

Three Spanish *Querelle* Texts:  
*Grisel and Mirabella, The Slander  
against Women, and The Defense  
of Ladies against Slanderers*  
A Bilingual Edition and Study

PERE TORRELLAS  
*and* JUAN DE FLORES



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Iter Inc.  
Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies  
Toronto  
2013

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## Introduction

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### *The Other Voice*

This volume of the Other Voice brings together the two most influential voices in the Spanish *querelle des femmes*, Pere Torrellas (ca. 1420–ca. 1492) and Juan de Flores (d. ca. 1503). Although their names and works are not well known today outside of Hispanic Studies, Torrellas’s *Slander against Women* (*Maldezir de mugeres*) (ca. 1445) and Flores’s short romance *Grisel and Mirabella* (*La historia de Grisel y Mirabella*) (ca. 1475) circulated widely among Spanish readers from the time of their composition through the sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> *Grisel and Mirabella* also achieved considerable success in translation and was read across Europe. Pere Torrellas and Juan de Flores in all likelihood never met, but their works have more in common than their participation in the *querelle*, for Torrellas appears as a misogynist, libertine character in *Grisel and Mirabella*. Indeed, *The Slander against Women*, Flores’s *Grisel and Mirabella*, and Torrellas’s lesser-known *Defense of Ladies against Slanderers* together circumscribe the Spanish *querelle*, a debate that blurs the lines between literature and history.

In the debate about women in Spanish poetry and prose that flared in the second half of the fifteenth century, the name “Torrellas” was synonymous with misogyny.<sup>2</sup> Pere Torrellas, a Catalanian courtier and poet in the service of the Crown of Aragon, may or may not have wanted to throw down a gauntlet when he composed the poem

1. Although both writers may be considered “Spanish” in the present day by virtue of their use of the Castilian language and homes within what is now Spain, the political map of the mid- and late-fifteenth century was quite different from today. While “Spain” as a political unit did not exist in the Middle Ages, *España* (Spain) did exist as a geographic and cultural concept, embracing the many kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, including those of Castile, Aragon, Navarre, Portugal, and the last remnant of al-Andalus, the Kingdom of Granada. The Crown of Aragon, moreover, had expanded into a Mediterranean empire that included much of the Italian peninsula. Consequently, I use the terms “Spain” and “Spanish” in a broad sense.

2. In the texts of the period—and in modern scholarship as well—Torrellas’s name appears in several different forms: Torrellas, Torrella, Torroella, Torroellas. The first spelling is used throughout this study.

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that would come to be known as the *Maldezir de mugeres*, or *Slander against Women*, which begins with the cautionary verses, “the man in love who courts / a woman, destroys himself.”<sup>3</sup> Whatever the poet’s true intentions, his twelve stanzas on the dangerous and devious nature of “Woman,” followed by one concluding stanza in praise of a “Lady” who is an exception to the rule, incited many of his contemporaries, as well as future generations of writers, to take up their pens in the defense or defamation of women. The exact date and circumstances of the poem’s composition are unknown, but it was raising hackles in the courts of Aragon, Navarre, Naples, and Castile by the 1450s. The *Slander* incited a *querelle* in its day: at least twelve contemporary poets wrote responses to it, defaming Torrellas and ostensibly defending women, or praising and agreeing with his depiction of women and their wiles. Torrellas, provoked by his fellow courtiers and poets—and perhaps by the unwritten and now lost reactions of the women present in his original audiences as well—penned a self-consciously ironic retraction in prose, *The Defense of Ladies against Slanderers*.<sup>4</sup> Among the many late-medieval Spanish works that define and question gender roles and relations, the *Slander* and the texts that respond directly to it and to its author stand out as an exchange of directly related texts. Importantly, not only are beliefs about the nature of women central to the polemic; these literary exchanges also discuss the character of men who debate about women.

Torrellas’s historical and literary legacy as an enemy of women was sealed for future generations by Juan de Flores, author of several short romances and royal chronicler to Isabel I and Fernando V of Castile, known as the Catholic Monarchs. Flores’s extremely popular *Grisel and Mirabella*, written in the 1480s and first printed in 1495, is a fictional response to Torrellas’s *Slander* and *Defense*. The plot of *Grisel and Mirabella*, in which Torrellas is resurrected as a character, turns upon the polemic about gender relations: Torrellas, as an “expert on

3. “Quien bien amando persigue / dona, a sí mesmo destruye.”

4. In addition, Torrellas wrote two poetic sequels to the *Slander*: *A quien basta el conocer* (To the man whose knowledge is sufficient), a poem justifying the *Slander* as a call to reform women, and *Entre las otras sois vos* (You are among the others), a gloss upon the *Slander*’s final stanza, in honor of the Queen of Naples. Pere Torroella, *Obras completas*, ed. Robert Archer (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubbettino, 2004), 242–48.

women,” is called upon to prove women’s universal guilt in sexual seduction in a trial by jury. *Grisel and Mirabella* turns Torrellas’s poetic diatribe, which Flores clearly knew, into a farce of forensic rhetoric. His opponent in the trial is the beautiful and worldly-wise Braçayda, a character from the Homeric tradition, who argues in defense of women. Braçayda echoes both Christine de Pizan and Chaucer’s Wife of Bath when she insists that the jury’s decision to condemn women is a foregone conclusion because men write the laws by which women must live and judge them according to those laws. *Grisel and Mirabella* concludes with the sadistic revenge unleashed upon Torrellas by aggrieved women, thus creating a legend of his “martyrdom” when he dies at their hands.

*Grisel and Mirabella*, dedicated to an unnamed female reader who may have been none other than Queen Isabel I, not only imagines a woman taking part in the debate, but also uses the medium of narrative fiction to show that the *querelle* could have real effects upon the lives of women and men. Nevertheless, *Grisel and Mirabella* leaves the debate open, at once suggesting that it can never be resolved and encouraging the romance’s historical readers—male and female—to continue the debate and lend their voices to the *querelle*.

Torrellas and Flores’s first audiences were limited to the rarefied cultural settings of late-medieval courts. Nevertheless, both *The Slander against Women* and *Grisel and Mirabella* appeared in multiple print editions, thus reaching a wider readership. Torrellas’s *Defense of Ladies against Slanderers* reached far fewer readers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and has received little scholarly attention in the present day. Nevertheless, it serves as an important bridge between the two more famous works.

*Grisel and Mirabella* was not only popular in the Spanish context. In the sixteenth century, *Grisel* was translated into Italian, French, English, and Polish. Presses across Europe produced multiple editions well into the seventeenth century, when it was also translated into German. Translations were also published in bilingual, trilingual and quadrilingual formats for use as tools for language learning. In addition to its influence on other seventeenth-century works, *Grisel* eventually became the basis for the anonymous Jacobean play *Sweetnam the Woman Hater* (ca. 1620), which was part of the historical de-

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bate on women in England.<sup>5</sup> Thus, in one form or another, *Grisel and Mirabella* was perhaps the most widely disseminated work of fiction in the sixteenth-century pan-European *querelle des femmes*.

The broad and lasting influence of both Torrellas's *Slander* and Flores's *Grisel and Mirabella* merit their inclusion among the titles included in *The Other Voice*. To date, neither work has been available to students and scholars in modern English translation, nor is *Grisel and Mirabella* easily accessible in Spanish.<sup>6</sup> The inclusion of Torrellas's *Defense of Ladies against Slanderers* also makes a lesser-known intertext of *Grisel and Mirabella* available to readers. Torrellas went down in history as the ultimate misogynist and Flores was long considered by critics a staunch defender of women. Recent scholarship has added nuance to our understanding of these two polar positions, particularly in the case of Flores.<sup>7</sup> Torrellas's literary engagement in the *querelle* as

5. Joseph Swetnam's pamphlet *The Arraignment of Lewde, idle, forward, and unconstant women* (1615), like Pere Torrellas's *Slander*, provoked contemporary rejoinders. Three direct replies all published under female names (Rachel Speght, Ester Sowerman, and Constantia Munda, this last clearly a pseudonym) appeared in print in 1617. The play *Swetnam the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women* followed soon after the pamphlets. See *Swetnam the Woman-Hater: The Controversy and the Play*, ed. Coryl Crandall (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1969) and *Female Replies to Swetnam the Woman-Hater*, ed. Charles Butler (Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1995).

6. Two published critical editions exist: *Grisel y Mirabella: edizione critica, introduzione e note de Maria Grazia Ciccarello Di Blasi* (Rome: Bagatto, 2003) and *La historia de Grisel y Mirabella*, ed. Pablo Alcázar López and José A. González Núñez. (Granada: Editorial Don Quijote, 1983). Joseph J. Gwara also edited *Grisel and Mirabella* in "A Study of the Works of Juan de Flores, with a critical edition of *La Historia de Grisel y Mirabella*" (Ph.D. diss., Westfield College, University of London, 1989), 2:513–708. Barbara Matulka included a transcription in *The Novels of Juan de Flores and their European Diffusion: A Study in Comparative Literature* (New York: Institute of French Studies, 1931), 331–71.

7. The classic studies are Matulka's *The Novels of Juan de Flores and Their European Diffusion* and Jacob Ornstein's "La misoginia y el profeminismo en la literatura castellana," *Revista de filología española* 3 (1941): 219–32. Both Matulka and Ornstein see Flores as a committed defender of women. Antony Van Beysterveldt was one of the first readers of the debate to question the validity and usefulness of assigning authors to either the pro- or anti-feminist sides of the polemic in his "Revisión de los debates feministas," *Hispania* 64 (1981): 1–13. More recent scholarship, to which I will refer below, includes Patricia E. Grieve, *Desire and Death in the Spanish Sentimental Romance (1440–1550)* (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1987), Antonio Pérez-Romero, *The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2005), Mercedes Roffé, *La cuestión del género en*

a defender as well as a detractor of women points to the ambiguity of authorial intentions in these central texts of the Spanish debate on women, which, with the exception of the *Slander*, cannot be easily classified as either misogynist or profeminine.<sup>8</sup> The *Slander*, *Defense*, and *Grisel and Mirabella* exude a sense of literary delight in re-staging the old arguments concerning women's chastity, mercy, goodness, and power over men. At the same time, they reveal the urgency with which writers continued to engage in what seemed to be an endless and intractable debate. The lasting popularity of the *Slander* and *Grisel and Mirabella*, moreover, shows how readers remained eager for debate texts and works about the *querelle*.

*The Historical Context for The Slander against Women,  
The Defense of Ladies against Slanderers, and Grisel and  
Mirabella: Iberian Politics and the Debate on Women 1440–  
1500*

The heyday of the Spanish debate on women lasted from the time Torrellas composed his *Slander* until the turn of the sixteenth century. In those decades, which were marked by great changes in the political fortunes of the Iberian Kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, Portugal, and Granada, male courtly and clerical writers produced an extraordinary number of works on women. Despite the intensity and persistence of the production of *querelle* texts, there are no known Spanish debate texts written by women. Julian Weiss's recent inventory of clerical treatises, poetry, conduct books, catalogs of women, narrative fiction, drama, and translations contributing to the debate during the period includes over fifty works.<sup>9</sup> They range from the scathing misogynist

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Grisel y Mirabella de Juan de Flores (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 1996), and Barbara F. Weissberger, *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), Chapter Six.

8. The terms "profeminine" and "profeminist" describe medieval defenses of women that praise women according to the traditional definitions of gendered roles in society, thus avoiding the anachronistic connotations of the word "feminist" when applied to medieval texts about women. Alcuin Blamires, *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

9. "Bibliography of Primary Texts in Spanish," in *Gender and Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Clare Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002),

treatise of Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, called the *Corbacho* (1438), in honor of its ideological debt to Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*, and to Álvaro de Luna's catalog, the *Book of Famous and Virtuous Women* (ca. 1444), to Fray Martín de Córdoba's conduct book dedicated to the future Queen Isabel I, *The Garden of Noble Damsels* (ca. 1468). Many authors, like Juan de Flores, also embedded the debate within longer fictional works, such as *The Prison of Love*, a short romance by Diego de San Pedro that, like *Grisel and Mirabella*, became an international success. Flores is, however, the only known Spanish author who turned the debate itself into the central plot of a work of fiction. He is also one of the few to imagine a female character participating in the debate, speaking on behalf of women.

Torrellas's *Slander and Defense* and Flores's *Grisel and Mirabella* epitomize the critical challenge of late-medieval texts that rehearse and refute misogynist discourse. Profeminine and misogynist texts from the later Middle Ages and Early Modern period often sound alike; the parroting effect of diatribes against and defenses of women is easily mistaken for a lack of historical specificity. Moreover, humor abounds in the texts of the Spanish *querelle*, leading many readers to consider medieval debate texts as part of a courtly game, entertainment without serious cultural importance or consequences. Defining, vituperating, and praising women may well have been a ludic and even lubricious activity, but behind the sly laughter serious issues are at stake. Notwithstanding the repetitive—and seemingly timeless—nature of the terms of the debate on women and its often jocular register, each text is in reality grounded in particular ideologies, in the historical, political, and economic circumstances, as well as in the literary trends of its time and place. The texts, Robert Archer concludes, “are all characterized by a real concern with the viability of the authoritative view of women [which is] essentially contradictory and self undermining,” resulting in the “strong sense of indeterminacy” that runs through late-medieval Hispanic texts that address issues of sexuality and gender identity.<sup>10</sup>

275–81.

10. Archer concludes, “the localized context in which each of the texts is written ensures that the combination of common ideas about women they contain ... is nearly always unique.”

The outpouring of texts on the subject of gender identity in Spanish literature of the fifteenth century was at once part of the ancient and on-going misogynist and profeminine traditions—defining women as inferior beings, dangerous to men; defining women as the sum of virtues, necessary for men’s comfort and survival—and also a phenomenon relating to the political upheaval and civil strife among many of the kingdoms and powerful families of Iberia during the period.

In Castile, the reigns of three successive monarchs of the Trastamaran dynasty—Juan II (1406–1454), Enrique IV (1454–1474), and Isabel I (1474–1504)—brought questions of sexuality and gender into the forefront of political life. Juan II’s long reign began under the shared regency of his uncle Fernando of Antequera (d. 1416) and his mother Catherine of Lancaster (1373–1418), known for her “manly” qualities.<sup>11</sup> Even after reaching the age of majority, Juan II was essentially a puppet king, who left most decision-making and power in the hands of his favorite, Álvaro de Luna (ca. 1390–1453), rumored to be both a sorcerer and the king’s lover. Luna’s *Book of Famous and Virtuous Women*, mentioned above, which was perhaps an attempt to demonstrate his own appreciation for and courtly protection of women, was dedicated to Juan’s first wife María of Aragon. Luna’s power came to an abrupt end in 1453 when Juan II’s second wife, Isabel of Portugal, convinced her husband to order his execution. Ironically, Álvaro de Luna had forced Juan II to marry Isabel. Juan II died soon after the execution of his favorite.<sup>12</sup> His son Enrique IV, who came to be known as “the impotent,” succeeded him and, like his father, was also under the sway of a favorite, Juan Pacheco.<sup>13</sup> Both Juan II and Enrique IV were portrayed as weak, effeminate, heterodox, and sexually deviant by chroniclers wishing to elevate Isabel I as the savior of her kingdom.

*The Problem of Woman in Late-Medieval Hispanic Literature* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Tamesis, 2005), 204.

11. Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, *Generaciones y semblanzas*, ed. José Antonio Barrio Sánchez (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998), 77–78.

12. For the career of Álvaro de Luna, see Nicholas G. Round, *The Greatest Man Uncrowned: A Study of the Fall of Álvaro de Luna* (London: Tamesis, 1986).

13. For the reign of Enrique IV, see William D. Phillips, *Enrique IV and the Crisis of Fifteenth-Century Castile 1425–1480* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1978).

Isabel I, daughter of Juan II, convinced her brother Enrique IV to name her as his successor to the throne after the death of their other brother Alfonso, because Enrique was apparently unable to father an heir of his own. Enrique, after repudiating his first wife Blanca of Navarre, married Juana of Portugal, who did eventually have a daughter. However, that daughter, Juana (1462–1530), was soon known as “la Beltraneja” due to the relationship between her mother Queen Juana and the nobleman Beltrán de la Cueva. Isabel rose to power following a civil war pitting her supporters against those of her niece Juana.

Other royal and noble women played important roles in the Iberian kingdoms of Castile, Navarre, and Aragon during this period, empirically demonstrating political and also martial abilities that gave the lie to definitions of women shared by misogynist and profeminine arguments alike. In addition to Isabel I and Catherine of Lancaster, who ruled during her son Juan II of Castile’s minority, María of Castile served as queen-lieutenant of Aragon during her husband Alfonso V of Aragon’s (1416–1458) conquest of and residence in Naples.<sup>14</sup>

Spanish debate literature thus burgeoned against a background of dynastic upheaval that challenged traditional gender roles. In Castile, where women could inherit the throne and reign as queens in their own right, gender issues in discussions of monarchy were particularly charged. Isabel I’s ascension to the throne followed the reigns of two kings accused of effeminacy as well as a civil war pitting Isabel against her niece as rival for the crown. The presence of a strong female monarch in Spain in the last decades of the fifteenth century clearly generated anxiety that found its expression in the literature of the day.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the overt gender issues involved in succession and regency, the period was also one of transition for the definition of nobility itself. Arguing the “Woman Question” was

14. See Theresa Earenfight, “Absent Kings: Queens as Political Partners in the Medieval Crown of Aragon,” in *Queenship and Political Power in Medieval and Early Modern Spain*, ed. Theresa Earenfight (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 33–51.

15. See Weissberger, ‘Deceitful Sects’: The Debate about Women in the Age of Isabel the Catholic,” in *Gender and Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 207–36; and chapter one of *Isabel Rules: Constructing Queenship, Wielding Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

an important way in which courtiers and clerics could jockey for position in the court in a continual game of symbolic one-upmanship, which at once assuaged and revealed “men’s anxiety that their identity rests on the shaky foundations of a female Other, who by their own definition, is mutable and beyond absolute control.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, as Julian Weiss asserts, debating about women served as a way for men to gain cultural and symbolic capital at court during a period in which many cultural boundaries were being redrawn, in particular the respective positions of clerical and secular learned men at court.<sup>17</sup> Torrellas and Flores, who both held important posts in their respective courts, were writers for whom composing entertaining poetry and prose about sex and gender identities was perfectly compatible with political careers. Indeed, at the time, writing for the entertainment of the court was a significant factor in social and political advancement.<sup>18</sup>

At the turn of the sixteenth century, however, Spain entered an era of unprecedented power and stability, following the unification made possible by the marriage of Isabel I of Castile to Fernando II of Aragon in 1479 (when he also became Fernando V of Castile), the conquest of Granada in 1492, and the expansion of the Spanish Empire into the New World. This expansion continued in 1516, when, Charles I, the grandson of Isabel and Fernando, ascended the Spanish throne, and the Empire also extended to the Low Countries. In addition to Spain’s increased visibility and power, the sixteenth century saw a concentrated number of reigning queens and queens regent throughout Europe, including, but not limited to, Catherine de Medici and the two Tudors, Mary and Elizabeth. The printed editions of *Grisel and Mirabella* and the *Slander* circulated in this dual context of Spanish international hegemony and the “Age of Queens.”<sup>19</sup>

16. Weiss, “¿Qué demandamos de las mugeres?: Forming the Debate about Women in Late Medieval Spain (With a Baroque Response),” in *Gender and Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 237–75; 240.

17. Weiss, “¿Qué demandamos de las mugeres?” 238–40.

18. Archer, *The Problem of Woman*, 132.

19. The epithet is Sharon L. Jansen’s. *Debating Women, Politics and Power in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1–9.

*The Literary Contexts of the Torrellas Querelle and  
Grisel and Mirabella*

Pere Torrellas's *Slander* and the responses it provoked were composed and first circulated in a very particular mid- to late-fifteenth-century literary and courtly context. Juan II of Castile, Alfonso V "The Magnanimous" of Aragon, and his nephew, Carlos de Viana, were all avid patrons of the arts and letters. In Naples, Alfonso V established a brilliant court that attracted many of the leading lights of Italian humanism, as well as Castilian writers who had fallen out of favor with King Juan II of Castile.<sup>20</sup> Writers in the courts of Castile, Navarre, Aragon and Naples cultivated a vast corpus of lyrics compiled in anthologies of court entertainment known today as the *cancioneros* or "song books."<sup>21</sup> Much more than collections of verse, the *cancioneros* contain religious poetry, debates in verse on both weighty philosophical topics and lighter fare, collections of *motes* (cryptic mottoes), *letras* (brief poems) and *devisas* (emblematic verses), love poetry, moral allegories, poetry celebrating or vituperating individuals of note, advice, social and sexual satire, letters, and short treatises. Some *cancioneros* represent the output of a particular court, like the *Cancionero de Herberay*, which is closely linked to the court of Navarre, and others were compiled around a group of texts that had first circulated among an original readership and then was reconfigured for new readers. Some *cancioneros* are thematically unified, others miscellanea. Of the over 190 known manuscript *cancioneros*, some were clearly produced as luxury items made for luminaries, such as Juan II of Castile, and others as little more than rough copies. What is perhaps most homogenous about this group of texts and manuscripts is its courtliness and social nature—two elements that form recognizable *cancionero* poetics.

20. For politics and literary patronage at the court of Alfonso The Magnanimous, see Roger Boase, *The Troubadour Revival: A Study of Social Change and Traditionalism in Late Medieval Spain* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 95–102.

21. The term *cancionero* means "songbook," but, as Dorothy Severin has rightly observed, the term is too limiting and specific to describe the heterogeneous nature of the texts copied in anthologies for a range of purposes, both public and private. "Cancionero: un género mal-nombrado," *Cultura Neolatina* 54 (1994): 95–105.

*Cancionero* poetry, particularly amatory poetry, was long held in low esteem by scholars, branded as impersonal, artificial, and insignificant.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it was clearly highly valued by contemporary audiences. In the early sixteenth centuries *cancionero* poetry was re-edited and repackaged for new readers, in the 1511 printing of the bestselling *Cancionero general*, which was followed by eight successive editions printed in Spain and the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup> The resulting broader circulation transformed the *cancionero* from a distinctly courtly corpus to one that reached an urban, non-noble public. *Cancionero* lyric was praised in the seventeenth century by Baltasar Gracián for its *agudeza* (sharp wit), a combination of cleverness, conciseness, punning, and allusion.<sup>24</sup> *Cancionero* poets employed a markedly limited vocabulary, exploiting polysemy and syntactical obscurity; most of their verses contain multiple—sometimes contrary—meanings. Whatever one’s evaluation of the aesthetic quality of *cancionero* poetry, it is clearly of cultural and historical interest, a record of one of the most salient non-martial methods available for self-promotion and self-fashioning in court.

The poems and other texts in the *cancionero* corpus show the imaginary world of courtly love created by the old elite as well as its recreation and re-evaluation by new generations of courtiers, both noble and non-noble. The idealization and deflation of courtly ideals reside side by side in the *cancioneros*. *Cancionero* poetry, as Roger Boase argues, consisted of a “revival” of troubadour poetic and chivalric ideas in a time when social changes were continually shedding light on their irrelevance.<sup>25</sup> As E. Michael Gerli similarly observes, the *cancioneros* are “evidence of a baronial culture in decline,” the “last

22. Keith Whinnom provides a good overview of criticism on *cancionero* poetry in *La poesía amatoria cancioneril* (Durham, UK: University of Durham, 1981), 1–20.

23. Hernando del Castillo, comp. *Cancionero General*, ed. Joaquín González Cuenca (Madrid: Castalia, 2004), 5 vols.

24. Baltasar Gracián, *Arte de ingenio: tratado de la agudeza*, ed. Emilio Blanco (Madrid: Cátedra, 1998), 356–360.

25. *The Troubadour Revival*, 151–2.

vestiges of the decentralized landowning elite” that “signal its substitution by a centralized, bourgeois and lettered society.”<sup>26</sup>

*Cancionero* poetry was popular in Flores’s milieu and provided a sort of glossary for the emerging novelistic tradition in which he wrote. Flores’s *Grisel and Mirabella* belongs to the loosely defined genre known as the Spanish sentimental romance. The sentimental romances are a group of twenty or so short fictions produced in the second half of the fifteenth and first decades of the sixteenth centuries. Debate about the existence and limits of the genre itself is ongoing in Spanish literary studies, but the general critical consensus defines a sentimental romance as a short, formally hybrid, and fictional text about love that is unrequited or that ends badly. In this sense, many of the romances are stories worthy of inclusion in Day Four of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, in which Filostrato, whose very name means “prostrated by love,” orders his companions to tell tales of “those whose love ended unhappily,” and indeed, many of the Spanish sentimental romances are clearly indebted to the work of Boccaccio.<sup>27</sup> All of the sentimental romances, because of their thematic focus on heterosexual love, are profoundly concerned with gender and sexuality and often portray the tensions that inevitably arise between personal passion and political interests, thus putting both courtly and political ideals into question. In addition to incorporating varied literary forms, from letters, debates, and allegory to lyric poetry, many of the sentimental romances introduce a first-person narrator who is called “The Author.” The sentimental romances are also self-consciously literary, featuring metafictional scenes of writing, reading, translation,

26. “Introducción” in *Poesía cancioneril castellana* (Madrid: Akal, 1994), 12 (translation mine). For further reading on the cultural politics and milieu of the *cancioneros*, see Weiss, *The Poet’s Art: Literary Theory in Castile c. 1400–60* (Oxford: The Society for Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1990) and *Poetry at Court in Trastámaran Spain: From the Cancionero de Baena to the Cancionero general*, eds. E. Michael Gerli and Julian Weiss, (Tempe, AZ: MRTS, 1998).

27. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (1972; repr., New York: Penguin, 1995), 280. As Marina Scordilis Brownlee notes, the lovers’ situation in *Grisel and Mirabella* is quite similar to that of Ghismonda and her lover Guiscardo in the first story of Day Four in the *Decameron*. *The Severed Word: Ovid’s Heroides and the Novela Sentimental* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 192.

and interpretation.<sup>28</sup> Like the *cancioneros*, most of the Spanish sentimental romances were first intended for select and courtly audiences, but thanks to the introduction and spread of printing, they became available to an ever-widening readership.

### *Lives and Works of Pere Torrellas and Juan de Flores*

#### PERE TORRELLAS

The historical Pere Torrellas and the character that emerges from the *Slander* and *Grisel and Mirabella* are two very distinct figures. Born circa 1420 in La Bisbal, in the north of what is today Catalonia, Torrellas was the youngest son of a landowning family of the lower nobility.<sup>29</sup> As such, he was sent to be educated and serve as a squire in the retinue of Carlos of Viana, nephew of Alfonso V of Aragon and son of King Juan II of Navarre, future king of Aragon.<sup>30</sup> The young squire's service in the prince's household initiated a successful political career and, from that time forward, he was linked to the courts of Navarre and Aragon in the Iberian Peninsula and in Naples. Torrellas's association with these courts brought him into contact with many important literati of the day and also drew him into the political conflicts that were continually arising between and within the Iberian Peninsula's most powerful families.

Torrellas traveled frequently in the service of the royal houses of Navarre and Aragon. In 1441 he fought at the side of Juan II of Aragon in the battle of Medina del Campo, against the forces of his

28. See Emily C. Francomano, "The Spanish Sentimental Romance," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret C. Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006), 734–36; Joseph J. Gwara, "Preface," in *Studies on the Spanish Sentimental Romance (1440–1550): Redefining a Genre*, ed. Gwara and E. Michael Gerli, (Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 1997), vii–xii; Gerli, "Introduction," in *Studies on the Spanish Sentimental Romance (1440–1550)*, xiii–xvii; and Gerli, "Toward a Poetics of the Spanish Sentimental Romance," *Hispania* 72.3 (1989): 474–82.

29. For the outline of Torrellas's biography I have drawn upon Martí de Riquer, *Història de la literatura catalana* 2 (Barcelona: Ariel, 1980), 161–86; Archer, "Introducció," in Pere Torroella, *Obra Completa*, vii–xv; and Francisco Rodríguez Risquete, "Pere Torroella i les corts dels Infants d'Aragó al segle XV," *Llengua & literatura* 13 (2002): 209–220.

30. Historical documents place Torrellas at Carlos' court in 1438. Riquer, *Història*, 175.

cousin Juan II of Castile. Torrellas was wounded and taken prisoner while protecting the king's person and later paid his own ransom. Torrellas was sent with Juan II of Aragon's secretary to the court of Alfonso V in Naples in 1445. In 1450 we find him listed as the *oficial del cuchillo* (master of the knife; seneschal) in Juan's household, and he is referred to in various documents as seneschal and counselor to both Juan II and Carlos de Viana. In 1456 Torrellas was once more at the court in Naples, serving as the seneschal to Juan of Aragon, son of Juan II from an extra-marital relationship and future bishop of Saragossa. In 1458 Juan II recognized Torrellas's service, calling him "magnificum et dilectum consiliarium et maiordomum nostrum Pere Torroella militem" (Our noble and beloved counselor and majordomo Pere Torroella, knight) and granted him the income from the windmills attached to the Castle of Belcaire near Torrellas's family home in northern Catalonia. The documents praising Torrellas and granting the income also refer to his recent marriage to Yolant de Levià. In the 1460s Torrellas was active in the civil wars pitting Dom Pedro of Portugal (1429–1466) against Juan II for rule of Catalonia, which took place when the Castilian nobility, backed by Juan II, challenged the throne of Enrique IV of Castile. In 1475 Juan II named his former seneschal Lord of Empordà.

All of Torrellas's known work is preserved in the *cancioneros*, where forty-six poems in Spanish and Catalan are attributed to him directly and eleven more poems may be the products of his pen.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the poems, his *Defense of Ladies against Slanderers* and thirteen other short prose works are also preserved in *cancionero* manuscripts. Many of the poems in Catalan are addressed to a female figure Torrellas calls by the code name, or *senhal*, "Bé de mos mals," which can be loosely translated as "Good of my ills." The name is a play upon the language of courtly love, in which love is a pleasurable malady and the beloved, who causes the illness, is the source of both favor and suffering. The majority of Torrellas's poems in Spanish are also love poems. Like the *Slander*, Torrellas's prose works are also intimately related to his life at court, including short pieces mourning the

31. Archer, "Introducció," x. For Torrellas's complete works in Spanish and Catalan see Pere Torroella, *Obra completa*, ed. Robert Archer (Soveria Mannelli, Italy: Rubbettino, 2004) and *Obra completa*, ed. Francisco Rodríguez Risquete, 2 vols. (Barcelona: Barcino, 2011).

deaths of prominent figures, an imaginary letter from Demosthenes to Alexander the Great, and exchanges of letters with other writers, notably a series of letters on the nature of love with Pedro de Urrea.

#### JUAN DE FLORES

Other than the conjecture that “Juan de Flores was a Castilian noble,” little was known about Flores’s life until the archival investigations of Joseph J. Gwara and Carmen Parrilla demonstrated that he was nothing less than an official chronicler to the Catholic Monarchs, a *corregidor*, or royal administrator, and may have also served as a rector at the University of Salamanca.<sup>32</sup> The identification of Juan de Flores as the author of the previously anonymous *Crónica incompleta de los Reyes Católicos* (Unfinished Chronicle of the Catholic Monarchs) and the discovery of new works also attributable to his pen reveal him to have been a major figure in Castilian letters, indeed one of, if not *the* most “prolific, versatile, and influential writer of late-fifteenth-century Spain.”<sup>33</sup>

Flores is the author of two short romances, *Grisel and Mirabella*, presented here, and *Grimalte and Gradissa*, a continuation of Boccaccio’s *The Elegy of Lady Fiammeta*. In *Grimalte*, the title character attempts to unite Fiametta and her beloved Panfilo as a test of his love for Gradissa and proof of his worthiness. Grimalte’s project is unfruitful; Fiametta’s love for Panfilo remains unrequited, as does Grimalte’s for Gradissa. Although it was not as widely disseminated as *Grisel and Mirabella*, *Grimalte and Gradissa* also enjoyed an international readership in the sixteenth century, when it was translated into French.

Flores’s unfinished *Chronicle of the Catholic Monarchs* covers the tumultuous time leading to Isabel I’s marriage to Fernando II of

32. See Gwara, “The Identity of Juan de Flores: The evidence of the *Crónica incompleta de los Reyes Católicos*,” *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 11.2 (1987): 103–29; and “The Identity of Juan de Flores: The evidence of the *Crónica incompleta de los Reyes Católicos* (concluded),” *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 11.3 (1987): 205–22; as well as Carmen Parrilla, “Un cronista olvidado: Juan de Flores, autor de la *Crónica incompleta de los Reyes Católicos*,” in *The Age of the Catholic Monarchs, 1475–1516: Literary Studies in Memory of Keith Whinnom*, ed. Alan Deyermond and Ian Macpherson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 123–33.

33. Gwara, “The Identity of Juan de Flores (concluded),” 222.

Aragon and the early years of their reign. In addition to the discovery of Flores's official role in the court of the Catholic Monarchs, in recent decades, more works attributed to him have come to light. In 1976 *Triunfo de amor* (The Triumph of Love) previously thought to be a lost or even non-existent work, was recovered.<sup>34</sup> *The Triumph of Love* is an allegory in which a civil war breaks out between all the subjects, both living and dead, of the God of Love. When the war ends, Love mandates a new courtly code, ordering that men no longer court women. Rather, women must forever more court men. Composed at roughly the same time as Flores's chronicle, *The Triumph of Love* allegorizes the civil war preceding Isabel I's consolidation of power and the challenge to traditional gender roles inherent in her presence on the throne. A fourth work, *La coronación de la Señora Gracisla* (The Coronation of the Lady Gracisla), which was recovered at the same time as the *Triumph of Love*, can also be reliably attributed to Flores.<sup>35</sup> *The Coronation* relates the story of a beauty contest and, like the *Triumph of Love*, contains elements suggesting its intention as a *roman à clé*.

Flores's fictional works, with the exception of *The Coronation*, are all dedicated to female readers. As an official historian, he was writing for a very particular female reader, Isabel I, who was in many ways his "most privileged reader."<sup>36</sup> Appointed chronicler in 1476, Flores would undoubtedly have had personal contact with his royal patrons and personal knowledge of the affairs of their court.<sup>37</sup>

34. Grieve, "Juan de Flores Other Work: Technique and Genre of *Triunfo de Amor*," *Journal of Hispanic Philology* 5 (1980): 25–40. On history and the politics of gender in *Triunfo*, see Francomano, "Juan de Flores Delivers a Bull," in "*De ninguna cosa es alegre posesión sin compañía*": *Estudios celestinescos y medievales en honor del profesor Joseph Thomas Snow*, ed. David Paolini (New York: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 2010), 2:151–161; Gerli, "Gender Trouble: Juan de Flores's *Triunfo de Amor*, Isabel la Católica, and the Economies of Power at Court," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 4.2 (2003): 169–84; and Weissberger, Isabel's 'Nuevas leyes': Monarchic Law and Justice in *Triunfo de Amor*," in *Juan de Flores: Four Studies*, ed. Gwara (London: Department of Hispanic Studies, Queen Mary and Westfield College, 2005), 91–113.

35. Gwara "Another Work by Juan de Flores: *La coronación de la señora Gracisla*," in *Studies on the Spanish Sentimental Romance*, 75–110.

36. Weissberger, "Isabel's 'Nuevas leyes,'" 92.

37. Gwara, "The Identity of Juan de Flores," 108; and "The Identity of Juan de Flores (concluded)," 206.

*Content and Analysis of Pere Torrellas's Slander and Defense*

## THE SLANDER AGAINST WOMEN

"The man in love who courts / a woman, destroys himself." So begins the poem that would come to be called the *Slander*. Although it is impossible to know with certainty, at our centuries-long remove from the genesis and first audiences of the poem, it is likely that it was intended to entertain a courtly gathering of men and women in Naples in the 1440s.<sup>38</sup> It was probably meant to be provocative in the same mischievous way that much *cancionero* lyric is. Twelve stanzas declaim the vices and defects of women: they are ungracious, capricious, lascivious, obsessive, greedy, fickle, cunning, often physically repugnant, liars and schemers who deceive and disappoint men at every turn. In the words of Robert Archer, the *Slander* is a "a rosary of neatly phrased misogynistic ideas."<sup>39</sup> Torrellas cleverly couched the all-too familiar accusations in the octosyllabic rhyming verses that are commonplace in *cancionero* poetry. Yet, as readings of debate literature continually reveal, misogynist humor, no matter how "innocently" and playfully presented, gave audiences serious food for thought.<sup>40</sup> The *Slander* certainly fanned the flames of discord.

The *Slander* is a product of cultural and geographic confluence. Such poetic invectives were familiar in Catalan-Occitan literary circles, but were unprecedented in Castilian *cancioneros*, where individual women were sometimes made the targets of vituperation, but never in the context of courtly love itself, and where the "Woman Question" was a theme the courtly poets did not address.<sup>41</sup> The

38. Although most scholars date the poem's composition between 1440 and 1460, Weiss, following Brian Dutton, argues for an earlier date, circa 1435. "¿Qué demandamos de las mugeres?" 268n. Rodríguez Risquete posits that it could not have been composed any earlier than 1436. *Obra completa*, 2: 96.

39. *The Problem of Woman*, 170.

40. As Blamires cautions, in speaking about literary defenses of women "a distinction should be made between the seriousness with which the views are held by the writers ... and the seriousness which a reader is able to find in the views constructed." *The Case for Women*, 31. The same, I would argue, is true for invective texts.

41. Rosanna Cantavella, *Els cards i el llir: una lectura de l'Espill de Jaume Roig* (Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1992), 36. This idea is fully explored by Archer in "Las coplas 'De las

*querelle* Torrellas provoked, which is as much a debate about masculine courtliness as it is about women, shows the tension between older and newer court identities.

The poem begins as a courtly lover's complaint, but quickly veers off the well-known course of describing or remonstrating a *belle dame sans merci*. This familiar conceit places the poet and unnamed ladies in the standard positions of lover and object of courtly love. And, as Robert Archer notes, the first five stanzas maintain this relationship between poetic subject and female love object.<sup>42</sup> Unlike clerical diatribes such as the Martínez de Toledo's *Corbacho*, Torrellas does not deplore the apotheosis of women in the courtly "religion of love;" nor does the *Slander* concern itself with the state of man's soul before God.<sup>43</sup> Rather, the poem is almost entirely concerned with the behavior of women toward men in amorous matters. On the other hand, accusations of heresy were not only wielded by moralists critical of courtly love; poets who criticized Torrellas and others who speak ill of women as *maldizientes* (slanderers) called them heretics against the religion of love. Such accusations were akin to accusations of homosexuality, thus recalling the frequent association of so-called deviant sexuality with religious heterodoxy.<sup>44</sup>

In the third stanza, Torrellas turns from the commonplace complaints of a slighted lover to proverbial wisdom. Women, he says, "are just like she-wolves / when they choose a mate."<sup>45</sup> He does not mean that they are bloodthirsty predators, as the English suggests, but rather, refers to the Spanish adage that women, like she-wolves in heat, always choose the least attractive male to be found. This proverb

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calidades de las donas' de Pere Torroella y la tradición lírica catalana," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona* 47 (1999–2000): 405–23.

42. *The Problem of Woman*, 175.

43. Gerli discusses the connections between courtly love and clerical misogyny in "La 'religión del amor' y el antifeminismo en las letras castellanas del siglo XV," *Hispanic Review* 49.1 (1981): 65–81.

44. Weissberger, "'A Tierra Puto!' Alfonso de Palencia's Discourse of Effeminacy," in *Queer Iberia: Sexualities, Cultures, and Crossings from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Josiah Blackmore and Gregory S. Hutcheson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 291–24.

45. "De natura de lobas son / ciertamente, en escoger."

equating women with wolves when they choose a mate is glossed by Juan Luis Vives in *The Education of A Christian Woman*:

I have seen women who do not recoil from men whose nature is worse than that of brute beasts—dirty drunk, wrathful, stupid, imprudent, idiotic, cruel, and blood-thirsty, who have less in common with men than wild beasts, [and women] who flee and avoid the company of wise and temperate men. This conduct inspired one of our own writers, using the vernacular tongue to attack them, saying that they have the instinct of she-wolves in choosing a mate, since they are said to choose the vilest and most foul-smelling of the males that follow after them. From this characteristic the name of she-wolf has been assigned to women.<sup>46</sup>

Vives' reference to Torrellas, written in 1523, attests to the long-lived reputation of the poet. Torrellas turns the proverb into an extended simile, elaborating upon the proverb with animal lore that is not normally connected to sexual activity:

Truly, women are just like she-wolves  
when they choose a mate,  
like eels, when hooked into the bait,  
when they resist, like porcupines;  
they think nothing of virtue or ability,  
intelligence, kindness, or wisdom  
rather, they look for advantage,  
comely ways, and generosity,  
where riches may be had.<sup>47</sup>

46. *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, trans. Charles Fantazzi, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 161.

47. "De natura de lobas son / ciertamente, en escoger, / de anguillas en retener, / e en contrastar, de erisón; / no estiman virtud ni abteça, / seso, bondat, nin saber, / mas catan abinenteza, / talle de obrar e franqueza, / do puedan bienes aver."

The second verse of the stanza is emblematic of the concise yet obscure syntax characteristic of *cancionero* lyric. Women are “de anguillas en retener;” literally, they are “in holding, like eels.” The line yields two, opposite interpretations. On the one hand women may be like eels because they are slippery and hard to hold on to.<sup>48</sup> However, the line may also refer to the hooked teeth common to some types of eels, which allow them to snag the flesh of their prey.<sup>49</sup> Both interpretations further the poem’s invective. Torrellas next equates women with porcupines, who, according to medieval bestiaries, when attacked roll into a ball and shoot out their quills.

The invective escalates, as it moves from the register of courtly love to definitions of women’s nature in stanzas six through twelve. Torrellas includes a scabrous double entendre when he claims that women lead men on only to disappoint them because they need to keep hidden physical defects a secret. However, *secreto* means both “secret,” and was also used in medieval Castilian as a noun referring to a small bag or purse kept hidden within the skirts of a garment. The implication is that the hidden defect is genital. Rodríguez Risquete further remarks that the defect alluded to may be the loss of virginity.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the poem, Torrellas aligns himself and men with cultural authority, opposing male humanity to female subhumanity. In the eleventh stanza, Torrellas returns to the concept of women’s animal nature, announcing in the first line that “Woman” is an animal. The second line, however, reveals that the poet is paraphrasing the Aristotelian theory on the generation of women:

Woman is that animal  
we call an imperfect man,  
procreated by defect  
of nature’s good heat.<sup>51</sup>

48. Archer and Rodríguez Risquete both interpret the line in this manner. Archer, ed., *Obra completa*, 204n and Rodríguez Risquete, ed., *Obra completa*, 2:107.

49. This is Nicasio Salvador Miguel’s reading. “La tradición animalística en las *Coplas de las calidades de las donas*, de Pere Torrellas,” *El crotalón* 2 (1985): 215–24.

50. *Obra completa*, 2:108.

51. “Mujer es un animal / que se diz’ hombre imperfecto / procreado en el defecto / del buen calor natural.”