

Documentation for Mon Henri de Breton (original song)

By Lady Biya (mka Laurel A Rockefeller)

Mon Henri de Breton is an original song written January 29, 2011 to the tune of the 11th century Chinese song “Spring in Luoyang”. As a bard in the Society who has been performing Asian music since 1996, this is my first time mixing Western language and culture theme to an Asian music piece. This may, on some level, reflect the fact that mundanely I am more culturally Asian than Western on many levels.

Mon Henri de Breton (My Henry of the Bretons) tells the story of the singer, a Beguine nun and healer with Jeanne d’Arc’s army who falls in love with Henri, a Breton (Celt) from the Duchy of Brittany who left Brittany to fight with the French army against the English during the 100 Years war. In the song, Henri and the nun quickly fall in love and secretly marry only to lose each other when Henri is killed in the Battle of Paris on September 8, 1429. The entire song takes place in 1429, the year of Jeanne d’Arc’s campaign. Their marriage, and their love is brief, but powerful and she grieves for him for the rest of her life.

In period, Brittany was often caught up in the English-French conflict, as discussed in Luminarium: The Encyclopedia Project at <http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/100years.htm>. It would not at all be particularly unusual for a Breton to side with the French in hopes of expelling the English from the continent.

My character expresses a belief in the first verse in reincarnation. The Beguine order of nuns was an order of healers who often pushed the boundaries of what was and was not acceptable to orthodoxy. They were often mystics who dared to step outside of the normal role assigned for women and walk in public to do charitable service. They lived “in-between” as Abby Stoner puts in her detailed article on medieval religious societies and the history of the women’s religious movements, and the Beguines in particular. But true to any religious order in Europe, they were required to be celibate for life upon entering the order. My character’s marriage to Henri therefore constitutes a serious breach of those vows—with very serious consequences for both of them—and hence the need to keep the marriage secret. It was simply never acceptable to leave a religious order once entered! Even and probably especially for true love.

But then, what is a song if it is not about true love? Especially true love lost heroically and tragically? I hope you enjoy it!

Bibliography:

Condit, Jonathan. Music of the Korean Renaissance: Songs and Dances of the 15th Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Jokinin, Anniina. Luminarium: The Encyclopedia Project at <http://www.luminarium.org/encyclopedia/100years.htm>

Proctor, Steven. Hundred Years War Timeline <http://www.maisonstclair.org/timeline/1361.html>

Stoner, Abby. "Sisters Between: Gender and the Medieval Beguines" at <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~epf/1995/beguine.html>

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Pa hoa sik lu hyang kui hong, — Mun löi ts'ye pong lang pül. —
 Spring-time geese re-turn-ing home, — Have you seen my true love? —

'Medieval' version

The song as it might have been performed in eleventh-century China. The percussion part of the 'renaissance' version is too elaborate to accompany the 'medieval' version, hence it is omitted.

紗窗未曉黃鶯語， 蕙爐燒殘炷。
 Birds are sing-ing in the dawn, Coals glow in the grate.
 Shā chuāng wèi xiǎo huāng yīng yǔ huì lú shāo cán zhǔ

錦帷羅幕度春寒， 昨夜裏三更雨。
 Cur-tains keep the spring cold out, Rain-storms came last night late.
 jīn wéi luó mù dù chūn hán zuó yè lǐ sān gēng yǔ

繡簾閑倚吹輕絮， 斂眉山無緒。
 Wip-ing tears up-on my sleeve, I gaze high a-bove.
 xiù lián xián yǐ chuī qīng xù liǎn méi shān wú xù

把花拚淚向歸鴻， 問來處逢郎不。
 Spring-time geese re-turn-ing home, Have you seen my true love?
 bǎ huā pīn lèi xiàng guī hōng wèn lái chù féng láng bù

28. Walking in the Void

'Renaissance' version

The song as it might have been performed in fifteenth-century Korea.

Pyek yen long hyo hōi p'a han, — Kang — syang —
 Blue mist wraps the chil-ly dawn, — O — — — — — cean —

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