Reading Corella's Riddle: The Seriality of Emotion in the "Cobla de dos senys"

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> [T]he way in which opposites can be stated so as to satisfy a wide variety of people, for a great number of degrees of interpretation, is the most important thing about the communication of the arts.
> (William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*)

The extent to which emotions are linguistic phenomena remains a matter of debate and is likely to remain so indefinitely. However, even historians of emotion who seek to identify certain dimensions of emotional universality or independence recognize that language plays some role in lived individual and social experiences of emotion and in the emotional aspects of literary discourse (Reddy xii and 105; Rosenwein 2006, 14-27; Rosenwein 2016, 3-6). In this essay, through the example of Joan Roís de Corella's "Cobla de dos senys," I reflect on how historical expressions of emotion in literary discourse should be read. I do so by bringing together recent methodological debates surrounding close reading as a critical method with modern theories of medieval literary subjectivity, which have specifically put into question the legibility of emotion in medieval lyric. In the first two parts of the essay, I synthesize debates about close reading to show how they cast doubt on notions of literary specificity and on interpretation as a mode of literary analysis. Some scholars, however, have pointed to affect as a resource for the renovation of close reading. Thus, in the third part of the essay, I seek to exemplify such an approach by showing how Corella's stanza suggests a notion of serialized reading that intervenes in debates about reason, the rhetoric of emotion, and pleasure's role in cognition. Through an enigmatic opposition of serial reading to courtly notions of contradiction, antithesis, and paradox, Corella demonstrates a specific relationship between poetics and emotion that can be reduced neither to the straightforward expression of inner experience nor to a fundamental irony that defies interpretation absolutely.

Close Reading, Literary Autonomy, and Historicism

In a recent article about the critical abandonment of close reading as a method of literary analysis, an abandonment which began to gain steam in the 1990s and has only become more widespread and multifaceted since then, Anne Emmanuelle Berger explains how a particular notion of literary autonomy emerged as a product of modernity. Building on Baudelaire's claim, in some notes on Edgar Allen Poe, that poetry takes itself, and not truth, as its object, Berger traces the emancipation of literature from social norms and moral expectations:

> [T]his liberation, or rather this 'autonomization' of literature was thought to produce in its wake a straining of the relation between the literary text and the referential function of language. Henceforth, 'writing' was conceived as – or appeared to be – an intransitive gesture, an autotelic or objectless passion, which is to say one whose sole object was itself (166).

This conception of literary autonomy would be developed by critics and philosophers such as Roland Barthes in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* or Jacques Derrida and the other deconstructionists, producing effects at once theoretical and institutional or disciplinary:

> [I]t was no longer enough to think of studying literature as the attempt to account historically or sociologically for the material, social and cultural conditions underlying its production and reception; rather, one had to grapple with the operations of 'writing' as such. And this shift towards an autonomous status for literature under modernity can be credited with creating the conditions favourable for both the establishment and affirmation of literary studies as a separate discipline, one henceforth endowed with its own normative criteria and procedures of evaluation (167).

This modern (and, eventually, postmodern) conceptualization of writing gave rise, necessarily, to new approaches to reading, principally that of close reading, which took root in the first half of the twentieth century but became dominant in its last three decades.

Berger's analysis identifies several terms and questions that have been central to broader debates about the relationship between the technique of close reading and the independence or disciplinary identity of literary studies. In almost all cases – but not always in the same way – what is finally at stake is the relationship between literary studies, literary history, and the discipline of history as such. Critics studying the Anglophone academy are likelier to emphasize the development of close reading in the first half of the twentieth century than the poststructuralist turn, although the key players in that development rarely, if ever, used the term "close reading" itself (Guillory, 3-20). In this account, critics such as I. A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks, in seeking a solid basis for the exercise of literary judgment, "developed a corollary *technique of reading* that confirmed the value of the literary work of art in a universe of new media and mass forms of writing" (Guillory, viii; emphasis in original). This technique then became, itself, "the basis for asserting criticism as a *specialized knowledge*" (Guillory, 42; emphasis in original). The discipline of literary studies and its central technique would thus have emerged in distinction from literary history (the previously dominant mode of literary scholarship) and as a reaction to emergent forms of mass culture. Furthermore, deconstruction and other forms of poststructural critique, far from rejecting close reading, "infused it with new zeal. Just when the New Criticism was looking old, deconstructionism came along to make close reading chic and smart and potent again" (Gallop, 182).

In North America, Susan Sontag's 1966 essay "Against Interpretation" represented an early dissent from close reading's methodological dominance, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's well-known "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," first published in 1997, also attracted a wide audience. However, critical resistance to close reading took flight with a special issue of *Representations*, "The Way We Read Now," edited by Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus in 2009, and was consolidated ten years later in a *PMLA* critical cluster, "Cultures of Reading," edited by Deidre Shauna Lynch and Evelyne Ender in 2018. As Berger points out, the proposals of "distant" or "surface" reading in these essay collections "go to great lengths to disavow the type of painstaking attention to textual detail that might create a sense of 'closeness' with respect to a work" (174), and they are grounded in an implicit claim "that there is no specificity to literature; that literature is not essentially different from any other type of written artefact and that, like any other type of discursive production, it too takes part in […] a 'social discourse'" (175). As Best and Marcus put it, the readers gathered in their volume "place noticeably less faith than many other critics in the heroic qualities of art" (13); they assimilate literary studies into the broad group of "disciplines that study culture," whose uniqueness consists in their "interest in human artifacts," of which literary texts are (it goes without saying) but one example (17).

For those who espouse this distant vision of literature, the path out of the current crisis, notes Berger, would appear to be the transformation of literary studies into cultural studies (169, 175), a transformation that has taken effect, explicitly or implicitly, in many North American departments of English and other literatures. However, as Jane Gallop explains, the shift toward cultural studies – as opposed to cultural history – did not imply the immediate abandonment of close reading; on the contrary, "[w]hen literary studies broadened into cultural studies, it was precisely through the power of this move to close-read nonliterary texts. Looking at the same type of documents that a historian or a sociologist might look at, a literary-trained cultural scholar could notice different sorts of things and thus have something original to contribute" (183-184). In this sense, the move away from close reading – perhaps the only method literary studies had managed to export to other disciplines (Gallop, 184) – is first and foremost a return to historicist methods and aims. Thus, in a recent article seeking to reconcile the hermeneutic and quantitative approaches to literature found in his own scholarship, Franco Moretti describes the latter straightforwardly as "quantitative literary history" (125).[1]

"Lyric Reading" and Material Studies

John Guillory has also noted the predominance of the poem "as a metonym for literature" among the New Critics that "authorized the extension of close reading to other forms of literature by constructing passages from these works as ontologically *like* poems" (53; emphasis in original). Indeed, in her 2005 book *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading*, Virginia Jackson had already traced a history of approaches to lyric interpretation that parallels the trajectory traced by Berger for literature as a whole. According to Jackson, the New Critics of the 1930s and 1940s developed a notion of the lyric as "temporally self-present or unmediated" (9), a notion that, in another observation parallel to Berger's, "accompanied the migration of lyric from the popular press to the classroom" (10). "Lyric reading" is the type of reading that emerges from the perception of lyric poetry as "historically indeterminate" and, therefore, fictitious, and it dominates the twentieth century through a circular operation in which critics "identify poetry as lyric […] identify the lyric as the literary, and […] specify the literary as what they want to teach the student in turn to identify in poetry" (98). In this way, the lyric, autonomous and atemporal, becomes a metaphor for all literature, which therefore must be read in the same way.

Nevertheless, if Berger in the end defends a certain notion of literature's specificity and the careful attention that would correspond to it (a point to which I will return), Jackson opposes the flattening effects of lyric reading on the critical understanding of Emily Dickinson's compositional practices. The transformation of Dickinson into a "lyric" poet by both editors and scholars concealed many of the more idiosyncratic aspects of her writing, and this is especially true in the case of its material dimensions. To erase the diverse material supports of her poems and the objects, such as a leaf (12, fig. 3) or the remains of a cricket (91, fig. 17), that sometimes accompanied them in the mail, publishing them as pure, autonomous "lyrics," does not illuminate their discursive content; on the contrary, it distorts it, even to the point of inventing a "poem" where one never necessarily existed at all (3-6, 11-13). A critical vision that includes these material aspects produces a reading at once more attentive to historical reality, where texts circulated in very different ways, and more insightful as an interpretation of the words on the page. In the Iberian context, Mary E. Barnard's monographs on material culture and the lyric in early modern Spain

[1] Moretti concludes, to his own disappointment, that interpretation and quantification can "work one next to the other" but "cannot *intervene in each other's work*" (136; emphasis in original). There is, nevertheless, "nothing wrong in studying a complicated object like literature in two entirely independent ways" (136).

have been exemplary in this regard. Focusing less on book history and more on the circulation of objects within and beyond the lyric, Barnard has shown how "[o]bjects, words, and images animate one another" (2014, 8), and thus how, in becoming "interactive participants in the lyric enterprise," objects "served as vehicles for exploring issues of moment in Philip III's Spain" (2022, 4, 13). The rhetorical role played by objects in poems and the historical role they played in a particular social context thus illuminate each other.[2]

These two aspects of material studies in the lyric realm are also brought out by Albert Lloret and Miguel Martínez in their introduction to a special issue of *Calíope* from 2018, where the editors begin by stating that "la materialidad de los textos literarios es en muchos casos constitutiva de sus significados y crucial en todos ellos para comprender su circulación y sus usos sociales" (7), an idea that they repeat in explaining that in early modernity, "La proliferación de medios materiales sueltos y efímeros […] permitieron una movilidad y una sociabilidad literarias de gran vitalidad que pertenecen de manera integral a los procesos de construcción de sentido de la comunicación poética" (8). The editors also highlight that, whereas the theoretical and historiographic advances of material studies were slow to be applied to early modern poetry, "el medievalismo, seguramente por el peso de la codicología y de los estudios manuscritos, ha prestado más atención a la dimensión material de la creación lírica" (8-9).[3]

There is no doubt that medievalists have for decades, if not always, paid close attention to the material dimensions of the texts they study through codicology, textual criticism, and, in recent years, through a broader notion of material studies that includes both book history and the study of textual reference to objects both sublime and banal. In principle, as Lloret and Martínez state clearly, this attention serves to shed light on lyric production as a cultural phenomenon and, at the same time, as a medium of discursive expression. In other words, and in contrast to Moretti's account of quantitivate methods, material studies ideally comprises a set of critical procedures both historiographic and hermeneutic, two sides of the same coin, in which hermeneutics benefits from the historiographic care that establishes trustworthy texts and illuminates their social uses. Yet medievalism's material practices have just as often blazed a trail away from hermeneutic ends and from the associated technique of close reading; this is especially true when they have been used to reinforce extreme claims of medieval poetic difference. Traditional textual criticism often features all of the steps leading up to interpretation – and of course, elements of interpretation are inherent to some philological techniques – without ever fully arriving. This may be seen as a virtue for scholars who understand themselves as literary historians and view interpretation as a speculative and even ahistorical procedure. In a similar vein, the attention paid in material studies to book history, to the objects that appear in literary texts, and to the social function of those texts is often viewed as an end in itself rather than a way of shedding light on the meaning of poetic communication, thus remaining in a persistent deferral of reading.

One point of articulation between these philological approaches and more theoretically-inflected ones is found in the studies of Paul Zumthor and his followers, and it is a double articulation. On the one hand, Zumthor introduces in his 1972 *Essai de poétique médiévale* the concept of *mouvance*, that is, the combination of anonymity (or quasi-anonymity) and variability that characterizes most of the body of medieval lyric as it appears in the manuscript tradition. For Zumthor, this textual instability does not constitute a philological problem to resolve, but rather an essential element of the techniques of poetic composition in the Middle Ages. On the other hand,

[2] Ana M. Gómez-Bravo's indispensable analysis in *Textual Agency: Writing Culture and Social Networks* (2013) combines the question of gift exchange with that of the material support of the text in fifteenth-century Castile.
[3] Lloret and Martínez cite the examples of Sylvia Huot, Wayne Storey, and Marisa Galvez.

we find the oft-cited observation, again in the *Essai*, that medieval poetry is almost entirely "objectivized" (40), an observation that contradicts the traditional classification of the lyric as the subjective genre *par excellence* and that gives rise, in the studies of medievalists influenced by Zumthor, to the search for methods of reading medieval lyric if it cannot be understood as a medium for the expression of feelings and inner (subjective) experience. This difficulty includes the use, on the part of the troubadours, of a common discourse that seems to make impossible the individualization of any poet through language, style, or even ideas, given that beyond a vocabulary, they share tropes, images, and emotional possibilities (Stone 4-7). Among the troubadours, everything is codified, everything is conventional, and if it is not, these poets give their innovations the appearance of convention (Haidu 4). If their songs are to be read, they must be read as texts determined by their participation in a shared and decisive tradition (Kay 6).

This is thus a critical tradition that, implicitly or explicitly, accepts the notion of the invention of the subject in the Renaissance and makes of it a weapon to defend medieval difference. I do not mean to imply that it is wrong to do so; in fact, these critics offer, to my mind, the most apt description of the troubadour corpus, in Occitan as well as in Catalan and the other Iberian romance varieties. Yet what these critical insights have sometimes implied, owing especially to their emphasis on tradition, is a return to the identification of sources, commonplaces, authorized ideas, and networks of intertexts as the most legitimate way of reading these objectivized poems. It is therefore important to underscore the nuanced revision elaborated by Sarah Kay in *Subjectivity in Troubadour Poetry*, where Kay defines literary subjectivity not as the representation of an interiority but rather as the elaboration of a position of first-person enunciation in troubadour rhetoric (1). Instead of submitting any reading to a process of objectification, Kay proposes that, upon recognizing the collective dimension of the subjectivity expressed in and through language, we may speak of a "generalized" subject (6). This generalized subject, in turn, is torn between the inspiration of desire and the self-control of courtesy, between, that is, the individual and the social (77). In this sense, Kay, working in the theory of subjectivity, echoes the theory of reception elaborated by Han Robert Jauss in the 1960s. Jauss, in highlighting the role of the reading or listening public in the historical development of literature, paradoxically rescues the active potential of the work of art, which he describes dialectically as "a medium capable of forming and altering perception" (16). The audience arrives with, to use one of Jauss's best-known formulations, a horizon of expectations based on the generic and stylistic conventions of the tradition in question, but undergoes a process of "guided perception" that, in at least some cases, undermines or even destroys that horizon through poetic effects (23-24). What I want to suggest in this brief recapitulation of Kay's and Jauss's ideas is that, without falling into a naïve subjectivism or ahistoricism, it is possible to detect such poetic effects through careful attention to the text, read as an attempt at expression or communication, even if this may be – perhaps especially when it is – undertaken with irony, ambivalence, or ambiguity. And this is doubly true in poetic expressions of emotion.

The Riddle of Emotion

There are two concepts in the debates around reading that have been aligned with both closeness and distance: form or formalism, and affect. In the first case, Guillory has argued that "a conflict between historicism and formalism structured literary theory from the 1980s forward" (11 n. 19), thus associating formalism with interpretation and close reading.[4] Yet Best and Marcus have identified New Formalism's attention to the "intricate verbal structure of literary language" as a

[4] Guillory notes that "[h]istoricism increasingly prevailed in this conflict" (11 n. 19).

form of surface reading (10). This disagreement turns on the relationship between closeness and depth. To the extent that literary language and form are understood as the constituents of a text rather than a subtext, attention to them, no matter how close, entails remaining at the surface and, perhaps, in a descriptive rather than interpretive mode. However, if it is asserted that this careful attention reveals hidden (buried) meanings, it is better understood as a method of the symptomatic reading decried by partisans of the surface.

Understandings of the role of affect in reading turn similarly on questions of depth, meaning, and the critic's goals. Some critics have proposed attending to one's affective response to a text as an ethical or even erotic stance in which one defers to the text or represents it "as it is" rather than plumbing it for hidden meanings; Best and Marcus place Sontag and Kosofsky Sedgwick in this camp (10-11). Isobel Armstrong, however, has proposed attention to affect not as an alternative to, but rather as a revision of, close reading. Armstrong decries the persistent rationalism that dominates literary interpretation for its unexamined acceptance of an antithesis between thought and feeling, which does more to obscure than to illuminate:

> Sexuality, feeling and emotion are associated with a language of *affect* which is deemed to be non-cognitive and non-rational. Affect falls outside what is legitimately discussable. It is merely a textual *effect*, and a persistent erotic language returns to describe it and thus intensify it even as it is banished, expelled for its blandishment, flattery, deception, "soft" somatic and seductive power (87; emphasis in original).

This rationalist prejudice cannot help but understand texts as "outside" and "other" – "something external which has to be grasped" (87) – and is therefore in reality a form of distant rather than close reading. For Armstrong, the reform of close reading implies a need "to rethink the power of affect, feeling and emotion in a *cognitive* space" (87; emphasis in original). A truly "close" model of reading would recognize that

> all reading that is not reading for mastery necessarily gets caught up with, imbricated in, the structure of the text's processes, and that this is where thought begins. The intensity of this experience can be renamed as affect and consigned to the non-rational, but this is an impoverishment. Arguably, close reading has never been close enough. It has always been the rationalist's defence against the shattering of the subject. It has always been engaged with mastery, and the erotics of the text have been invoked to endorse the reader's power over it (94-95).

The sentimental writers and, perhaps especially, the poets of fifteenth-century Iberia were engaged (among other things) in a multifaceted effort to undermine the rationalist presuppositions of their own time and place, and their rhetorical understanding of emotion placed it in the fields of both cognition and ethics. At stake was precisely not the reader's power over the text, but the affective power of the text over the reader (Berlin, 4-22, 59-85). In this context, emotional discourse enunciated in the first-person singular should be read neither as a transparent attempt to communicate inner experience nor as insincere, to the extent that it takes part in, indeed seeks to propel, ongoing cultural and political developments. It cannot be safely ignored as conventional – since conventions were themselves a matter of debate – but neither can it be taken at face value. Yet interpretations that seek to pierce an apparently conventional or straightforwardly subjective

surface need not be understood as skeptical or suspicious. In fact, an important subset of lyric from this time and place offers itself up to readers in explicitly enigmatic terms.

It is therefore not as perverse as it may seem to defend close reading and a certain notion of literary specificity through the example of so clearly ludic a poem as the "Cobla de dos senys" by the Valencian writer Joan Roís de Corella (1435-1497). The "Cobla" is found on folio 140r of the *Cançoner de Maians*, one of the few Catalan manuscripts dedicated to a single author, as its editor, Stefano M. Cingolani, notes in his introduction.[5] The poem's full rubric reads, "Cobla que legint la per larch diu contentament, e legint la per mitat diu descontentament." Without this rubric, it would hardly be evident that the "Cobla" has two meanings:

> De béns e plaer / tostemps abundós
> sempre freturós / de dol e tristor
> no estic desitjós / de veure dolor
> de pendre muller / ben cobdiciós
> solaç ab cantar / io prenc en repòs
> del tot vull fugir / pensar en la mort
> ni em plau gens oir / res que em desconhort
> lo riure i ballar / tinc per mon espòs.[6]

Read traditionally (that is, line-by-line, horizontally from left to right), the "Cobla" seems nothing more than a frank statement of happiness, although the rubric's term, *contentament*, does not actually appear in the poem, which refers rather to pleasure, the absence of sadness, carnal desire, and an attraction to the festive activities of social life. Only a careful listener will realize that a series of internal rhymes reveals the composition's double character:

> De béns e *plaer* / tostemps abundós
> sempre *freturós* / de dol e tristor
> no estic *desitjós* / de veure dolor
> de pendre *muller* / ben cobdiciós
> solaç ab *cantar* / io prenc en repòs
> del tot vull *fugir* / pensar en la mort
> ni em plau gens *oir* / res que em desconhort
> lo riure i *ballar* / tinc per mon espòs.

In the *Cançoner de Maians*, all of the lyrics feature slashes dividing the hemistichs of each line, so these internal rhymes represent the only cue that the poem can be read as two vertical columns, in which case it declares the speaker's sadness and isolation.

There are two other "doubled" stanzas from fifteenth-century Aragon, both of which deal with praise and blame rather than happiness and unhappiness. One, by Bernat Fenollar, is dedicated to Corella and included at the end of the *Cançoner de Maians* (142v) with a rubric that explains,

[5] Cingolani's edition, which includes manuscript images, can be consulted at https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/portales/rois_de_corella/manuscrits_maians/. As Cingolani notes, single-author manuscripts also survive for both Bernat Metge and Ausiàs March. For a detailed analysis of this manuscript's origins and context, see Martos.

[6] Ed. Jordi Carbonell (47), slightly modified to reflect the manuscript's formatting.

as in the case of Corella's "Cobla," the two ways of reading its lines.[7] The other, attributed to Pere Torroella in manuscript B 2281 of the Hispanic Society, is there entitled simply "Cobla sparsa de lahor he deslaor."[8] When this stanza was first published by Peter Cocozzella in 1986, the highly perspicacious scholar failed to detect its titular "dispraise" and theorized that it originally featured a second part, now lost (161-62). Some years later, Jordi Parramon i Blasco, pointing out that if the stanza had a second part, it would cease to be a *cobla sparsa*, and comparing Torroella's stanza to those of Corella and Fenollar, revealed the stanza of dispraise hidden within the stanza of praise (171). Parramon ends his analysis with some dispraise of his own: "Havent descobert que es tracta d'un joc trivial es comprèn que la cobla sigui tan anodina com les seves germanes" (171), which he goes on to characterize as "les restes del naufragi d'un joc de saló amb què els poetes d'aquell temps posaven a prova el seu enginy" (172).

This conjunction of the concept of ingenuity or wit with an overarching portrait of fifteenth-century Iberian poetry as a mere courtly pastime features frequently in arguments that interpretation of this corpus is superfluous or even anachronistic. At the same time, framing these stanzas as the rubble of a game whose purpose is the ostentatious display of wit militates against any sincere interpretation of Corella's emotional discourse, even setting aside its self-contradictory structure. It is not my intention here to deny the ludic character of any of these three stanzas; however, I would suggest that it is more profitable to understand them not as games but as riddles whose keys lie in their contradictory form. They are not exactly *devinalhs*, like another contradictory composition from the previous generation, Jordi de Sant Jordi's "Cançó d'opòsits," but they do have roots in the spirit of the tradition that started with Guilhèm de Peitieus's "Vers de dreit nien."[9] This last song has itself been accused of a certain illegibility: whereas some critics have suggested "love" as the key to Guilhèm's riddle (Dragonetti, 187, 191; Roubaud, 34; Lawner, 161), and others see the key as the very pleasure to be found in song (Huchet, 107), there are several who assert the riddle's essential emptiness. In the words of Joseph J. Duggan, for example, "The *vers de dreit nien* has nothing to transmit, in the end, but meter, rhyme, and a series of contradictions and impossibilities that leaves the audience, which is in search of substance, nothing but word-play" (835). Kay, studying irony and hyperbole in the troubadours, expands this analysis, showing how the troubadours' exploration of irony, especially in their love songs, could make reading functionally impossible. She gives the example of a song by Arnaut de Maruelh in which he thanks the other troubadours because their excessive irony has made it possible for him to tell the truth about his love without worrying that any reader will recognize it as such: "[T]hey will never suspect him of telling the unvarnished truth, and so the quality of his love will never be betrayed however openly he sings about it. The literary conventions of his day have made them in some radical way 'unreadable,' their meaning inevitably ironized and thus protected" (22).

For Kay, the clearest example of this phenomenon is found in a subtradition she calls "narratives of two women," in which the poet laments the love he sang to a first woman, dedicating the current song to a more deserving one: "Such songs," Kay explains, "are ironic in that they oppose one love narrative against another, in a self-canceling juxtaposition which undermines belief in either" (26). Cocozzella, in turn, relates this subtradition to Torroella's stanza of praise

[7] This is the only work by an author other than Corella included in the *Cançoner de Maians* (Martos, 313 n. 1).
[8] On the attribution of this stanza to Torroella, which is disputed by Francisco J. Rodríguez Risquete, or at least to "pseudo-Torroella," see Cocozzella 159-60.
[9] On Sant Jordi's "Cançó d'opòsits" as a *devinalh*, see Riquer and Badia, 219; Terry, 25; Torró, 340; and Sant Jordi, 168. On the lasting influence of the "Vers de dreit nien" on the troubadour tradition, see Dragonetti, 191 and Huchet, 108.

and blame, a stanza that at first glance constitutes both "a veritable emblem of indeterminacy" (164) and, furthermore, a continuation of the ambivalent misogyny found in his well-known "Maldezir de mugeres." Nevertheless, Cocozzella argues that Torroella's stanza carries out a poetic operation similar to the "self-cancelling juxtaposition" described by Kay, finding a way to relativize profound questions of truth and authenticity. "For Torroella," concludes Cocozzella, "ambivalence is emblematic of the equilibrium and equanimity that the inspired poet puts at the service of rescued truth and restored function of language to signify" (181). In other words, poets such as Maruelh and Torroella deploy poetic ambiguity and even outright contradiction not as an attack on truth but as a technique to reveal hidden relationships between poetic discourse and truth.

The praise and blame featured in the stanzas of Fenollar and Torroella place them squarely in the tradition of epideictic or demonstrative rhetoric. This tradition arises directly in Joan Ramon Ferrer's self-glossed *Sirventesch*, where the phrase "qui de bondats avia" is glossed: "Car atribuesch a ell [that is, Joan Valentí, the subject of the poem] virtuts e redundació de lahor, de la qual és compost lo present sirventesch, perquè, segons Rhetòrica, és en lo linatge demonstratiu" (*Lírica trobadoresca del segle XV* 120). Although the satirical nature of the *sirventes* genre – and of associated genres such as the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas de escárnio e maldizer* – implied either mocking praise or, more often, scathing attacks and insults, the form was not always explicitly linked to demonstrative praise and blame; Ferrer's gloss is a manifestation of, on the one hand, the author's humanistic learning and legal studies, and, on the other, of the increasing influence of rhetorical compositional modes on fifteenth-century Iberian lyric (Gómez-Bravo 2000, 174-75). In contrast, the enigmatic form of Fenollar's and Torroella's stanzas recalls the essentially comic thrust of earlier genres, even if the *lahor* of their rubrics echoes Ferrer's language. Their double and contradictory meaning does not remove them from the fields of ethical judgment or epideictic; rather, it suggests the intellectual and creative resources that literature might offer to those fields. In Fenollar's poem to Corella, such resources are expressed through emotional contradictions:

> Quant vos sermonau / Nos pot goig atenyer
> Alegras lo temple / Sens vostres fauors
> Tot hom sentresteix / Dohir uos en trona
> De vostre sçilençi / Lo poble [e]s content […] (*Obres de J. Roiç de Corella* 431, ll. 3-6)

Emotions such as joy (*goig*, *alegria*), sadness, and happiness result alternatively from Corella's speech or silence. As a verdict on Corella's eloquence, Fenollar's lines are "unreadable," an example of self-cancelling irony. But as a form of address – "Cobla que Mossen Fenollar trames a Mossen Corella" – the stanza invites not silence but a lyric response. Rather than taking up Fenollar's framework of praise and blame, however, Corella applies Fenollar's productively contradictory form to happiness and sadness as such. In doing so, he appears to remove these emotions from straightforward debates about literary skill or incompetence, instead proving his skill through a reflection on emotion that can only be realized in the intricate literary form of the doubled stanza.

At first glance, Corella's "Cobla," in its juxtaposition of pleasure and pain, laughter and the thought of death, seems merely to repeat the troubadours' taste for antithesis, oxymoron, paradox, and contradiction. These figures are associated above all with the love song and find their most emblematic expression in Petrarch's "Pace non trovo," where blame for the lyric voice's contradictory experience is attributed to his beloved: "in questo stato son, donna, per voi." Several

of Petrarch's antitheses are incorporated into Sant Jordi's "Cançó d'opòsits," and it is fair to say that the taste for paradox is just as widespread in fifteenth-century Catalan love poetry as in any other troubadour tradition. Corella himself cultivated amorous themes in some of the other poems in the *Cançoner de Maians*, and in his fundamental study of Corella's career, Cingolani identifies the rejection of human love – "una malaltia ruïnosa que l'home, i encara més la dona, ha d'evitar, costi el que costi" – as a central theme in the entire "quefer ètico-literari" of the eventual Valencian theologian (24-25). At the same time, the poets of Corella's generation and their immediate predecessors had investigated questions of happiness and pleasure in love through terms such as *grat*, *alt*, and *delit*. In a letter from Torroella to fellow poet Francesc Ferrer, *grat* is defined as the understanding's conscious approval of pleasurable feelings; in facilitating the union of objective impressions and subjective inclinations, it allows the will to function properly (Berlin, 78-80).[10] Pleasure was therefore not just one possible, if rare, outcome of a love affair; it was a semantic field in which to explore the role of emotion in cognition.

Of particular relevance in connection with this exploration is the well-known introduction to Corella's *Parlament o col·lació que s'esdevenc en casa de Berenguer Mercader entre alguns hòmens d'estat de la ciutat de València*, a prose text depicting a literary gathering in which each participant recounts a tale from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and offers a moral interpretation of it. Corella describes the evening's activities in terms of both delight and pleasure: "Per la celsitud transcendent de la senyora de les ciències, sacra Teologia, davallant, ab delitós estudi, en los florits e verds camps d'afable poesia, llevant les àncores de pereós oci, lleixats los prats de reposat silenci, estendré les càndides veles, ab plaent exercici, en les baixes antenes de vulgar poesia" (*Obres completes*, 137). As Lola Badia has noted, although the shift from theology to poetry implies a descent, it is also a matter of delightful study, "senyal que la poesia, tot i constituir un grau de saber inferior al teològic i més 'delitós', requereix anàlisi i concentració" (153-54); although lower than theology and even than Latin poetry, *vulgar poesia* is nevertheless praised by Corella and related to "nocions tals com l'harmonia, l'elegància, i l'elevació de l'estil" (154). Furthermore, alongside these technical reflections on the relationship of poetry to pleasure and knowledge, Corella portrays in some detail literature's emotional effects on the *Parlament*'s participants, who "cry their eyes out, moan, and lament while considering the stories' moral repercussions," making of the literary evening "a pleasurable, not to mention cathartic, exercise" (Miguel-Prendes, 143). However pessimistic Corella was about human love, he does not portray literature's potential for ethical instruction as exclusive of a certain form of delight.

In this context, it is important to recognize that despite its reveling in the antithesis of pleasure and pain, the "Cobla de dos senys" is not a love poem. In contrast to Petrarch, who blames his contradictory suffering on his beloved, Corella's stanza omits the question of causes entirely. Pleasure, invoked in the first and seventh lines, remains general, coming and going as a reaction to environmental stimuli. Where the poet could speak of courtly love, he mentions only the desire to "prendre muller" – or the lack of such desire. In any case, the presence or absence of such desire are here symptoms or signs of underlying happiness or unhappiness, just like the wish to dance or to flee from company. There may be an allusion here to Ausiàs March's well-known poem XXIII, "Colguen les gents ab alegria festes," in which the great Valencian poet – whose verses were well-known to Corella (Cingolani, 14; Terry, 39) – rejects the festive *deports* of his compatriots, preferring the company of the dead, and in which the only *delit* contemplated is the sight, from the afterlife, of the tears of his beloved *Llir entre cards*. March presents no paradox in this poem; instead he forges a hyperbolic (and Dantesque) contrast that evokes the ironic strategies through

[10] For Torroella's letter, see *Obra completa* 2: 225-42.

which the troubadours sought individuation. Corella, for his part, may allude to questions of salvation and damnation in the concluding question of taking a spouse: "lo riure i ballar / tinc per mon espòs," or "res que em desconhort / tinc per mon espòs" (I will return to this *res* shortly). Indeed, both the invocation of marriage and the rubric's identification (perhaps taking its cue from Fenollar's stanza) of *(des)contentament* as the poem's subject further remove the "Cobla" from courtly parameters.

Does the "Cobla de dos senys" portray, then, a contradiction between happiness and unhappiness, or between pleasure and pain? A careful reading of the stanza reveals this not to be the case. If we imagine a recital of the stanza at a literary salon of the kind evoked by Parramon or by Corella himself in the *Parlament*, it is impossible for the speaker's happiness and unhappiness to be heard simultaneously.[11] Although the riddle may have tantalized listeners, its doubled sense does not seem to belong to a public spectacle only. Neither is it possible to read the stanza's two emotional sides at the same time; they are even difficult to visualize together. In short, either one meaning will go undetected, or one will dominate the other before being dominated in turn. The stanza's enigmatic form, it seems to me, is not directly contradictory, nor does it surreptitiously favor one alternative. Rather, it emphasizes the ever-changing character of emotional experience through obligatorily serial reading or listening. The supposedly simultaneous game is, in Kay's terms, self-cancelling.

Nevertheless, there is one moment in Corella's text that achieves a maximum contradictory concentration. Reading the seventh verse "per larch," we have: "ni em plau gens oir res que em desconhort." Reading the last verse "per mitat," we have: "res que em desconhort tinc per mon espòs." Through the stanza's doubled form, Corella manages to give the word *res* both its frequent sense of "nothing" along with its rarer (when unmodified) affirmative sense, "something."[12] It is through such special effects that the troubadours threaten language's signifying potential, but in the stanza's serial development, this doubled sense of *res* demonstrates that, in lived experience, nothingness and existence do not in fact coincide. Furthermore, again in human experience, strong evidence of this fundamental difference is to be found in emotional fluctuations that unfold in time. Lived experience can be ambivalent and obscure, but it cannot be reduced, Corella intimates enigmatically, to the experience of abstract and absolute contradictions.

Cingolani writes that Corella, before and after his studies in theology, and in spite of his ethical commitment to the rejection of human love throughout all phases of his written production, always pursued "un espai per a una literatura" (189). In the "Cobla de dos senys," this space is not just the ambivalence between two absolute extremes, but rather the space of anti-absolutism. Corella has made of lyric form a weapon against a certain formalism found in both the philosophical and poetic traditions of his time (and in other times, very much including our own). We cannot find the space of literature in Corella's stanza without reading and re-reading it; the

[11] Considering some ambiguous lines from John Donne's "The Apparition," William Empson writes, "You may be intended, while reading a line one way, to be conscious that it could be read in another; so that if it is to be read aloud it must be read twice; or you may be intended to read it in some way different from the colloquial speech-movement so as to imply both ways at once" (147-48). As Empson's reflection makes clear, even a single line may require different voicings to bring out different meanings, so that it would have to be read aloud twice to make each meaning evident. In the case of the stanzas by Torroella, Fenollar, and Corella, the second method of reading or recitation contemplated by Empson would be impossible.

[12] The term *res* arises frequently in the poetry of Ausiàs March, almost always in negative constructions similar to Corella's "ni em plau gens oir res […]" or in constructions with *si*. When it does have an affirmative sense, it is mainly in the phrase *tota res*; *aquella res* appears once, in line 139 of poem 100 (see the lemma *res* in *Concordances lematitzades de les poesies d'Ausiàs March*).

idea of contradiction and, to a certain extent, its form are also present there, when contemplated from a distance – but the experience of contradiction is not.

Berger concludes her essay with a reading of Faulkner's novel *Wild Palms*, whose protagonist must choose, in the end, between living with enormous pain or suicide; he chooses the pain. For Berger, "the choice to endure the pain/the hurt (*le mal*), to twist the knife in the wound of the soul, is precisely what makes memory possible. And with it, the story; and thanks to the story, a kind of *traitement* for the pain […] in and through language" (187). Memory, emotion, reading: all phenomena that arise from the convergence of language and time. Corella's "Cobla" emphasizes this convergence and its vital implications. One specificity of literature would be, then, that of holding open this anti-absolutist space, of pleasure and pain, song and dance, laughter, even of the thought of death. In this sense, the "Cobla" takes up the idiosyncratic resistance to a rigid ethical rationalism in which reason and the emotions were opposed to each other absolutely, a resistance shared with other Iberian writers of his time, in lyric and other genres, including prose (Berlin 59-85). He also takes up, obliquely, Torroella's suggestion that certain forms of pleasure demonstrate the ties between emotion and cognition. But he goes further in showing how literary form has a special role to play in such a demonstration. Whether the lyric voice is happy or unhappy, readers may delight in unraveling the riddle it addresses to them.

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