

joyous beginning by which I think myself made greater and crowned with great joy among lovers. **2.** I wear this high crown since I am a servant to you, whom it seems a sublime triumph to serve; it gives me such exalted joy to remain obedient to you. I pray that you deign to be pleased by it. And truly I think to say beyond doubt that you are sovereign among women, the attainment of all grace and virtue – it would be life for me to die of love for you. **3.** If every part of my body could become a tongue, it could not recount your beauties. I compare you to every joy that might be mentioned. You possess every beauty that might be imagined. By far you stand above all beautiful and noble women, like sky over the earth. It's worth more to have hope of you than have firm assurance from other ladies. **4.** Although love's torment is heavy, whatever I might possess of love seems good to me. And my heart cannot imagine any cruelty in you, Lady, that would not be just. Joy and solace sustain me in my pain, hoping that greater joy can come. I would rather endure evil from you than realise joy from another. **5.** My lady, I rejoice in my pain through fine love, thinking that high knowledge resides in you. I should not endure the trouble I suffer too much, since a good lord doesn't give a bad sentence. All value is fully realised in you – you are reward and death and life. You are more virtuous in merit than I can be in serving you. (Guinizzelli 78-81)

In *Donna, lo fino amore*, with its exalted view of the lady, utter submission of the poet to her, and complete avoidance of any hint of physicality (not a single feature of the lady's appearance is mentioned), we could not be further from the burlesque poetry of Guillaume. In many respects this poem could indeed be about *Our Lady* rather than *a lady*. If one were to isolate certain lines, for instance those in which he declares his service and obedience, or when he says that her beauty is as far above other women in beauty and nobility as Heaven is above the earth (“*voi soprastate come il ciel la terra*” 29), they could indeed be applied to the Virgin. Moreover, Guinizzelli perhaps somewhat playfully seems to use language that echoes the Lucan narrative of the Visitation to Elizabeth. The Magnificat (Luke 1.46-55) seems to be recalled when he speaks of his amorous nature being “magnified” by the ardent love he experiences for his lady (“*ondio mi credo assai magnificato*”), but of course God is not the subject here, but the poet himself,

as is typical of the almost narcissistic auto-referentiality of *fin'amor*. Likewise he is, as it were, blessed among lovers (“*nfra gli amanti in gran gioia coronato*” 10) because he has been granted the gift of loving his lady, just as Mary was blessed among women, but in her case because God had shown his favour to her by choosing her as the Mother of the Word. For her part, his lady reigns supreme among women in her virtue and grace (“*nfra le donne voi siete sovrana / di ogni grazia e di virtù compita*” 18-19), and in her everything of worth is to be found (“*Compiutamente è 'n voi tutta valenza*” 54). But, for all her Marian qualities, this lady is quite unlike the Virgin because to love her is a torment (*lo tormento d'amore* 32),³⁷ and he cannot be sure that she will return his love, so that he is always left in a state of suspension, between joy and solace (“*Gioco e sollazzo*” 35) and pain (“*pene*” 35). Most telling of all is the poem’s conclusion: whereas it would be perfectly legitimate to declare one’s inability to serve the Virgin adequately, that the poet declares this lady to be life and death to him (“*voi siete, e morte e vita*”) instantly alerts us to the non-Christian values of the poem. Love of Mary would never lead to a state of such agitation and dependence and she could never be seen as a cause of death since to love her is to love God who is the source of all life.

The same pattern is discernible in another of Guinizzelli’s poems *Vedut’ ho la lucente stella Diana* (Guinizzelli 34-35). Just as Pier della Vigna of the Sicilian school had called his lady “*stella de l’albore*”(Contini 1:126), Guinizzelli associates his lady with the morning star, that typically Marian *topos*. The star of course, also refers to Venus in her morning manifestation as the goddess of higher love, and is therefore perfectly suited to Guinizzelli’s ambiguous fusion of the Christian and the secular:

*Vedut’ ho la lucente stella diana,
ch’apare anzi che l’giorno rend’ albore,
c’ha preso forma di figura umana;
sovr’ ogn’ altra me par che dea splendore (1-4)*

³⁷ There are instances in Medieval miracle tales where Mary severely punishes those who have failed to remain loyal to their commitment to serve her, and she also can be extremely severe in her treatment of those who in some way have offended her Son, but she never causes torment to those who seek her love and mercy.

I have seen the bright morning star that appears before the morning offers dawn, taking the shape of a human figure, she who seems to me to shine above all other figures

However, unlike Mary, who as the morning star announces the coming of the Sun/Son, and who does not seek to bask in her own glory, this lady's radiance points to nothing other than her own beauty. Moreover, where the Marian star is a source of hope, the wondrous brightness and virtue of Guinizzelli's lady (which is innate rather than coming from God) so overwhelms him that he is perturbed and reduced to silence ("Ed io dal suo valor son assalito / con sì fera battaglia di sospiri / ch'avanti a lei de dir non seri' ardito." "And I am struck by her indwelling worth in such a wild battle of sighs that I would not be bold enough to address her.") (9-11). The "stella Diana" appears again in the even more obviously Marian-influenced poem, *Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare*:

*Io vogl' del ver la mia donna laudare
ed asemprarli la rosa e lo giglio:
più che stella d'iana splende e pare,
e ciò ch'è lassù bello a lei somiglio.
Verde river' a lei rasembro e l'âre, 5
tutti color di fior', giano e vermiglio,
oro ed azzurro e ricche gioi per dare:
medesmo Amor per lei rafina meglio.
Passa per la via adorna e sì gentile
ch'abassa orgoglio a cui dona salute, 10
e fa 'l di nostra fê se non la crede;
e non le pò apressare om che sia vile;
ancor ve dirò c'ha maggior vertute:
null'om pò mal pensar fin che la vede.*

I want to praise my lady truly / And compare the rose and lily to her: / She appears and outshines the dawn star; / And I compare her to everything beautiful on high. / I liken green fields and air to her— / All colors of flowers, yellow and vermilion, / Gold and azure and jewels rich for gifts: / Love himself is refined still more through her. / She passes through the streets so elegant

and noble / That she humbles pride in anyone she greets / And
 converts all unbelievers to our faith. / No base-thinking man can
 approach her, / Yet I'll tell you she has a power greater still: /
 No man can ever think evil after he sees her. (40-41)

The first feature that we notice about this poem is that its sole aim seems to be to praise the lady. There is no trace here of an underlying sexual tension, no angst-ridden poet, enslaved by longing for his lady's favour. Lacking too is the haughtiness of the lady, who instead of withholding her favour bestows beatitude on all those who glimpse her. Rather than inspiring jealousy and fear of rejection she cleanses all those that lay their eyes on her of any evil thoughts that they might have. Here, truly, is a miraculous presence and yet something does not sit quite right. The lady remains entirely impersonal so that she is more a force than someone with whom one can establish a personal relation. Moreover, this lady does not point beyond herself to the source of her beatifying power. Praise of her is an end in itself, not a means to salvation. Her beauty and nobility inspires and humbles, yes, but where does it lead? The poem ends inconclusively by stating that no man can think evil having seen her, but without any reference to the next life. Moreover, some lines jar with orthodox Christian theology. The "Love" (*Amor* with a capital "A") referred to here is not the Johannine God of Love (1 John 4.8), but the deity of *Eros* beloved of the courtly poets. The *salute* that she offers is a salvation of sorts but of an earthly rather than divine variety, in that it offers only temporary bliss as opposed to the eternal beatitude that Mary holds forth, while the baseness of those men (and note that it is only men) who approach her is less that of the sinner than of the unrefined and ignoble.

Let us now consider some of the poems of Guido Cavalcanti. Turning first to *Fresca rosa novella* (2-4), the opening words themselves alert us to a possible Marian influence, though the lines that follow, which speak of Spring meadows and birds gaily singing, are more typical of the courtly genre.³⁸ Though the poem has been seen as atypical of Cavalcanti's output, its style and language having more in common with Occitan and Sicilian poetry than with the so-called Siculo-Tuscan school,³⁹ the repeated emphasis on the angelic, supra-human nature of the lady suggests the influence of Guinizzelli

³⁸ Dronke notes the derivation from the *rosa novella* of Marian hymnody. See Dronke, *Medieval Latin*. Vol. 1. 140.

³⁹ See, for instance, Contini, who describes it as a "ballata di schemi e linguaggio arcaici" (2: 491).

and also anticipates later metaphysical developments in Cavalcanti's poetry concerning the destructive power of the lady's preternatural beauty. The insistence on the lady's uniqueness among women ("*fra lor le donne dea / vi chiaman*"; "among themselves the ladies call you goddess") (27-8), on God's exceptional action in creating her ("*Oltra natura umana / vostra fina piasenza / fece Dio, per esenza / che voi foste sovrana*"; "Beyond human nature did God create your fine loveliness so that you would be supreme by your very being") (32-35) and on her angelic nature ("*siete angelicata criatura*" // "*Angelicata sembranza in voi, donna, riposa*"; "You are an angel-like creature. An angelic semblance dwells, lady, in you") (17-19), all have a faintly Marian ring, since they single out the lady as unique among women and above human nature, yet on closer examination they do not quite fit: Mary would never be called a goddess, nor is she like the angels, but rather like God. Likewise, the use of courtly and philosophical terms such as "*fina piasenza*" and "*per esenza*" would be out of place in a Marian text. One finds a similar pattern in *Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdure* (4-5), where the lady is again placed above all other women ("*di tutte siete la migliore*") (14), and her beauty is beyond any other creature ("*In questo mondo non ha creatura / si piena di bieltà ne di piacere*"; "In this world there is no creature so full of beauty of or comeliness") (5-6), where "*piacere*" is a term that places these lines firmly within the courtly register.

The poem that most obviously shows a Marian influence is *Chi è questa che ven, ch'ogn'om la mira*, whose opening lines paraphrase the Song of Songs, 6:9: "Who is she that cometh forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?"⁴⁰ No-one could read these lines in Cavalcanti's time without immediately thinking of the Virgin, to whom these words were applied in numerous sermons, commentaries and hymns.⁴¹ Here, along with her beauty and gracefulness, it is the lady's unrivalled virtuousness and, above all, her humility that enhance the sense of her Marian uniqueness:

*Chi è questa che vèn, ch'ogn'om la mira,
che fa tremar di chiaritate l'âre*

⁴⁰ Also 3:6: 'Who is she that goeth up by the desert, as a pillar of smoke of aromatical spices, of myrrh, and frankincense, and of all the powders of the perfumer?' And 8:5: 'Who is this that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her beloved?' See Contini. Vol. 2. 495.

⁴¹ See Lino Pertile's comments in this regard in *La puttana e il gigante*. 33-34.

*e mena seco Amor, sì che parlare
null' omo pote, ma ciascun sospira?*

*O Deo, che sembra quando li occhi gira, 5
Dical' Amor, ch' i' nol savria contare:
cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare,
ch' ogn'altra ver' di lei i' la chiam' ira.*

*Non si poria contar la sua piagenza,
ch' a le' s'inchin' ogni gentil vertute, 10
e la beltate per sua dea la mostra.*

*Non fu sì alta già la mente nostra
e non si pose 'n noi tanta salute,
che propriamente n'aviàn canoscenza.*

Who is she who comes, that everyone looks at her / Who makes the air tremble with clarity / And brings Love with her, so that no one / can speak, though everyone sighs? // O God, what she looks like when she turns her eyes / Let Love say, for I could not describe it. / To me she seems so much a lady of good will / That any other in comparison to her I call vexation. // One could not describe her gracefulness, / For every noble virtue inclines towards her / And beauty displays her as its goddess. // Our mind never was so lofty / and never was such beatitude granted us / That we could really have knowledge of her. (6-7)

At both a thematic and formal level there are numerous references in this sonnet to Guinizzelli's *Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare*. Nevertheless, though the poem may superficially appear to adhere to the Guinizzellian model of the angelic lady in its praise of a transcendent feminine figure and in its fusion of Christian and secular elements, in Cavalcanti the sheer ineffability of the lady goes much further,⁴² so that she becomes the sensible manifestation of virtues or forms that derive from the Averroistic notion of the

⁴² In layman's terms we could say "visible to the human eye."

common intellect.⁴³ She can therefore only be known through the intellect and yet her sensible form so overwhelms the lover and arouses his passion that he is unable to go beyond the *phantasma* to arrive at a purely intellectual understanding of her. Thus the lover can only admire but not understand or adequately express in words the humility and beauty of his lady. These same characteristics are to be found in *Veggio negli occhi de la donna mia* (36-37), though it goes even further through its references to the Nativity. From the lady's beauty is born a second transcendent self who, announced by a star, brings salvation to the poet: "*ne nasce un'altra di bellezza nova, / da la qual par ch'una stella si mova / e dica: 'La salute tua è apparita'*" (10-12). What is more, in a scene that has resonances of both the Assumption and Resurrection, the poem ends with the ascent of her '*vertù*' to heaven (20). Here then, we have a full-blown appropriation of aspects of Marian literature for purposes that are diametrically opposed to those of the Virgin's cult, in other words, an entirely secular interpretation of the overwhelming effects that feminine beauty may have on the soul of the lover. In the place of Mary's allure, which leads the admirer onwards and upwards through grace to an apprehension of the beauty and goodness of God himself (as occurs in Dante's *Paradiso* thanks to the mediation of Beatrice and the Virgin), the lover is ultimately overwhelmed and defeated by the enormity of what he has envisioned, so that he is left only with the desire but not its fulfilment.

Vernacular Marian Texts

We have now come to the final part of our analysis in which we shall examine some examples of vernacular Marian texts. Once again we are spoiled for choice. We could turn to the rich tradition of the Iberian peninsula where we find works such as Gonzalo de Berceo's († c. 1264) *Milagros*, and Alfonso X el Sabio's (†1284) *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. In the French area we have a number of important compositions by troubadours such as Gautier de Coinci (†1236), Thibaut de Champagne (†1253), Rutebeuf (†1285), and Guiraut Riquier (†1292). Meanwhile in Italy, beginning in the latter half of the thirteenth century considerable numbers of Marian *laude* began to emerge from lay confraternities, associated with the new mendicant orders, especially

⁴³ On Cavalcanti's Averroism, see Bruno Nardi 93-129; Maria Corti 3-37; Maria Luisa Ardizzone 49-50.

the Franciscans.⁴⁴ What these vernacular texts tend to do, with varying degrees of success, is draw on both courtly and Marian traditions, so that one finds elements of the typological style typical of Latin hymns mixed together with a *fin'amor* lexicon.

In *De chanter ne me puis tenir*,⁴⁵ Thibaut de Champagne employs a number of traditional Marian topoi to praise the Virgin, such as the morning star ("*plus clers qu'estoile journaus*") (16) and flower imagery derived from the Old Testament exegesis of Isaiah 11. 1 and Numbers 17. 8, but also uses more courtly terminology addressing her as "Lady full of great goodness, courtliness and compassion" ("*Dame plaine de grant bonté, / De courtoisie et de pitié*") (33-34). This poem, which is clearly influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux, is also imbued with the notion of Mary's mercy. She can save even the worst "renegade" ("*renoié*") (36) from the wrath of God. We would do well to cling to her, he declares, because God "wishes to obey her" ("*la volt obeïr*") (9). The song ends with an appeal for the Virgin's mercy that mirrors both the plea of the courtly lover and the traditional ending of Marian prayers with a personal request for aid: "Sweet lady, I pray to you now for compassion, that you prevent me from being damned and lost through my sins" ("*Douce dame. Or vos pri gié / Merci, que me deffendez / Que je ne soi dampnez / Ne perduz par mon pechié*") (41-44). In *De grant travail et de petit exploit*,⁴⁶ Thibaut takes up another much-favoured theme in later Medieval Mariology, the notion that the Mother of Mercy acts as a counterbalance to God's harsh justice, placating his ire at the sinfulness of humanity. But he does so using the language of the court, so that Mary resembles the courtly lady who pleads with her lord on behalf of wayward courtesans who have offered her love and service: "Her exceedingly sweet and pleasant, and delicate words soothe the great ire of the great Lord. Foolish is the one who tries another love" ("*Si douz moz plesanz et savoré / Le grant coroz du grant Seigneur rapaie. / Mult par est fous qui autre amor essaie*") (14-16). The same pattern recurs in *Commencerai a fere un lai*,⁴⁷ in which he berates himself for his sinful life and begs for the Virgin's aid in persuading God to

⁴⁴ For some of the more significant collections of *laude* see del Popolo's *Laude fiorentine*, Scentoni's *Laudario orvietano*, Manetti's *Laudario di Santa Maria della Scala*, and Guarnini's *Laudario di Cortona*.

⁴⁵ Text and translation, O'Sullivan 134-36.

⁴⁶ Text and translation, O'Sullivan, 145-47.

⁴⁷ Text and translation, O'Sullivan, 158-59.

show mercy rather than the just punishment that he richly deserves: “If pity does not vanquish vengeance, then we will be, without a doubt, in a bad way. Lady full of goodness, may your sweet gracious words not be forgotten!” (“*Se pitiez ne vaint vengeance, / Dont seronz nos, sans doutance, / Trop mal mené. / Dame plene de bonté, / Vostre douz moz savoré / Ne soient pas oublié !*”) (34-39). Both Gautier and Thibaut emphasise the power that Mary holds over the Devil, because she gave birth to Christ, who defeated the Enemy through his death on the Cross, and because she continues to protect those who are faithful to her by obtaining forgiveness of their sins and protecting them from Satan’s wiles. In *Dou tres douz non a la virge Marie*,⁴⁸ for instance Thibaut writes that “through her souls are freed from torment; for through her God came down here among us” (“*les amens en sont fors de torment; / Quar par li vint ça jus entre sa gent*”) (4-5), and goes on to urge his listeners to appeal without delay to Mary, because “She has such a sweet, noble, and pure heart, the one who calls to her without guile will never fail to obtain forgiveness” (“*Tant a douz cuer, gentil et esmeré, / Qui l’apele de cuer sans fausseté, / Ja ne faudra a avoir repentence*”) (38-40). In *De grant travail et de petit exploit*, he implicitly suggests that only Mary can effectively combat the “hooks baited with torment” (“*aimeçons aoschiez de torment*”) (28), namely covetousness, arrogance, lust and wickedness, that “the Devil has cast out” (“*Li Deable a geté*”) (28), for it is difficult to identify anyone in this life who is as worthy of admiration, service and love, while “the Lady, who increases all good” (“*la Dame qui touz les biens avance*”) (46), to whom he sends his song, will indeed bring good fortune. In fact, this is the crucial difference between service to the Lady, which only brings further enslavement, and Mary, who offers freedom from the bonds of sin (Lindsay 214). Thibaut emphasises that the Virgin always repays those who are faithful to her, thus implicitly contrasting her with the ladies of the court. He opens *De chanter ne me puis tenir*, by declaring that he cannot keep himself from singing of this most beautiful of ladies “whom no one could serve and receive shame or misfortune” (“*Cui rien du mont ne peut server / Cui ja viegne honte ne maus*”) (4-5), because the God, who deigned to dwell in her, “could never allow one who has served her to not be saved” (“*Ne porroit mie soffir / Qiu la sert, q’il ne fust saus*”) (7-9). He declares, as was commonly believed in the Middle Ages, that it is through the Virgin that we must be saved (“*par vos devons*

⁴⁸ Text and translation, O’Sullivan, 137-39.

garir”) (24), because it was through her that God came on earth and saved his people from the devil.

In *Amours, qui bien set enchanter*,⁴⁹ Gautier de Coinci redirects the *fin’amor* concept of service to spiritual ends. No longer is it the love of the lady that is sought but that of her son, Jesus: “Sweet lady, he who serves you well, deserves the love of your sweet son” (“*Douce dame, qui te sert bien / L’amour ton douz fil en desert*”) (49-50). The reward for such service is not the “joy” that was a euphemism for sexual pleasure in the Occitan poets, but the joy of eternal life: “All those who serve you well will deserve joy without end” (“*Touz cil qui bien te serviront / Joie sans fin deserviront*”) (52-53). This is an idea that he repeats in *Royne celestre*,⁵⁰ in even stronger terms, saying that those who do not serve her will most certainly be damned (32-33). Instead of speaking of Mary’s humility, he employs the typically courtly *topos* of the suitor who humbles himself in order to gain the lady’s favour: “All praise you and humble themselves before you” (“*Touz li mons t’alose / Et vers toi s’umilie*”) (47-48). He strikingly endows Mary with *fin’amor* virtues, such as loyalty, worth, and courtliness (*loiauté, valeur, cortoisie*) (63-64). In the concluding lines of *Royne celestre* (88-108), he employs the typical *fin’amor topos* of declaring his unworthiness and begging for his lady’s mercy, but there are some fundamental differences. What is at stake is not the poet’s earthly happiness but the fate of his eternal soul, while there is never any doubt that Mary, the “fountain of mercy” (“*fons de misericorde*”) (108) will heed his request, for as he reminds her, she has saved many who have fallen out of favour. The same theme occurs in *D’une amour quoie et serie*,⁵¹ where he contrasts the serenity that those who love the Virgin experience with the anguish of “base people” (“*Vilanie genz*”), for, upon their death, she will present those who love her in this life to her Son.

Rutebeuf also makes use of courtly terms in praising Mary, but, consistent with his overall pattern of interspersing his poems with theological content, he includes terms that would find no place in a courtly lyric. The opening of *C’est de Notre Dame*,⁵² in which he declares that he must “sing of the best woman who ever was and who ever will be” (“... *chantier de la mellieur / Qui onques fest ne qui jamais sera*”) (1-2) is entirely conventional,

⁴⁹ Text and translation, O’Sullivan, 120-23.

⁵⁰ Text and translation, O’Sullivan, 127-30.

⁵¹ Text and translation, O’Sullivan, 132-33.

⁵² Text and translation, O’Sullivan, 200-02.

and as yet there is no hint that the lady concerned is Mary. The lines that follow, where he speaks of the lady's capacity to "heal every pain" ("*garit toute douleur*") (3) are also standard fare, though he hints at her identity when we are told that her curative powers extend beyond the poet himself: "She has cured many a soul" ("*Mainte arme a gaire*") (4). However, it is not until the second stanza, with the use of "charity," a term that is incompatible with courtly *amor*, that we are certain who this lady is: "there is in her courtesy and worth; in her is righteousness, goodness and charity" ("*Mout a en li courtoizie et valour; / Bien et bonteï et chariteï*") (10-11). Immediately afterwards, Rutebeuf, reverts to courtly language with the multiple use of 'folly' and its cognates (eight times in seven lines), but it is with the express intention of contrasting the charity that Mary represents with the *fol'amor* of his earlier career. Thereafter, the poem largely turns away from courtly motifs to concentrate on Mary's mediatory role as enemy of the Devil and Virgin Mother of the incarnate God.

One area of French literature in which there was a notable degree of cross-pollination was thirteenth century motets. Motets were polyphonic choral compositions that developed in the thirteenth century, initially in Paris from the Notre Dame school of Léonin and Pérotin, out of the *organum* tradition of elaborating on plainchant with one or more voices. Early motets generally consisted of a *cantus firmus* (a pre-existing melody, usually plainchant) around which were composed different voices with each voice using a distinct text. While the *cantus firmus* was always in Latin, the other voices could be a mixture of Latin and the vernacular and typically combined both sacred and secular texts. There are a number of Marian motets dating from this time which do just this by combining liturgical Latin texts with French songs in the courtly love tradition. Rothenberg suggests that allegory played a crucial role in allowing these secular love songs to be interpreted in a Marian key, an interesting argument that I believe is borne out to some extent when one looks at some of the texts concerned. However, he occasionally goes too far in trying to align specific Marian and courtly texts, suggesting, for instance that the courtly "plains [...] de douçour" (full of sweetness) corresponds to the Marian "gratia plena" (full of grace) (77): while it is reasonable to suggest that the secular content of early motets was open to allegorical interpretation, especially given that it was combined with sacred texts and/or music, to speak of such specific correspondences without solid

evidence is inadvisable. In broader terms, however, it is true to say that an allegorical reading of both more refined *fin'amor* lyrics and even the sexually loaded *pastourelle* was the only means whereby they could be reconciled with the religious base text/melody of the early motets. I would argue that the principal means whereby this rather curious juxtaposition of seemingly opposite poles could coexist was the Song of Songs, whose exegesis since the earliest centuries of the Church had legitimised the allegorical reading of a poem about human love in terms of the relationship between the soul and God, and which in more recent times had also been interpreted as love between Mary and her divine Spouse.⁵³

But let us look at some of the texts that Rothenberg quotes. The first set are from the anonymous 13th century motet *Plus bele que flor / Quant revient et feuille et flor / L'autrier jouer m'en alai*, which overlays three French lyrics onto the Latin words *Flos filius eius* (the Flower, her Son) drawn from a *Styrps lesse* responsory originally composed by Fulbert of Chartres:

Quadruplum

More beautiful than a flower, in my opinion, is she to whom I belong. For as long as I live, no one will have joy or pleasure of my love except the flower that is of paradise: she is the Mother of the Lord, who placed us here, and wants us to return to him forever.⁵⁴

Triplum

When leaf and flower return with the approach of summer, Lord, then I remember Love, who has always been courtly and gentle with me. I am so grateful for his help, because he lightens my pain when I desire it. One gains much good and much honour from being his friend.

Motetus

The other day I was wandering in a lonely place, and into an orchard I went to pick a flower. There I found a pleasing lady, prettily dressed; her body was frail and she was singing in great

⁵³ For a discussion of the influence of the Song of Songs on both Marian and courtly texts, see Kendrick 140-56.

⁵⁴ Translation is adapted from the version by Huot 91-92, quoted in modified form by Rothenberg 48.

distress: I am in love, what shall I do. It is the end, the
end, whatever anyone says, I will love.⁵⁵

These French texts form part of a wider family, all based on the *Flos filius eius*, but whereas the other *triplum* and *motetus* texts are all in Latin and are entirely religious, drawing on the standard biblical types of the flower and the lily,⁵⁶ here the *triplum* uses a Spring *topos*, much favoured by *fin'amor* poets, while the *motetus* displays all the typical features of *pastourelle* - the knight who tries to bed a lowly shepherd girl, the refusal of the girl (often named Marion) on the grounds that she wishes to remain faithful to her shepherd lover, Robin.⁵⁷ Only the *quadruplum*, which was added at a later date, is specifically religious, though written in the courtly manner of a lover who is pledging faithfulness to his lady. Meanwhile, underlying all these layers are the words (or perhaps only the melody since it is not clear if the words themselves were used) drawn from the *Styrps Iesse* responsory, "(R) The stock of Jesse produced a branch and the branch a flower. And on this flower rested the nourishing spirit. (V) The Virgin Mother of God is the branch, *the flower her Son*,"⁵⁸ which would have been familiar to any listener with a clerical or monastic background. So what is happening here? Is this an attempt to sacralise courtly love or to secularise Marian devotion, or perhaps a bid to reconcile the two in some sort of synthesis? Or is it simply a literary conceit, a show of musical bravura, for the amusement and entertainment of an educated clerical audience? Given that the audience would have been well aware that the underlying melody was religious, would they have been drawn to an allegorical interpretation of the love lyrics, even in the absence of the later Marian *quadruplum*? Or would they have felt uncomfortable with the combination so that it would have led them to question the values being promoted by the courtly songs? Or perhaps they would have simply been amused? It is impossible to answer these questions at such a distance with any certainty, whether in terms of authorial intention or audience reaction.

⁵⁵ Translation Robyn E. Smith, in Gordon A. Anderson, ed. *Compositions of the Bamberg Manuscript* (lxxx), quoted in Rothenberg 45.

⁵⁶ For the texts see Rothenberg 42-44.

⁵⁷ Maid Marian and Robin were by no means unique or original to the adventurous tales of Sherwood forest, being stock figures in the pastoral genre, generally first associated with Marcabru but perfected by Giraut Riquier see his *Yeu cuiava souen d'amor chanter*), in which they appear as a shepherd and shepherdess couple.

⁵⁸ Translation adapted from Rothenberg 32.

However, given the gradual evolution of the motet away from secular themes, to the extent that by the Renaissance secular love themes were entirely eliminated, we can at least conclude that whatever the intention of individual authors, the long-term result was the triumph of the Marian element in the religious sphere. Where the composers of hymns that made use of courtly motifs, who had always been conscious of the essentially adversarial relationship they had with their secular counterparts, had previously been happy to appropriate courtly love to their own ends, it seems that there came a point when such an intergeneric approach was no longer deemed acceptable. Meanwhile secular love poetry and music took a different direction, though, of course, given their history of drawing on some of the same sources, they continued to bear some similarities.

As a final text to quote in this essay I can find nothing better than a poem by Alfonso X el Sabio. In many of the *loors*, or praise poems, which intersperse the miracle tales of the *Cantigas* we find a similar pattern to the poets such as Thibaut and de Coinci, or the *laude* of Italy, in which the courtly lexicon is employed alongside traditional Marian motifs. But the particular poem that I have chosen is of interest not just because of its intergeneric language but because it sets out with exceptional clarity the fundamental opposition that existed between the Virgin and the courtly lady. The beauty of this poem is that Alfonso performs a surgical deconstruction of the courtly model using the very language and notions that the courtly poets themselves had evolved, hoisting them, as it were, on their own petard:

*Quen entender quisér, entendedor
seja da Madre de Nóstro Sennor*

*mais esta nos dá sis' e faz-nos pról
e guarda-nos de fazê-lo peor.*

*Ca ela faz todo ben entender,
e entendendo nos faz connocer
Nóstro Sennor e o séu ben aver
e que perçamos do démo pavor*

*As outras dan séu ben fazendo mal,
e esta dando-o sempre mais val;
e queno gaannad' á, non lle fal,
senôn se é mui mao peçador.*

*En cujo poder outras donas van
metê-los séus, e coita e afán
lles fazem sofrer, atal costum' an;
porên non é leal o séu amor*

*As outras muitas vezes van mentir,
mas aquesta nunca non quér falir;
e porende, quen se dela partir
Déu-lo cofonda, per u quér que for.*

*As outras fazem óme seer fól
e preçan-s' ende, assí seer sól;*

As outras nos fazem muit' esperar

*polo séu ben e por el lazerar,
mas esta non quér con séu ben tardar
e dá-nos ben d'outros bẽes maior.*

*E porên séu entendedor serei
enquant' éu viva, e a loarei
e de muitos bẽes que faz direi
e miragres grandes, ond' ei sabo.*

Ref. He who would seek perfect love and understanding let him woo Holy Mary. **1.** For she makes all things clearly understood and through understanding makes us know Our Lord and enjoy his blessing and lose our fear of the devil **2.** in whose power other ladies place their servants and make them suffer great grief and woe, for such is their way, and hence their love is not true. **3.** Other ladies cause a man to be foolish and are wont to pride themselves on that. However, the Lady gives us wisdom and befriends us and saves us from going astray. **4.** The others bestow their favour by doing harm, but she, in bestowing it, becomes the more worthy. He who has won her favour will never lose it unless he be a hopeless sinner. **5.** The other ladies often lie, but she never betrays us. Therefore, he who departs from her is punished by God, whenever he may be. **6.** The others make us wait and pine for their favours, but this Lady will not withhold her rewards but gives the greatest blessing of all. **7.** Therefore, her suitor I will be as long as I may live and will praise her and tell of the many blessings she bestows and miracles she performs, in which I rejoice.⁵⁹

Here, Alfonso brilliantly contrasts the attributes of the Virgin with those of other women and urges those who would seek perfect love to woo Mary. Where courtly ladies lead men astray and fill them with folly – a key word in the courtly lexicon implying a loss of reason – Mary offers true knowledge, and always gives her devotees their reward, loving them with a love that is true. Courtly ladies hold their lovers in the devil's power. The love that the poets experience is not true since it provokes anxiety and fear. Mary, instead, keeps her admirers on the path of virtue; her favours do good while those of other ladies do harm. Where the courtly lady humiliates her suitor and causes him suffering and pain, since she does not offer true love, Our Lady offers a love that does not delude. Indeed, were the courtly lady to grant her lover's

⁵⁹ Text from Walter Mettman edition and Connie L. Scarborough. I have also consulted Cunningham's translation for clarity.

desire and give him her favour, she would no longer be the unblemished object of his desire so that love of her leads to a never-ending loop of delusion. Instead, the Virgin *can* respond to love with love and grant her petitioners' pleas, and in the process her own worth is confirmed and enhanced.

Conclusion

What conclusions can we draw at the end of our odyssey through several centuries of song and verse from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds? In the first place we can affirm with some confidence that the courtly and Marian genres had decidedly different origins and started off on very different tracks, as is amply illustrated by our Latin hymns and by the poems of Guillaume X, so that any argument for a major Marian input in the emergence of the *fin'amor* lyric may be dismissed. At best it could be argued that the centuries-long encomiastic tradition which had elevated the Virgin to an exalted position in the Medieval mind may have indirectly inspired the early troubadours, but even this is a pretty tendentious argument. In the later Occitan poets (whom we have not explored here), and even more so in the Siculo-Tuscan poets we have looked at, we find more evidence of Marian influences as the lady became more and more spiritualised and abstract. Nevertheless, even though these poets may have drawn on the Marian tradition, the fundamental values that they espoused were contrary to a Christian world view, so that there is always an unresolved tension between the “marianised” lady and the sort of love she represents which leads away from, not towards God. A further point is that we can see clearly the radically different origin and purpose of imagery in the two genres, typology being by far the most dominant feature in Latin Marian hymnody, whereas it is something that is entirely alien to *fin'amor* poetry. Even where imagery apparently coincides, for instance in the likening of the lady or the Virgin to a rose of lily, the purpose is very different. If any influence can be said to have been exerted on courtly poetry in terms of typology it is that it opened up the potential for writers to explore and exploit the polyvalence of language and imagery, most obviously in the use of the bride-bridegroom motif in Song of Songs as the basis for the spiritual readings of apparently secular texts. We can also conclude that a number of aspects of the Virgin's cult – her queenship, declarations of service, devotion and loyalty to her, the use of nature imagery – long predate the courtly phenomenon and are therefore not a

product of it. Finally, we can say that vernacular Marian song and verse, rather than being the passive subject of interference from the courtly genre, engaged actively with it, at times seeking an accommodation (with varying degrees of success) but in other cases actively seeking to appropriate its language and subvert its values. Ultimately, the two genres made uneasy bedfellows and no true synthesis was ever achieved.

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