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TONGUES OF FIRE IN *Guilhem de la Barra*

IN MANY WAYS, THE *Libre de Mossen Guilhem de la Barra* (1318) may be read as a back-to-front rewriting of the key narrative features of *Girart de Roussillon*. It opens with a lengthy, violent conversion narrative that addresses the questions of interlinguistic communication, one that has attracted substantial critical attention.[1] A Saracen lady persuades her husband to convert with *belas messonjas* (beautiful lies) (96) and is accordingly baptized with the somewhat ironic name of Constance "en el nom de Dieu que venir / volc en lenguas de foc ardent" (in the name of God who wished to come in tongues of burning flame) (lines 1612–13).[2] The conversion episode appears to be important for the narrative, but it has no further purpose, as neither the converted Saracens nor Guilhem's muscular piety reappear in the main part of the story. Indeed, Guilhem's religious fervor seems to disappear. The main body of his story concerns itself with the consequences of the queen's lust for and aggression toward both Guilhem's family and her kingdom. In this respect, the ethical crisis that determines the bulk of *Guilhem de la Barra* resembles the first part of *Girart de Roussillon* with the aggressor role shifted from the king (who remains a weak and treacherous figure) to the queen. The queen's love for Guilhem, like Elissent and Berte's for Girart, is the product of a proxy betrothal. The king betrays Guilhem twice, first, by failing to remember his service and, second, by privileging his wife's written accusations over Guilhem's silent refusal to appear at court, another echo of Girart's contumacy. Tongues of fire play a thematic role in the remainder of the text, as the queen's false accusation of rape sends Guilhem into exile. In early fourteenth-century Toulouse, those who made false accusations of heresy could be punished by public exhibition wearing red tongues sewn on their clothing, while real tongues of burning flame punished those whose accusers found sufficient support to ensure that they were condemned to death.[3]

It has long been fashionable to describe Occitan chivalric texts as ironic readings of French models. This claim has been made for *Blandin de Cornualha*; *Jaufre*; and, less tentatively, *Flamenca*.[4] I would propose to read *Guilhem de la Barra* in such a light, not because I wish to revive a tired view of Occitan narrative as both derivative and secondary to more canonical (French) literary models, but because it appears to dissolve the moral and spiritual content of both its secular and its spiritual sources. While the manuscript tradition of *Girart de Roussillon* points to its diffusion across both Oïl and Oc domains, *Guilhem de la Barra* seems to be an isolated linguistic and literary experiment that survives in only one manuscript. If *Girart* owes its failure with audiences to its hybrid language choice, *Guilhem*'s hybridity lies in its apparent narrative incoherence and its equally apparent uniqueness. I shall argue that it is neither a unique nor an incoherent work. Additionally, Arnaut Vidal's rewriting of the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife echoes Ataïn's failed seduction of Berte, but also provides the ethical core of this troubling and far from trivial work.

Synopsis

Guilhem de la Barra is sent to England by the king of La Serra to fetch his wife, the princess Englantina. He acts as the proxy spouse in a betrothal ceremony and impresses Englantina further when they are abducted on their journey to La Serra by the Saracen lord of Malleo. Guilhem converts Malleo and his subjects to Christianity through several spectacular and violent miracles. During her husband's absence at war, Englantina tries to seduce Guilhem. He rebuffs her. She cries rape and makes a formal accusation against Guilhem, who flees to his castle. The king besieges La Barra. Guilhem flees and hands his two children to a female recluse and a shepherd. His son is adopted by the king of Armenia, and his daughter becomes a noted seamstress whose embroidery wins her the admiration and the hand of the count of Terramada. Guilhem spends seven years with a physician and travels the earth for a further fifteen, until he becomes the tutor to Terramada's children and his champion against the king of Armenia's champion, his own son. The father's war cry ("Barra!") provokes a grand recognition scene. Guilhem decides to reclaim La Barra, Englantina is persuaded to admit her crime, and Guilhem is reconciled with her as well as the king. He is restored to his lands, but lives in the English court for seven years. The king of England eventually makes him the first duke of Guyenne, and he dies after twenty-one years of untrammeled rule.

Guilhem de la Barra was completed in late May 1318 by Arnaut Vidal de Castelnaudary, who was also one of the first laureates of the Toulouse poetry contest in 1324 (lines 5326–44). Its only surviving manuscript is externally dated to 1324 and may show some connection with the Toulouse Consistory, but the poem is dedicated with a fulsome panegyric (evidently in the hope of employment as well as unspecified legal assistance) to a nobleman, Sicart de Montaut, whose seat was at Auterive (Haute Garonne), some thirty kilometers to the south of Toulouse (lines 5290–5325). By 1324, in Arnaut Vidal's prize poem (that date is also inscribed on the manuscript's cover), he says he is a member of the collegial church of Uzeste (Gironde), where the Gascon pope Clement V had been contentiously buried in 1314. He may well by then have been enjoying the patronage of Clement's nephew Arnaut de Canteloup (cardinal of the province of Bordeaux), or of any number of other Gascon relatives of the powerful de Got lineage, who held benefices in that region, including the see of Bazas.[5] The *roman* of 1318 in all probability reflects leaner years, but it has the transparent aim of ensuring that Arnaut Vidal, clearly an ambitious man, would establish links from a powerful network of both secular and religious fellow speakers of Occitan. The poem offers intriguing echoes, however, for Clement V (Bertrand de Got) was connected to the lineage of Mauléon, which is theoretically behind the monolingual, piratical, and pagan lord of Malleo in the opening section of *Guilhem de la Barra*.[6]

The poem is modeled both on *chansons de geste* and on the French *roman d'aventures*. It may derive from a lost original, as much of the narrative (with the exception of the opening conversion narrative) reappears with slight differences in Boccaccio's *Decameron* (*giornata* 2, *novella* 8).[7] *Guilhem de la Barra* also resembles fourteenth-century works such as Jehan Maillart's *Li Romans du comte d'Anjou* (c. 1316), another poem in octosyllabic rhyming couplets.[8] Arnaut calls his poem a *roman* (lines 5304, 5315, 5338) in another nod to the fashions of his time and, like Maillart, eschews the supernatural except in a strictly Christian context.

The text echoes several aspects of *Girart de Roussillon* in its depiction of an underlying sexual rivalry between king and vassal produced by a proxy betrothal, which expresses itself less figuratively through Englantina's accusation, the king's attacks on Guilhem's castle, and the betrayed vassal's lengthy exile. The poem is framed by an explicit association of its narrator/author with Guilhem. In the closing lines, Arnaut Vidal depicts himself as a wronged and isolated man who requires Sicart's legal assistance against the abuses of certain barons (lines 5308–11), hoping that the nobleman will

also take him as his servant and reward him suitably, "qu'estat ay un temps encantatz / ab tot jorn prometre ses dar" (for I have been bewitched for a time by endless unfulfilled promises) (lines 5322–23). The betrayed service offered by Guilhem to the king of La Serra is set in a frame that identifies the author with his sufferings, and Sicart with a divinely sent protector (line 5308). Arnaut also affirms his Christian beliefs, as he avers that he believes in the Incarnation "segon ques a mi m'es a vist, / per cartas, et es veritatz" (as it seems to me, through charters, and it is the truth) (lines 5330–35). Such an explicit assertion of orthodox Christian (indeed, Marian) belief, and of reliance on written authority, seems to have been necessary for the poets who participated in the Toulouse Consistory, where the devotional prize poems were scrutinized by masters of the university for any hint of incorrect (by which they meant, heretical) belief. Accordingly, Arnaut prays as he closes the poem that he might be rid of any harm, obstacle, or wicked thought, "cuy Dieus defenda de tot mal / e que.l gar de tot encombrier / e.l tuelha tot mal cossïer" (lines 5340–42).

It is hard to read any literary product of early fourteenth-century Toulouse outside the filter of the repressive religious scrutiny that still dominated the city and its surrounding regions, and it seems essential to do so when we read a poem that foregrounds its French literary influences while using the poetic Occitan that was learned and practiced in the Consistory. Betrayal by powerful rulers and exile are invoked by the poem in both its narrative and its frame; their explicit association with assertions of religious belief would, in my view, point to a further concern with the orthodoxy of its sources. Dispossession and exile were used by Inquisition and French military authorities throughout the thirteenth century as the most palpable aspect of their harsh repression of heresy in the Languedoc (both Cathar and Waldensian). In the first decade of the fourteenth century, it was still possible to seize lands on the suspicion that a deceased family member had had dealings with a heretic. Indeed, the inquisitor Geoffroy d'Ablis, working from nearby Carcassonne, gathered depositions from young lawyers who shared Arnaut Vidal's education at Toulouse that cast doubts on the orthodoxy of both students and masters.[9]

The tale of Englantina's failed seduction of Guilhem derives either directly from the biblical story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39), or from parabiblical vernacular traditions, which I will discuss below. I shall resist the temptation to dismiss it as a stock tale because its role in this particular narrative is too important, and its surrounding sources too multiple, to overlook. It resembles but does not reproduce the frame

narrative of the Occitan-Catalan version of the *Seven Sages of Rome* (c. 1350) (an empress fails to seduce her stepson and accuses him of rape), which was known to members of the Toulouse Consistory.[10] There is nothing commonplace about Arnaut Vidal's use of an Old Testament narrative in an early fourteenth-century Occitan text. The Old Testament was rejected by the Cathars, along with much of the New Testament, so his inclusion of the tale might have been received as an assertion of an approved religious education, but it might also have opened Arnaut to further pressure, because Jewish communities of early fourteenth-century Languedoc were also subjected to aggressive campaigns on the part of both royal and religious authorities. The Toulouse inquisitor Bernard Gui supervised the confiscation and destruction of copies of the Talmud in 1310 and 1319.[11] In 1306, King Philip IV (Philip the Fair) ordered the seizure and sale of all Jewish property, and according to Cyril Hershon, the royal officers in Toulouse declared "that this property was held direct and allodially [*en franc alleu*], and so it could be sold directly for the king's benefit."[12] The Jewish communities of the Languedoc and surrounding regions were systematically dispossessed from 1306 onward. A decree passed by King Louis X in 1315 permitted a difficult return that ended in 1322, but Jewish property in Arnaut's birthplace of Castelnaudary was still being seized by the crown in 1320. Arnaut's assertion that he believes in the Incarnation is especially interesting in this respect because Bernard Gui's *Practica inquisitionis* (1323/24) held that Jews denied the virginity of Mary in their prayers. Denial of the Incarnation is a topos of anti-Jewish, rather than anti-Cathar, polemic from the thirteenth century onward.[13] Arnaut's prize-winning Marian poem of 1324 also mentions the Incarnation quite graphically: "per la virginal porta / intret Dieus dins vostre port" (Through the virgin door God entered your harbor).[14] While there are no grounds for assuming that Arnaut Vidal de Castelnaudary was a converted Jew (the name Vitalis/Vidal is both a Jewish and Christian surname in the Languedoc), his romance focuses on false accusation, dispossession, and exile at a time and in a region in which several religious communities lived under that threat.

Guilhem de la Barra's fortress seems to be the mirror opposite of Girart de Roussillon's tower, but its geography is fantastical: "En una terra lay d'Ungría / Ac .I. rey qu'era de Suría / ques ac nom lo rey de la Serra" (In a country, over there, of Hungary, there was a king from Syria who was known as the king of La Serra) (lines 1–3). La Serra (in Occitan, "a hill or a strait") echoes the nouns that derive from the verb *serrar* or *sarrar,* "to lock,

close, or enclose," such as *serradura* (a lock). Guilhem is associated with his wish, in this enclosed land, to lock himself in the nearby fortress of La Barra: "El ha nom Guilhem de la Barra, / el sieu castel que gent se sarra / de murs de marmet tot entorn" (His name is Guilhem de la Barra, in his castle that is attractively enclosed all around by marble walls). "La Barra," or "Barra!" (Guilhem's war cry) may refer to a wooden staff, a barrier, or a barrage.[15] It alludes to Guilhem's repeated attempts to create protective ramparts around himself. This enclosed haven in a "locked" kingdom contrasts sharply with the twenty-four years that Guilhem spends in exile, as well as with the travels he undertakes to England at both the start and the close of the poem. This king of Syria has, for unexplained reasons, established a kingdom in Hungary, so his son's kingdom of La Serra, despite its name, is anything but securely grounded.

Access to La Serra from England (line 116) is further compromised by the presence at the one harbor of the Saracen lord of Malleo (lines 122–37), who exacts tribute and a forced abjuration of Christianity from every traveler. Malleo owns a handsome fortress, "d'obra talhada / espes de torrs e ben dechatz / Malleos" (of carved stonework, thick with towers, and well named Malleo) (lines 154–56). In what way is it *ben dechatz* (well named)? This is usually assumed to be a play on the toponym Mauléon, which would make *mal-leon* (evil lion) a coherent but unsuitable etymology for a well-built fortress, especially as Malleo takes the Christian name Leon on baptism. In any case, Malleo's language is incomprehensible, as Guilhem and his companion quickly realize, for although the first Saracens they encounter speak their language, their lord does not: "E.l bar senher de Malleo / non entendec las lors paraulas, / mas que cujec que fossan faulas" (The noble lord of Malleo did not understand their words and thought that they were *faulas*) (lines 220–22). Malleo thinks that words that he does not understand are fictions and fables; *faulas:* empty words. His *latinier* (interpreter) speaks to him in their shared *algaravic* (line 248), the term for Arabic (*al-fiarabiyya*) that eventually became modern Castilian *algarabía* or French *charabia* (nonsense). The *latiniers* addresses Guilhem and Chabertz in "pla lingage" (clear language), in other words, their own tongue, the Occitan of the poem (line 277). In the *Leys d'Amors, pla* (clear) language is one of the four necessary virtues of the vernacular rhetor: "Lenga per veritat / plana per parlar pla / Per qu'om no parle va" (a smooth tongue truly, for speaking clearly, so that one might not speak in vain) (Anglade, I.85).[16]

The religious conflict is played out through competing statues and actions; both the Saracen idols and the crucifix nailed to a laurel tree move

their heads and change position to enact a conflict that cannot be pursued through either spoken or written words, as the *latinier* comments in frustration: "dyabli son / aquelh crestia en lor parlar" (These Christians are devils in their speech) (lines 556–57). The trilingual inscription on the cross is here presented monolingually, in gilt Latin writing, "Jhesus Nazarenum, rex Judeorum," and then glossed orally by Guilhem in Occitan: "e.l sieus noms, qu'es ab letras d'aur, / fon escrit per Pilat desus: / de Nazaret ha nom Jhesus, / reys que fo et es dels Juzieus; / aquel crezem qu'es verays Dieus" (His name, which is in letters of gold, was written by Pilate: "of Nazareth, named Jesus, who was and is king of the Jews"; we believe him to be the true God) (lines 384–85, 429–33). Guilhem ensures that the crucifix is accessible only through Latin (the other two divine languages clearly having been forgotten) and his vernacular gloss, with Pilate and his own voice as respectively the (pagan) Latin *auctoritas* and the Christian interpreter. Malleo's *latiniers* translates this sermon to his master as an invitation to see "lor dieu qu'an mes us .I. laurier / qu'es pens en .I. pauc de papier" (their god, which they have placed in a laurel tree, painted on a scrap of paper) (lines 457–58). He acknowledges the authority of the written inscription in identifying this foreign deity, but denies the value that Guilhem has attributed to it. In Malleo's uncomprehending eyes and ears, it can be no more than meaningless signs on a scrap of paper.

The lengthy conversion conflict stages the violent defeat of the Saracen images by the Christian image: the statues explode, stink, and fester in ditches. Written words and uttered prayers appear to be less effective than the physical actions of warring deities, something reminiscent of the story (often used in iconography) in which Saint Dominic ended a disputation with Cathar *perfecti* by casting both sides' books of arguments into the fire, so that the Christian booklet could fly out unharmed from the flames.[17] The conflict ends when the interpreter converts (lines 714–69), closely followed by Malleo's wife (lines 909–29). The wife manipulates her husband into conversion through what the rubric calls her "beautiful lies" (*belas messonjas* [96]), a foreshadowing of Englantina's lying words later in the text. Malleo, his wife, and their subjects are baptized by the nobleman Chabert on pain of either death or confiscation of their wealth (line 1515), in a ceremony that the rubric terms the most novel and the most pious baptism ever seen ("lo pus novel e.l pus devot babtisme" [108]). It is novel only in that coerced baptism was deemed to be irreversible by inquisitors of the early fourteenth century. In 1320, Jacques Fournier stated that a baptism could be nullified only if the person undergoing it protested or struggled, even in the case of

a Jew, Baruch, who had been forcibly baptized in Toulouse's Saint-Étienne Cathedral by a mob. He concluded that baptism bound Baruch either to stay a Christian or to become a "heretic."[18]

In this novel and allegedly pious ceremony, the layman Chabert baptizes Malleo in the name of the Trinity, "senes carta e ses escrit" (without letter or written document) (line 1560). This could be read as an allusion to the Cathar ritual of *consolamentum,* which required the *perfectus* to hold a copy of the New Testament or the Gospel of John over the believer's head.[19] Chabert and Guilhem, laymen both, have already improvised a Eucharistic host from laurel leaves and focused on the crucifix more as an object adored or affixed to a tree than as an image of divine Logos (lines 345–65). Their spectacular gestures have proved more successful than the preaching words that the *latiniers* initially described as "vostre gran no sen" (your great nonsense) (line 281), the mere hearing of which should have provoked Malleo to have them put to death (lines 280–85). Malleo's lady echoes the men's spectacular tactics. She arranges with the interpreter for the collective baptism to take place in a huge circular vat made of a single piece of marble that cannot be harmed by either hammers or clubs (lines 1465–71) and that is sheltered from dirt, dust, and wind by layers of textiles and a surrounding rim of worked gold ("una sentura d'aur obrada") (line 1484). This secure marble circle in turn foreshadows the marble enclosure of Barra.

The conversion episode sets up an uneasy relationship between language and actions. Coerced baptism masquerades as piety; lies and preaching are the flimsy adornment of violent confrontations. If Guilhem's conversion of Malleo and his townsmen claims to be the high point of his spiritual career, it is followed by a brutal fall into far more worldly concerns. Deceitful words (*belas messonjas*), in fact, not pious deeds, are the agent of the ethical crisis that follows the king's marriage. Guilhem inspects the princess of England's naked body, as part of his task of approving her as the king's wife, and brings her to La Serra. He promptly falls sick and goes to La Barra to recover, and the king forgets to inform him of his wedding. The king inadvertently makes an enemy of him (lines 2316–25, 2358–59, 2622–29). Englantina and the king of La Serra spend the first month of their marriage locked in a strong sexual attraction that surpasses even the terrestrial Paradise, and they kiss during Mass before the assembled court (lines 2492–99). It would seem that the court of La Serra does not set a great example of religious piety. The king decides to assist a besieged city in Hungary and he tells the queen that he has decided to entrust both her and his kingdom to the most virtuous and handsome of men (lines 2534–47). The king's description sparks a secret

passion in Englantina for this exemplary vassal (lines 2550–53), and she asks to know his name (lines 2554–65). Englantina's lust for Guilhem is then the product of her husband's admiring words: "tant fort fon son cors enflamatz / del cavalier que l'a lausat" (So much was her heart aflame for the knight, because he had praised him) (lines 2570–71). The king's words inadvertently cause Englantina to transfer her erotic desire from her husband to the man whom he has chosen as his substitute in everything but the marital role. This is already an ambiguous role for Guilhem to assume, given his compromising position as the king's proxy in Englantina's chamber in England. On that occasion, Guilhem praises Englantina's beauty as an index of her virtue:

> La.ifanta fo cum causa muda
> De vergonha no poc parlar.
> Guilhem de la Barra intrar
> Vay en la chambray totz soletz,
> E vic son cors c'ayssi fo netz
> E clars e nous cum .I. cristalh.
> Guillem Barra diss: "Ges no.us falh,
> Per ma fe, deguna beutat."
>
> (lines 1920–27)

> [The princess was like a dumb thing; she could not speak for shame. Guilhem went alone into the chamber and saw that her body was as unmarked, bright, and fresh as crystal. He said, "By my faith, you are lacking in no aspect of beauty."]

Guilhem can look at Englantina's body without feeling erotic desire, as if she were made of translucent stone, but she cannot listen to the verbal description of his beauty without being provoked into lustful feelings. Guilhem is re-presented to her, no longer as her husband's virtuous proxy, but as a potential lover who has been carefully kept enclosed and inaccessible by the king, "El ha nom Guilhem de la Barra, / el sieu castel que gent se sarra / de murs de marmet tot entorn." Guilhem initially refuses to set foot in the king's palace on the grounds that his children had lost their mother a few days before, and are too young to be left alone (lines 2630–33). He is a widower, enclosed in his stone circle, suddenly endowed with the king's temporal powers. After letting the king's messengers admire the crenellations of his castle, Guilhem consents to his new role (lines 2640–41), as if the fortress of his own counsel had already been breached.

Englantina hides her feelings with hypocritical sighs (lines 2738–43) and ensures that Guilhem's proxy legal authority is endorsed by charters before her husband departs (lines 2724–29). The rubric announces that at this legally charged point, the "diverssas adventuras" of Guilhem de la Barra truly commence (Gouiran, 170). He takes immediate precautions by surrounding the king's palace with a palisade of wooden stakes (lines 2760–65) to ensure that no one can enter it save through a single *port* (entry point), on pain of death. Guilhem's attempt to re-create his secure circle at La Barra is in vain, as the queen (whose heart is sufficiently aflame to burn down any palisade) is already set on undermining his security. A month later, she attempts to seduce Guilhem:

La regina li vay mandar
Qu'ela volia parlar am luy,
E que no fossan mas amduy
E sa cambra tot per privat.
Le cavaliers venc de bon grat
Vas la dona quan lo mandec;
En sa cambra totz sols intrec
E vic la sola ses donzela,
E va.s gent sezer delatz ela
Sus la colça le cavaliers,
E fon guays e fon plasentiers;
E la regina que.l regara,
E va.l dir: "Senher de la Barra,
Si.us platz, vos mi daretz .i. do,
E no m'en vulhatz dir de no,
Senher, per la fe que.m tenetz."
"Dona, digay me que voletz,
Qu'ieu faray per vos tota re,
Sol que gardetz ma lïal fe,
E que no.y capía tracïo."
La dona diss: "Mot mi sab bo,
Et yeu diray vos mo voler,
E no.us tengatz a desplazer,
Senh'en Guilhem, so que.us vuelh dir.
El cor m'avetz mes .i. desir
De fin'amor qui.m ven de vos,
Qu'ades vos dic tot ad estros

Que fassatz de mi que.us vulhatz,
E que tant sïatz mos privatz
Cum fora mos maritz si.y fos."

(lines 2774–2803)

[The queen had him come to her, saying she wanted a word and that they should be alone together in her chamber, in secret. The knight came willingly to the lady when she called for him. He entered the chamber alone and found her on her own, without a woman servant. The knight sat down next to her on the cushion, both gaily and attractively. The queen gazed at him and said, "My lord of La Barra, please grant me a gift, and do not say no to me, by the faith you owe me." "My lady, tell me what you wish, for I will do anything for you, as long as you respect my loyalty and do not demand any treason from me." The lady said, "That seems good to me, and I will tell you what I want, and please do not be displeased, Sir Guilhem, by what I want to say to you. You have placed a desire in my heart for *fin'amor,* which comes to me from you. I say to you unreservedly that you may do whatever you want with me, and you may be my intimate man [*mos privatz*] as much as my husband would be, were he here."]

Guilhem is horrified by Englantina's proposition, looks into her face to reject her, and receives a "close" kiss on the mouth for his pains (line 2806). He replies:

Madona, per re
Non o faría, quar la fe
Qu'ay mandada a mo senhor
E la lïaltat e l'amor
Li vuelh tenir e la.y tendray;
Perque.us dic, dona, ses tot play,
Que mais voldría esser mortz.

(lines 2809–15)

[My lady, I would never do this for anything, because I want to maintain the faith, the loyalty, and the love that I have pledged to my lord, and maintain them I shall. So I tell you, my lady, without any discussion, that I would rather die.]

If Englantina has until this point been enacting a narrative of *fin'amors,* she is rudely introduced to Guilhem's contradictory interpretation of her words as the lustful advances of Potiphar's wife. The dialogue is strikingly similar to a section of the Catalan *Genesi de Scriptura,* a digest of biblical narratives that is described in one manuscript of 1451 as a translation from Occitan by a certain Guillem Serra:[20]

> E com Josep era bell hom e sert, donali lo dit rich hom les claus de la sua casa e feulo majordom: e quant vench per temps la muller de Phutifar, la qual hauia nom Meuphitica, enamoras de Josep. E un dia quel senyor fon anat a cassa crida la dona a Josep e feulo entrar en la sua cambra e dixli: tu, Josep, vols hauer be e honor? Respos Josep: madona, si volria en bona manera. Ara, dix ella, tinme secreta de tot ço que jot dire e fe aço que jot manare. Madona, dix Josep, totes coses qui sien fehedores fare. Adonchs dix ella: vull que hages affer ab mi e hauras totes coses que demans. E Josep respos e dix: no ho vulla Deus, madona, que jo fassa aytal cosa, que gran traycio seria; que mon senyor se fia en mi e en mon poder ha mes tot ço del seu. No ho faria, dix Josep, ans ne sofferria mort. (35–36)
>
> [And as Joseph was a handsome and knowledgeable man, the nobleman gave him the keys of his house and made him his chamberlain. And eventually the wife of Potiphar, who was called Meuphitica, fell in love with Joseph. One day, when the lord was out hunting, the lady called for Joseph and made him come into her chamber and said to him, "Joseph, do you want to have possessions and honor?" Joseph replied, "My lady, I would indeed." "Then," she said. "Keep secret everything I will say to you, and do whatever I ask of you." "My lady," said Joseph, "I shall do all the things that may be done." Then she said, "I want you to 'become involved with me,' and you can have anything you ask for." Joseph replied, "God does not want me to do such a thing, my lady, because it would be treason; because my lord has put his trust in me and has put everything he owns in my power. I will not do this." Joseph said, "I would rather suffer death for it."]

The *Genesi de Scriptura* text is quite different from the Vulgate:

> Post multos itaque dies iniecit domina sua oculos suos in Ioseph, et ait: Dormi mecum. Qui nequaquam acquiescens operi nefario, dixit ad

> eam: Ecce, dominus meus, omnibus mihi traditis, ignorat quid habeat in domo sua: nec quidquam est quod non in mea sit potestate, vel non tradiderit mihi, praeter te, quae uxor eius es: quomodo ergo possum hoc malum facere, et peccare in Deum meum? (Gen. 39:7–9)

One husband is away fighting the Saracens, and the other is hunting; both tales set the dialogue in a courtly environment and emphasize that the wife has invited the servant into her private bedchamber; Englantina invites Guilhem to sit on her *colça,* and Meuphitica's marital bed is in the room. This is not said in either the Vulgate or the Qu'ran, but the Vulgate alters the Hebrew text (rendered most often as "Lie with me") to order less directly, "Dormi mecum" (Sleep with me). In the Qu'ran, the wife traps Yusuf by closing the entire house, while in the Vulgate, they find themselves alone together in an unspecified location within the house. The *Genesi de Scriptura* tale has Meuphitica fall in love with the slave, "enamoras," but she requests that he "hages affer ab me," which translates clumsily (perhaps quite crudely) as "concerning" himself with her. Englantina unveils her *cors enflamatz* in terms of courtly *fin'amors* and offers Guilhem a privileged status as her *privatz*. Neither woman is as direct as the wife in Genesis, who simply issues twice her command: "Lie with me." Both Guilhem and Josep interpret the wife's words as a betrayal of their role as the husband's proxy in everything but the sexual sense. Guilhem is acting as regent and has been granted judicial powers, while Joseph may be a slave, but he has been entrusted with the husband's household, and as Mieke Bal points out, a house in biblical terminology signifies both the household (*familia*) and the lineage of Potiphar.[21] Both men protest, quite unlike the Joseph of the Vulgate, that their loyalty and love (*amor*) for their master or king must take precedence. In Genesis, Joseph's relationship is primarily with God, and his belief that it would be sinful to take his master's wife. Neither man expresses or feels any reciprocal desire for the woman.

The *Genesi de Scriptura* and *Guilhem de la Barra* diverge at this point. Meuphitica threatens Joseph with a false accusation: "Sapies, dix ella, que si no ho fas, jo dire al senyor que tu m'has volguda forsar e fare en guisa que ell te auciura. E lauors dix Josep: jo per pahor de mort no fare tan gran engan a mon senyor" (The lady said, "Know that if you do not do it, I will tell the lord that you tried to rape me, and I will make sure he kills you." Then Joseph said, "I would never shame my lord out of fear of death"). Englantina, however, immediately tears her clothes and hair, and cries rape to assemble her men as Guilhem tries to escape from the chamber

(lines 2816–27). Her torn clothing also echoes the next part of the Joseph narrative. In the Vulgate, it is some time after this dialogue that Potiphar's wife finds herself alone again with Joseph and reiterates her request, "Lie with me," grasping his garment (Gen. 39:11–16). He tears himself away from her, leaves his clothing in her hands, and she shows it to the men of the household as evidence that he has attempted to rape her. She also keeps the garment as evidence for her husband's eyes: "And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home" (Gen. 39:16) The *Genesi de Scriptura* translates this detail into a more dramatic accusation:

> E ell, volentse desempatxar de ella e essir de ses mans, desempara son mantel e lexalli e exis de la cambra, e romas elle molt irada e gita lo mantell de Josep sobre lo seu lit e de son marit. E quant lo senyor fon vengut de la cassa troba la dona molt irada e demanali que hauia. E ella dixli: aquel vostro catiu, en que vos tant vos fiats, entra en la mia cambra e volch jaure ab mi per forsa, e quant hoy que vos veniets exi corrent de la cambra: e veus lo mantell que romas sobre lo lit, que nol li lech pendre. Quant lo rich hom hach aço entes, feu metre Josep en la preso. (36)
>
> [Wanting to extricate himself from her grasp and from her hands, he let fall his cloak, left it behind, and left the room; she stayed behind, very angry, and threw the cloak on her, and her husband's, bed. When the lord returned from the hunt, he found the lady very angry and asked her what was the matter. She said, "This captive of yours whom you trust so much came into my chamber and wanted to lie with me, by force, and when he heard that you were coming, he ran out of the chamber. Look at the cloak that was left on the bed, because I did not let him take it." When the nobleman heard this, he had Joseph put in prison.]

It is very likely that the *Genesi de Scriptura* has expanded on the Vulgate text, because the corresponding narrative in the Qu'ran (sura 12:24–35) says that the lustful wife tears the back of Yusuf's shirt as he flees, and it is the evidence of Yusuf's torn clothing on his own body that persuades the husband of his guilt.[22] However, there may well be other sources, for Potiphar's wife is given the intriguing name of Meuphitica, rather than the more common Zuleikha.[23] In the Vulgate, Potiphar's wife accuses Joseph first before the assembled men of the household (as does Englantina) and, second, before her husband.

Guilhem flees to his castle and attempts to close its gates securely (lines 2836–37), but its walls can no longer afford him the same protection. He relates his version of events to his men, omitting the queen's talk of *fin'amors* in favor of a direct reference to the text of Genesis (39:8): "A ma dona venc en plazer / qu'en sa cambra mi fey intrar, / e va.m preguar e va.m mandar / tot obra qu'ab liey mi colques" (My lady saw fit to have me come into her chamber, and she asked and ordered me openly to lie with her) (lines 2858–61). He states that as soon as she began to tear at her clothing and hair, he realized that this was no joke ("yeu no m'o tengui a gab"), and made his escape (lines 2864–69), upon which she ran after him crying rape. Englantina sends word to the king by letter (lines 2874–2907). The king abandons his siege (the narrator comments that the city promptly falls to the Saracens, lines 2908–9) and applies legal process to his attempted prosecution of Guilhem (lines 2910–47).

The Joseph tale functions as an important structural device, in that it separates Guilhem definitively from his king without compromising his loyalty to him. It also should provide the opportunity to reconcile the two men at the poem's close by condemning Englantina for her lies and disruptive sexual advances; after all, Arnaut's fellow Consistory members were familiar with this outcome to the parallel story of the *Set Savis de Roma*. In keeping with this expectation, Guilhem tells his long-lost daughter that he was the victim of attempted rape:

> La regina, de gran plaser,
> me vay en sa cambra sonar
> de guiza que.m volia forssar,
> e vau me tost de liey partir;
> vas la Barra m'en vau fugir,
> et ela diss qu'ieu la forssava
> e son dan que li demandava;
> qu'ieu era senhors de la Barra,
> et ay nom Guillem de la Barra;
> e.l reys me venc essetïar
> e jugar que.m fey a penjar
> sus al portal de mon castel.
>
> (lines 4574–85)

> [The queen took pleasure in calling me into her chamber in order to try to rape me, and I tried to escape from her, to run away to La

> Barra. And she said that I was trying to rape her, and asking her to do something harmful to her, for I was the lord of La Barra, and my name is Guilhem de la Barra. The king besieged me and condemned me to be hanged above my castle gates.]

The two terms "que.m volia forssar" and "qu'ieu la forssava" show that Guilhem narrates Englantina's allegedly pleasurable actions (to her) as sexual violence. He flees to his castle but it in turn is taken by force by the king. Guilhem's association of the castle with his chastity becomes explicit at the poem's close. He returns to La Barra to admire the "vila d'obra talhada, / al noble castel de la Barra, / le quals de nobles murs se ssara / totz de marmetz espessamens" (the town built from carved stones, the noble castle of La Barra, which is enclosed by noble walls of thick marble) (lines 4696–99). He tells the assembled bourgeois that in his opinion such a fine marble fortification, with such fine crenellations, should belong to one lord alone, not to two (lines 4716–25). The townspeople have gathered, it seems, partly because these foreign visitors are of a foreign tongue ("foron de estranh lingage" [line 4715]), so Guilhem's description of his own castle, disguised as a foreign visitor, allows them to express opinions they have concealed. Accordingly, one of the bourgeois delivers a lengthy panegyric to the castle's lost lord (lines 4732–61), as he agrees that the king of la Serra has merely appropriated the castle through war (lines 4730–31). Guilhem's virtues (including his good looks, amorousness, loyalty, and charming conversation) make him the rightful lord of such a fine fortress. However, it is not Guilhem's described attractions that win his cause, but the threat delivered by messengers to the king of la Serra that if he does not restore this "little castle" (*castelet*) to his former vassal, his subjects will be massacred by foreign troops (lines 4852–71). Guilhem's beauty and virtues are described once again, this time in terms of nostalgia, and provoking only the chaste *amor* of his subjects. The bourgeois' description allows the queen's misdeed to be revisited and brought to an end, "quar per liey se moc l'ataïna, / e per liey se fara la patz" (for the quarrel arose through her, and through her peace will be restored) (lines 4878–79).

However, the poem does not end quite as neatly as this may promise. Far from denying the erotic bond that was established at the opening through Guilhem's role as the king's proxy in the English court, and far from punishing the queen for her false accusation, Arnaut Vidal binds the two into an adulterous relationship that goes beyond *fin'amors*. Both the bourgeois and the king ask Englantina to forgive Guilhem for his presumed crime,

and she agrees to see him, because she still loves him (lines 4916–17). This allows her to confess that she made a false accusation purely in order to test his loyalty to his king (lines 4969–83) and to see Guilhem to ask him for his forgiveness, even though she still desires him (lines 5116–25). Again, there is no sign that Guilhem feels the slightest desire for the queen. The erotic desire is purely hers. The two are reconciled and ride into la Serra together, "speaking about both the present and the past" (line 5130). Finally they process into La Barra, back to Guilhem's castle, and the narrator notes with irony, "Latz e latz venc ab la regina / e dic vos que fo bel parelh" (Side by side he went with the queen, and I tell you, they made a fine pair), as the queen, "joguan rizen" (playfully smiling), invites the king to make his public gesture of affection in restoring the castle to his vassal by receiving the collective oath of the townspeople. La Barra is given commune status by the king. In an ultimate gesture of ironic reversal, Guilhem's son leaves to take up his role as the adoptive son and heir of the king of Armenia, and Guilhem, now childless and freed of his responsibility toward La Barra, leaves for England to become a favored champion and, eventually, duke of Guyenne. No sooner is Guilhem's beloved fortress restored to him than he appears to lose control of it, as both it and his son free themselves from his authority. He appears to return to his own *enfances* as an unmarried knight in the court where he first gazed chastely on Englantina's then uncorrupted body, and it is there that he wins both knightly honors and eventually a duchy of his own, much as he would have done had he won Englantina's hand for himself as a knight errant. Except, and this appears to be the point, he has never desired Englantina's love.

Arnaut Vidal closes *Guillem de la Barra* with an ironic twist that makes this fourteenth-century Languedocian Joseph ultimately the recipient of the lands and near-marital love of Potiphar's English wife, while her husband simply disappears from the narrative. If, as I suggested, the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife was one of the sources for the tale, it is altered and rewritten in terms of other narratives. One of these is Guilhem's cherished fortress of La Barra. La Barra is not associated with pride. Rather, it symbolizes Guilhem's virtues, their physical (aesthetic) strength but also their fragility. Joseph's beauty (which was important in both Jewish and Islamic exegesis as a sign of his high spiritual status) is both a guarantor of his high status in Potiphar's house and the cause of his momentary downfall at the hands of the wife. La Barra's marble walls appear to ensure Guilhem's chaste distance from the corrupting environment of La Serra, but they do not resist the queen's manipulative influence, and they cannot protect him when the

false accusation is formulated. When the fortress is said to be designed for the rule of a single lord, not two, it proclaims the virtues of loyalty and monogamy that Joseph and Guilhem seek to defend. However, the castle is restored to the equally handsome Guilhem only in order to become affranchised, ruled by the bourgeois who have ensured that Guilhem, and not the king, should own it.

The morality of the kingdom of La Serra disintegrates throughout the narrative, until by its close, the characters appear to have no grounding for their actions except in their collective nostalgia for the actions of the past and a belief in beauty as an index of virtue. As Mieke Bal has said in her recent thought-provoking book, *Loving Yusuf,* Potiphar's wife is received in almost every tradition and every literature as an emblematic misogynous stereotype: she is a predatory, lustful object in Potiphar's house, who endangers Joseph's secure position in his master's love and trust. Englantina adopts a quite different position by being caught in an ambiguous erotic relationship with Guilhem at the outset and developing into his consort in every sense but the sexual one by the end of the romance. It is through her continued and unreciprocated love that Guilhem ends the romance as the first duke of Guyenne. Arnaut associates himself with Guilhem, and implicitly with Joseph, as the wronged victim of unspecified accusations, and this narrative of dispossession and partial restoration of lands has a powerful political and religious dimension for both him and Sicart de Montaut. Ultimately, it seems to conclude that allying oneself cautiously with Potiphar's wife may well provide the necessary route to peace and to other lands, while the lost castles of the present remain forever in the hands of other rulers.

Finally, how does the use of the tale of Joseph and Potiphar's wife connect with the treatment of languages at the start of *Guilhem de la Barra*? According to Shalom Goldman, in some Jewish postbiblical texts, Joseph pretends to be unable to understand the Egyptian woman's words (this may be a source for the stepson's mute refusal of the empress's advances in the *Set Savis*). In others, Joseph's status as an interpreter of dreams includes his knowledge of many (sometimes all seventy) of the languages of the world; as Goldman points out, "A knowledge of many languages was seen as a sign of holiness and power" throughout the ancient Near East.[24] However, Guilhem de la Barra remains monolingual, despite his twenty-four years of exile. At the start of the poem, he converts through actions because he can only gloss a Latin inscription in the vernacular, and cannot enter into direct dialogue with the lord of Malleo. He travels through England and other far-off lands without interpreters, perhaps because the poem presents Christendom as a

monolingual environment. Yet these monolingual words in the kingdom of La Serra prove misleading, seductive, and unreliable, and the nonnoble citizens of La Barra identify their Armenian visitors as a curiosity because they are people "of another language." Guilhem may play at being Joseph through his narrator's intertextual work, but he cannot emulate his later career as a powerful interpreter either of languages or of dreams. Guilhem remains tied to an unreliable overlord, striving to maintain and to re-create a protective enclosure for his lineage in a Christianized world that seems bereft of any ethical grounding, where conversion is the product of force and deceit, and false accusations may never be punished. His only resort is to ally himself with his worst enemy, the queen, and to seek an alternative home in exile. While the confusion of Babel has apparently been canceled by the tongues of fire at Pentecost, these tongues would seem to be those that were associated with the spectacular punishments that were organized by Bernard Gui in Toulouse in the years during which the poem was written: not the fiery tongues of multilingual preaching, nor the fires of *fin'amors,* but burning tongues of real flame and the red cloth tongues of false accusation.