
The querelle des femmes is an active and at times aggressive conversation between the sexes that has been ongoing since the Middle Ages. There has been considerable scholarship on the topic, from feminist historians, gender studies specialists, and literary scholars who have investigated and deconstructed a series of works related to this “debate” from across Europe in the medieval and Early Modern eras. This new bilingual collection edited by Emily C. Francomano brings three fifteenth-century Spanish texts to a wider audience, coupling two texts that were influential far beyond the context of their creation in late medieval Iberia, Juan de Flores’s “Grisel and Mirabella” and Pere Torrellas’s “The Slander against Women,” with a lesser known text, Torrellas’s “The Defense of Ladies against Slanderers.”

In the first fifty pages of the volume, Francomano has created an informative and useful introduction to the three texts. She begins by justifying the need for this particular bilingual volume, noting that these important works lacked a modern English translation and that “Grisel and Mirabella” is not even widely available in Spanish. She also creates a compelling argument for the grouping of these particular texts; that they not only deepen our understanding of the querelle in both the Iberian and European context but that these three texts are closely related and thus need to be read together. Torrellas’s provocative stance in “The Slander against Women” brought it to prominence and ensured that it was included in manuscript and later printed collections of cancionero poetry. “The Defense of Ladies against Slanderers” was a text that Torrellas produced in response to the reaction that “Slander” created. While the two texts were often paired in cancionero collections, the “Defense” did not garner the same level of attention from either contemporaries or later scholars. However, the failure to look at “Defense” created a skewed perception of Torrellas’s attitude towards women and his position in the querelle debate.

Torrellas became a central character in “Grisel and Mirabella” due to his notoriety after the publication of “The Slander against Women.” The plot of “Grisel and Mirabella” revolves around a lengthy debate between Torrellas, who is defending the honor of the knight Grisel, against Braçayda, who is defending the princess Mirabella. Grisel and Mirabella are star-crossed lovers who have been caught conducting an illicit and forbidden romance, and Mirabella’s father,
the king, has ordained that whichever lover is deemed to be responsible for the seduction and initiation of their relationship must be put to death. The debate between Torrellas and Braçayda becomes an extension of the *querelle* itself, as the debate reaches far beyond the fate of the lovers, and the honor of men and women at large becomes the center of the argument. Ultimately however, while Torrellas wins the argument, he is undone by his attraction to Braçayda, who lures him to a painful and protracted death at the hands of a group of women in revenge for the death of princess Mirabella.

These explicit connections between the three texts underpin Francomano’s selection process for this volume. Moreover, she argues that the “Defense” needs to be included in order to balance the appraisal of Torrellas—that by only reading the more widely known “Slander” and “Grisel and Mirabella,” Torrellas can be misunderstood as a purely misogynist figure.

Francomano’s introductory section provides a helpful overview of all three texts, important information about the authors, the context of their creation, and the impact and influence of the texts in the Early Modern period. Torrellas’s “Slander” generated a number of texts written in response, which gave additional impetus to the *querelle*. Francomano summarizes several of these texts including those by Suero de Ribera, Antón de Montoro, and Gómez Manrique. She also includes a section on the afterlife of “Grisel and Mirabella,” noting that it was a “best seller” in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that was translated into several languages, with versions produced in French, Italian, and English. Interestingly, she notes that a bilingual, trilingual, and even a four-language edition of the text were created, foreshadowing her own bilingual study version here.

The introduction concludes with a useful discussion of the particular copies of the texts she has chosen for the Spanish version and notes to explain her approach to translating the texts into English. After the introductory section, each text follows in turn: the “Slander,” the “Defense,” and last, “Grisel and Mirabella.” The texts are clearly laid out side by side, with slightly different fonts for the Spanish and English versions to aid the reader in distinguishing between the two. Each text concludes with endnotes, and at the end of the entire volume Francomano has compiled a bibliography that includes a listing of all the various manuscript and printed versions of these texts, as well as various translations and modern editions and facsimiles. Scholarship on the various texts and other cited sources round off the bibliographic section.

In sum, Francomano has produced an excellent bilingual study text that will not only be useful to literary scholars but perhaps even more helpful in the
classroom. This volume would serve as an excellent teaching aid in language-based programs, gender studies, and history. The bilingual format facilitates not only translation and language study but also makes the texts accessible to students who have little or no understanding of Spanish. The tone is pitched perfectly so as to be of interest to scholars but also engaging and informative for students of any discipline. The texts themselves continue to fascinate and shed light on relations between the sexes, even today, and as the volume is slim, quick to read, and reasonably priced, would make enjoyable reading for any academic or a member of the interested public.

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