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Abstract

Notarial documents are an indispensable resource for the history of culture, politics, and literature, because they are free from much of the social and cultural prejudices that color many literary texts. As the Spanish literary critic, Maria Eugenia Lacarra, rightly states in a recent article on feminist approaches to medieval Spanish history and literature «It is unfortunate that notarial documents, which are the least ideologically contaminated sources and therefore the most reliable, have been least studied [by literary historians]» (1988, 14). Precisely because this type of source material helps the critic see past culturally propagated misrepresentations of reality, Lacarra advocates more thorough utilization of notarial material in the study of women's history and literature in Spain. Wills, inventories, diaries, and particularly letters, were richly cultivated by women during the Middle Ages, because of their accessibility and their intrinsic link to the domestic life to which most women were bound. Notarial source material of this type, which is written in the highly personal and authoritative first person, clearly provides the least obstructed path of access to the voice, vision, and experience of the medieval woman.

Disciplines

European Languages and Societies | Medieval Studies | Modern Languages | Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature

Comments

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A REAPPRAISAL OF THE CORRESPONDENCE
OF VIOLANT DE BAR
(1365-1431)

DAWN E. PRINCE

Notarial documents are an indispensable resource for the history of culture, politics, and literature, because they are free from much of the social and cultural prejudices that color many literary texts. As the Spanish literary critic, María Eugenia Lacarra, rightly states in a recent article on feminist approaches to medieval Spanish history and literature «It is unfortunate that notarial documents, which are the least ideologically contaminated sources and therefore the most reliable, have been least studied [by literary historians]» (1988, 14). Precisely because this type of source material helps the critic see past culturally propagated misrepresentations of reality, Lacarra advocates more thorough utilization of notarial material in the study of women's history and literature in Spain. Wills, inventories, diaries, and particularly letters, were richly cultivated by women during the Middle Ages, because of their accessibility and their intrinsic link to the domestic life to which most women were bound. Notarial source material of this type, which is written in the highly personal and authoritative first person, clearly provides the least obstructed path of access to the voice, vision, and experience of the medieval woman.

Of the above mentioned written sources, the letter was one of the few literary genres popularly cultivated by women throughout Europe during the Middle Ages.¹ Epistolary composition greatly appealed to women as an avenue of both public and personal communication because letters related ideas directly and immediately to an audience that was in constant supply. Since letters were commonly dictated to a scribe or secretary, a woman did not need to have a formal education or a literary patron. For this reason, letters were accessible to women of nearly all social levels (Cherewatuk and Wiethaus 1993, 1-2). For Hispanists, listening to the female voices echoed in letters from the period is essential to a feminist rewriting of the cultural, socio-political, and literary contributions made by Hispanic

¹ For a general discussion of medieval women and letter-writing, see the volumes by Cherewatuk and Wiethaus (1993), Duckett (1965), Kenyon (1992), Goldsmith (1989), as well as the article by Classen (1988).

women during the Middle Ages. Given the importance that letters have as a primary source of contact with the intimate experience of medieval women in the peninsula, it is surprising that the copious correspondence of Violant de Bar, princess and queen of Aragon, has remained neglected by scholars. Because of the critical age in which she lived, an age which saw the genesis of peninsular humanism and which witnessed the dissolution of the Aragonese dynasty, and because of her own vibrant personality, Violant's correspondence is of unique interest to Hispanists.²

The epistolary production of Violant, both public and private in nature, forms one of the largest epistolary collections by a woman in medieval Spain. The correspondence of this little-studied, yet influential, noblewoman forms part of the extensive chancellery holdings of the *Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó (ACA)* in Barcelona. The magnificent *Registres de Cancelleria* of the ACA preserve several million pieces of royal diplomatic correspondence, which were systematically categorized and copied by secretaries into registry books before they were sent out to their destinaries. According to the registry index (Udina Matorell 1986, 195), some 45 volumes of letters composed by Violant de Bar have been preserved in the ACA: regs. 1815-24 (*Varia*, 1380-1395); reg. 2027 (*Varia Pro regina Jolante*, 1387-1392); and regs. 2029-62 (*Lugartenentia de la reina Violante de Bar*). Each volume contains between 140-200 folios and is labeled with one of the following rubrics, according to its contents: *Commune*, *Commune sigilli secreti*; *Gratiarum*, *Officialium*, *Diversorum*, *Curiae*, *Secretorum*, *Pecuniae*, *Coenarum et quaestiarum*, and *Alienationum*. The organization of each registry volume is meticulous: each written letter is followed by a single line indicating its addressee, while a separate rubric on the right-hand side of the page indicates the person who ordered the letter written, and the name and signature of the scribe. Some letters are preceded by a brief rubric summarizing their content. While nearly all the most formal pieces are composed in Latin, the local and more personal letters are written in Catalan; several dozen pieces are written in

² This article is the fruit of my initial research on the correspondence of Violant de Bar, a selection of which I am in the process of editing for publication, along with a feminist consideration of Violant's life and literary production. All epistolary excerpts included in this study (unless otherwise noted) have been transcribed from the original MS or a microfilm copy by the author following the guidelines established by the Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies (University of Wisconsin, Madison) for the *Dictionary of the Old Spanish Language*. Spelling has not been altered, but punctuation and capitalization have been added to conform to modern usage, and all scribal abbreviations have been resolved. My thanks to my research assistant, David Clark, for his help with the transcriptions, and to Juan Antonio Sempere for his linguistic expertise.

Aragonese or Castilian, primarily those addressed to the kings of Castile or Navarre, while only a hand full are in French. It is Violant's vernacular correspondence that is of primary interest in the present context.

The immense corpus of personal and public letters written by Violant has remained largely unedited to date.³ This is due, in part, to the fact that her figure has been marginalized by that of her husband, Joan I of Aragon, and her father-in-law Pere III, both famous for their patronage of the literary arts in an age when humanistic tendencies were just beginning to take hold. The need to recuperate the figure of Violant de Bar as an exceptional one in the history of peninsular literature becomes clear if one glances at the scope of her political prominence, evident in the circumstances of her rise to power.

Violant, or Yolande, de Bar⁴ was the daughter of Robert, Duke of Bar (1352-1411) and Marie de France, sister of Charles V of France. Violant and her four distinguished younger brothers⁵ belonged to the ruling family of the Duchy of Le Barrois in the French province of Lorraine. At the age of fifteen, she became a player in an advantageous marital union with Joan, Duke of Gerona (1350-1396) and heir to the Aragonese throne occupied by his father, Pere III. Pere disapproved of his widowed son's choice of a second wife, having chosen for him a more profitable candidate, namely Maria de Sicília.⁶ Nevertheless, Joan and Violant were married in Perpinyà on April 29, 1380,⁷ to the displeasure of the Aragonese monarch, who manifested ill feelings towards the couple until his death. Evidently, the fifteen-year-

³ A few scholars have published selections: Rubió i Lluch (1908-21) prints seven letters by Violant which relate to her patronage of literary texts; Vieliard (1930) publishes eighteen letters relative to the queen's cultural endeavors; Vieliard (1935) provides brief translated quotes from Violant's more domestic letters; Madurell i Marimón (1979-82) edits fourteen letters relating to Violant's involvement in the problem of succession to the Aragonese throne in 1412.

⁴ Proper names will be given in their Catalan form, e.g., Violant, Joan, Pere, Martí, etc.

⁵ Henri (d. 1396), Edouard (d. 1415), Jean (d. 1415), and Louis, cardinal and Bishop of Chalons, who inherited the Duchy of Barrois in 1415.

⁶ Pere III, desirous of reuniting Sicily to the Aragonese Crown, planned for Joan to marry Maria de Sicília, granddaughter of the Aragonese monarch. Rubió i Lluch (1917-18, 8) reiterates the opinion of the medieval French writer Jean Froissart that Joan loved everything French, and that he «transplantà a sa vida palatina aquella gentil regina [Violant], per amor de la qual havia renunciat la corona de Sicília».

⁷ The *Archives Nationales de France* possess several as-yet-unedited documents relative to the marriage of Joan and Violant (see Paz 1934): there is a proclamation from Pere III ratifying the marriage contract between Joan and Violant dated July 14, 1379 (doc. J.592-7), and a letter of payment, dated May 6, 1380, for 3,000 francs received by Joan, which was half the sum promised by Charles V for the marriage with Violant (doc. J.592-8).

old Violant did not perceive her father-in-law's hostility towards her upon her arrival in Aragon. In a letter written to her father on July 29, 1380 (see *Appendix, Letter I*), a happy Violant declared herself «bon maridada con reyna», and described how Pere and all his subjects «haujen gran goig e pler de ma venguda». She detailed how her father-in-law humbled himself before her by traveling «ben luny a mj a carrera fora dela dita noble ciutat». The king's gesture clearly impressed the young princess, who, only years later, would come to recognize his antagonism towards her and her husband.

As heir to the throne, Joan was responsible for guaranteeing a strong male line of succession in order to insure the continued rule of the Barcelonese dynasty. As was customary, the task of providing a healthy male heir fell to the young Violant.⁸ Pregnant eight times, Violant watched seven of her children die in early infancy. Only her first child, Violant d'Aragó (b. 1381), survived into adulthood.⁹ Her firstborn son, Jaume, lived for four years, providing both his father and grandfather with a source of dynastic hope; tragically, he became ill and died in 1388, an event that anticipated the eventual demise of the ruling dynasty. In an eloquent response to a letter of condolence from the king of Castilla, the grieving Violant revealed «el graujo desplacer & dolor transendent» caused by the premature death of Jaume. She explained to the king that his «sauio & sano consiello» could be of no use to her yet: «d'aquello vsar non podemos ahun buenament, como por nuestra fragilidadat, constrenyent ley de natura, non nos podamos de tanta & tan greu separacion consolar de todo» (see *Appendix, Letter III*).

Joan ascended to the throne of Aragon upon the death of his father in 1387.¹⁰ Violant participated fully in the daily life of the aristocratic Aragonese court which she imbued with a distinctly French spirit. In characterizing this period of Catalan history, Rubió i Lluch (1917-18, 8) refers to «la culta influència dels Valois» with whom Joan became intimately aligned after his marriage to Violant. Her close familial ties with her uncles in France, Charles V and Jean de Berry, proved invaluable to Joan, as can be attested to by his considerable

⁸ Joan's first marriage to Martha d'Armagnac (d. 1378) had produced a daughter, Joana, who survived into adulthood and married Mateu, count of Foix.

⁹ Violant d'Aragó later married Louis II d'Anjou, with whom she had at least three children: Louis III, René d'Anjou, and Marie d'Anjou, wife of Charles VII of France.

¹⁰ Two unedited documents extant in the *Archives Nationales de France* date from Joan's succession to the throne: his will and testament, dated April 29, 1387 (doc. J.594-6); and a confirmation of his donations to Violant upon his ascension to the throne, dated May 28, 1387 (doc. J.594-9).

correspondence with them (see Rubió i Lluç 1908-21). Judging from the scope of her letters, it appears that Joan allowed his wife a substantial role in his government and charged her with his business during his absences. Violant's participation in political matters is evident in her correspondence (see Bofarull), and was likely the result of Joan's sickly constitution and frequent illnesses.¹¹

Both Violant and Joan were literate, multilingual, and ardent bibliophiles, and surrounded themselves with noble and learned people who shared their interest in religious and secular literature, as well as their political ambition. Among the more notable members of their court were: Francesc Eiximenis, theologian and author of the encyclopedic *Lo Crestià*; Bernat Descoll, treasurer, chancellor, and author of *Cronica del rey d'Arago, en Pere IV lo Ceremonios o del Punyaleit*; Antoni Vilaregut, *majordom* and translator of Seneca; Pere d'Artés, treasurer and patron of numerous vernacular translations, among them Brunetto Latini's *Li livres dou tresor*; Antoni Canals, confessor to the queen, and translator of *Scipió e Anibal, De providentia, De arra de anima*; Guillem de Copons, secretary and Catalan translator of *Li livres dou tresor*; Jaume d'Aragó, bishop of Valencia, and poet; and Bernat Metge, royal secretary, the queen's *procurador reial*, and author of *Lo somni*, considered by some to be the first humanistic literary work written in Catalan.¹²

The reign of Joan and Violant came to an end when, in 1396, the king was mortally injured while hunting. Violant was left to mourn, as she put it «el cas doloros & amarch a nos sdeuengut dela mort del senyor rey, senyor e marit nostre, lo qual es e sera tristor continuada en nostre cor mentre viscam» (See *Appendix, Letter IV*). Following Joan's death, Violant began to close many of her letters with the signature «La trista e dolorosa reyna», attesting to her great loss of companionship, and perhaps more acutely, her loss of political power.

Because of the lack of a legitimate male heir to the throne at the time of Joan's death, the Aragonese crown passed to the king's younger brother, Martí, and his wife, Maria de Luna, as the lawful successors. Infuriated by this unfortunate turn of events, the wid-

¹¹ Letters referring to Joan's «accidents» or illnesses are found throughout Violant's correspondence. In a letter copied and sent to several monasteries, Violant petitions «deuotes oracios» for the improved health of the king, who «segons sabets de loncs temps açaca es malalt», only weeks after he ascended to the throne (see *Appendix, Letter II*).

¹² Aragó Cabañas (1969) provides a more detailed list of notaries and scribes working in the Royal Chancellery during the reign of Joan I, many of whom were translators and authors.

owed Violant claimed to be pregnant, throwing the orderly process of succession into confusion. Kept under royal guard to insure the veracity of her claim, the young widow was forced to admit her false declaration and accept her brother-in-law as the rightful monarch.

After Joan's death, Violant, whose political ambition did not seem to diminish, was reluctant to retreat from the public eye. When Martí I died in 1411 without a legitimate male heir, Violant tried to secure the throne for her grandson, Louis III d'Anjou, son of Violant d'Aragó and Louis II, Duke d'Anjou, Count of Provence, and King of Jerusalem and Naples (see Madurell i Marimon 1946).⁹ On this occasion, as in 1396, she was unsuccessful in her attempt. When her brother Edouard was killed in Azincourt in 1415, Violant challenged her brother Louis, cardinal of Chalons, to the rights of the Duchy of Bar. Although Violant was defeated once again in her claim, she did receive some consolation in seeing her brother Louis cede his rights to the Duchy to her grandson, Louis III d'Anjou, in 1419. Long after the death of her husband, Violant continued to reside in Barcelona, preferring to live in the city she had come to consider her own. With the exception of a year spent in Provence in the company of her widowed daughter and grandchildren (ca. 1420), Violant resided in Barcelona until her death July 3, 1431,

As her correspondence reveals, during her 35 years as a widow, Violant continued to cultivate a larger-than-life image for herself and to demand special treatment from the Aragonese people, government officials, and ruling monarchs, for which she was known as somewhat of a political nuisance. She was fierce in her formal directness to those who crossed her, as is evident in her 1417 letter to Mossen Vidal de Blanes, military governor of Valencia, who is accused of having said «paraules de manaces & jnjurioses..., segons nos es stat reportat, a nostre procurador general mossen Francesch Sarçola». She is quick to remind the king's servants of their feudal obligations, and even quicker to threaten retribution for wrongs done, as is explicitly demonstrated in her admonition of Vidal de Blanes:

Podets pensar que qui desonre nostres officials no fa honor a nos. E vos & tota persona que tal practica serue, com vos hauets en aquest cas, pot & deu esser jutjada de poch sen. Et si no, que pensam que mossen Vidal, vostre nebot, haura desplaer de la vostra errada: nos lo haguerm

⁹ PAZ (1934) lists a letter from Violant to the Count of Foix in which she promises to return to him the Barony of Castellvell if one of her children or grandchildren inherits the Aragonese throne (*Archives Nationales de France*, doc. J. 880-27).

reuocar del offici que te per nos; pensats, donchs, en vos mateix que hauets errat & no tornets en semblant errada.

(See *Appendix, Letter V.*)

There is further proof of Violant's self-fashioned political importance in 1422, when she writes to the prince, possibly the future Juan II, son of Alfons el Magnànim, complaining that his officials are mistreating her, and reminding him that «nos som stada regna & hauem tengut lo ceptre d'aquest regne, representans la ymage & carn del senyor rey, vostre oncle, de gloriosa memoria...». She goes on to mention «los beneficis que per nos ha reportats lo dit regne», and «los fruyts, honors, & profits que.s son segurits per nostra mjga al rey, vostre pare, & per consequent a vos», which the prince's officials ought not forget (*ACA*, reg. 2052, fol. 167r; Oct. 11, 1422). Most of her later correspondence exhibits a similar hostility at having been excluded from the dominant political circles after the death of her husband.

Violant's political prominence in fourteenth-century Europe insured commentary by both medieval and modern writers and historians. Contemporary literary works cultivated an image of Violant as an admired and respected figure. For example, the French poet Eustache Deschamps (1346-1406), in a ballad written in honor of his patroness and Violant's mother, Marie de France, praised the young Aragonese queen, saying: «Yolent au cler vis,/ En Arragon rent s'odour soir et main» (Deschamps 1878, 1: *Balade LXXXVIII*, vv. 10-11).¹⁴ Bernat Metge, Violant's *procurador reial* and secretary, praised the virtues of the queen in the last book of *Lo somni*:

Qui et poria dir, a ésser suficient relador, de les virtuts de la regina dona Violant, muller de mon Senyor, qui ací és?... Natura femenina és naturalment a avarícia inclinada, e aquesta, contra natura, és estada la pus lliberal que haja llest ne oït, que em record.... La sua casa és estada e és encara temple de lliberalitat, e molt pus ocupada en donar que en resebre. De subtilitat singular, d'entendre, no pens que persona vivent li en port avantatge... Si oiràs parlar d'ací avant d'amor conjugal e d'aquesta no et serà feta singular

¹⁴ In a second ballad, also dedicated to Marie de France, Deschamps writes: «Yolant, qui a prins/ En Arragon son siege ou est plentée» (Deschamps 1878, 1: *Balade LXXIX*, vv. 5-6).

menció, no hages per bon historial ni disert aquell qui en parlarà, car sàpies que poques en nombre són a ella estades eguals.

Casacuberta (1980, 144-45)

We must note, however, that literary characterizations of this type, written by one's servants, are almost always flattering and politically biased. Deschamps could do little else but praise the beauty of his patroness' daughter. Metge, too, was obligated to portray Violant as a paragon of virtue, praising her «lliberalitat», «subtilitat» and «amor conjugal», glowing attributes which are not always supported by her own deeds. Violant's own self-characterization as «mes enclinada a perdonar que a venjances» (ACA, reg. 2052, fol. 167r) imitates the antithetical style of her adulator («Natura femenina és naturalment a avaricia inclinada, e aquesta, contra natura, és estada la pus lliberal que haja llest ne oït, que em record») and takes advantage of the public persona cultivated for her by her contemporaries.

Although more recent historical sources have continued to be intrigued by the lively character of this woman, they are few in number, and either speculative and poorly documented in nature, or ideologically distorted. Miron's *The Queens of Aragon: Their Lives and Times* (1913) offers a romantic narrative account of the life of Violant; surprisingly, there is no documentation of her data, and no footnotes or bibliography. The biographical sketch by Vielliard (1935) also omits source references, although the author does explain that «Les lettres de Yolande sont consignées en catalan dans les registres de sa chancellerie; nous les traduisons» (42). Vielliard cites from Violant's letters preserved in the ACA by translating Catalan and Latin excerpts into French; she omits, however, all archival references. Vielliard's depiction of the young princess stereotypes her in terms of the idealized medieval woman. For example, Violant is depicted as emotional and truly in love with her husband, who in turn is wholly devoted to her; in writing to her parents she is said to fulfill her filial obligation and to exude filial love.¹⁵ While both Miron (1913) and Vielliard (1935) advance pleasant accounts of the young queen's life, their accuracy is debatable. These trite character portrayals of this medieval woman are likely the result of early-twentieth century moral and cultural bias, and not the consequence of more objective archival research.

¹⁵ Bofarull attacks the romanticized notion of the royal pair's love: «tinc el sentiment de destuir la novela dels amors d'en Joan amb na Violant de Bar, que ls nostres historiadors i no 'ls novelistes, han fet, per peresa d'estudiar l'assumpte» (fol. 10r).

More prominent Catalan literary historians have noted in eloquent terms the important role Violant played in the cultural development of Aragon, but they have failed to elaborate and substantiate it through documentation of her own words and actions.¹⁶ In his classic masterpiece of archival research, *Documents per l'història de la cultura catalana mig-èval* (1908-21), Rubió i Lluch repeatedly mentions the cultural influence exerted by Violant in Aragon, relegating it, however, to the periphery of his discussion. First, he reiterates the sentiments of medieval historian Pere Tomic in stating that:

des del punt en què es casà [Joan] amb Na Violant de Bar, de la família dels Valois de França, fou el rei català que tingué «major casa que rei que hom sabés entre'ls pobles cristians de tot ço que a gentilessa se pertany...» (2).

Further along, he comments on Violant's role as cultural ambassador who contributed much to «arrelar i estendre el prestigi de tot lo transpirinaic» in Aragon (8). Finally, in his discussion of the pre-humanistic spirit that surged in fourteenth-century Catalonia, Rubió i Lluch recognizes that: «Aquell primer impuls [humanístic] a que'ns hem referit, coincidí quasi amb el seu casament [de Joan] amb la princesa francesa Violant de Bar» (51). While Rubió i Lluch recognizes the distinction that the French noblewoman enjoyed in the kingdom, he does not substantiate her contribution to cultural developments beyond several vague comments, despite the fact that he rightly concludes that Violant is «la primera sobirana de la nostra terra de la qual pugui recullir-se una correspondència literària» (1917-18, 9).

Violant receives fairer treatment in Riquer (1964), but he, too, falls short of substantiating her stature in the history of the period. Riquer (1964, 2: 360-61) reiterates the belief that Violant brought French cultural currents to Aragon:

Es prou coneguda la influència que Violant de Bar exercí sobre el seu marit, de la qual aviat veurem mostres ben paleses, i és sabut també

¹⁶ One important exception to this is an unedited manuscript by Francesc de Bofarull (Biblioteca de Catalunya, MS 1697). The library catalog identifies the volume as *Violant de Bar. Notes de l'Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó*; however, careful examination of the volume shows that Bofarull meant to title his book *Dames d'Aragó* (fol. 191r), stating that it was «un llibre consagrat a estudiar els tipus d'algunes dames que tal vegada polítiquejaven massa en llur temps» (fol. 195r). In this volume, Bofarull recounts the story of the political disputes of Pere III and Sibília de Fortià with Joan and Violant, weaving the chancery correspondence of Pere, Joan and Violant into the fabric of his narrative.

com contribuí a acréixer els gustos francesos del Primogènit i a estendre modes i costums de França per les nostres terres.

Later Riquer characterizes Violant as a «dama amb excel·lent gust literari i molt amant dels llibres» (1964, 2: 361). Both Rubió i Lluch and Riquer are clearly impressed with the intellectual qualities of this woman, yet neither considers elaborating on the books she commissioned and borrowed, nor on the learned people with whom she had routine contact, nor on the political and social matters in which she involved herself. It is not my intention here to criticize the enormous contributions of these scholars to the literary history of the period, but rather to point out that the role of literate women, such as Violant, in the social, political, and cultural development of medieval Iberia has been largely overlooked by traditional scholars who focus primarily on the role of powerful males speaking and writing in the mainstream, despite the existence, albeit in the margins, of plentiful archival material written by women.

The correspondence of Violant de Bar merits study for numerous reasons, particularly for its function as autobiographical source material, free from the misogynistic bias of the medieval period and the romantic distortion of the early twentieth century. By reading a cross section of her letters, one can trace a clear psychological development in the author, from naive «bon maridada» (*Letter I*), to supportive wife and mother (*Letters II-IV*), to covetous monarch, to bitter and hostile widow (*Letter V*). Her own words unfold for us the many facets of her personality, which she skillfully manipulates to fit the circumstance. Her commentaries provide a woman's vantage point on the political, cultural, and social issues of the period, e.g., the issue of royal succession, nepotism, feudal allegiance, marriage, the status of Jews and Moors, taxation, the role of the clergy, and literary patronage.

In addition, the correspondence of Violant de Bar is valuable to the study of peninsular literary history, particularly that of Catalonia. First and foremost, the letters represent a major corpus of medieval literature written in the vernacular, primarily Catalan, by a woman. Many of the vernacular letters are written in the eloquent chancellery style of the period and follow, to an extent, the rules of the *ars dictandi*. The letters possess a «spontanéité d'expression» which contrasts with the highly formulaic style of more official pieces (Vielliard 1935, 50). An instinctive frankness is evident in Violant's petitions for money, goods, or favors, in her descriptions of her husband's many illnesses, in her lengthy letters to her father-in-law, Pere III, and in her brief reprimands of those friends and servants who cross her. The

spontaneity that generates initially from her youthfulness, continues through the years as a result of her gender. As a female writer, Violant was excluded from the formal education reserved for the literate male society; her compositions thus exhibit some deviation from the established literary norm. However, that fact that Violant follows the general model of the *ars dictandi*, and utilizes a good deal of formulaic discourse in the salutations and closings of her letters, reminds us that she was a woman of high political stature, not completely exempt from institutional norms.

As stated above, the correspondence of Violant is valuable to the study of Catalan literary history as an example of «una correspondència literària» in its own right, and as evidence of which literary texts were popular in Catalonia during the turn of the fourteenth century. During Violant's tenure in Aragon, royal interest in the production of translations of classical and medieval texts into the local vernaculars reached its peak. While Joan I is portrayed as the instigator of these prehumanistic undertakings, Violant was unquestionably a powerful motivating force. In the later medieval period, France furnished a good deal of the stimuli and resources for the evolution of vernacular translation in Aragon through the bibliographic endeavors of the Valois rulers. Thus, the premiere wave of prehumanistic activity in fourteenth-century Aragon was likely intensified by the personality, upbringing, and royal French lineage of the young princess and queen.

Violant dispatched requests to many influential bibliophiles of the period for texts written in French or Catalan. Among her petitions are those addressed to her husband Joan, her brother-in-law Martí, the count d'Urgell, Jean de Berry, Guillem de Perapertusa, Antoni Canals, Carroça de Vilaragut, and Antoni Palomar. In her correspondence, Violant commissions copies and translations, promises to lend books, requests the return of books loaned out, and asks that books be lent to her. The titles requested by Violant acknowledge a wide range of literary interests. Among the religious texts she petitions are: *Morales de Job* in Catalan; *La Vie de Jesus-Christ*; a book of hours titled *Heures*; a *Tractat de confessió* composed by Antoni Canals; and the Bible, the *Evangelis*, and the *Epistoles de Saint Pol* all in Catalan (Vielliard 1935). Violant sought the poetry of Jaume d'Aragó's *Cançoner* and *El llibre de Machault* or *Guillen de Machault*, requested from Guillem de Parapertusa in order that she might supplement her copy which «no es acabat, ans hi fallen alsunes coses en sustancia bones» (Vielliard 1930, doc. XV). The romances sought by the queen were primarily requested in French, proof that she had not lost touch with her native language. The titles solicited include *Le liv-*

re de la Rose or *Roman de la Rose*, *Le livre de Godefroid de Bouillon*,¹⁷ *Le livre du roi Meliadux et du bon chevalier san peur*, *Donahi le Roux*, *Tristan historié*, and *Guiron le Courtois*, which she asks Martí to send to cheer her up «per rao del nostro prenyat» (Vielliard 1930, doc. XII). In addition, Violant, along with her husband, demanded Guillem Nicolau's glossed translation of the Ovid's *Heroides*, which had been prepared for Joana de Foix, Violant's step-daughter.¹⁸ It is appropriate that Violant would have wanted to read the *Heroides*, a book of fictitious epistles composed by famous women, in light of her own utilization of the genre.

As I have attempted to show, the notarial documents which preserve the correspondence of Violant de Bar are fascinating study for a multitude of reasons, not the least being their value as autobiographical source material, uncluttered by many of the dominant preconceptions regarding the role of women in the Middle Ages. A feminist reading of a selection of her correspondence should allow us to contrast the image that recorded history has conferred upon Violant with the larger-than-life image that her own words fashion, and the truer persona that her own deeds betray. As her biographical account and epistolary excerpts have sought to intimate, Violant's letters also furnish Hispanists with a female perspective on matters of socio-political, cultural, and literary concern within the Aragonese kingdom. Her candid discourse and evident initiative in all matters of concern to her—which caused (Bofarull, fol. 168r) to characterize her as having «un ànim...varonil»—make Violant de Bar a figure worthy of further scholarly attention through the richness of her correspondence.

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¹⁷ This volume found its way into the library of Martí I, and is catalogued in his 1410 inventory (see Massó Torrents 1905, #181).

¹⁸ For specific references see Rubió i Lluch (1917-18, 58) and Rubió i Lluch (1908-21: I), docs. 405 and 407.

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APPENDIX

= ACA reg. 1821, fols. 14v-15r. July 29, 1380.

Mon car pare e senyor:

A la vostra senyoria per altra letra mja scriu ab mestre Clarj, secretarj vostre, sobre l'aculliment gracios e verdader, e gran amor que lo senyor duch, marit e senyor meu molt car, me fet e fahia, segons que en la dita letra, creença contenent de ma part per lo dit Clarj, a uos explicadora, pus largament se contenje. En apres per altra ma letra a uos, mon car pare e senyor, notiffiquj com lo dit senyor duch hauja rebudes letres del senyor rey son pare, que ell e jo nos en anassem a Barchinona a ell, on nos speraue ab molt gran pler, e hauie feta apparellar solemne festa. E siats cert, mon car pare e senyor, que lo dit senyor duch e jo fom reebuts per lo dit senyor rey fort graciosament e per ses gens, lo qual senyor rey, per sa humilitat, isque ben luny a mj acarrera fora de la dita noble ciutat de Barchinona, e acullj.m molt altament e be, e en la dita ciutat foren fetes per ma entrada moltes alegries e per diuersses maneres, e ab grans solemnitats de honors, les quals serien largues de recomptar, vltra les grans dons axi en vexella con en altres joyes fort notables a mj fets, axi que tot hom podia conexer que axi lo dit senyor rey con totes ses gents haujen gran goig e pler de ma venguda, de que jo.m tench molt per contenta. E lo vostre cor ne pot reebre alegria e consolacio, e son axi bon maridada con reyna que sie el mon, beneyt sia lo nom de Deu. Ara, mon car pare e senyor, jo he rebudes letres de ma cara mare e senyora, la duquessa, per les quals jo he sabuda la bona sanitat vostra e sua e de mes cars freres, e sie perque jo he haut molt gran pler e consolacio. Suplicam vos que de la dita salut e bon stament vullats continuament certifficar per vostres letres lo dit senyor duch e mj, con sera cosa de que ell e jo hauem sobiran pler. E per tal con se que.n haurets pler, certiffich, la vostra magnificencia, que lo dit senyor duch e jo som sans e en bona disposicio de nostres persones, a la merçe de Deu. Lo Sant Spirit sia en vostra guarda. Scripta en Barchinona a .XXIX. de juny, l'any M.CCC.LXXX.

II. ACA reg. 2053, fol. 7v. April 29, 1387.

Sobiranament desijants la conualescencia & plena sanjtat del senyor rey, marit & senyor nostre molt car, quj segons sabets de lonch temps acaça es malalt, & hauents deuocio singular a vostre orde, & per con-

seguent a vostres deuotes oracions, pregam vos affectuosament & de cor que a laor de Nostre Senyor Deu & de tota la cort celestial, vullats fer ab efficacia, en general & en singular, continua & deuota oracio per la salut del dit senyor rey, tant & tan longament tro que plenerament sia restitujt. Sabents que vltra lo deute a que sots tenguts, farets d'ago a nos seruey sjngular. Dada en Barchinona sots nostre segell secret a .xxix. dies d'abrjl del any M.CCC.LXXXVIJ. La Reyna.

Fuit djrecta priorj & conuentuj monasterj Montisserati.

Jtem aliam priorj & conuentuj monasterj de Terracia.

Jtem aliam monasterj sancti Paulj Dezmaresme.

Jtem aliam monasterj Descaladu.

Jtem aliam monasterj santi Geronjmj.

Jtem aliam monasterj de Portacelj.

= ACA reg. 2053, fol. 73v: September 11, 1388.

Rey muyt caro & muyt amado hermano:

Nos, la reyna d'Aragon, vos embiamos muyto a saludar, como aquell pora quien querriamos que diesse Dios tanta salut & honra quanta vos mismo querriades. Sabet, rey hermano muyt caro, que recibimos vostra buena letra, & aquella entendida & las cosas que nos ha ditas muyt discretament & bien de vostra part fray Toribio Custodio de los Freyres Menores de Palencia, vostro familiar, creyemos firmament que vos tambien, por las razones en vostra letra posadas como ahun por vostra piadosa humanjdat, hauedes participat & participades con nos en el graujo desplacer & dolor transcendent que houjmos e hemos de la muerte de nostro fillo muyt caro, el delfin. E esto & lo muyt sauio & sano consiello que nos dades, & el qual parece bien que procedeix de vostra muyt gran sauiesa, vos regradamos quanto podemos. Empero, d'aquello vsar non podemos ahun buenament como por nostra fragilidadat, constrenyent ley de natura, non nos podamos de tanta & tan greu separacion consolar de todo. Sea loado Nostro Senyor Dios, al qual placia por su clemencia jnfinjda que nos ende quiere dar aquella consolacion que hemos menaster & nos hauer en la suya santa gracia & proteccion. E si vos plazen algunas cosas que fer podamos, hermano muyt caro, por vostra honra, embiat las nos dezir & complir las hemos de grand coraçon. E sea todos tiempos guarda vostra la Santa Trinjdat. Data en Saragoça dius nostro siello secreto a .xj. dias de setembre del any mil CCC.LXXXVIJ.

IV. ACA reg. 2056, fol. 64r. June 18, 1396.

Molt cara cosina:

Vostra letra hauem rebuda continen paraules de conort del cas doloros & amarch a nos sdeuengut de la mort del senyor rey, senyor e marit nostre, lo qual es e sera tristor continuada en nostre cor mentre viscam; e apres paraules de offerta graciosa a les quals coses saujament dites responem que tots temps hauem hauda singular affeccio uers vos. & vuy, entre les altres de que fem compte en consolacio e altres coses nos e nostre honor toquants, sots vos, cara cosina, la qual, jatsia viuent lo dit senyor, qui Deus hauria, coneguessem esser ab nos en feruent dileccio per lo gran deute de consangujnitat que ab lo dit senyor haujets e ab nos hauets nostra molt mes. Reffermam e continuam la dita amjstat e deute per la agradable e bona letra a nos per vos trama. Pregans vos tan affectuosament com podem que en totes coses vostre honor & plaer toquants nos vullats temprar com a special singular & precordial parenta e amjga, car nos ho complirem de bon cor. E sia Nostre Senyor Deus, molt cara cosina, tots temps en vostra guarda. Dada en Barchinona sots nostre segell secret a .xviij. dies de juny, l'any de la nativitat de Nostre Senyor M.CCCXC.vj.

La trista e dolorosa reyna.

A nostre molt car cosina, la Comtessa d'Urgell.

= ACA reg. 2052, fol. 39r. January 3, 1417.

Mossen Vidal:

No sens causa som molt marauellada de vos, quj fins a vuy tenjem per serujdor, que paraules de manaces & injurioses haiats dites, segons nos es stat reportat, a nostre procurador general mossen Francesch Sarçola. Com vos & tota persona dege & puxe rahonablement pensar que nos disposam a nostre volentat de nostres officis; e per aquesta raho, sens reuocacio de la procuracio de mossen Vidal, vostre nebot, nos haujem ordendat & manat al dit mossen Francesch, lo qual per alguns nostres affers haujem trames a nostre car nebot, lo rey, que ell, com a procurador general nostre en totes nostres villes & locs, visitas Cocentania & la Val d'Elda & axni vullam encara. & per aço, ell no deuja oyr de vos paraules çorregudses ne injurioses, com fos per.us rahonable que per contemplacio nostra hagues de vos bons acolliments & honors. Podets pensar que quj desonre nostres officials no fa honor a nos. E vos & tota persona que tal pratica serue, com vos hauets en aquest cas, pot & deu esser jutjada de poch sen. E si no, que pensam que mossen Vidal, vostre nebot, haura desplaer de la vostra

errada: nos lo hauerem reuocar del offici que te per nos. Pensats, donchs, en vos mateix que hauets errat & no tornets en semblant errada. Car si no.us constregues nostra prehemjnencia, que es mes encljnada a perdonar que a venjances, & per los serueys que.ns hauets fets, vos hauerets sentiment & coneguerets que hauets errat. Dada en Barchinona sots nostre segell secret a .iij. dies de jener, en l'any de Nostre Senyor M.CCCC.xviij. La Reyna Y. Dirigitur Vitali de Blanes, mjlti gubernatorj Valentie