

Bridging Past, Present and Future Through Art: El Mal Querer and Le Roman de Flamenca

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INTRODUCTION

This on-going project examines the capability of contemporary art to bring history into the present thus paving the way for the future, utilizing the example of the 2018 double platinum Latin pop album *El Mal Querer* by Catalan musician Rosalia which drew its inspiration from the anonymously written 13th century Occitan novel *Le Roman de Flamenca*.

Prior to the release of the album, *Le Roman de Flamenca* was the subject of academic study by a small group of medievalists. Following the release of EMQ, copies of the novel quickly sold out creating demand for more printed copies and a new user-friendly Spanish edition published by the University of Murcia.

LE ROMAN DE FLAMENCA

Le Roman de Flamenca presents a troubadour satire of courtly love via the story of a young woman imprisoned by her husband as a result of his fear of losing her to another. During her confinement, the young woman falls in love with a knight she comes in contact with during the Catholic masses she is permitted to attend. The presentation of a female protagonist, feminine eroticism and frank social commentary by the narrator denouncing Christian ideals of female chastity rendered the work subversive in medieval times and feminist in modern times.

In addition to presenting themes relevant to today's society, the novel is also encyclopedic in its description of medieval Occitan court life including descriptions of foods, wellness practices, clothing, holiday celebrations, games, religious practices and numerous references to other works of classical literature and Greek philosophy.



The sole manuscript of *Le Roman de Flamenca* belonged to a French noble family and was lost during the French Revolution. It remained virtually unknown until the 19th century when it was re-discovered in Carcassonne by philologist Charles Raynouard. The manuscript consists of 8,025 verses and is found in the municipal library of Carcassonne, France. Due to damage to several of the folios, the beginning and the end of the novel are missing leaving it an open-ended work to the modern reader.

EL MAL QUERER

Rosalía's modern interpretation of *Le Roman de Flamenca* takes form in an 11-track album in which each track represents a portion of the novel. EMQ examines the themes of jealousy and mistrust in romantic relationships, intimate partner violence and female empowerment via emancipation from an abusive domestic partnership - themes all present in *Le Roman de Flamenca*.



"What is the concept behind *El Mal Querer*?"

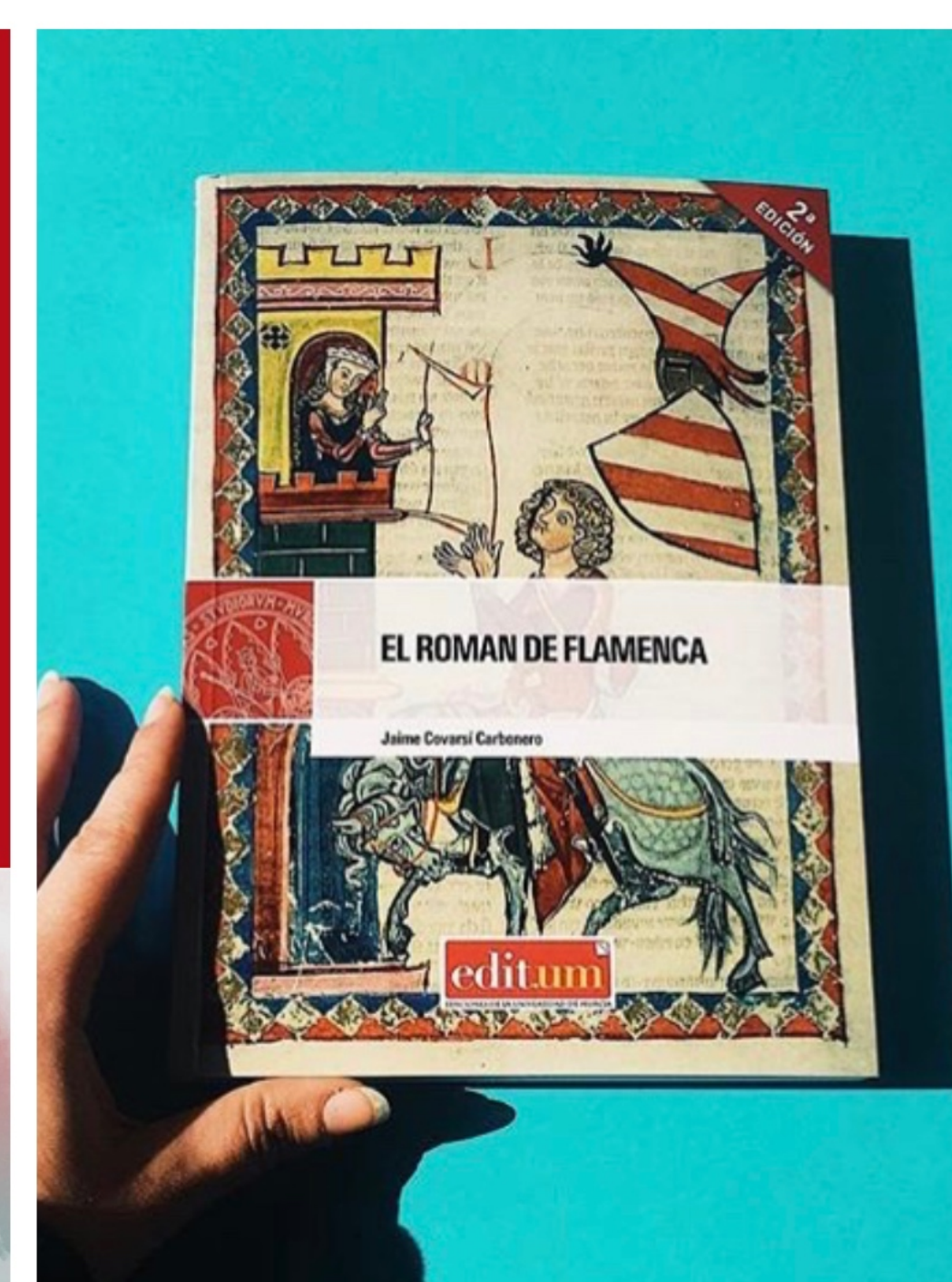
"I came across a 13th-century novel called *Flamenca* by an anonymous author. I was struck by the coincidence of the title, which has nothing to do with the musical genre, and began to read it. It's the story of a woman who married a man who becomes consumed with jealousy, and he goes crazy and imprisons her. And it got me thinking, almost anthropologically: Centuries later, have we altered the ways in which we love and relate to other people, or are we still acting in the same ways?" (Vila Tobella, 2018)



RECEPTION

Roughly 300 copies of *Le Roman de Flamenca* had been sold over the course of its first eight years on the market. After the release of EMQ, over 1,000 copies were sold over the course of a few months. As of January 2020, over 80,000 copies of EMQ sold.

Rosalía's inadvertent popularization of the novel has expanded the demographic of its readership far beyond the world of academia and breathed new life into this piece of medieval history.



CONCLUSIONS

The inspiration of a work of popular contemporary art drawing from a piece of medieval literature, as is demonstrated by *El Mal Querer* and *Le Roman de Flamenca*, can breathe new life into a valuable historic work which would otherwise be likely remain relegated to a limited audience. Through socially-relevant artistic reinterpretation, cultural patrimony can be brought into the present and reveal social parallels between the past and the present thus paving the way for the future.



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