



## BOOKS

# 'Belle époque' medieval

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## FLAMENCA

Translated and edited  
BY Anton Maria Espadaler  
University of Barcelona, 2015  
244 pages (€20)

The cliché, let's face it, of the darkness of the Middle Ages is refuted with a handful of historical arguments, but reading *Flamenca* will surely be one of the most illuminating and entertaining ways to do so. In the face of this novel, written in Occitan around the middle of the 13th century and of which we do not know the author, we can recall the phrase of Albert Rossich, one of our most eminent philologists, who heads an anthology of Catalan poetry from the Baroque: "Ancient literature should not only be an object of study, but also an object of reading". Because, beyond the distance of centuries and the social and mental transformations, *Flamenca* provides lively and enjoyable entertainment and allows us to identify with the feelings of the protagonists. Ideas change a lot, but emotions are perennial.

Our reading of *Flamenca* must necessarily be anachronistic, because we do it with centuries of accumulated literature. In fact, the most recalcitrant academics will tell us that the current concept of literature is an invention of Romanticism and that we can only understand these works if we accurately reconstruct their historical and ideological context. This is half-truth.

The splendid edition of *Flamenca* by Anton Espadaler complies with philological rigor through the scholarly notes at the end of the book, which will satisfy the most demanding reader or student of Romance (if there are any left!). But there is a freer and more uncomplicated way of reading *Flamenca*, for which the prologue and the excellent translation by Espadaler are sufficient, who has found the right register to revive polite society with a slightly formalized modern Catalan without being archaic.

We can thus enjoy a book edited with care and elegance by the University of Barcelona. A beautiful book, in accordance

with the plot of the novel: the loves of a knight and a lady locked in a tower by a jealous husband. We are faced with another cliché, in the territory of troubadour love, but *Flamenca*, like all excellent works, resizes and transcends the cliché. Guillem de Nevers, the knight, has both a complete university education ("you are a knight and a cleric", Amor reminds him) and *Flamenca*, the lady with whom he falls in love from afar, by fame, without having seen her, breaks with the image of the beautiful lady without mercy. Hedonism and carnal pleasure impose themselves without hesitation.

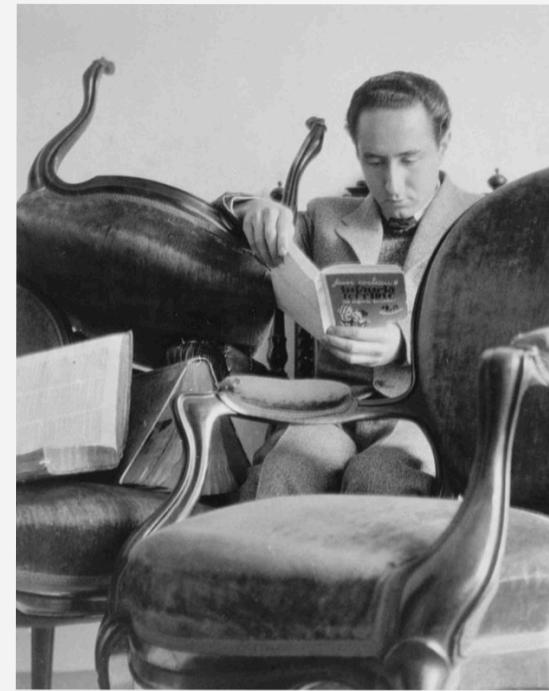
In this game of love, the narrator remarks that "the dice did not land on the ground". Ingenuity and ease rule: the lovers manage to overcome the lady's



Medieval image of a couple of lovers.

isolation through the famous brief furtive dialogues scratched out at the moment of taking their leave at mass. And when the jealous husband has regained his senses and freed *Flamenca*, we are praised for the fact that, in the middle of the court, Guillem takes *Flamenca* to bed "without anyone noticing anything".

Like the 12th-century French Arthurian novels in which it is mirrored, *Flamenca* offers courtship and tournaments, but here the challenge, the adventure, is the lady's love, liberation and full enjoyment. The spirit of the novel, for which Espadaler suggests in the prologue some probable ideological affiliation, is that of troubadour and Albigensian Occitanie, aided by Catalonia, which was defeated on the battlefield of Muret, in 1213, by the French Crusaders. Picardy, intelligence, vitality (the scenes with Alice and Margaret, the lady's maids, are priceless): *Flamenca* is an old novel to read right now.

The poet Gurruchaga, by Nicolás de Lekuona. On the right, *Fantasia*, by Martí Gasull, mid-fifties.

## ART

## First of all...

Josep Casamartina i Parassols

As the new season is about to kick off, it's good to look at what's still pending from the previous one. There are more and more galleries that overlap exhibitions from one course to the next, outside the usual rhythm of most establishments in the sector and thematic cycles, which are ultimately advertising and commercial, which collect the wheat and the chaff at the same level. The Marc Domènech and El Quadern Robat galleries are open until almost the end of the month for the recovery of two little-known artists, one Basque, the versatile Nicolás de Lekuona, and one Catalan, the photographer Martí Gasull i Coral.

Nicolás de Lekuona (Ordicia, Guipúzcoa, 1913 - Frúniz, Biscay, 1937) is not completely unknown in Catalonia because in 1989 the Miró Foundation dedicated a retrospective to him, co-produced with the Valencian IVAM. A few years earlier, between 1982 and 1983, the Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao brought it back from oblivion. And much later, in 2004, the Artium, in Vitoria, and the Museo Reina Sofía, in Madrid, also dedicated an anthological review to him. The history of the first avant-gardes in Spain is not very bright. Nor in the Catalan sphere, despite the fact that three essential names on a global scale, Picasso, Miró and Dalí, left Barcelona to triumph in Paris. As a general rule —except for cases like Julio González or Pablo Gargallo, and Maruja Mallo and a few others—, the rest are crumbs that, grouped together, end up forming a presentable nucleus, both inside and outside the doors.

But it is an unfortunate story, full of broken promises, forced desertions, due to lack of conviction or a conservative environment not very favorable to modernity, and, above all, due to the sudden and violent blow of General Franco's National Uprising, which set in motion in ruins what perhaps could have ended up

flourishing, who knows if in a splendid way. Lekuona's life and work are in the middle of the *xeflis*. A cabinetmaker, interior designer, painter, draftsman and photographer, he was one of the great promises of the Basque avant-garde, along with the painter and decorator Alfonso de Olivares, the latter of whom died in a hunting accident in 1936. Lekuona, after studying to be a technical architect in Madrid, where he met Jorge Oteiza, returned to San Sebastian, and there he contacted the rationalist architect José Manuel Aizpurúa, a member of the Grupo Norte of the then GATEPAC, an extension of the Group of Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architec-

Lekuona stood out as a promising figure in Basque avant-garde painting

A popular commercial portraitist, Gasull i Coral was a contemporary of Català-Roca.

ture, founded in Barcelona by Josep Lluís Sert and other colleagues. But unlike his Catalan friends, who were leftists, Aizpurúa was a founder of Falange Espanola and appointed by José Antonio, in 1934, national delegate of Press and Propaganda, for which reason he was shot dead, just before the entry of Francoist troops into the capital of San Sebastian in 1936.

Like so many other Basque colleagues, Lekuona was on the national side, enlisted in the army and worked as a litter bearer. In 1937, when he was only 24 years old, he was killed by friendly fire, in one of the violent bombings of the Italian air force. In his short and promising career

he left behind paintings, drawings, architectural projects, photographs and exceptional photomontages. His painting can be compared to that of contemporary authors, such as the Lleida and republican Antoni García Lamolla. Recently, the Lekuona family decided to sell some of the material they had, and this has given rise to a for-sale exhibition in three galleries: Guillermo de Osma in Madrid, Michel Mejuto in Bilbao, and Marc Domènech in Barcelona.

If it weren't for the recent rediscovery of him by the El Quadern Robat gallery, Martí Gasull i Coral (1919-1994) would still be a great unknown in the panorama of post-war Catalan photography. Father of fellow photographer Martí Gasull, he was a popular commercial portraitist, with an establishment in Portal de l'Angel and a laboratory on Carrer de Sant Pere Més Alt. Gasull i Coral would go out early in the morning to do his creative work, before opening the shop, and perhaps that is why the 30 images in the El Quadern Robat exhibition have a special light, impeccable and sharp as a diamond, all with unique and period prints. Alongside a giant of the forties and fifties like Francesc Català-Roca, however, it is still difficult to place Gasull i Coral in the plane that belongs to him; more work will have to be seen, especially that dedicated to advertising and, also, the semi-abstract essays. So let's hope that, after this excellent aperitif, the warm gallery on Carrer de Còrsega will soon show us what's missing.

## NICOLÁS DE LEKUONA

Marc Domènech gallery  
Mercader Passage, 12,  
Barcelona. Until  
September 25

## MARTÍ GASULL I CORAL

El Quadern Robat gallery  
Còrsega, 267, Barcelona.  
Until September 30.