

IN MEDIEVAL RHETORIC, *translatio* refers to interpretation and glossing, the transfer of meaning from one word to another. It also has the sense of the usurpation of either meaning or power, and by this gloss, the translator may be seen trying to seize control of a place or of a text.¹ As Catalan literary prose developed in the royal chancery and households during the last quarter of the fourteenth century, translation became the means of forging a new literary idiom. Latin treatises and chronicles, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* and *Corbaccio* were all translated into Catalan by members of the royal households of Pere IV (1319–87), Joan I (1387–96), and Martí I l'Humà (1397–1410).²

Translation has an ambiguous relationship with multilingualism. It requires the intervention of at least one person in possession of several languages, but it invokes an intended reader who is, by definition, monolingual. The translator's complex task is to render a text in a credible and legible form for a reader who may not know about the original text's cultural or literary context. Lawrence Venuti has commented at length on the phenomenon of "domestication," by which he means those choices that are made to select a particular foreign work from many others, then to either omit or maintain cultural markers within that text, and finally to render the base text in a particular dialect or register. Canon formation and cultural stereotyping are both involved in the process of literary translation. Venuti emphasizes also that domestication is not coterminous with assimilation; a text may be appropriated by the varied domestic audience in ways that are subversive of the dominant ideologies: "Translation is scandalous because it can create different values and practices, whatever the domestic setting."³ Venuti proposes an "ethics of translation" that would work across borders to create an "intercultural" identity, "not merely in the sense of straddling two cultures, domestic and foreign, but crossing the cultural borders among domestic audiences."⁴ Venuti is concerned with translation from one language into another (usually English). Much translation in the

later Middle Ages either worked through more than two languages at a time or used a combination of oral and written work.

There are instances of direct, solitary translation. In 1389 and 1390, King Joan I and Violant sent out letters urgently requesting copies of Guillem Nicolau's rumored translation of Ovid's *Heroides*.⁵ Nicolau produced his own translation and gloss; others worked in teams for pragmatic reasons. According to Carlos Alvar, Alonso de Cartagena recounts the method he used with Juan Alfonso de Zamora in 1422 for translating the ninth and tenth books of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* into Castilian: one man translated orally from the Latin text into Castilian, as the other wrote it down.⁶ This was because Juan Alfonso de Zamora knew very little Latin. He also had a weak command of Catalan, so his translation into Castilian of Antoni Canals's Catalan version of Valerius Maximus's *Facta et dicta memorabilia* (1418–19) was produced with a collaborator who checked a copy of the Latin text.⁷ Such indirect networks of translation are not uncommon, especially with works that had been glossed and translated by many others. Alfonso Gómez de Zamora produced a Castilian Orosius (c. 1439) from Pedro de Parmerola's Aragonese version of an Italian translation by Bono Giamboni (1291).⁸ Nor was the movement solely from Latin into the vernacular, as Antoni Ginebreda's Catalan version of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (c. 1390) was translated back into Latin in 1476.⁹

A further issue in translation is the context into which the translator placed the work. Alain Chartier's *Belle Dame sans mercy* (1424) was translated into Catalan by Francesc Oliver (before 1457). One marginal note shows that either this translator or a scribe identified one particular passage as a translation of Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* and furnished the relevant section of that text in Catalan.¹⁰ This is a very seductive example of a particular aspect of "domestication." We might assume that the translator worked from Chartier to the Catalan text without consulting other works, but in fact, he was actively reading the French poem in terms of a Tuscan prose narrative that would not appear to be directly relevant. The Catalan audience for Chartier read the poem in terms of an established literary canon predicated on Boccaccio; similarly, Ferran Valentí refers to Boccaccio's *Fiammetta* and *Corbaccio* on a par with classical works in his preface to his translation of Cicero's *Paradoxa stoicorum*.¹¹

Translations may be "scandalous" in other ways as well. While other parts of Europe in the same period began to police the translation of the Bible into the vernacular on suspicion of heresy, Castilian and Catalan translators came under pressure to translate from Latin, rather than from Hebrew,

scripture. Violant; her husband, Joan I; and his brother Martí commissioned and owned translated Bibles between the years 1400 and 1427. By the mid-to late fifteenth century, however, translated Bibles that included the Old Testament were destroyed by inquisitors, on suspicion that they were translated from Hebrew.¹² Similarly, Carlos Alvar has commented on the implausibly small number of Muslim names (only two out of fifty) that he collated as authors of fifteenth-century translations.¹³

In this chapter I will address three texts that make explicit the tensions of translation. First, Bernat Metge's *Lo Somni* shows how gender and borders are used to figure the complex work of rendering multiple sources from Latin and Tuscan in Catalan prose. In the second part, I examine a trilingual text, the anonymous *História de l'amat Frondino e de Brisona*, with a view to asking how a culture that privileges monolingualism as an ideological goal can produce such a work. I close my enquiry with a short consideration of a later French manuscript that has no text, only images.

Lo Somni

Bernat Metge (c. 1340/46–1413) is a key figure in the development of Catalan prose literature. He inserts translated fragments of Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* in his verse *Libre de Fortuna e Prudència* (internally dated to 1381). He also translated the Pseudo-Ovidian *De vetula* (*Ovidi enamorat*, before 1388) and Petrarch's tale of Griselda (dated 1388). In the turmoil surrounding the catastrophic end to the reign of Joan I (and probably when he was indicted as a prominent member of the late king's corrupt circle of advisers), Bernat Metge composed an intriguing and complex text, the *Somni* (The Dream).¹⁴ The *Somni* (completed by April 1399) directs a dazzling display of Metge's erudition at his new king, Martí, in the hope of gaining readmission to the royal court.¹⁵ As Stefano Cingolani has demonstrated at length, Metge's work inserts lengthy extracts of a Catalan version of Boccaccio's *Corbaccio* into a work that borrows its consolation narrative from Boethius and places the most extensive Boccaccian passages in the mouth of the mythological figure of Tiresias.

Synopsis

Book 1: Metge falls asleep in prison and dreams that he is visited by the ghost of King Joan I and his two companions, the blind seer Tiresias and

the musician Orpheus. The king and his erstwhile servant discuss the immortality of the soul. Metge presents a skeptical, epicurean point of view and the king disproves it, citing classical and biblical authorities. Book 2: Metge asks the king how he died, but receives no exact reply. Joan narrates the debate staged between Satan and the Virgin Mary over his sins and says that he has been condemned to dwell in Purgatory until the end of the papal schism, despite his well-received endorsement of the Immaculate Conception. Book 3: Orpheus tells his story (taken from Ovid). Tiresias berates Metge for finding such stories pleasurable and rails against the frailty of love and women. Orpheus then describes the torments of Hell, and Tiresias tells his own story in an attempt to cure Metge's delusions, but their dialogue slips once more into a misogynistic tirade on his part. Tiresias urges Metge to believe that his mistress is unfaithful. Book 4: A downcast Metge defends women by citing exemplary women (including the new queen, Maria de Luna) and criticizing men, but Tiresias believes that he has won the debate. As dawn breaks, the three visitors fade away and the prisoner is left in gloomy isolation.

All four protagonists are liminal figures, placed in the borderland between sleep and awakening that is traditional in dream visions. The protagonist wishes to be freed from the spiritual burden of his involvement in his former king's sudden death, but he is not as yet freed from its political aftermath. He wants to love his mistress as a lover should, but he cannot resist feeling the negative impact of Tiresias's scornful comments. The king's soul inhabits a borderland between the damned and the blessed both because of his sudden death and his support for the Schism during his lifetime. He devotes most of book 1 to defending the very idea that his soul could have survived his death, and book 2 to describing the trial it has endured in the other world. He is further tormented by the constant presence of an irritable old man and an irritating minstrel. Orpheus has visited the underworld while he was still alive and acts as the mouthpiece for a description of Hell and its torments. He describes a loving devotion to his wife that leads him to reject the love of all women and to die at their hands. Tiresias is placed in between masculine and feminine identities. He draws on his personal experience of living as a woman to urge his listeners to avoid any relationship with women at all. The text is equally divided, replete with quotations from existing translations, translations from Latin and Tuscan, and allusions to other texts.

The *Somni* is uneven in part because it falls into two very different halves. The first two books are concerned with immediate spiritual and political

matters relating to the king's death, and the second two are catalogs of commonplaces in the *querelle des femmes*, framed by mythical narratives. Book 1 contains translations of extracts from Cicero, Aristotelian treatises, and Patristic writings. Book 2 cites Petrarch, as do books 3 and 4, which also draw heavily on Boccaccio. Metge's dialogue with Tiresias in books 3 and 4 clearly parodies that between Boethius's protagonist and his Philosophy, and it dominates the second half of the *Somni*. There is surely a new layer of irony in the misogynistic seer's adoption of a role allotted to this most famous of feminine allegorical personifications. Given the abrupt contrast between the two halves, it is tempting to argue that Metge uses traditional material concerning men's attitudes toward women to develop ideas that were already present in books 1 and 2. This is all the more likely because of the sudden introduction in book 3 of the married protagonist's doubts concerning his mistress, which appear to bear no relation to the theological musings of the political prisoner in books 1 and 2. I would argue that Metge uses gender as an accessible medium in which he can explore more complex ideas concerning authority and control in translation.

In book 4, Tiresias delivers an attack on women based on his personal experience of being a woman. He underlines their patronage of both languages and literature:

De venitat han axí plen lo cap, que impossible és que t ho pogués tot dir;
emperò diré't ço que me'n recorde. Elles entenen ésser en gran felicitat
haver molt delicament e loçania, e saber parlar diverses lengatges, recorda
moltes cançons e novas rimades, al·legar dits de trobadors e las *Epístolas*
de Ovidi, recitar les ystòrias de Lançelot, de Tristany, del rey Artús e de
quants amorosos són stats a lur temps; argumentar, offender, deffendre
e rahonar un fet, saber bé respondre a aquells qui de amor les enqueren,
haver les galtes ben plenas e vermellas, e grossas anques e grossos pits.

[Their heads are so full of vanity that it is impossible to tell you all of it, but I will tell you what I remember. They are very happy when they get a great deal of flirting and praise, speak several languages, recall many *cançons* and *noves rimades*, know the tales of troubadours and Ovid's *Heroides*, recite the stories of Lancelot, of Tristan, of King Arthur, and of all lovers who have existed since their time; when they are arguing, proffering, defending, and reasoning a fact, when they can reply well to whoever asks them for their love, [and] when they have cheeks that are round and red, big buttocks, and big breasts.]

Tiresias's speech is already evidence of this patronage, because it is adapted from the antifeminist rants of Boccaccio's notoriously unreliable narrator in the *Corbaccio*.¹⁶ The pleasure to be found in knowing several languages is embedded in this translated citation of a Tuscan text, placed in the mouth of a figure borrowed from classical literature. Tiresias's words allude to the literary passions of the court of Joan I and his second wife, Violant de Bar.¹⁷

The *Somni*'s defense of women is an extended display of Metge's already well-known skills as a translator. Tiresias cites Boccaccio to attack women, and much of the protagonist's defense of women is translated from Petrarch's *Familiars*. This includes praise of those women who invented writing, wrote poetry, and knew languages, such as "Proba, the wife of Adelphus, who was expert in Latin and Greek and other languages" (328). Metge adds a reference to his own translation of Petrarch's tale (itself a translation) of Griselda, "la istòria de la qual fou per mi de latí en vulgar transportada" (the tale of whom was translated by me from Latin into the vernacular). He claims that it is now so famous that women recite the tale by night and when they are spinning by the fire. It seems that women may provide an audience for the works of Petrarch if a translator is willing to accommodate their wishes. Of course, this is ironic. Petrarch's Latin text was a translation of Boccaccio's tale, and Metge's contribution seems to have been to restore a moralizing, slightly allegorical Latin rendering back to the vernacular to the point that it appeals to oral storytellers.¹⁸ Metge's paradoxical praise of "his" Griselda echoes Tiresias's words, in that he dismisses the intellectual and social value of his women patrons at the same time as he acknowledges their role in making him a famous author. This is especially intriguing with respect to the complex treatment of women readers in the Griselda tradition. The ideal reader and transmitter of the tale might well be an uneducated peasant woman, in line with its humble heroine, but Metge's dedicatee, Isabel de Guimerà, was a prominent female member of the bibliophile royal court and it is debatable if she would have found such an association attractive, unless it was intended to amuse her. After all, Metge had framed his *Valter e Griselda* with his version of Petrarch's prefatory words, urging his women readers not to seek to emulate the peasant martyr, but to view the tale figuratively as a spur to greater virtue in themselves (118). Were a noblewoman to transmit the tale while spinning at her hearth, her actions would reveal the superficiality of her reading of it, as she would have resorted to masquerading as Valter's humble wife.

Tiresias is also a turbulent figure for the sexual and literary politics of the *Somni*. He appears in several myths as a figure of interruption and unwelcome

knowledge.¹⁹ Tiresias interrupts two snakes as they are mating and is punished by being turned into a woman. Seven years later, she is restored to her original male form when she witnesses yet another pair of snakes mating. Tiresias is invited to arbitrate in a debate between Juno and Jupiter (who are in bed, making love) over whether women enjoy sexual intercourse more than men. He reveals Juno's secret knowledge that women take more pleasure than men, and she blinds him. The blind seer of the *Somni* interrupts Metge's theological conversation with the shade of the king to forbid any insight into future events (specifically the deeds of royal women) and later breaks into Orpheus's account of his mythical adventures to sneer at the musician's naive faith in heterosexual love. Metge protests Tiresias's interruptions of his pleasure both in a debate and as an audience. This stresses that Tiresias's main function is not, as he believes, to disenchant his listener (Tiresias repeatedly confuses his role with that of Boethius's Philosophy), but to interrupt pleasurable encounters between male and female, narrator and listener, or two interlocutors. Metge in turn identifies the seer's crude behavior as masculine. He sets women's good taste in troubadour poetry against men's dubious affection for the lower uses of rhetoric:

Dançes e cançons dius que escolten les donas ab gran plaer. No m'en meravell, car natural cosa és prendre delit en músicha, e especialment que sia mesclada ab retòrica e poesia, que concorren sovén en les dançes e cansons dictates per bons trobadors. Poch se adeliten los hòmens en oyr semblants cosas, les qual deurien saber per fer fugir ociositat e per poder dir bé lo concebiment de lur pensa. Mas deliten-se molt en oyr truffadors, scarnidors, raylladors, mals parlers, cridadors, avolotadors, jutyardors e migensers de bacallarias e de viltats. (368)

[You say women listen to *dansas* and *cançons* with great pleasure. I'm not surprised, for it is a natural thing to take delight in music, especially if it is mixed with rhetoric and poetry, which come together often in the *dansas* and *cançons* recited by good troubadours. Men do not take much pleasure in hearing such things, [things] that they should know about to dispel idleness and to express their thoughts well in words. Instead, they delight in listening to tricksters, mockers, jeerers, slanderers, shouters, liars, gamblers, and the fomenters of quarrels and ruin.]

The troubadour Orpheus, armed with his rote and devoted to his lady, has described himself as a man devoted to music and rhetoric. It is Tiresias who

finds pleasure in discordant aggression. Interestingly, this passage echoes Bernat Metge's letter on behalf of Joan I, published in 1393 to order the citizens of Barcelona to host a poetry competition modeled on the Toulouse *Consistori de la Gaia Sciencia*.²⁰ Metge says on that occasion that men should cultivate poetry in the vernacular to avoid idleness, as well as to find entertainment.

Book 2 of the *Somni* describes Orpheus's successful performance before an all-female consistory of Furies, Fates, and goddesses. It seems that somehow the Toulouse school, as it was translated into Bernat Metge's multilayered text, hit a curious translation problem. What Metge seems to be doing is redefining the all-male Toulouse poetic school and competition by aligning himself with "feminine" tastes. Through Tiresias's paradoxical claims and Orpheus's troubadour activity, it emerges that women are the multilingual and educated patrons of good music, poetry, and narrative. They form the ideal audience for multilingual, educated authors such as Metge, but they are also the weak link in a system of secular patronage that was attacked (most famously by Eiximenis) for its sinful frivolity.²¹ Femininity is problematic in the *Somni* because what is feminized is literary patronage itself. Metge, the protagonist, is the translator of a tale that has found success among women, he enjoys female patronage, and he hopes that his return to favor will be marked by further success among noblewomen such as the new queen, María de Luna.

The development of Catalan literary culture could be envisaged as a strikingly explicit agonistic process, in which language, genre, and authors are set up in lively new dialogues. Metge's Tiresias struggles to master some form of language that may enable him/her to narrate the experience of having been a woman. Paradoxically, the only cultural register that is available to the blind seer is the tradition of comic misogyny. Metge furnishes him with an example of that discourse that is both decontextualized and misinterpreted, as Tiresias ventriloquizes not the words of a learned sage, but those of a grossly unreliable narrator. Regina Psaki has underlined the recent critical consensus that the *Corbaccio* is an ironic work that plays on male fears of women's "secret knowledge."²² Tiresias's mythical role is to provide unwanted insight for men into that secret experience, and it is for that reason that Juno strikes him blind. Metge's Tiresias can do no more than repeat ancient commonplaces concerning women's frivolity and cosmetics, but his words overlap with those of serious misogynists such as Eiximenis. Psaki makes the important point that "when an author carefully contextualizes certain utterances to rob them of all validity, but an audience persists in reading them straight, we have the literalist habit of misreading which makes of *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, a racist book."²³ Metge's selective quotations from the *Corbaccio* turn the *Corbaccio*

into the misogynous sermon that (according to Psaki) it may be undermining. In so doing, he makes the process of cultural “domestication” in translation explicit. Despite the multiple layers of Tiresias’s utterances, he remains stubbornly (and deludedly) “monolingual,” insisting that his stereotypes about femininity are empirically based rather than part of a literary tradition.

Metge’s knowing translations in the *Somni* are eclectic, displaying the author’s learning and what Rosi Braidotti terms “nomadism.” Braidotti rests her theory of nomadic reading on the critical distance from patriarchal language that is afforded by the simultaneous experience of several idioms: “The polyglot is a variation of the theme of critical nomadic consciousness; being in between languages constitutes a vantage point in deconstructing identity.”²⁴ It is this concept of the “being in between” that seems to emerge with Metge’s Tiresias. His words, traversed as they are by a multiplicity of texts and languages, establish an essential critical distance from their content. Semantically, Tiresias’s misogyny becomes the words of an identity so complex that it cannot be fully invested with authority, an illustration of Braidotti’s key idea of “a difference within the same culture.” Cultures of translation are acutely aware that, in Braidotti’s words, “the polyglot has no vernacular, but many lines of transit, of transgression.” In the *Somni*, women as both readers and linguists are constructed through several clashing discourses as objects of a mixture of fascination and horror, viewed as the containers for multiple voices, or as empty vessels that may be filled with a tale such as that of Griselda without being capable of doing more than passing it on. However, their discernment in matters of language and expression is praised, to the point that even the Furies are invested with emotional responses to Orpheus’s music. Metge uses gender conflict to highlight the cultural conflicts that are usually concealed in a translation and, in so doing, points out the intercultural polyphony that constructs his text. Venuti proposes that if translators maintain awareness of the foreignness of their texts, “culture is not viewed as monolithic or unchanging, but as a shifting sphere of multiple and heterogeneous borders where different histories, languages, experiences, and voices intermingle amid diverse relations of power and privilege.”²⁵

História de l’amat Frondino e de Brisona

Where fragments remain of a multilingual context for literary production, it is sometimes tempting to prescribe a single language as the dominant one and to ignore the possibility that language choice may carry an ideological

or didactic element. Homi Bhabha's writings on colonial oppression point to the development of a "third space" within national cultures, a "cultural space . . . where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences."²⁶ This borderline existence is, I would argue, where such multilingual texts can find voice. If Metge's Tiresias deconstructs the illusory nature of monolingualism at its most triumphant, in the form of a unified prose work, other texts may point out explicitly that they are the products of a multilingual environment.

The trilingual *História de l'amat Frondino e de Brisona* (c. 1400) uses a simple narrative to frame its sophisticated play on language and genre.²⁷ It offers no narratorial comment on the use of several languages in this text. Each language is confined to its generic frame. The tale's narrative sections are composed in *noves rimades* (octosyllabic rhyming couplets) in a hybrid Occitan-Catalan.²⁸ Its *rondeaux* and *virelais* are in French, and its letters are in Catalan prose. In the following summary of the text, I have labeled the Occitan-Catalan narrative verse N, the French lyric element L, and the Catalan prose P:

(N) Frondino, a squire (line 35), loves the noble lady Brisona (lines 43–45). He asks her permission to go on crusade, and she asks him to swear to wear black and green for her sake (she will do this too): "Ayço faras, / amics: tu portaras / le neyr e.l vert per mi, / ez eu per tu axi" (lines 193–96).

(L) They exchange two poems in writing (hers is on black paper, written in "refined" blue ink. "scrit sus neyr papier / ab color de blau fi." (lines 244–45).

(N) Two years later, he returns and finds out from gossips that she has been unfaithful. The gossips' allegations come in a letter that is not cited.

(P) He writes her, accusing her of forgetting him, and appends a mournful *rondeau* (L).

(N) Narrative link.

(P) She replies that she is innocent, thinks about him often, and appends a poem too (L).

(N) Narrative link.

(P) Brisona says his letters enable her to imagine his presence when she is alone.

(L) She appends a *rondeau*.

(N) Narrative link.

(P) Frondino replies with a letter in which he develops a dual theme of speech and food and claims that he is simultaneously “eaten up inside” and starving.

(L) He appends a rondeau.

(N) Narrative link.

(P) She replies in kind and says she is “choked,” so that her mouth can only emit sighs. She needs to see him in person because (a) she can no longer write rhetorically because of her intense emotion and (b) she’s ruined the paper and ink with her tears and is so blinded that she can no longer write.

(N) Frondino meets up with Brisona. Reunion.

The N sections depict a conventional tale of decorous lovers who exchange vows, poems, and tokens, but Frondino confronts the possibility that Brisona might be less courtly than she seems. Brisona sends to Frondino her first rondeau, written in blue ink on black paper. This medium (not reproduced on the page) hints at her inadequate authority, for she has composed a French song that expresses her emotions, but she needs to add a visual emblem of her loyalty. Moreover, blue ink on black paper might well be illegible, but Brisona’s letter might not be designed to be read by Frondino, as it supports a song. The black paper functions as a visual token of the emotion that is represented in turn by the poem, especially given Brisona’s later claims that writing and reading involve visual hallucination (*meditatio*) (111–13).

When he reads the gossips’ allegations, Frondino writes to her claiming that his anguish has caused him to unbind the tongue of the lover, who should always be tongue-tied before his lady. This letter claims to bring an end to silence, but it highlights a problem: if Frondino has been “tongue-tied” beforehand, were his written and spoken words false? The prose letter, then, appears to represent Frondino’s direct communication with Brisona, addressing her as *tu* and presenting his complaints one by one. He explains his decision to write by saying that he is incapable of weeping out his emotions, because he is a *ferm amador* who should not weep. So Frondino’s letter aims to supplant the lover’s previously inarticulate and emotionally repressed behavior.

In the narrative section, Brisona’s reaction to his letter is to weep, before she replies to him by letter. Is she then not a “ferm amadora”? If she has put her reaction into tears, words should be unnecessary. What she does is to complain that Frondino’s letter, not his rondeau, seeks to rename her by claiming that she is “falsa e desconexent amadora,” when she would rather

he persisted in naming her a “leyal e ferma amiga tua” (84). She demands that he writes her more pleasantly, to show deference to her fidelity, and to comfort her with his written presence (84–85). Brisona’s next letter expands on the problematic role of the letter as a questionable substitute for an absent lover. She plays on the letter as a cell of memory, which gives her the opportunity to meditate alone on her love from afar, while insinuating that her solitary state was made more painful still, as she found herself “desolada e trista” (86–88).

The narrative says Frondino reads and rereads the “lletra plasent” sent by Brisona (lines 377–79). He sends her by messenger something he hopes is a “clearer” message. What follows is the most dense and strained metaphor of the text. He addresses her as his beloved “sister.” He says that their separation has caused his heart to split into several parts within his body, to the extent that bystanders could hear his insides grinding (“cruixents”) like sea rolling over ground. Not content with emitting loud crunching, his body is starved of the “vianda” provided by his gazing upon her beauty in his mind. His limbs can now no longer bear to lift food to his mouth, which is just as well because his mouth is emitting the sighs of his heart, “vianda amargosa qui passa per mes estretes dents ab algunes sordes e tristes veus planyents” (bitter food that passes through my clenched teeth with some downcast and miserable wailings) (89). He is simultaneously starving himself of Brisona’s “food” and vomiting his own internal (emotional) “food.” So, he adds, she should take pity on his aching, sleep-deprived head and let him see her. The French poem makes its point far more simply:

Le gran desir que jay puyse veoyr
 Ma douce dame
 Si duramant mon doulant cuer afflame,
 Que nuyt et jour me fayt playndre et gemir.

(lines 390–93)

[The great desire I have to see my sweet lady so harshly kindles my suffering heart that it makes me lament and wail both by day and by night.]

Both lovers’ letters include ever more sophisticated metaphors for their unhappy love. It is as if Frondino’s attempt to be clear were sucked into an ever more symbolic epistolary frame. Brisona asks him to read her letters several times, as she does his. They are engaged in *ruminatio*, and their

purpose is to incorporate the letters into their minds and hearts. She has, she says, taken to her bed: “Pensament disseca mon cors e gasta mos membres, així com la forts llima d’acer gasta lo ferre moll” (Sad thoughts desiccate my heart and whittle my limbs, like the strong steel file thins down soft iron) (92). She cannot dispel idleness by doing handiwork, because her limbs are tied by her emotional state. In her case, food cannot enter her body; her throat is tight and her stomach is tired. Her mouth will not ingest food either for it will only emit sighs from her heart. If Brisona cannot work with her hands, she cannot write. Unlike Frondino, she draws attention to the fact that limbs are needed to write letters. Her thinking in bed is also connected to *meditatio*, the process of written composition. She puts an end to the correspondence in her last letter. In this, she orders him to stop the letters and to speak to her in person: he must come to see her, in daylight, so she can see his face. Brisona seems to call attention at this point to the deceptiveness of any written language. She adds:

Frondino, si lo dictat d’aquesta lletra no et sembla meu, per tal cum no he gardada en dictar alguna manera de retòrica, segons que he acostumat, creure pots que sí és, mas la gran cuita ab què e volia escriure mos treballs m’ha feita venir en plor qui m’ha torbat lo cap, tant que no he gardada ciència a fer ma lletra. E si la trobes tort escrita o pus mal que no solia escriure, no t’en maravelles, car la multitud de l’aiga qui m’eixia plorant dels ulls me torbava la vista e anul.lava lo paper, perquè la tinta s’hi estenia massa, mas bons me seran aitals plors, ab que et veia. (128)

[Frondino, if the style of this letter does not look like mine, it is because I did not take care as I wrote with any kind of rhetoric, as I would usually do, you can believe it is mine, but the great suffering with which I wanted to write down my sufferings has made me weep; this has disturbed my head so much that I have not considered learning in writing my letter. And if you find it to be written badly, or worse than I used to write, do not be surprised, for the many tears that streamed from my eyes disturbed my sight and ruined the paper, for the ink spread out, but these tears will be good for me, with which I will see you.]

Her letter does not include a rondeau. Brisona’s last letter seems to stage a physical language that melts down the possibility of writing altogether.

She says the letter is illegible, so how is the reader to understand the communication between them at this stage? Her sodden paper, with its blurred inks, is in any case highly rhetorical, even as it disclaims any rhetoric, as she develops a metaphor that was initially fed to her by Frondino, so her parting shot that she will see him through her own tears of distress offers an interesting final rejoinder.

Catalan scholars have claimed *Frondino e Brisona* as a key stage in the development of an autonomous literary language, as well as, according to António Cortijo Ocaña, an important early incorporation of the epistolary style in the inception of the *novela sentimental*. The text seems to stage the emergence of a genre from the interaction in Catalan royal circles of several genres: Catalan-Occitan *noves rimades*, French lyric poetry, *prosimetrum* devices borrowed from Machaut's *Livre du Voir Dit* (c. 1363), and the *ars dictaminis*.²⁹ However, I am tempted to avoid concluding that this text is offering three facets to a single tale, providing us with verse narrative, lyric emotion, and epistolary analysis. The text also seems to present the underlying issue that the protagonists and their audience do not regard any of the three languages as their mother tongue. Indeed, Brisona complains to Frondino that when he resorts to Catalan prose, he is giving her a name she finds foreign or strange. She draws attention to the physical work that is involved in letter writing, as well as to the need to compose in a rhetorical, controlled style, even when she claims to be overwhelmed by the language of the body. She has in any case initially commented on the opacity of written language by sending him a poem written in blue ink on black paper.

Frondino believes that he can communicate more clearly through the use of epistolary prose informed by the *ars dictaminis*. Brisona, echoing Bernat Metge's suggestions about women readers, seems to be more receptive to lyric expression than to the alleged clarity of prose. At no moment does any section of the text mention which language is the more immediately accessible to the protagonists. The tale ends with Frondino's body usurping his letter writing by emitting all kinds of indiscreet signs. Her body destroys the letter that she is, in any case, unable to write.

The *novel·la* queries communication on several levels. A reader who is not familiar with one of its three languages would find him- or herself at differing levels of hermeneutic disadvantage, depending on which language proved incomprehensible. The French sections are simple lyric poems, which minimizes their reliance on the reader's semantic understanding, so they may function primarily as shorthand for an erotic message. The Occitan-Catalan narrative verse is grammatically straightforward and may

have been comprehensible also thanks to its simplicity. The Catalan prose, which should have been most accessible to a native speaker of Catalan, is dense, filled with complex imagery. It depends on the reader's recognition of rhetorical features learned from the *ars dictaminis*. Ironically, therefore, in *Fronchino* the apparently straightforward medium of vernacular prose is the language that is made most strange, and the most artificial medium of vernacular courtly lyric becomes the most transparent. In between these two extremes, the hybrid verse narrative in a blend of Occitan and Catalan verse acts as a mediator, the go-between that relays the characters' actions while they write and display their self-absorbed construction of emotional worlds. Occitan-Catalan verse here acts as the vehicular language, deterritorialized and free of associations (at least in principle) with either the royal authority of the Catalan court or the competing literary prestige of French courtiers. It exists in between the two competing idioms and genres, and it appears to do so discreetly, without drawing attention to its function as the prime (indeed, the only) source of information about what actually happens between the two protagonists. The mediating idiom is in fact crucial to the intelligibility of this apparently simple text. If the passages in *noves rimades* were cut, the tale would quite literally fall apart.

The narrative of *Fronchino e Brisona* appears to conclude that visual communication is the only reliable form of language between the two confused lovers. This in turn depends on the reader's ability to imagine several images, those of blue writing on black paper, a sheet of writing that has been made illegible by tears, or the bodily symptoms of anguish exhibited by both protagonists: their disheveled hair, belching guts, or pallor. All three imaginings are highly coded, for a letter may be just as easily blackened by smoke, written signs may equally be dissolved by rainwater or a spillage, and a body may become ill or unkempt for all kinds of reasons. All the reader has to rely on is the pattern of written signs constructed by the three-voiced narrative and (once again) the narrative thread provided mostly by the Occitan-Catalan *noves rimades*.

A Text Without Words

A multilingual context may produce the fantasy that individuals can find voice beyond the diversity of tongues. Ramon Llull's *Llibre de Amic e d'Amat* (c. 1274) expresses the aspirations of an author who sought to use several languages (Catalan, Latin, and Arabic) in order to express ideas that lay beyond speech.³⁰

Cantava lauçell en lo verger de lamat vench lamich qui dix a laucell si
nons entenam per lenguatge entenam nos per amor cor en lot eu cant
se representa a mos hulls mon amat.

[A bird was singing in the garden of the Beloved. The Lover came and
said to the bird: “Even if we cannot understand each other in words,
let us understand each other through love, because in your song, the
image of my Beloved appears before my eyes.”]

An early sixteenth-century manuscript produced in France presents a tale as apparently simple as that of *Fronchino e Brisona* entirely through images. Patricia Stirnemann has given the book the title *Histoire d’amour sans paroles*. It consists of a series of fifteen narrative illuminations, divided into sections by three blank folios, as well as thirteen folios that show either abstract or heraldic designs, some on a black background.³¹ Like the tale of *Fronchino*, seems to be a conventional courtly narrative. A young man who wears a brooch on his hat marked “I”/“J,” appears to pursue a troubled love affair with a woman who is occasionally associated with the motif of a gold wing: “ele”/“L.” The tale of J and L, perhaps Jehan and Louise, or possibly Je and Elle, has not been identified. The book draws attention to the fascinating relationship between narrative images and the viewer’s cultural preconceptions. Mieke Bal has pointed out the radical omissions and oversights (what Venuti would term “the choices”) that result when a viewer reads an image in terms of one canonical narrative. Stirnemann writes that she has presented the book to more than fifty individuals and produced no consensus about its narrative.³² She published the book with the suggestion that the most apposite interpretation for this early sixteenth-century narrative came from Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, who noted that an image of a green bird on a black background (perhaps an attempt at a parakeet) may signify “J’s” infidelity (14v).³³ It would be a visual allusion to the works of Guillaume de Machaut, and this suits both the cultural and the linguistic context of the book reasonably well. The facing folio depicts “L” weeping in her chamber as two women argue with her (15r). Stirnemann’s hypothesis has the advantage of endowing the nonfigurative folios with narrative content as evocative depictions of the characters’ emotions through color and heraldic signs. This would make them the pictorial equivalent of lyric insertions. She does not expand on what these narratives were, but it is intriguing that only one reader (in this instance, a noted Machaut scholar) should have been able to decode this text as an allusion to Machaut.

Green is a color that has many cultural and literary associations. *Fronдино i Brisona's* French rondeaux betray the Aragonese fashion for Machaut around 1400, but black-and-green clothes in that text are treated as tokens of fidelity. In Occitan troubadour poetry green refers to spring, youth, or immaturity. Indeed, French also interpreted green as the color of spring (in lyric genres such as the *reverdie*) or of lechery. Given the possible dating of the manuscript, and the weeping woman on the facing folio, would it not be more likely to allude to the dead parrot of Jean Lemaire de Belges' *Épîtres de l'amant vert* (1505)?³⁴ Despite its very persuasive literary and cultural credentials, there is no firm foundation for interpreting the *Histoire d'amour sans paroles* as a tale of infidelity. Moreover, its illuminations are replete with gray black, gold, red, and blue; and blue, especially, may signify fidelity or even virginity. Furthermore, a non-Francophone reader would find different significations in the lady's apparent association with the emblem of a golden wing, no longer as *aile* signifying *Elle* (Her, She) or perhaps the initial *L* (pronounced like *aile*) for a name such as Louise. In Castilian, *ala* might yield new names or nouns, but would the color gold (*oro*) play a more significant role? An Anglophone reader may resort to heraldry to decode the golden wing. This reader might also have interpreted the bush of red and white roses depicted on one folio (8v) as a heraldic motif alluding to the Tudor rose emblem that was used by King Henry VII after he seized the throne of England in 1485. The date would certainly chime with the possible dating of the manuscript, but it would affect its location, purpose, and (inevitably) narrative, as the most likely candidate for a patron in France would become Henry VII's daughter Mary Tudor in her short marriage to the French king Louis XII in 1514. Stirnemann suggests, in keeping with the dominant hypothesis that this is the emanation of a courtly French milieu, that the varicolored rose bush is an erotic motif derived from the *Roman de la rose*. Both these readings leave other aspects of that particular image unexplored, as the young man is wearing spurs and might be returning from battle, heading to a chivalric *emprise*, or setting off on crusade, as in *Fronдино*.

In folio 11r, an allegorical tower is besieged by "J" and his men (fig. 4). They are scaling the tower on siege ladders, but the heroine's maid is standing next to "J," holding a set of keys. The gold frame contains a statement in French that runs clockwise from the lower left side of the frame: "QVANT. LA.TOUR.NOERRE.SAFOEY.GARDERA.ET.CEUX.QVI.ONT.LES.CLES.LEVR.SERMEN.T. GARDERONT.EN.MOEY.NEST.SOUSY.ET.IAMES.NE.CERA." (Provided the black tower will keep its faith and those who have the keys will keep their sworn promise, I have no concern, and never will.)



Fig. 4 The Lover besieges the Beloved's tower, *Histoire d'amour sans paroles*, Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 338, fol. 11v. © RMN/René-Gabriel Ojéda.

Does this scene depict the lover's attempt to breach the heroine's enclosure by a jealous husband or father, as the literary context of many courtly romances would imply? The first-person statement seems to support this interpretation: the black tower and the keeper of the keys are required to keep their word. Do they, however, keep their word by freeing the woman, or by keeping her enclosed? Worse, my assumption that she is enclosed in the tower derives from the cultural baggage of medieval romance and lyric allegory. Perhaps the tower represents the young man's enclosure; perhaps the words are not his, but those of "L," or even of another, absent, character. Also, French mottoes, *devises*, and phrases were often deployed for purely decorative reasons in court culture of this period. Catalan and Occitan texts play on French *devises* much as the text of *Fronдино* inserts French poems without glossing their words.³⁵ The content of the French writing is far less important than its function as a representation of courtly refinement.

Little else can be concluded from exploring this later and difficult example, but it points to the fragility of narratives when they are robbed of their linguistic key. Even a text that looks like a succession of clichés may prove frustrating or disorientating to the most specialized of readers. *L'Histoire d'amour sans paroles* also draws attention back to the black letter inscribed with blue ink in *Fronдино* and *Brisona*. The *Histoire* includes several folios with a black oblong in a frame (4v; fig. 5). It may be that *Brisona*'s illegible letter denotes the lack of communication between the lovers, perhaps their inability to use three languages and three forms of rhetoric to establish transparent communication with each other. The *novel·la* makes demands on the reader's linguistic and interpretative skills, but it also underlines that these are essentially *learned* discourses and that even the language of the body is in some way acquired and certainly dependent on subjective interpretation. A trilingual text and a text without narrating words can reveal the extent to which reading and viewing are predicated on our "domestication," sometimes unconscious, of a foreign or alien text. They make explicit that fact that the reader (whether monolingual or multilingual) is "not so much the subject of a language as the subject of language."³⁶

The poet and critic Alfredo Arteaga has suggested that "interlingual" poetry should be read carefully for the ways in which it constructs a "confluence of cultures." He moves away from rigid notions of code-switching and code-mixing to note how languages are placed vis-à-vis one another, in discrete blocks or blended into a single poetic shape. *Fronдино* separates its three languages into three separate genres, in a move that acknowledges the text's confluence of (literary) cultures while appearing to prevent it,



Fig. 5 *Histoire d'amour sans paroles*, Chantilly, Musée Condé MS 338, fol. 4v. © RMN/ René-Gabriel Ojéda.

for it requires that the reader should at least have some grasp of the *razo* of its lyric French inserts and certainly should comprehend its other two idioms. It also undoes the hierarchies that may be derived from medieval writings about language, as there is no dominant language in this *novel·la*. The narrative creates a unifying thread for the three sections, making it properly intercultural, as *ars dictaminis* meets lyric rondeau and *noves rimades* in a conceptual borderland, with each element staying autonomous, yet engaged in an energetic multilingual dialogue.

Monolingualism emerges in late medieval Catalonia as the expression of the expansionist ideological agenda of the royal court. Paradoxically, it does so through the medium of translation. Where Metge's *Somni* explores the difficulties of a culture built on translations, *Fronchino e Brisona* depicts the multiple dialogues that existed within the same courtly environment. Both texts are discontinuous, frustrating, and elusive. Both depict explicitly the illusory nature of literary languages and genres as they emerge from a "confluence of cultures" and of languages. In opposition to this, a narrative constructed from unglossed images highlights the extent to which all readers "domesticate" a text as they encounter it.

