

**43. NOVELS OF LOVE AND THE *HOLY FAITH* IN ITALY**

Troubadours and *Faithfuls of Love* used to write sonnets, songs and ballads in rhyme. They communicated with each other in a hidden way, responding in kind (literally “responding in rhymes”). The answer was recognizable as it reproduced exactly the same pattern of rhymes of the received message. We report as an example, two well-known exchanges among *Faithfuls of Love* of the Florentine school of the thirteenth century¹:

From Dante to Cino da Pistoia	Reply of Cino da Pistoia to Dante
Perch’io non trovo chi meco ragioni del signor a cui siete voi ed io, conviemmi sodisfare al gran disio ch’i’ ho di dire i pensamenti boni. Null’altra cosa appo voi m’accagioni del lungo e del noioso tacer mio, se non il loco ov’i’ son, ch’è sì rio, che ’l ben non trova chi albergo li doni.	Dante, i’ non so in qual albergo soni Lo ben, ch’è da ciascun messo in oblio; è sì gran tempo che di qua fuggio, che del contraro son nati li troni; e per le variate condizioni, chi ’l ben tacesse non risponde al fio: lo ben sa’ tu che predicava Iddio, e nol tacea nel regno de’ dimoni.

From Dante to the “Dames” (<i>Faithfuls of Love</i>)	Reply of the “Dames” to Dante
Donne ch’avete intelletto d’Amore, i’ vo’ con voi de la mia donna dire, non perch’io creda sua laude finire, ma ragionar per isfogar la mente. Io dico che pensando il suo valore, Amor sì dolce mi si fa sentire, che s’io allora non perdessi ardire, farei parlando innamorar la gente.	Ben aggia l’amoroso e dolce core Che vol noi donne di tanto servire, che sua dolce ragion ne face audire, la quale è piena di piacer piagente; che ben è stato bon conoscidore, poi quella dov’è fermo lo disire nostro per donna volerla seguire, perché di noi ciascuna fa saccente,

Such correspondence had the most varied subjects: requests for advice on how to use the method (sskrt. *prakriyā*); questions about the doctrine; declaration on the achieved degree of realization; injunctions (sskrt. *vidhi*) by the master to the disciples; warning of imminent danger; convocation of the Court of Love; accusations of doctrinal deviations of some fellow disciples, etc.

In the *Holy Faith*, however, there was also another literary vernacular genre: the novel. This mixed form of prose and poetry referred directly to the novel tradition of the cycle of King Arthur and the Grail and,

¹ We will write more on the content and meaning of these rhymes in the following chapters.



indirectly, to the Latin treatises of Love which, through Andreas Capellanus (*De Amore*), went back to Severinus Boethius (*De consolatione Philosophiae*) up to Ovid (*Ars Amatoria*)¹. The first novel that we know of was *Le roman de la Rose* (*The novel of the Rose*). It is an allegorical tale begun in 1237 by Guillaume de Lorris, that remained unfinished. After forty years, a second poet, Jean de Meun, continued and completed the narration.



1- Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun

In the novel the protagonist decides to look for an unknown woman he fell in love with in a dream. This lady is mysteriously identified with a white rose, pure and fragrant, locked in a castle².

It is quite clear that the Rose-Lady represents the holy wisdom, the initiatic knowledge that reflect itself in the “fountain of teaching”³. The protagonist of the *Roman* enters the kingdom of Love, led by Cupid and accompanied by the contrasting fairies Venus and Chastity. The knight is continually hindered along the way by Poverty and *Papelardie* (*Lard-eater*). Poverty is the personification of the mendicant orders, Franciscans and Dominicans; in particular the last one who led the activities of the Inquisition. The second term, on the other hand, is a derogatory nickname for the Papacy desire of fatten up on earthly goods. The continuation of the quest, and eventual success, is narrated by Jean de Meun. In this second part of

¹ This literary current was partly inspired by Prudentius's *Psychomachia* (348-405 AD), where vices and virtues are represented as characters in an epic struggle between them; and by the anonymous *De Jherusalem la cité* (11th century), in which Jerusalem, considered an initiatic centre, is depicted as a woman threatened by evil forces, while virtuous knights try to reach her; we would also like to mention the *Pamphilus de Amore*, by a Spanish anonymous of the 12th century and *Li Fablel dou Dieu d'Amours*, in the Oc language.

² It is evident the resemblance between this allegory and the novels on the search for the Grail. The white Rose-Lady corresponds to *Blanchefleur*, daughter of the Fisher King, who lives in the castle of Corbenic and who marries the knight conqueror of the Holy Grail. In India this archetype can be found in the *Rāmāyana*, the epic that tells the expedition of Rāma, perfect King and *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, to free Sītā who is held captive in the fortress of the demon Rāvaṇa. With many variations, such as Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitram*, this allegorical story was perpetuated until the very time when Guillaume de Lorris wrote down his novel. In fact, in the middle of the 13th century, in India the *rājaput* Prince Ratan Singh went to Ceylan to free Princess Padmavati (which means white lotus). In that contingency, the forces of evil that hindered the quest were represented by the Muslim hordes. Three centuries later the oral narration was put into words in the famous poem *Padmavāt* by the *sufi* Malik Muhammad Jāyasī (1477-1542). This *pīr* of the *tariqa* Chiṣtiyya continued to depict the Muslims of India as obstacles to the search for Padmavati, the sacred wisdom.

³ Following the chivalrous customs, the *Faithfuls of Love* devoted themselves to a Lady belonging to the same initiatic tradition, acting as a ‘devoted admirer’. The Dame is the symbol of the wisdom that the knight wanted to achieve, and in the same way his ardent desire for knowledge was concealed behind an earthly love. On this note it is not justifiable that a serious scholar like Alfonso Ricolfi constantly and insistently underlines the carnality of these Dames. He even finds lubricious hints in the Rose of Jean de Meun (A. Ricolfi, *Studi sui “Fedeli d’Amore II. – Dal problema del gergo al crollo d’un Regno”*, Genova-Roma-Napoli-Città di Castello, Soc. A. Ed. Dante Alighieri, 1940, pp. 25-26). Obviously, the ordinary historians of Italian literature share this idea of an underlying lust in these writings, which indeed is a inclination existing only in their minds.



the *Roman de la Rose*, the knight must overcome the obstacles that False Appearance (*Faux-Semblant*) puts on his way, until he finally conquers the Rose-Holy Wisdom.



2. Attack on the castle where the Rose is held captive

This first narration of the conquest of the Rose, or of the Whiteflower, is characterized by a blunt satire towards the exoteric Catholicism, a characteristic that will continue and become more and more scathing in the following novels of the same genre.



3. Love rejects Franciscans and Dominicans

The most important book of this kind¹ is *Il Fiore (The Flower)*, by Ser Durante Fiorentino, which according to all the critics, is Dante (contraction of Durante) Alighieri. In this allegorical novel the



4. Sir Durant Florentine (Dante Alighieri)

¹ The erudite book *Tesoretto*, by Ser Brunetto Latini and its version in the language of oil, *Li livres dou Tresor*, also belongs to this current: these poems tell of an initiatic journey to the top of Mount Olympus.



protagonist is introduced in the garden of Love by his Dame *Bel Acuel* (*Nice Welcoming*) and attains to kiss the Flower. *Bel Acuel* is evidently the master (sskrt. *guru*), the garden is the initiatic organization (sskrt. *kula*), and the kiss is the initiation rite (sskrt. *dīkṣita kriyā*), as already mentioned in the previous chapter.



5. The Garden of Love and the Fountain of Teaching

From that moment on, the knight is opposed by *Malebouche* (*Badmouth*) and *Jalusie* (*Jealousy*), who represent respectively the false accusation of heresy, and the profanity that considers Love as an earthly passion. During the journey to conquer the *Flower*, the protagonist runs also into *False Appearance* and *Compulsory Abstinence*, who represent the hypocritical clergy and the new pauperistic orders, Franciscans and Dominicans. After having overcome all these obstacles, the knight eventually achieves to pick up the Flower. This symbolic narrative of the conquest of knowledge is so full of polemical hints against the exotericism that many academic scholars wrongly see it as a proof of heresy or even of Catharism.



6. The Woman (the *Faithful of Love*) picks the Rose

This indeed is not the case in Dante's *Il Fiore*¹. In the novel, the difference between the persecuted by the Inquisition is actually quite clear: on one side the simple followers of Catharism and “perfect” Cathars (who obtained the *consolamentum*) and, on the other, those who rebel against the exoteric impositions of the Church². After the crusade against the Albigensians and because of the hostility unleashed by the papacy towards the Emperor Frederick II, the initiates of the different esoteric currents had to

¹ Given the traditional importance of the Greatest Poet, we will not write about him at this point, but we will dedicate more space to Dante in the next chapters.

² So Dante makes *Badmouth* talk: “*Sed i' truovo in cittade o in castello / Colà ove Patarin [cataro] sia riparato / credente ched' e' o consolato, / od altri uom ma che sia mio rubello...*” (If I find in a city or in a castle where a Cathar took refuge, whether he is a simple believer or one who has obtained the *consolamentum*, or anyone else who is rebellious to me...[the Church]) (*Il Fiore*, CXXIV).



increasingly hide themselves. From this moment on they had to hide behind a profane appearance (*Mal Sembiente*, viz. *Ugly Appearance*), or an assumed cover. Even the initiates therefore disguised themselves as *Falso Sembiente* (*False Appearance*). During and after the crusade against the Cathars, troubadours and *Faithfuls of Love* took refuge in the Courts of the Sovereigns who sympathized with them or who were themselves initiates. It was particularly important the welcome that Emperor Frederick II granted to the Provençal fugitives in his kingdom of southern Italy. Troubadours gathered around him and henceforth the Sicilian school of the *Faithfuls of Love* was founded. The Sicilian poets sang in the Provençal manner the Dame, the Flower and the Rose, using now the Italian vernacular of Sicily¹.



7. Emperor Frederick II, the *Stupor Mundi*

Frederick II of Swabia, who was raised by the Templars of Apulia and the bishop of Troia, received since young age a profound and vast education. He spoke six languages: Latin, Sicily Italian, German, Provençal, Greek and Arabic. He was a very refined poet, soon to become one of the most popular troubadours of his kingdom. He founded a court of intellectuals called *Magna Curia* in Palermo, the School of medicine in Salerno, the University in Naples and the school of rhetoric in Capua. The master (sskrt. *dīkṣā guru*) of the poetic school, which was also a Court of Love and initiatic school (sskrt. *gurukula*), was the great troubadour Jacopo da Lentini². The greatness of the Emperor's wisdom, that stimulated such an important cultural growth, made him known to all as *Stupor Mundi* (Wonder of the World, sskrt. *lokādbhuta*).



8. The Empire of Frederick II surrounding the Church State

¹ Some argue that it was a Sicilian vernacular. But "*Rosa fresca aulentissima ch'appari in ver l'estate, le donne ti desiano pulzelle e maritate...*" wrote by the jester Cielo d'Alcamo looks nothing like Sicilian dialect.

² The most important disciples of Jacopo were, in addition to the Emperor himself, his sons King Enzo and Manfred, Pier della Vigna, Ruggieri d'Amici, Odo delle Colonne, Rinaldo d'Aquino, Arrigo Testa, Guido delle Colonne, Stefano Protonotaro, Filippo da Messina, Mazzeo di Ricco, Jacopo Mostacci, Percivalle Doria, Tommaso di Sasso, Giovanni di Brienne, Compagnetto da Prato, Paganino da Serzana, Folco di Calavra and Pietro da Eboli.



The popes who succeeded one another during Emperor Frederick's reign undertook a hostile policy towards him. The papacy did not tolerate the Emperor's control over Germany, northern Italy and the south of Italy, the Church State being thus completely surrounded. On the other hand, Frederick II did not hide his desire to take over Rome as Roman Emperor. Hence, he was repeatedly excommunicated, in order to dissolve the oath of loyalty his vassals had with him. Frederick II led the sixth crusade against the Islamic occupation of Palestine. While in the Middle East, the Emperor met with Malik al-Kamil, Sultan of Syria and Egypt. The two sovereigns recognized each other as initiates of their respective religions, sympathized and reached a compromise¹.



9. Hermann von Salza, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order

In this way the Emperor obtained the return of Jerusalem to the Roman Empire without a fight. This success was used as pretext for a new papal excommunication. Due to these continuous expulsions from the Catholic community, even the Order of the Temple had to distance itself from Frederick II. This led to several disagreements between the Templars and the Imperial cause. Among the monk-knights only the Teutonic maintained rather good relations with the Emperor, as their Grand Master Hermann von Salza was a close friend and counsellor of Frederick II. The political events caused by the continuous papal hostility prevented the prestigious wisdom of the Emperor to reach the rest of Europe. But he represents one of the cornerstones of the initiatic tradition and after his death, he remained into the legend².

As previously mentioned, the Provençal troubadours had a warm welcome not only in Sicily, Spain and Portugal, but also in northern Italy. They gave birth to a school of *Faithfuls of Love* which had its main centres first in the city of Bologna and then in Florence. In Bologna Guido Guinizzelli (1235-1276) was the master of the *Faithfuls of Love* of central Italy and without any doubt he was one of the most important

¹ Malik al-Kamil was a disciple of the *sufi* master 'Umar ibn al-Farid, also a poet of love. The Sultan had met twice the greatest of the *sufi* masters, Muḥiddin Ibn 'Arabi. Saint Francis tried to convert Malik al-Kamil to Christianity, but he had the misfortune to face a character of a very superior stature.

² Frederick II, like his grandfather, the great Emperor Frederick I 'Barbarossa', Charlemagne and King Arthur, is one of the characters who are said to be sleeping and waiting to return at the end of the cycle. When the time comes those great warriors will awaken to establish the universal kingdom of peace and justice. No doubt that *Stupor Mundi* was not only a Holy Roman Emperor, but also an *Imperator* of the initiatic paths of the Western tradition. Antonino de Stefano, *Federico II e le correnti spirituali del suo tempo*, Parma, Ed. all'insegna del Veltro, 1981, pp. 145-158; A. de Stefano, *L'idea imperiale di Federico II*, Parma, Ed. all'insegna del Veltro, 1981, pp. 223-234; Nuccio D'Anna, *Il segreto dei trovatori. Sapienza e poesia nell'Europa medievale*, Rimini, Il Cerchio, 2005, pp. 72-76.



poets. His poem “*Al cor gentil rempaira sempre Amore*” is a true doctrinal statement outside the *parler cloz* (hidden language), which we paraphrase here:



10. *Ser Guido Guinizzelli*

Love always takes refuge in the noble heart, as the bird shelters in the green of the forest. Nature did not create Love before the noble heart, nor the noble heart before Love: when the sun was created, its splendour shone immediately and not before the creation of the sun. Love takes its place in nobility in such a natural way as heat in the light of fire. The fire of Love lights up in the noble heart as the power in the gem. This power does not descend from the [corresponding] star¹ before the sun has not ennobled it: when the sun, thanks to its strength, has expelled what is vile in it, the star charges it of its own power. Thus, the heart that was by nature chosen, pure and noble, makes him fall in love with the Dame who is similar to the star. Love dwells in the noble heart as the fire in the torch; there, clear and subtle, it shines at its will. It is so indomitable that no other receptacle could accept it. Instead, an ignoble birth is contrary to Love, like water, which by nature is cold, is opposite to the heat of fire.



11. *Dame grasps and illuminates the hearts. The Sun of Love illuminates the Faithfuls of Love*

¹ Exactly as in the Indian conception, the virtues of the nine planets [sskrt. *navagraha*] are reflected in the powers of the nine precious stones [sskrt. *navaratna*].



Love takes dwelling in the noble heart, as if this place was similar to itself, like the diamond in the iron mine. The sun hits the mud all day long: yet it remains worthless and the sun does not lose its heat; the proud man says: “I am noble by birth”. But he is similar to mud, and the virtue of nobility is like the sun, because it should not be believed that inherited nobility can be deprived of a virtuous heart. If the noble heart has virtue, it is like the water that lets the sunbeam pass through and like the sky that shines of the light of the stars it contains. God, the Creator shines in the angelic intellect, more than the sun shines before our eyes: it [the intellect] has knowledge of its Creator beyond the movement of the heavens and it obeys Him¹ by making them move. In truth, the beautiful Lady should inspire him in the same way he fulfils the divine plan; after she has shed light in the eyes of her lover, the desire rises of never disobey her. The moment my soul will stand before Him, God will tell me: “Dame [i.e. the Faithful of Love], what was your presumption? You have crossed the heavens and have come to me vainly thinking of Love as if it were Me. Praises are only suited to Me and to the Queen of the true Kingdom [the Virgin Mary], before whom every illusion vanishes “. I will be able to answer him: “She had the appearance of an angel of Your Kingdom; it was not a mistake if I placed my love in her”.

Gian Giuseppe Filippi

¹ The Dame is like a sunbeam of Love that makes the sunlight shine on the surface of the purified intellect in the noble heart. Note the similarity with the *ābhāsavāda* (doctrine of the reflex) of *Brahma vidyā* taught in Hinduism.