Jaufré Rudel's "love from afar" and distant love via chat; a metaphorical approach

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Abstract

Love for an unknown person in a distant location has featured spectacularly throughout the history of literature. One of the emblematic authors who dealt with falling in love in such a blind fashion was the troubadour Jaufré Rudel, to the extent that he may be considered to be a literary paradigm. When analysing his work and its repercussions, it is impossible to escape a comparison with the type of amorous relationships that can be established via chat, the common denominator of which is that the interlocutor is unknown. In addition to the mystery, related to a high component of idealisation, we believe that there are other comparative links from a metaphorical perspective, such as distance, the identity of the participants and the specific nature of the code used. In this article, we will set out some ideas with a view to stimulating further analyses in that respect.

Keywords

troubadour, chat, personal relationships, Jaufré Rudel

Resum

Al llarg de la història de la literatura, l'amor cap a una persona desconeguda i distant en l'espai ha tingut un rendiment espectacular. Un dels autors emblemàtics que va tractar aquest enamorament a cegues va ser el trobador Jaufré Rudel; fins al punt que el podem considerar un paradigma literari. En analitzar la seva obra i la seva repercussió, hom no pot defugir la comparació amb el tipus de relacions amoroses que es poden establir als xats, que tenen el desconeixement de l'interlocutor com a base comuna. A més de la incògnita, lligada a un alt component d'idealització, pensem que hi ha altres vincles de comparació en clau metafòrica, com ara la distància, la identitat dels participants i l'especificitat del codi. Apuntarem aquí algunes idees amb la finalitat d'esperonar a fer ulteriors anàlisis en aquest sentit.

Paraules clau

trobador, xat, relacions personals, Jaufré Rudel

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1. Introduction: Jaufré Rudel as a model of falling in love from afar

Jaufres Rudels de Blaia si fo mout gentils hom, princes de Blaia. Et enamoret se de la comtessa de Tripol, ses vezer, per lo ben qu'el n'auzi dire als pelerins que venguen d'Antiocha. E fez de leis mans vers ab bons sons, ab paubres motz. E per voluntat de leis vezer, el se croset e se mes en mar, e pres lo malautia en la nau, e fo condug a Tripol, en un alberc, per mort. E fo fait saber a la comtessa et ella venc ad el, al son leit, e pres lo antre sos bratz. E saup qu'ella era la comtessa, e mantenent recobret l'auzir e·l flairar, e lauzet Dieu, que l'avia la vida sostenguda tro qu'el l'agues vista; et enaissi el mori entre sos bratz. Et ella lo fez a gran honor sepellir en la maison del Temple; e pois, en aquel dia, ella se rendet morga, per la dolor qu'ella n'ac de la mort de lui.

"Jaufré Rudel of Blaye was a very noble man, the prince of Blaye. And he fell in love with the countess of Tripoli, without having seen her, due to all the good things he heard about her from the pilgrims who came from Antioch. And he wrote many songs about her, with beautiful melodies and simple words. And in his desire to see her, he became a crusader, and set to sea and became ill on the ship, and was taken to Tripoli, to an inn, a dying man. The countess was told what had happened and she went to his bedside and took him in her arms. He knew that she was the countess and his hearing and breathing recovered, and he praised God for having let him live until he had seen her; and he died thus in her arms. And she had him buried with great honour in the house of the Temple; and afterwards, on the same day, she became a nun due to the sorrow that his death caused her."[1]

This is the *Vida* of Jaufré Rudel,[2] a noble troubadour of the mid–12th century. It tells of a love that is impossible in terms of the distance involved, hyperbolic in that it is based on hearsay,

and doomed in that it ends at the moment at which it is fulfilled; a love that has become classic, crystallised in the epithet "from afar" (*de lohn*, in the original).

It may be that the *Vida* has an actual biographic basis; the character is real and was apparently in Tripoli. Various studies have even sought to determine the name of Rudel's beloved (Melisende, Hodierna, Eleanor of Aquitaine, etc.).[3] Others, meanwhile, such as Gaston Paris and Constanzo di Girolamo, have cast doubt on that historical basis. However, regardless of whether or not the actual events were as recounted by the *Vida*, or whether the troubadour "diluted the personal relationships of his experience into an abstract, idealistic I" (Jauss, 1986), or whether the verses of Rudel ought to be read from a mystical perspective (Spitzer, 1944; Chiarini, 1985; Cirlot, 1996),[4] the tale in question is part of a commonplace chain whose links include Homer, Qohelet, Virgil, Giacomo Leopardi, Saint Augustine, Ovid (the *Heroides*); Guillaume de Nevers fell in love with Flamenca without ever having seen her, Ibn Hazm of Cordoba in his *El collar de la coloma*,[5] Amanieu de Sescars, Petrarca, Andreu Febrer, Rimbaud, Uhland, Heine, Carducci, Rostand, etc. Even the countess in *Tirant lo Blanc* assesses love from afar, saying that "car amor de lluny e fum d'estopa tot és u" (chapter IV, translated by Rosenthal as "but love of those far away is like pollen on flax"). Each of those links gives the chain a new dimension, whilst retaining "faraway love" as a principal element. Kaija Saariaho premiered her opera *L'amour de loin*, with a script by Amin Maalouf, at the Salzburg Festival in August 2000, while Columna published *L'amor de lluny* by Antoni Dalmau in 2001, both of which are indicative of the topical nature of the subject matter at present. A Planeta Prize finalist in 1999, the work *El amor en los tiempos del xat,* in which the authors José Luís Palma and Roca Infantes describe their own experience of love in the chat environment, could well constitute the other side of the comparison.

However, our intention is not to engage in an essay involving literary critique or comparative literature with regard to any of the aforementioned works. Our proposal consists of concisely analysing six aspects of the works of Rudel which allow us to

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1. Translation to English based on the translation to Catalan by Eduard Vilella, in V. Cirlot (1996), pp. 76 –77, as used in the original Catalan version of this article. The version in Provençal is, however, from Riquer (1983), p. 154, who takes it from Boutière–Schutz–Cluzel. The English translations of the works of Rudel which appear in this article are by James H. Donalson and have been translated from Provençal.
2. Martí de Riquer (1983), p. 26. The *Vidas* were "prose texts that recount their biographies in a condensed manner […]. Of greater interest, however, […] is their value as a historical document, a hotly debated issue among Provençal scholars, whose opinions range from the extreme of denying that they have any value and regarding them as pure fantasy, to that of stating that they are entirely factual".
3. Martí de Riquer (1983), also V. Cirlot (1996, p. 18).
4. We fully agree with Professor Victòria Cirlot's interpretation of the poems of Jaufré Rudel. Nonetheless, our analysis does not only focus on the six poems of Rudel as a "whole" (Cirlot, 1996, p. 17), but on the entire anthology, including the *Vida*, and the legend to which it later gave rise. We believe that a biographic reading of the *Vida* and the verses of Jaufré Rudel, confusing, in the words of Cirlot, literal and symbolic aspects, is the interpretation that has done most to fuel "the idea and the experience of love in our world" (p. 12); the anonymous writer of the *Vida,* of that type of "miniature *roman*" (p. 31), established, with their contribution, a certain interpretation of the verses of Rudel, which is the one that will be used here, maybe erroneously, in a biased fashion, in the same way as in the case of the Romantics, but knowingly.
5. Information extracted from the observations of Martí de Riquer (1983) on the poetry of Rudel.

establish links between his amorous relationship and the amorous relationships that arise in the chat environment, in which respect a perpetuation over time of feelings that persist and adapt to new media can be seen.

2. The adulterous nature of the troubadour's relationship and the acceptance of that possibility where chat is concerned

The first similarity is related to the adulterous quality of the relationship. The love of the troubadour was an adulterous love. The lady had been married as the result of an agreement between her family and an economic or political component and, now, before the amorous entreaties of the poet, was able to show true affection, paradoxically, "of greater spiritual content" (Riquer, 1983). The troubadour devoted his compositions to a married lady, i.e. a lady with a legal status, who was a wife (domina). Evidently, loving relationships on the Internet are not inherently adulterous, although a significant proportion of amorous contacts established via chat between adults involve married people.[6] Those who seek to experience love via chat accept that the other person could be married or have another relationship in real life, and nonetheless establish a loving connection. The cultural visual symbols of being part of a couple (the ring, for example) disappear in such cases, given that the type of communication in question takes place in "contexts in which most social identifying signs are absent" (Núñez, 2001). In the case of asynchronous conversations (based on e–mail, for example), it is possible to conceal the routine or the standard schedule of family life; nonetheless, or maybe due to an awareness of the situation, the relationship continues, as was the case with Jaufré:

> Luenh es lo castelhs e la tors
> on elha jay e sos maritz[7]

> "Far is the castle, far is the tower
> where she and her husband lie"

3. The honesty of the troubadour's love and honesty in the fictional environment

The existence of a husband does not trouble the lover, as the latter considers his relationship to be honest:[8]

> Ben sai c'anc de lei no·m jauzi
> ni ja de mi no·s jauzira,
> ni per son amic no·m tenra
> ni coven no·m fara de si[9]

> "I know I've not enjoyed her yet
> and me she never will enjoy
> nor will she hold me as a friend
> and she won't promise me a thing"

The honesty of Rudel is reinforced by the transfer of the pact of serfdom to the pact of love, whereby the smitten male swears to accompany, to be loyal to and to aid his lady in exchange for her attention. In the same way, the process of becoming more involved in an interpersonal relationship via chat entails a "concern for the wellbeing of the other, characterised by displays of companionship, trust and assistance between the subjects" (Roco, 2001).

4. The idealisation of the other

Another metaphor lies in the platonic idealisation (Bescós, 2002) of a love that is fated to die, like Jaufré on the beach in Tripoli, when it loses its virtual nature, when contact occurs, when it becomes real, upon leaving the platonic cave:

> Nuils hom no·s meravill de mi
> s'ieu am so que ja no·veira[10]

> "Let no–one be amazed at me
> that I love one who won't see me"[11]

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6. Association for Media Research (http://www.aimc.es/). The other major group consists of teenagers. The difference between the two sectors of users lies in the repetition of contact (adults tend to maintain relationships for longer) and the tone of messages (involving more explicitly sexual content among teenagers). Those factors have been studied by Area (1998), Chidley (1994) and Smolowe (1995). Since those studies were conducted, it is to be supposed that, with the increase in the size of the population of regular ICT users and the fall in the price of the necessary equipment, the group in question has grown significantly.

7. Verses 17 and 18 of Jaufré Rudel: *Pro ai del chan essenhadors*

8. "What we call *virtual love* can be nothing more than *platonic love*, in that it is honest due to the impossibility of it being fulfilled" (Victòria Bescós, 2002). The author argues that while relationships conducted via chat can lead to a face–to–face encounter, the type of relationship becomes substantially different.

9. Verses 24 to 28 of Jaufré Rudel: *No sap chantar qui so non di*

10. Verses 7 and 8 of Jaufré Rudel: *No sap chantar qui so non di*

11. In his famous *Farai un vers de dreit nien,* Guilhem de Peitieu had already sung "Amigu'ai, non sai qui s'es" (my lady friend I've never seen), v. 25, to a female friend he did not know. The translation to English is by Leonard Cottrell.

[…]

e lauzet Dieu, que l'avia la vida sostenguda tro qu'el l'agues vista;
et enaissi el mori entre sos bratz

"and he praised God for having let him live until he had seen her; and he thus died in her arms"[12]

B. G. Chenault wonders what better way there is to idealise if not via chat, where one fashions one's own mental image of somebody. A death that could be interpreted as being due to disappointment, once all the interlocutor's contextual elements have been pieced together (J.S. Donath, 1999).

5. Physical distance

The fourth metaphor is related to the geographical distance from which the legend under discussion takes its name. The greatest attraction of a virtual relationship is, precisely, remoteness. A chat interlocutor is far away in that fictional environment, even if they are actually a work colleague, something that we may never know, as it is the relationship itself that is important, rather than the elements involved therein.[13] Love is not close at hand, there is no possibility of contact. However, it is that very impossibility that glorifies it; it is a utopian love, in the etymological sense of the term:

Lai es mos cors sitotz c'alhors
non a ni sima ni raitz,
et en dormen sotz cobertors
es lai ab lieis mos esperitz[14]

"My heart's entirely there as well:
it has no other root or branch.
While sleeping under coverlets
my spirit is far off with her"

6. The identity of the message sender

Continuing with the metaphorical research, another similarity can be found where the identity of the message sender is concerned. The frail nature of the identification of the troubadour/composer with the singing voice has already been commented upon, in the form of the kind of "abstract I" referred to by Jauss (1986). In the words of Girolamo (1994), "the poet who says *I* is only referring to their subjective experience in terms of experience that can be generalised".[15] The public nature of the song contrasts with the intimacy of a message in a chat environment (outside the group or shared room, MUT, IRC), but a pseudoschizoid splitting, of the "I am someone else" variety, is common to both cases. If the poet is not the lover, then the lover is a literary invention. Likewise, lovers using chat are not themselves, beginning with the loss of the their real name and the adoption of a nickname with a high component of symbolism, just like a knight of Chrétien de Troyes. Does that mean that the lover is insincere? Not necessarily. A. Sánchez (1999) has emphasised that in the case of chat, as an environment of anonymity, "the intimate acquires incredible levels of expressive transparency, it is an inexhaustible, ad hoc source of practice for psychoanalysts and those who study matters related to human conduct […]. Contrary to the claims of many, communication on the Web is very sincere". F. J. Tirado and A. Gálvez have signalled the therapeutic potential entailed by the fact that, in the virtual environment, one depicts oneself as one would like to be.

7. The medium used for message transmission

The written format of chat, which allows for a certain degree of preparation of the message, rendered impossible by the spontaneity of oral communication or the semiotic explosion of visual contact, has its correlate in the reasoned, considered, possibly even written form that the troubadour himself says is a feature of his poetry:

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12. *Vida* of Jaufré Rudel.
13. Bescós (2002): "In a virtual environment, relationships are more important than the people who enter into them. Alternatively, going even further, we could say that nothing is important other than relationships». That does not exclude a desire for a face–to–face encounter; Rudel asks God for the power "q'en breu veia l'amor de loing" (for me to see this far–off love) in *Lanqand li jorn son lonc en mai* (v. 39).
14. Verses 33 to 36 of Jaufré Rudel: *Pro ai del chan essenhadors*
15. Here, it is once again necessary to remember the input of Victòria Cirlot, in the sense that Rudel, in reality, is expressing a mystical "internal pilgrimage". In order to keep the metaphor within the bounds of that interpretation, the "pseudoschizoid splitting" would occur in terms of "I am on an internal pilgrimage, but I am pretending to be in love". Does chat allow for any kind of mysticism? What is a virtual lover really seeking?

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Senes breu de perguamina
tramet lo vers, que chantam
en plana lengua romana
a·N Hugo Bru per Filhol[16]

"Without any parchment letter
I send verses we can sing
in our common romance language,
Filhol, take it to Hugh Brown"

Bos es lo vers, qu'anc no·i falhi,
e tot so que·i es ben esta;
e sel que de mi l'apenra
gart se no·l franha ni·l pessi[17]

"The verse is good, I've never failed
and all that's there is in its place,
and he who'd like to learn from me
be careful not to break it up"

The written language of chat is also a language that is subject to certain stylistic conventions (although it may appear otherwise), on the basis of which a *Razó[18]* of chat could be established:

No sap chantar qui so non di,
ni vers trobar qui motz no fa,
ni conois de rima co·s va
si razo no enten en si[19]

"One cannot sing without a tune,
or versify without a word,
one cannot understand a verse
if he can't understand himself"

It is necessary to be aware of the conventions that make it possible to interpret, for example, emoticons, combinations of orthographic signs (inverted commas, full stops, brackets, square brackets, etc.), which, by way of graphical onomatopoeia, reflect facial expressions of emotion (sadness, happiness, surprise, etc.), as well as of other conventions, such as the use of the upper case to indicate shouting or the meaning of certain expressions that are specific to chat. The language of chat is a "relexicalised" language in which "one plays with letters to imitate the phonology of words, with suffixes and prefixes, with consonantal changes, compositions and simplifications" (Imaña, 2003); or, as Halliday (1986) says, "chat is an alternative medium, for which reason it is a question of an anti–society that has its own language […]. The function of an alternative language is that of creating an alternative reality. The distinguishing feature of an anti–language is that it is, in its own right, a metaphorical entity and metaphorical modes of expression are thus the norm".[20]

8. Conclusions

Evidently (close to a thousand years have gone by!), we cannot ignore clear differences, such as the different role of women in the troubadouresque communicative act and in society in general nowadays. Additionally, from a merely literary point of view, chat entails no literature–related motives whatsoever. The courtly nature of the poetry of the troubadour compared to the increasingly generalised proletarianisation of chat. Troubadouresque publicity versus the intimacy of chat windows, etc.[21] However, identifying differences between the two fields in question is not only not particularly worthy of merit, but also takes us even further away from a world (that of Romance literature) that we ought to visit more often, if only to see that things have not changed to such a great extent.

As stated in the title, this piece of work has been approached from a metaphorical perspective and is not an in–depth, verified study of both sides of the comparison. Literary sources have been used extensively to find out about human relationships in a given era; our intention is to propose a new line of sociological or anthropological work that compares Rudel's concept of love and new forms of amorous relationships. Adulterous love, pacts of love, platonic idealisation, geographical distance, the identity of the message sender, the written format, stylistic conventions, etc., are some of the elements that make it possible to trace a line from Jaufré Rudel to the present day.

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16. Verses 29 to 32 of Jaufré Rudel: *Quan lo rius de la fontana*
17. Verses 31 to 34 of Jaufré Rudel: *No sap chantar qui so non di*
18. *Razó* is a Provençal word that refers to the contextual explanations by which certain poems are accompanied. *Trans.*
19. Verses 1 to 4 of Jaufré Rudel: *No sap chantar qui so non di*
20. This interpretation of Halliday can be found in Imaña (2003).
21. The search for similarities and differences based on a previous version of this article was a project carried out by students of the Medieval Romance Literature subject at the UOC (2005–1). This paragraph is the result of some of the ideas that they provided. I am enormously grateful to them for their interest and their contributions to the ensuing debate.

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