

## AN INTRODUCTION TO *FLAMENCA*

*Flamenca* provides one of the greatest concentrations of “courtly love” and its correlates in medieval Romance literature, and presents a very different idea of the relationship between *amor cortesa* and *amor coral* from that of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. *trobadors*. The phrase that is often cited as evidence for the medieval existence of courtly love provides a good example of *Flamenca*’s critical approach to the subject: *fenera d’amor cortes* (l. 1197).<sup>1</sup> The phrase is spoken by *Flamenca*’s jealous husband Archimbaud, tortured by his fear of possible cuckolding to the point of madness. He refers to *donnejador* – “ladies’ men” with, also, some effeminate qualities (l. 1149) – who, he swears, *non sai trobaran huis ubert* (l. 1151) – “will not find open house here.” Later, alone, he will ponder the possibility that this might, indeed, happen:

|                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                            |
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| E que faria s'us truanz,<br>q u e - s <b>fenera d'amor</b><br><b>cortes</b><br>e non sabra d'amor ques es,<br>l'avia messa en follia?<br>(ll. 1196-99) <sup>2</sup> | But what if some vile adversary,<br>A courteous faker of love –<br>A thing that he knows nothing of –<br>Should make her virtue go astray? |
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The line looks, at first glance, as though it links *amor* to *cortes*: “a faker of courtly-love.” But *cortes* is actually an attribute of the *fenera*, as both are masculine singular, whereas *amor* is – as always in Occitan – feminine. So rather than the *fenera* being the negative thing that sullies the positive *amor cortes(a)*, we have instead the doubly-repugnant *fenera cortes* messing with *amor*: so the whole line translates not as a “faker of courtly love,” but rather as a “courtly faker of love.” So courtliness or courtesy is not necessarily a positive attribute.

Shortly before, in a comment on Archimbaud’s unfortunate condition, we have met the term *gelos fins*, a parodic contrary of *fin’ amans* (“fine, true lover”).<sup>3</sup> Read in the context of *gelos fins*, *fenera d’amor cortes* heralds *Flamenca*’s sardonic critique of love: crucially, it is not only a critique of *courtly* love, but of *all* love. The work functions as an extreme form of *compilatio*, a highly allusive literary *summa*, weaving together complex layers of literary reference, of many kinds and degrees, from loaded vocabulary (ex. *trobar*) to entire narratives (ex. *Tristan*).<sup>4</sup> It does so by assimilating a substantial corpus of earlier (mainly 12<sup>th</sup> c.) Occitan lyric and (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.) French romance, bound together through the use of techniques that draw on the French romance with lyric inserts (early 13<sup>th</sup> c., e.g. Jean Renart’s *Roman de la Rose*) and the later Occitan *vida* and *razo* traditions (in *chansonniers* from the late 13<sup>th</sup>-early 14<sup>th</sup> c.).

*Flamenca*'s date of composition remains, however, an uncertain factor. The manuscript is late 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> c.; *Flamenca* is the only text in it; and it is anonymous and lacunary, lacking, notably, a beginning and end. If *Flamenca* is at least contemporaneous with the *vidas* and *razos*, then it must date from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> c.<sup>5</sup> Like its contemporaries the (mainly ex-patriate) *chansonniers*, Matfré Ermengaud's *Breviari d'Amors*, and Occitan and Catalan poetics treatises, *Flamenca* presents an attempt to catalogue a whole literary corpus, a body of knowledge, and, even, to preserve the ruins of a culture. It is, in addition, a work of debate and criticism, thanks in part to the choice of mode of writing. A work combining, as we have just seen, Occitan and French elements, it is written in Occitan, "the" language of lyric poetry; but as a romance, the French form *par excellence*. Cultural juxtaposition and fusion are treated with sophisticated ambiguity, leaving interpretation open – ranging potentially from a wistful wish for harmonious hybridity to an ironic form of *translatio*, subversive reappropriation and theft by an underdog. This openness parallels other dialogic features in our romance, which features three different character-based focalizations, several distinct narrative voices (ranging from a distant and clinical observer to an un fiable manipulator who toys overtly with the audience), and the romance's middle portion is built around a dialogue between a pair of prospective lovers.

*Flamenca*'s three intertwined narratives present, from the protagonists' divergent points of view, each one's relationship with courtly love and the contrary proposition s/he explores in an attempt to escape from its dominion. In this debating mode, the protagonists may be seen to be trying to grapple with their preconceptions of courtly love and how they ought to be courtly lovers; and, eventually, with how to escape the constraints of this love, through which the audience certainly sees that courtly love *is* a constraint, and is not identical with true love. This genuinely polyphonic narrative results in a subtle critique of courtly love – and exploration of notions of love more generally – through the multi-pronged attack emanating from the different perspectives of those involved: husband, lover, wife, and court.

#### METANARRATIVE, CRITICAL DISCUSSION, AND THE *SUMMA*

Perhaps *Flamenca*'s most striking discursive feature is its concern with *trobar* itself: *au sens large* – from the "finding" of composition to that of comprehension; and including pivotal scenes of writing and reading. This metanarrative aspect spills over into reading, and poetic activity may be extended to encompass readings. If *Flamenca*'s audience is left with an open text and some potentially deeply cynical lessons, these do still generate the poetic continuation and

application that is discussion. Discussion itself is the closest we may come to understanding a “true love” that, as we have seen, includes both *amor cortesa* and *amor coral*, in a relationship that may be characterised as symbiotic and discursive.

*Flamenca*’s discussion has had two historical continuations. The first comprises contemporary reading, performance, and critical appreciation of *Flamenca*; refashionings and *reprises* of some of its material, such as in the *Livre du voir dit*; and, most importantly, in the application of the *translatio studii* principle to ideas of love. *Flamenca*’s second continuation is in its contributions to modern scholarly discussion about love in medieval literature. The *Charrette* and *De Amore* are key to making sense of the Northern move towards *amour courtois* or *courtoisie*, away from Occitan ideas of an *amor* that is interchangeably good, true, *fin*’, *cortesa*, and *coral*. *Flamenca* is, in turn, key to understanding a later refinement. Looking back on a whole corpus of courtly literature, it acts as a literary *summa* placing Occitan French literary traditions and their respective amorous ideas in critical discourse with one another, and engages in its own critical and metaliterary intercourse with them. This should be put in a larger context. Coming as it does from the period when works such as Jofre de Foixà’s *Regles de trobar* and Dante’s *De Vulgari eloquentia* provide an early instance of polemic about cardinal poetic issues, *Flamenca* constitutes a vital early step not just in the courtly love debate, but also in the history of literary criticism and theory.

A synopsis of *Flamenca*’s main plot lines is appropriate at this juncture. Archimbaut of Bourbon [-les-Bains], recently married to Flamenca of Nemours (possibly Namur), goes mad with jealousy. He cuts himself off from the outside world, and locks up his wife and her maids in a tower. She is only allowed out to go to church and to the local baths. This section of the text starts out in a courtly setting, with events reported at a distance through third-person commentary (by more than one voice, or, in different styles of interaction with the reader); before moving into Archimbaut-centred focalization.<sup>6</sup> These are the first two parts of our narrative. There is some overlap between them, and a less transition between them than in the next sections of the narrative. The latter also concentrate on matters of internal psychology, away from external events, and feature protagonist-centred focalization.

|              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| <u>Lines</u> | <u>Focalization</u> |
|--------------|---------------------|

1-152

Court

153-1562

Archimbaut

Guillem de Nevers, a nice young man, sallies forth to rescue this damsel in distress. The rescue involves further imprisonment, as he spends a lot of time mooning around in his room, gazing out the window at the tower, and tying himself

up in knots in lengthy rumination. This section of the work is narrated from Guillem's point of view.

|              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| <u>Lines</u> | <u>Focalization</u> |
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|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1-152 | Court |
|-------|-------|

|          |            |
|----------|------------|
| 153-1562 | Archimbaut |
|----------|------------|

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| 1563-3949 | Guillem |
|-----------|---------|

When the lovers do eventually get together, it is in several subversions of the outside world and its norms. Guillem assumes clerical disguise, enabling the lovers to meet at Mass, when they are able to speak briefly right under the husband's nose. *Very* briefly: only one of them at a time, and two syllables each time. During this first phase, focalization alternates between the lovers, as each "reads" the other's last response and "composes" their next replique. The alternation of declaration and question allows them to move rapidly beyond flirtatious uncertainties and comic misunderstandings and come to an "understanding" (*entendemen*), setting up the second, proper, hands-on stage of the affair. Full contact happens in the underground baths and then in Guillem's chambers, via a secret tunnel he has had dug from the baths. Literal subversion of the outside world is also the creation – through ingenious subterfuge - of the lovers' own, private, idyllic space. A double protagonist-based focalization goes in turn from Guillem to Flamenca; there is also a brief move into focalization on the couple as character (using plural pronouns and verbs, for example). This section of *Flamenca* is, effectively, a poetic narrative – a dialogue-poem with commentary. Commentary is by the protagonist-poets, Guillem and Flamenca; there is a complete *absence* of commentary by any outside observer's narrative voice. This section forms the structural centre of the work. At about 2500 lines long, it constitutes about a third of it and is its longest section. The lovers' idyll as a whole – including Guillem's section, and the next (Flamenca's) one – occupies around 5500 lines, over half the romance's total length (as it stands, in its lacunary state).

|              |                     |
|--------------|---------------------|
| <u>Lines</u> | <u>Focalization</u> |
|--------------|---------------------|

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| 1-152 | Court |
|-------|-------|

|          |            |
|----------|------------|
| 153-1562 | Archimbaut |
|----------|------------|

|           |         |
|-----------|---------|
| 1563-3949 | Guillem |
|-----------|---------|

|           |                                      |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|
| 3949-6659 | Guillem+Flamenca<br>(in alternation) |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|

Towards the end of this central section, focalization moves quite subtly to Flamenca, who begins to see a little more clearly and pragmatically, reason less clouded by love. She puts an end to the affair, sends Guillem away to the tourneying circuit, and is at least superficially reconciled with Archimbaut, who is cured of his

madness. This section is quite short, and much interrupted by lacunae at significant junctures.

| <u>Lines</u> | <u>Focalization</u>                  |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1-152        | Court                                |
| 153-1562     | Archimbaut                           |
| 1563-3949    | Guillem                              |
| 3949-6659    | Guillem+Flamenca<br>(in alternation) |
| 6660-7181    | Flamenca                             |

After the most sizeable lacuna in the romance, Archimbaut holds court, to which Guillem is invited. The lovers' enter into a new dalliance – less resumed in another phase, as refreshed in a new and cynical one on a different relational footing: public, *within* the court, and accepted (of sorts) by Archimbaut. Three days into the jousting, our narrative ends, suspended in another lacuna. This final section moves out from protagonist-centred focalization and back to a distanced observation and reporting of events, which have now moved back to a courtly setting.

| <u>Lines</u> | <u>Focalization</u>                  |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1-152        | Court                                |
| 153-1562     | Archimbaut                           |
| 1563-3949    | Guillem                              |
| 3949-6659    | Guillem+Flamenca<br>(in alternation) |
| 6660-7181    | Flamenca                             |
| 7182-8095    | Court                                |

Putting together the first and last sections, the romance can be seen to have an outer courtly frame. The outer frame picks up the middle part's themes of poetic composition, and reading, misreading, and interpretation. The main shift between middle and outer sections was one from internal to external. The same happens in a shift from a discussion of poetry associated with protagonist-poets, to its being associated with more external poets: a first-person commentating voice, generalized reference to poets and poetry in this courtly world, and reference to poets and poetry in the external world, including some direct naming.

<sup>1</sup> As observed by Ferrante 1980 and Kay 2000; the subsequent commentary is mine.

<sup>2</sup> Text: Ricketts *et al* 2001; based on Gschwindt 1976; graciously provided (*Flamenca* text alone, excerpted from the whole CD-ROM) by F.R.P. Akehurst. The translation is Hubert and Porter 1962, which I have sometimes altered when their translation significantly alters the sense of the original. Here, for example, *que-s fenera d'amor cortes* (l. 1197) was misleadingly translated as “aping the wiles of courtly love.” This line is vital to the argument that *Flamenca* distinguishes between “love” and “courtesy/courtliness.”

<sup>3</sup> l. 1172: *es ar sabon per lo pais / qu'en Archimbautz es gilos fins* – “and it was known throughout the land / that Sir Archimbaut was a true and perfect jealous anti-lover.”

<sup>4</sup> O'Brien 2006. On *compilatio*, see Elizabeth Wilson Poe, *Compilatio: Lyric Texts and Prose Commentaries in Troubadour Manuscript H (Vat. Lat. 3207)* (Lexington: French Forum, 2000). *Flamenca* may be read as a literary *summa*, “meta-romance,” and “supertext.” On meta-romance, see Clare Kinney, “The Best Book of Romance: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 59.4 (1990): 457-73; “Chivalry Unmasked: Courtly Spectacle and the Abuse of Romance in Sidney's *New Arcadia*,” *Studies in English Literature* 35.1 (1995): 35-52. On the supertext, see John V. Fleming, “Carthaginian Love: Text and Supertext in the *Romance of the Rose*,” in *Assays: Critical Approaches to Medieval and Renaissance Texts*, ed. Peggy A. Knapp and Michael A. Sturgin (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1981): 51-72.

<sup>5</sup> The date of composition proposed here would of course move with any new findings on the dates of the *vidas* and *razos*. What I term elsewhere the *razofication* of *Flamenca* is of a more subtle and evolved sort, stylistically akin to that of Uc de Saint Circ, active towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> c. On the *vidas* and *razos* and their dating, see William B. Burgwinkle, “For Love or Money: Uc de Saint Circ and the Rhetoric of Exchange,” *Romanic Review* 84.4 (1993): 347-76; “From Commentary to Tale: Biography, Boccaccio and Beyond,” in *Literary History, Narrative and Culture*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake and Steven Bradbury (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1989): 81-89; “Introduction,” *Razos and Troubadour Songs*, ed. and trans. (New York: Garland, 1997); and *Love for Sale: Materialist Readings of the Troubadour Razo Corpus* (New York: Garland, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> I use the term “focalization” in the traditional narratological sense: narration of events from the point of view of a particular protagonist, “focussed” on him and his perception of them and of the world, and with the option of seeing into his internal musings. The classic discussion of *focalisation* is Gérard Genette, *Nouveau discours du récit* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983). See further: Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961); “psycho-narration” in Dorrit Cohn, *Transparent Minds, Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978); Oswald Ducrot, *Le Dire et le dit* (Paris: Minuit, 1984); *Logique, structure, énonciation* (Paris: Minuit, 1989); Geoffrey N. Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 1981); Dominique Mangueneau, *Éléments de linguistique pour le texte littéraire* (Paris: Dunod, 1993); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983); *A Glance Beyond Doubt: Narration, Representation, Subjectivity* (Columbus, OH: 1996).

On specifically medieval literary applications and implications, and narratological aspects of medieval literary subjectivity: Bernard Cerquiglini, “Le Style indirect libre et la modernité,” *Language* 73 (1984): 7-16; Suzanne Fleishman, *Tense and Narrativity* (Austin, TX: U of Texas P, 1990); Monika Fludernik, *The Fictions of Language and the Languages of Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1993); *Towards a “Natural” Narratology* (London: Routledge, 1996); Minnette Grunmann-Gaudet and Robin F. Jones, eds., *The Nature of Medieval Narrative* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1980); Sophie Marnette, *Narrateur et points de vue dans la littérature française médiévale: une approche linguistique* (Bern: P. Lang, 1998); *Speech and Thought Perception in French: Concepts and Strategies* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005); O'Brien 2006 ch. 4; A.C. Spearing, *The Medieval Poet as Voyeur: Looking and Listening in Medieval Love-Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993): 48-50, 87-89; *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005); Sarah Spence, *Texts and the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire* (New York: New York UP, 1989); Michel Zink, *L'Invention de la subjectivité littéraire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985).