



You are accessing the Digital Archive of the Catalan Review Journal.

Esteu accedint a l'Arxiu Digital del Catalan Review

By accessing and/or using this Digital Archive, you accept and agree to abide by the Terms and Conditions of Use available at http://www.nacs-catalanstudies.org/catalan_review.html

A l' accedir i / o utilitzar aquest Arxiu Digital, vostè accepta i es compromet a complir els termes i condicions d'ús disponibles a http://www.nacs-catalanstudies.org/catalan_review.html

Catalan Review is the premier international scholarly journal devoted to all aspects of Catalan culture. By Catalan culture is understood all manifestations of intellectual and artistic life produced in the Catalan language or in the geographical areas where Catalan is spoken. Catalan Review has been in publication since 1986.

Catalan Review és la primera revista internacional dedicada a tots els aspectes de la cultura catalana. Per la cultura catalana s'entén totes les manifestacions de la vida intel·lectual i artística produïda en llengua catalana o en les zones geogràfiques on es parla català. Catalan Review es publica des de 1986.

Libre del Ordre de Cavayleria: Fashion and Fiction
Luisa Piemontese-Ramos

Catalan Review, Vol. IV, number 1-2 (1990), p. 347-355

LIBRE DEL ORDE DE CAUAYLERIA:
FASHION AND FICTION

LUISA PIEMONTESE-RAMOS

In his ascension to knighthood, a squire must be indoctrinated to the ways of chivalry, according to the hermit in the prologue to Ramon Llull's *Libre del Orde de Cauayleria*. Insofar as the aspiring knight wishes to take arms, he must not ignore the codes of the trade. The aforementioned hermit possesses a book which outlines the canons of chivalry observed by himself as a knight in earlier days. Suspecting his life will soon end, he kindly offers this precious and useful written information to a nameless squire whom he meets one autumn day. Upon reading the book, the young soon-to-be knight departs, determined to instruct others on the rules and order of chivalry.

Such is the introduction to Llull's text, and according to critics, such marks the end of the fictitious-literary quality of the work.

Its fiction, like that of the *Book of the Gentile*, starts promisingly, but its interest is illusory, both interest and fiction ending with the prologue and the rest of the book is more monotonous than that of the *Book of the Gentile*, its only merit being that of straightforwardness.¹

It is, however, this very straightforwardness which is transformed, due to the novelistic nature of the prologue, into something other than simply a didactic and authoritative monologic discourse.

The book is divided into seven parts, in accordance with the seven planets or heavenly bodies, each of which discusses a par-

¹ E. Allison Peers, *Ramon Llull* (New York and Toronto, The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 123.

ticular aspect of knighthood: the origin or beginnings of chivalry; the office of chivalry; the examination of a squire; the manner by which a squire must be dubbed; the knight's armour; the virtues of the knight; and the honors bestowed upon a knight. Written in an epoch when chivalry is very much a respected profession and an essential part of society, Llull's text becomes, together with Alfonso el Sabio's *Siete Partidas*, one of the oldest accounts of the order of knighthood in the history of the medieval Iberian peninsula. Both Llull's and Alfonso el Sabio's works serve as sources to many later works of literature, epic as well as more novelistic in nature. The *Libre del Orde de Cauayleria*, in fact, becomes popular quite instantly, is translated in several languages and is used by authors such as don Juan Manuel in *El Libro del Caballero y del Escudero* and Johanot Martorell in *Tirant lo Blanc*.²

Being that chivalry is so much and intrinsic part of society during this era, ironically, the more visual aspects of this occupation such as elaborate ceremonies and vestments of the knights become almost too conventional to describe in detail in written form. This at least seems to be the case with Ramon Llull's text, particularly the section on the knight's armour. The emphasis, in fact, does not appear to be on the actual depiction of the clothing or armour of the knight rather on the religious symbolism suggested by each article. As E. Allison Peers states

The symbolism in the knight's armour — as detailed as that in the vestments of a priest — is of interest to those who have small knowledge of such things, but the detailing of it would have seemed trite in Llull's day.³

It is, nonetheless, in this seemingly very didactic part of Llull's work where questions arise regarding its authority because of the

² Peers, p. 121.

³ Peers, p. 123.

very open-ended nature of the subject matter: clothing and «fashion».

Chivalry, as one may note in the visual arts and in works of literature, not only consists of fulfilling responsibilities to God and royalty; it is most definitely also a fashion statement. In literary works such as *El Poema de Mio Cid*, *Amadís de Gaula*, perhaps chivalric fashion and ceremonial etiquette are overemphasized, exaggerated and even romanticized. However, due to the important status of the knight during the Middle Ages, it seems hard to believe that the literary and perhaps almost novelistic pompous fashionableness is so very far from reality. A knight's appearance is indeed extremely important for his success since aesthetics rule how an individual is viewed by others and by himself. A poorly dressed knight, is subject to scorn and ridicule much like what is provoked in the readers of *Don Quijote* as this infamous knight discovers the dirty old vestments he wears as he is to be dubbed knight.

In his text entitled *The Fashion System*, Roland Barthes studies three types of clothing: «real», referring to the technology or manufacture; «iconic», photographs or drawings; and «written», verbal description. While written clothing his linguistic units and rules separate from the «real» and «iconic», its dependence on these other two categories is quite notable. Verbal language, in fact, finds itself limited in describing what is so intrinsically visual of tactual. «Written clothing is carried by language, but also resists it, and is created by this interplay.»⁴ In verbal description, the visually aesthetic function of clothing resists becoming limited in language and meaning. Such is the paradox faced by any author of written clothing, who tries to defy the unconstrained eye or touch within the boundaries of verbal language.

However, it must also be noted, that written clothing complements image clothing in that it may provide information which

⁴ Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (New York, Hill and Wang, 1983),

an icon cannot portray. In a sense, the visual and tactual can also be limiting in nature. In dealing with the knight's armour, Ramon Llull is faced with the dilemma of how to use syntax to portray what both may or may not otherwise be representable as an icon. His choice is to provide the reader both with a «straightforward» description and with a more rhetorical-symbolic verbal imagery. Hence, the somewhat overplayed religious tone of this part of the text.

Llull's description of the armour consists of introducing the different parts of the knight's attire by name; at times this is followed by a very brief account of what the article of clothing or the weapon looks like or of the material of which it is made; the part of the body for which the item is used is seldom specified. Some emphasis is placed on the article's purpose in battle, however, Llull dedicates the most effort to the religious symbolism surrounding the knight's armour. The text proposes to be didactic or instructional in nature and therefore means to consist of a thorough and complete outline or account of the subject matter at hand. Interestingly enough, however, this particular section of the text proves to be quite fragmented in its delivery. While apparently all items are named and are described symbolically in terms of christian values and virtues, not all are represented in a more physical-concrete, or, shall we say, «visual» sense. The lack of a structurally balanced description of all the articles of a knight's armour suggests that the text is incomplete, or at least «open», allowing for the reader's input.

In several instances the text lacks information regarding what a weapon or item of clothing actually looks like. The reader is told, for instance, that the helmet is used to protect the head; that the armor must be well sealed on all sides, that the shield is used to defend the knight from his enemy, the gorget protects the neck, the spurs are used to regulate the speed of the horse. Nonetheless, the reader is never informed of the physical or tangible appearance of these items. Few exceptions are noted however in

the case of the sword which, according to the text, must look like a cross and be double bladed and the spear, which must be straight and made of steel. Surprisingly, at times the text also lacks religious symbolism, as in the case of the footwear and the shield. Due to the fragmentedness and irregularities of the descriptions, the reader is not presented with a complete and thorough instruction on the knight's armour. Furthermore, and imbalanced representation is not an effective technique in didacticism. Indirectly and almost metaphorically, the text asks the reader to deduce or fill in missing information, to play a much more active role and therefore to become a participant in the writing process.

Besides being «open» because of the peculiar and irregular descriptive style in which the armour is presented, this part of the text also «open» in terms of its subject matter: the notion of fashion, which is itself an open system. One of the questions and dilemmas surrounding «fashion» is that authorship and authority. Who dictates what is to be worn at a particular time? Furthermore, who dictates the written description of fashion? Fashion is indeed a product of trends in society in general. A designer's name or label has in recent eras become more representative of a business institution than indicative of individual authorship or authority. The underlying social trends lead the way to a new look and a new style. Ultimately, it is the individual who must select what to wear. Fashion is therefore a combination of individual and social preferences: it is a collective function of society. Even in the case of uniforms, certain items are a product of the individual's choice, personality, or deeds; for example, the Knight of the Green Sword in *Amadís de Gaula* or the Cid, who prides himself in having two magnificent swords in his possession, the Colada and the Tizona, which are described elaborately. In written clothing, however, the notions of authorship and authority take on a different light. The written word establishes and authoritative relationship towards the reader, for he is told what to see and what to ignore.

The fashion text represents as it were the authoritative voice of someone who knows all there is behind the jumbled or incomplete appearance of the visible forms: thus it constitutes a technique of opening the invisible...⁵

In image or visual clothing the viewer has the freedom to choose what to look at first or last, whether to start from the top, the bottom, or the middle, whether or not to disregard certain items of less interest. In written clothing, the opposite occurs, the reader is manipulated by the author who establishes the order and the extent to which clothing must be described. The reader loses the freedom otherwise taken for granted in the case of visual clothing.

Language eliminates this freedom, but also this uncertainty; it conveys a choice and imposes it, it requires the perception of this dress to stop here (...). Thus, every written word has a function of authority insofar as it chooses.⁶

In the case of the *Libro del Orde de Cauayleria*, the presentation of the armour does not appear to follow any particular order. The reader is led heedlessly from the middle, to the head, to the feet and back to the middle of the body. Included as part of the knight's armour and clothing is also his horse, whose description is similarly not very methodic. The lack of order, in this case, is an order nonetheless since the arrangement is syntactical and in written form. At Lull's hands, the knight's vestments and armour are transformed from the social to the individual, from the collective to the authoritative. Or rather, for didactic purposes, this is what Lull wishes his readers to believe.

The prologue of the text, however, confuses the question of authorship of the *Libre del Orde de Cauayleria*. As stated at the beginning of this study, the hermit-knight offers a book to a young squire so that he may be educated in the profession of

⁵ Barthes, p. 14.

⁶ Barthes, p. 13.

chivalry. The reader is never informed of the true author of this book. It becomes increasingly evident as the prologue is analyzed further that Lull is only one of several possible authors. The hermit does not mention whether the book is in printed or manuscript form. The collection of canons of chivalry he possesses might very well be a journal which he himself has compiled through memories of when he was a knight. Hence, a dilemma appears between memory and reality. Along the same lines, the prologue places the reader in a fictitious setting, both the hermit and the squire are fictional characters, and therefore, it is logical to deduce that the book is also fictitious as well as its author. If, then, the author is indeed fictitious, how can the text's instruction and didacticism be taken seriously?

Not only is the reader not sure whether or not the information is «real» or fictitious, but, to complicate matters even further, he can neither be absolutely certain that what he is reading is indeed the original version offered by the hermit to the squire. The prologue ends, in fact, as the squire departs to present the book to all who love chivalry, so that they may «copy» it and at times, read and remember knighthood. By encouraging other to «copy» the text, the squire assumes an attitude similar to that of the Archpriest of Hita who offers his *Book of Good Love* as a ball passing from one hand to the next. The vertical relationship between teacher and student in didacticism is defied as the *Libre del Orde de Cauayleria* moves horizontally from hand to hand. As the text is continuously copied, and furthermore, as times change and so does fashion, the work may be slightly or greatly altered, the end result being a version or versions quite distant from the original. Not to be forgotten is don Juan Manuel's plea against the copyists in *El Conde Lucanor*, who amend and distort original works. Is the *Libre del Orde de Cauayleria*, then, only a possibly faithful version of a lost original, or simply a fictitious illusion?

This study begins with a quote by E. Allison Peers criticizing

Llull's part on the knight's armour in the *Libre del Orde de Cavayleria* as being to «straightforward», «uninteresting», «monotonous», and perhaps almost too «trite». Nevertheless, it is obvious that a new reading of the text in more structuralist and semiotic terms reveals several previously undiscovered possibilities. The reading of the text is actually quite challenging due not only to the subject matter but also to its relationship with the prologue. The notion of authority and authorship is defied both because of the notion of «fashion» and because of the fictitious quality of the prologue which introduces and sets the tone for the remainder of the book. In presenting «fashion», the written word reaches its limits and can only be an approach to reality, not a complete duplication of it. In its attempt to be straightforward, this text becomes literary and fictitious, for the reality of visual systems defies written language. In his later writings, Llull will explore the combination of the visual and the written word through his famous mystical diagrams.

LUISA PIEMONTESE-RAMOS
YALE UNIVERSITY

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barthes, Roland. *The Fashion System*. New York, Hill and Wang, 1983.

Llull, Ramon. *Libre del Orde de Cauayleria*. Barcelona, Librería den Alvar Verdaguer, 1879.

Peers, E. Allison. *Ramon Llull*. New York and Toronto, The Macmillan Co., 1929.