul - le - ment con - tre ce qu'ay pro -  
3. Se cui - de\_a - voir en ter - re des a -

Contra 1. Fors seul - le - ment l'ac - ten - te que je meu - re en  
3. Mon des - con - fort tou - te seul - le je pleu - re en

10  
mys <sup>2)</sup> et en tous lieux se - ray fort  
mys et que en eulx ay ma fi -

mon las cueur nul es - poir ne de - meu - re,  
maul - di - sant, sur ma foy, a toute heu - re

20  
en - - - tre - mis <sup>1)</sup>  
an - - - ce mis,

en - - - tre - mis  
an - - - ce mis,

car mon mal - heur si tres - fort  
ma loy - au - te qui tant me

27  
et ac - quer - ray u - ne bel - le a - li - an -  
on doit sca - voir que n'ay nul - le doub - tan -

et ac - quer - ray u - ne bel - le a - li - an -  
on doit sca - voir que n'ay nul - le doub - tan -

me fait tour - men - te  
fait do - len - te.

1) *Superius*, b. 24, fermata (error); moved to b. 38.



34

ce. J'en ay de - sir  
ce, ce, 2) ou aul - tre - ment

qu'il n'est do - leur qui par vous  
Las, que je suis de viv - re

3) voi - re dez mon en - fan - ce, point ne voul -  
quer - roy - e ma def - fi - an - ce, car je sce -

je ne sen - te, pour - ce que suis de  
mal con - ten - te quant de par vous n'ay

droy - e a - voir nulz hon -  
ray de tout neur

ne voul - droy sce - e ray a - voir tout nulz hon - e -  
je ne e - vous per - dre bien seu - riens qui me se - queu -

e - ne - mys.  
re - mis

re.  
re

2) *Superius*, text 3, bb. 39.2-45, the line "ou ... deffiance" is missing; supplied after MS Paris 1596.3) *Superius & tenor*, text 1, bb. 42-43, "voir"; changed in accordance with Paris 1596.

2a. Mon vou - loir j'ay tout en ce - la soub -

2a. Mon vou - loir j'ay tout en ce - la soub -

4) 2a. Vos - tre ri - gueur tel - le - ment me court seu - re qu'en

10 mis et hors de la ja ne se -

mis et hors de la ja ne se - - -

ce par - ti il fault que je m'as - seu - re,

20 rai trans - mis.

rai trans - - - - - mis.

dout je n'ay bien qui en rien

27 Gar - der ny veul or - dre, sens ne pru - den -

Gar - der ny veul or - dre, sens ne pru - den -

me con - ten - te

4) *Contra*, texts 2a and 3 are missing in the MS; added according to the version of the poem in the Leuven chansonnier.

34

ce  
ce  
ce  
ce

2b.4. fors seul - le - ment con - tre ce qu'ay pro -  
2b.4. fors seul - le - ment con - tre ce qu'ay pro -  
2b.4. fors seul - le - ment l'a - ten - te que je meu - re.

10

mys.  
mys.