



A Catalan *Cobla Sparsa* of the Fifteenth Century: An Icon of Ambivalence in the Misogynistic Background of *Celestina*, Act I

Peter Cocozzella (Binghamton)

■ 1 The «Cobla Sparsa» and Its Context

The trend of misogyny in Spanish literature of the fifteenth century has been the object of excellent studies, eminently exemplified by those yielded by the recent groundbreaking research of such scholars as Robert Archer, Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, Julian Weiss, Barbara E. Weissberger, among others.¹ In the present essay I aim no farther than to contribute a side note or two to these studies. Of special significance as a starting point for my discussion is the compelling argument that both Weiss and Weissberger marshal in support of the wide scope of their investigation. As for the numerous debates that prove to be a showcase of antifeminist discourse, Weissberger posits a broad literary and extra-literary contextualization in the following terms: «In studying the European gender debates we must recognize that they are shaped by particular sociopolitical circumstances» (Weissberger, 2002: 225). Weissberger proffers, as well, cogent comments concerning the customary recantation that even the most notorious exponents of misogyny – the likes of Alfonso Martínez de Toledo (ca. 1398–ca.1470), Jaume Roig (ca. 1400–1478), and Pere Torroella (ca. 1420–ca. 1492) – make it a point to show off not without a goodly measure of self-serving ostentation.² Weissberger duly recognizes the significance of a rhe-

1 For a sample list of the seminal publications of these authors, see the bibliography below.

2 Gerli provides a seminal, informative study on Martínez de Toledo's life and works (see Gerli, 1976). The same may be said about Solomon's monograph (Solomon, 1997), which presents a comparative analysis of Martínez's and Roig's respective masterpiece. Of special interest is Delgado-Librero's introduction to her recent edition and translation of Roig's *Spill*. Delgado-Librero delves into the predominant strain of misogyny

torical spin inherent in this eleventh-hour exhibition of pro-feminism and proffers the following explanation for the aforementioned penchant for the belated palinode on the part of hardened anti-feminists: «Such seeming about-faces are properly understood in the context of a court culture that encouraged display, competition, wordplay, and irony» (Weissberger, 2002: 230, n. 22). In much the same vein Weiss calls attention to the palinode included in the final stanza of Torroella's first antifeminist poem. Weiss observes that «[f]ar from bringing closure... this 'retraction' puts Torrellas's 'secret core' beyond reach, on an endlessly receding horizon of irony» (Weiss, 2002: 249).

There is a special significance in the mention of the mode of irony in the passages just quoted. The statements, in effect, adumbrate the weighty issue that, as I shall attempt to demonstrate, resides in the perception of irony as a factor concomitant to the ambivalent position of the misogynists in question.³ These, to quote directly from Weissberger's statement, «exulted in their ability to argue both sides of the woman question» (Weissberger, 2002: 330, n. 22).

In the course of the present discussion I shall focus on a short fifteenth-century poem, written in Catalan, which may be considered a veritable emblem of the type of ambivalence that not only Weissberger (2002) but also Archer (2000, 2001, 2005) and Cortijo Ocaña (2001) detect in Pere Torroella's distinctive mind-set in the debate about women.⁴ Together with

in *Spill* and provides an overview of the various perspectives proposed by authoritative scholars on that strain (Delgado-Librero, 2010: 39–46). For a comprehensive overview of Torroella's career, Rodríguez Risquete's extensive «Estudio biográfico» with all its ample documentation is indispensable (Rodríguez Risquete, 2003: XV–LXXIV). Besides «Torroella» Riquer registers three other variants of the author's surname – Torrella, Torrellas, Torrelles – in sundry combinations with three forms of his first name: Pere, Pero, Pedro (Riquer, 1964: 3: 161). An essential biography of Torroella may be found in Aubrun (1951: XLV–LI), Bach y Rita (1930: 12–27), Cocozzella (1986: 4–6), Riquer (1964: 174–186), Rubió Balaguer (1953: 871–873).

- 3 Ivy A. Corfis (1997) presents a broad overview of the various manifestations of irony in the salient exponents of the Spanish sentimental novel (*novela sentimental*) of the fifteenth century. Corfis's perceptive critique and extensive bibliographical references are complemented by a special focus on the art of *Celestina*.
- 4 As for the impact of Torroella's fascinating presence in the limelight of history, suffice it to point out the author's brilliant career as high-ranking member of the military, a diplomat, and, of course, a man of letters. No less fascinating, albeit of dubious distinction, is the reputation that Torroella attained as woman-hater par excellence. Torroella's immense popularity and notoriety stem, no doubt, from his «Maldezir de mugeres»,

five other love lyrics and one composition of a religious nature, the poem, headed by the rubric «Cobla sparsa de lahor he deslaor» ('Loose Stanza of Praise and Unpraise') appears in MS B 2281 of the Hispanic Society of America. Upon publishing these poems as a group for the first time in 1986, I considered the seven pieces, all written in Catalan, worthy specimens of Torroella's bilingual production – written, that is, partly in Catalan, partly in Castilian.⁵ In keeping with his meticulous examination of the layout of MS B 2281, Francisco J. Rodríguez Risquete categorically denies Torroella's authorship of the «Cobla sparsa» (2003: XCIII), even though he

demonstrably one of the most widely read, discussed, and disputed Spanish poems of the fifteenth century. Pertinent here is the following information provided by Archer:

The poem by Pere Torroella, or Pedro Torrellas, variously known as 'Maldezir de mugeres' and 'Coplas de las calidades de las donas' is one of the most successful in the whole *cancionero* tradition, copied in no fewer than seventeen manuscripts between the 1460s and 1541, as well as in the *Cancionero general* of Hernando del Castillo (1511, enlarged in 1514, and with several reprintings during the sixteenth century). (Archer, 2005: 170)

For the dating of the poem between 1442 and 1445 and other information concerning Torroella's life and career, see Archer (2005: 170, n. 1).

Curiously enough, Torroella's misogynous renown achieved legendary proportions as attested in the novel, entitled *Tractado de Grisel y Mirabella*, by the gifted Juan de Flores, one of Torroella's younger contemporaries. In Flores's novel, Torroella, fictionalized in the role of advocate for the male gender, engages in a heated debate with his counterpart, Braçayda, a formidable feminist. Though he might well boast of his resounding victory in the dispute, Torroella, as it turns out, has little to rejoice about. In short, Torroella meets with violent death, to put it mildly. I will borrow from a recent article by Helen Cathleen Tarp, an incisive summary of Flores's grisly account:

After the trial... Braçayda lures Torrellas to a secret meeting place where the court ladies bind, gag and subject him to a mock trial while removing his flesh from his bones with hot pincers. After burning his remains, the women gather his ashes and place them in lockets around their necks as a symbol of their triumph. (Tarp, 2006: 96)

- 5 For the text of these compositions see Cocozzella (1986), especially pp. 198–204. The attribution of these pieces is discussed on pp. 173–180. Torroella's poetry is accessible, also, thorough the internet: see Torroella, *Incipitario di Pere Torroella*. Robert Archer provides the following count of Torroella's extant production:

Torroella's work includes twenty-one poems in Catalan, thirty-one in Castilian, and fourteen further poems possibly attributable to him (eight in Catalan, six in Castilian); there are four prose works in Castilian together with four letters to Pedro d'Urrea and one further Castilian work possibly attributable to him; there are two *respostes* and one *demanda* in Catalan. (Archer, 2005: 178, n. 13)

advances his pronouncement with a cautious «Parece claro». There is, nevertheless, a palpable affinity between the «Cobla» in question and the other known works by Torroella. As will become evident presently, the ingeniousness of the «Cobla» exhibits a close similarity particularly with the structure of Torroella's «Maldezir.» In his concise critique of this most notable or notorious (as the case may be) of all Torroella's extant works, Weiss observes, poignantly: «[t]he poem is structured around a paradoxical double move...» (2002: 245). Besides the paradoxical quality that informs the entire makeup of the composition, the aforementioned ingeniousness comes to light especially in the final stanza, which Weiss describes as follows: «a palinode of sorts, in which Torrellas claims not only that his lady is an exception to the rule, but that the rule itself is open to question» (2002: 245). The intricate web of conceits embedded in said stanza finds a close match in the text of the «Cobla sparsa», which we will peruse in due time. There is even an echoing effect in the very wording of the Castilian stanza and the Catalan counterpart despite the obvious language difference between the two texts.

With all due admiration for Rodríguez Risquete's impressive spade-work, it is fair to say that, in view of the affinities I have been referring to, the most skeptical of readers would have to attribute the «Cobla» if not to Torroella, to an author we would have to call «pseudo-Torroella.»⁶ Whether or not Torroella turns out to be the author of the poem, there can be little doubt as to the insight that this little poem affords into a paramount dimension of Torroella's esthetics. As I will try to show, the mechanics that come into play in Torroella's poetics characterize, as well, a tradition that harks back to the mode of irony explored by the troubadours and, through the mediacy of none other than the Valencian luminary, Ausiàs March, comes to a head in *Celestina*, the nonpareil *chef-d'oeuvre* of Spanish literature of the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance.

In short, what I propose is an analytic journey that proceeds on the trail blazed by Weissberger, Archer, Cortijo Ocaña, to whose names we may add, as will soon become apparent, those of June Hall Martin, Linda M.

6 What remains to be said is that, even after excluding the «Cobla sparsa» the other poems that make up the aforementioned group included in MS B 2281 contribute a substantial addition to Torroella's extant works, published in 1930 by Pedro Bach y Rita, in 2004 by Robert Archer, and in 2011 by Rodríguez Risquete. I have been able to consult the latter edition in its version available on the internet (see the bibliography below). Rodríguez Risquete's monumental enterprise appears in two volumes in the collection *Els Nostres Clàssics* of Editorial Barcino.

Paterson and Sarah Kay. What lies in store at the end of the journey is the discovery of the miscegenation of some salient Catalan and Castilian strains in the literary developments distinctive of the age of Isabel of Castile and Fernando of Aragon.

■ 2 *Laus* or otherwise

At this point it is appropriate to go back to the main object of this discussion, the «Cobla sparsa» that reads as follows:

De moltas bondats yo us vetg habundosa,
 tostemps apartada de vicis he mal,
 de grans malvestats vivint freturosa;
 vós sou aretada de tot bon cabal
 e no gens composta de seny variable,
 de cor virtuós dotada sens par,
 senyora disposta, de gest amigable,
 en fet viciós no us puch apel·lar:
 sola sou vós del món singular. (Cocozzella, 1986: 200)

(Many good traits you have in abundance;
 you keep at a distance from vices and evil
 and live a good life, quite free of foul deeds.
 Goodness itself you wear as your jewels
 and never give in to fickle desires.
 You are without equal in noble and kind heart,
 o Lady so amiable and so well-disposed!
 For no act of malice I find you to blame:
 unique you stand out all over the world!)

At first reading, the words «lahor he deslaor» (‘praise and unpraise’) of the rubric alert us to an undefinable aura of strangeness that envelops the «Cobla sparsa.» While the *labor* is quite evident in the text, the same cannot be said of the *deslaor*. In view of compelling *prima facie* evidence, the author, whether he be Torroella or pseudo-Torroella, follows, no doubt, in the tradition of *Cant XXIII* by Ausiàs March (1997: 115–120), the non-pareil Valencian poet of the first half of the fifteenth century.⁷ This means that, from all appearances, the «Cobla sparsa» may be classified in the same «gènere dels laus» (‘genre of the *laus*’), which Robert Archer, with those very terms, assigns to March’s *Cant XXIII* (Archer, 1997: 115). As Archer

7 For the essential orientation on March’s life and works, see Riquer (1964(2): 471–568), and Terry (1972: 39–45).

indicates by a list of notable examples, the genre, characterized by the praises lavished on the virtues of the ladylove, is amply represented, long before Torroella's lifetime, in Occitan and Catalan lyricism (Archer, 1997: 115–116).

The label «lahor,» then, is an obvious equivalent of the *laus* of the troubadours. Still, we may ask, What about the concomitant designation of «deslaor?» In the preliminary study of the *Cobla* on the occasion of the aforementioned publication of the piece, I surmised that the un-praise component might have been lost or misplaced (Cocozzella, 1986: 188). Eventually, this conjecture was proved wrong by the Catalanist Jordi Parramon i Blasco, who has been able to show that the *deslaor* of the most vituperative kind is, indeed, stated in the poem itself. Parramon makes this quite clear in a short article based on his perspicacious reading (Parramon, 1993–1994). He proceeds to divide the poem in half but not in the usual way – that is, by a simple verse count. Rather, the division falls in a straight vertical line, following the caesura in each verse so that the hemistichs, aligned in succession in two separate columns, become the verses of two entirely new poems. The original *cobla sparsa*, with some minimal change in the punctuation, will be transformed, then, as follows:

A

De moltas bondats
tostemps apartada,
de grans malvestats
vós sou aretada;
e no gens composta
de cor virtuós.
Senyora, disposta
en fet viciós
sola sou vós.

B

Yo us vetg habundosa,
de vicis he mal,
vivint freturosa
de tot bon cabal,
de seny variable,
dotada sens par.
De gest amigable
no us puch apel·lar
del món singular.

Poem A

(‘You are divested, as always, of any good traits; you are all decked out in grievous faults. No virtuous heart resides in you. My Lady, you are unique in your disposition to vicious deeds.’)

Poem B

(‘I see you abounding in vices and evil. You live in default of any good trait. You are endowed with an incomparable fickle mind. I can hardly call you unique in this world for your pleasant disposition.’)

After acknowledging two other poems – one by Bernat Fenollar and the other by Joan Roís de Corella – Parramon dismisses Torroella's *cobla* with less than faint praise: «Havent descobert que es tracta d'un joc trivial es compren que la cobla sigui tan anodina com les seves germanes ja esmentades, malgrat els elogis que en fa Coccozzella, per l'aparent absència de la famosa misogínia de l'autor» (Parramon, 1993–1994: 171).⁸

Before embarking upon any further analysis of the composition as a whole, it is only fair to observe, *en passant*, that the newly generated poems clearly constitute exemplary manifestations of the *maldit*, a genre which lies at the opposite end of the spectrum with respect to the *laus*. Clearly, as the author of the emblematic «Maldezir,» Torroella would be right in his element in conceiving the two poems in question. Also, it is useful to bear in mind another notable exemplar of the *maldit*: Ausiàs March's *Cant* XLII, to which Archer dedicates enlightening studies (Archer, 1996: 119–139, and Archer, 2000).⁹ Archer provides the following data, essential for the definition of the genre:

El poema [March's *Cant* XLII] pertenece al género del «maldit», un tipo de poema practicado por los poetas catalanes del último tercio del siglo XIV. En catalán y occitanocatalán existen unos treinta y dos ejemplos, cinco de los cuales son fragmentarios. Todos ellos tienen como blanco a una mujer particular. El «maldit» (en provenzal «maldig») es el nombre que se daba a una forma de sirventés que también podía dirigirse a hombres, y hay en catalán un reducido número de vituperio de hombres que llevan este título. (Archer, 2000: 156–157)¹⁰

Needless to say, one does not have to agree with the wholesale negativity of Parramon's pronouncement. The extensive commentary Coccozzella has devoted to «la cobla... tan anodina com les seves germanes» dem-

8 For the essential data on Fenollar's and Corella's respective life and works, see Riquer (1964: 3: 345–354; 3: 254–320). The two intriguing poems to which Parramon refers are published by Ramon Miquel y Planas in his edition of the *Obres de Roiç de Corella*. See: Corellas's «Cobla [de dos senys] que legint la per larch diu contentament, e legint la per mitat diu descontentament» ('A stanza [of two meanings], which, when read as a whole, expresses happiness and, when read by halves, expresses unhappiness') (Roís de Corella, 1913: 425), and Fenollar's «Cobla que Mossen Fenollar trames a Mossen Corella, que legint la tota diu mal e legint la per mitat diu be» ('A stanza that Mossen Fenollar dedicated to Mossen Corella, which, when read as a whole, speaks unfavorably and, when read by halves, speaks favorably') (Roís de Corella, 1913: 431).

9 For a broad discussion on the relationship between the *maldit* and the «Maldezir» see Archer (2005: 170–202), and Archer (2001).

10 As for the kinship of the *maldit* with the so-called *mala cansó* of the troubadours, see Archer (2000: 157).

onstrates, if nothing else, that the pieces so blithely discarded deserve much more attention than Parramon is willing to grant them. Here I will explore the significance of the «Cobla sparsa» in terms of the salient issues it raises concerning the feminist and antifeminist debate. I intend to deal with the motifs of praise and vilification, articulated into what turns out to be a significant aspect of the «problem of woman,» to borrow the phrase from the very title of Robert Archer's recent book on this complex subject. It will become apparent that those issues hold in store noteworthy implications in relation to not only Ausiàs March's legacy but also the background of the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, better known as *Celestina*, the widely-acclaimed masterpiece of Spanish literature of the late Middle Ages.

A few considerations are in order concerning the overall makeup of the «Cobla sparsa» in question, which, in its unsettling dynamism of construction / deconstruction, integration / disintegration, cannot but strike the reader, at first blush, as a veritable emblem of indeterminacy. The indeterminacy is acute, especially, apropos of what Archer would consider the essential characteristics of the *maldit* (1996: 127–128). The *Cobla sparsa* adheres, to be sure, to the norm that the object of vilification be, as the genre requires, a particular individual; but may we presume that, as evidenced in many but not all *maldits*, the author – Torrella or otherwise – is addressing a woman (or the woman) with whom he is or has been romantically involved? The internal evidence provided by the minuscule poem is not sufficient to allow a definitive answer to the question and thus create a base of authenticity – that is, verifiable experience – for the *maldit* properly called. By the same token, it cannot be ascertained whether the author has actually in mind what Martin de Riquer calls a *maldit-comiat*, related to the *canjat* of the troubadours – a composition, that is, that attests to the break of relationship with the quondam ladylove (Archer, 2000: 159, 2005: 178). In all probability, Ausiàs March's paradigmatic *maldit* (*Cant XLII*), which, as Archer demonstrates, may not be read as a *comiat* (Archer, 1996: 133), provides a significant model for the tone of outright rejection that informs the «Cobla sparsa»'s two-pronged *destaor*.

Arguably, the roots of the trait of indeterminacy inherent in Torroella's deft articulation of extremes – the hyperbole in either the praise or the vilification of women or the ladylove, as exhibited in the «Maldezir» and other poems – may be traced back to the lyric of the troubadours, specifically to the type for which Sarah Kay devises a special label («the narrative of two women»). A passage such as the one I am about to quote reads as Kay's

rough-and-ready definition of a literary modality or form that foreshadows March's and Torroella's handling of the *laus* and *maldit* motifs. Kay observes:

This question of commitment to meaning is posed particularly acutely by a sub-tradition of the love lyric which I shall call 'narratives of two women' and which consists of songs where the poet-lover evokes the love (and songs) he felt (and composed) for a previous *domna*, regrets that he could have been so misguided, and directs the current composition to a new *domna* from whom he hopes for better things. Such songs are ironic in that they oppose one love narrative against another, in a self-canceling juxtaposition which undermines belief in either. (Kay, 1990: 26)¹¹

Another factor that needs to be taken into account is the penchant of the troubadours for hyperbole to such an extent that the fashionable use of hyperbolic praise compromises the epistemological dimensions of language – namely, 1) meaning or the capacity to signify and 2) communicability or the function of conveying meaning. Kay comes up with a concise explanation for the crisis faced by the Provençal masters. Witness, for instance, the following declaration:

Since it is evidently not possible for a troubadour to relinquish the convention of hyperbolic praise, 'reality' must be brought into line with rhetoric, and the lady's nature be acclaimed as such that art, provided it praise her, cannot lie. The claim to 'truthfulness' relies on the assertion that other poets are ironic, in the sense that their words can only be understood as diverging from 'true' meaning. But the attitude towards hyperbole is also ironic: exaggerated praise forms part of a conventional, established practice which the poet must adopt, however uncommittedly. And finally, in protesting the 'truth' of its own hyperbole, the text adopts an ironic stance towards its own criterion of 'reality' by alleging that it can be summoned to substantiate rhetorical expectation. (Kay, 1990: 21)

11 Amidst the various examples that Kay provides of the «narratives of two women,» two easily stand out: one by Marcabru («Lanquan fuelhon li boscatge» ['When the woods sprout leaves;' translation mine]) and the other by Bernart de Ventadorn («Estat ai com om esperdutz» ['I have been like a man out of his mind;' trans. Kay]). Kay explains that Marcabru's poem is parodic in nature (1990: 27), whereas Ventadorn's provides as straightforward an exposition as one can conceive of the lover-poet's dilemma (1990: 28–31). Kay summarizes as follows Ventadorn's unfolding of the conundrum:

At the beginning of the song the protagonist wishes to resume his career as a lover-poet, and at the end congratulates himself that he has done so, yet the cynicism of the intervening material undermines belief in him both as lover and as courtly poet. Once that has been ironized, how can we continue to underwrite the *opening* narrative of disappointed love? Both Bernart's 'love' stories are corroded by his irony. (Kay, 1990: 31)

Kay is well aware that the crisis she diagnoses throughout her monograph forebodes the ultimate collapse of signification. Regarding, for instance, Arnaut de Maruell's poems in general, Kay has this to say: «The literary conventions of his [Arnaut's] day have made them in some radical way 'unreadable', their meaning inevitably ironized and thus protected... from discovery» (Kay, 1990: 22).

Kay's remarks are relevant to our present discussion precisely because they shed light on March's position regarding hyperbole in his own version of the *laus* (the aforementioned *Cant* XXIII). Even as we reflect upon them, they evoke an ample context, encompassing, as a background of sorts, Marcabru's principle stemming from «so que veritatz autreia» ('whatever truth has to offer') (Cocozzella, 1986: 114–115). From this principle, as Linda M. Paterson points out, Marcabru develops the corollary distinction between the truth-oriented «trobar naturau» and the specious «trobar braus» (Paterson, 1975: 29). It bears noting that an accurate perception of *trobar braus* for what it really is bespeaks a rejection of, in Paterson's words, «smooth language associated with deceiving flatterers» (1975: 54). Incidentally, this is the smooth, sweet, flowery talk (an effective bait, so to speak, in the flatterer's trap), against which Andreas Capellanus warns his pupil Gualterius.¹²

What remains to be clarified is how March's and Torroella's respective treatment of the praise and un-praise of one woman or women in general, as the case may be, fits in with the analogous discourse of the troubadours critiqued by Kay and Paterson. It becomes evident that *Cant* XXIII proves to be a landmark document precisely because in its incisive first two verses March broaches a response to the «trobadors»: «Llexant a part l'estil dels trobadors / qui, per escalf, trespassen veritat» ('Discarding the style of the troubadours, those that are so inflamed that they cannot speak without exaggeration' [trans. Archer, 41; March, 1992: 41]).¹³ In his commentary,

12 Before entering into details apropos of the harmful effects of adulation in the love relationship, Capellanus proffers the following advice to young Gualterius: «Sermonis facundia multotiens ad amandum non amantium corda compellit. Ornatum etenim amantis eloquium amoris consuevit concitare aculeo et de loquentis facit probitate praesumi» ('In many instances a profusion of words moves the hearts of those who are not in love to fall in love. In fact, a lover's flowery rhetoric usually carries to full effect the stimulus of love and grants the smooth talker the presumption of righteousness' [translation mine]) (Capellanus, 1982: 44).

13 These are vv. 1–2 of March's *Cant* XXIII (see pp. 115–20) in Archer's 1997 edition. I adopt Robert Archer's translation with some minor emendations.

Robert Archer points out that in *Cant XXIII* the author employs the term «trobador» in a very broad sense, referring not simply to the great literary figures of Provence but, generally, to all the poets that may be associated with the Provençal tradition, to which, of course, March himself belongs. In fact, in v. 3 – «e sostraent mon voler afectat» ('and quelling my fervent desire' [trans. Archer, 41; March, 1992: 41]) – March confesses his own struggle against the excesses he ostensibly chastises in the other poets (Archer, 1997: 115). This subtle note of self-criticism happens to be one of many symptoms of March's wholehearted engagement in the exploration of the phenomenology of rescued meaning of language and restored authenticity of the lover's experience. Not surprisingly, the crucial term «escalç» encapsulates the deleterious workings of hyperbole, irony, and the rest that March imputes to his illustrious predecessors. Thus, by appealing to the high values of *veritat* while rejecting («lleixant a part») the transgressions against truth signaled by *escalç*, March not only revisits Marcabru's age-old contrast between the two *trobars* mentioned above but also strives to distance himself from the twists and counter-twists of irony, on account of which the troubadours run the risk of a catastrophic implosion of meaning.

A close comparative study would make it apparent that, from the momentous shift championed by Ausiàs March in the age-old tradition of woman-centered discourse, Torroella took his cue for bringing into effect a kindred agenda of his own. This, especially when brought to bear upon the composition of the «Maldezir», Archer describes as «an act of cultural transference» (2005: 182). Such an act involves the acclimation of the *maldit* within the domain of the Castilian *cancioneros*. It is fitting to borrow directly from Archer a description of this all-important though little-known process of acculturation:

[W]hen Torroella wrote his *Maldezir* he brought to Castilian poetry the deep-rooted conventions of an Occitan-Catalan tradition of invective against a woman who is or has been the object of the poet's real or feigned amorous service, a tradition that did not exist in Spanish. While it would be easy to find examples of misogynistic discourse in the *cancioneros*, there are no poems in Spanish before Torroella's that overtly develop the theme of 'What is wrong with women?' The *Maldezir* is in this sense an act of cultural transference: Castilian courtly verse simply had not been used for such purposes before. (Archer, 2005: 182)

Indeed, the reason why the «Maldezir» attracted so much attention and stirred such heated controversy in the first place is, according to Archer,

because Torroella was perceived by a host of his contemporaries to be manipulating for his purpose the sacrosanct code of *cortesía*.¹⁴

In sum, the antagonistic opposition between Torroella's «Maldezir» and the various defenses it spawns creates the atmosphere of controversy, which, in turn, as Archer puts it, «unleashed a similar conflict between courtly theory and practice, but one in which his [Torroella's] 'Maldezir' remains an almost completely isolated example, imitated by almost no other poet» (Archer, 2005: 185). Sooner or later, we come to realize that, at the heart of this conflict, lies the infraction that both Ausiàs March and Torroella incur regarding the norms of *cortesía*. The infraction so generally described has to do, specifically, with the transgression of the courtly ideal concerning the portrayal of woman as the praiseworthy object of a courtier's love. Thus, on an issue that could not be more crucial in love-centered literature, both March and Torroella break with the idealism of time-honored tradition. March and Torroella coincide on one level of the transgression. Both take a hand in the writing of the *maldit*, represented, respectively, by *Cant XLII* and by the «Maldezir,» complemented by the two poems yielded the «Cobla sparsa.» The poems, it bears pointing out, are the only exemplars of their kind in either March's or Torroella's extant production. Beyond this ordinary coincidence, March and Torroella blaze, each in an inimitable way, their own forbidden trails in their misogynist journey. March not only singles out for his satire, as convention allows, a particular woman but also indulges in the depiction of her grotesque appearance, repulsive manners, and reprehensible conduct. Then, stretching unconventionality to the edge of indiscretion and irreverence, he tops the vigorous lampooning with the ultimate insult: he drops the name, Na Monboí, with which the identity of the victim is brusquely exposed to disgrace. Only in the demimonde so colorfully conjured up by the poetry of a François Villon may we expect to find a convincing match for this Na

14 Eminently quotable, also, is the cogent explanation that Archer provides for the phenomenon of the numerous responses the «Maldezir» elicits from the poets of the *cancioneros*. The following passage is a fair sample of Archer's extensive argumentation:

Yet even at a surface level of discourse, it soon becomes obvious that these texts are only secondarily about women and that their main concern is that same *cortesía* which... was a major factor in attitudes to misogynous writing from at least as early as Cerverí de Girona and Matfre Ermengaud. That is, the problem discussed in these poems is the place of misogynistic notions in courtly practice rather than the inherent validity of such ideas that is the focus of the Castilian and Catalan defences. (Archer, 2005: 185)

Monboí that the bard from València regales with the epithet of «alcavota provada» (*Cant* XLII, v. 33). Torroella, on his part, reaches the highest peak of ingeniousness, in either devising a *laus* geminated into *maldits* or integrating scattered topics of antifeminism into a unique «Maldezir,» a whole genre unto itself.

■ 3 A Hypothesis of Syncretic Relativism

At a crucial juncture in his seminal study of Torroella's «Maldezir,» Archer asks a pointed question: «What was Torroella trying to do when he turned his misogynistic denunciation of all women into the eulogy of one particular lady» (Archer, 2005: 176)? As is the case with any inquiry into an author's intention, the answer is not easy to come by. Archer dismisses the answer proffered by scholars such as Juan Casas Rigall and Keith Whinnom, who focus on the dramatic turn of the protracted and preponderant misogynist diatribe of the «Maldezir» into the palinode of the last stanza. This notwithstanding, another look at the *Cobla sparsa*, which does not cease to intrigue us, not only supports Rigall's and Whinnom's reading but also underscores the astuteness of Archer's fundamental question, the relevancy of which, oddly enough, Archer himself seems to underestimate. In fact, the «Cobla sparsa» may be seen as the compendium or showcase of what may well be Torroella's stock-in-trade artistry: the deft articulation of opposites. Thus the poem may be considered iconic of the dilemma posed by Torroella's most representative pieces: the attack delivered by the «Maldezir» and the defense clearly spelled out in a tract, which bears the long rubric of «Razonamiento de Pere Torrella en deffension de las donas contra maldezientes, por satisfación de unas coplas qu'en dezir mal de aquellas compuso» (Archer, 2001: 552).¹⁵

The «Cobla sparsa,» to be sure, does not obviate the ambiguous attitude toward the «senyora» addressed in the poem and, perhaps, toward women in general. It does suggest, all the same, a daring intuitive operation that a poet may undertake in reaction to the «narratives of two women,» examined, as we have seen, by Kay. A salient aspect of Torroella's conceit consists, of course, in the conflation of the «two women» into one. This reduction *ad absurdum* and the concomitant double function of the hyper-

15 Archer's essay («Tus falsas opiniones e mis verdaderas razones': Pere Torroella and the Woman-Haters»), adduced here as reference, provides an instructive discussion of Torroella's avowed purpose to restore his reputation.

bole – the overt *laor* and the covert *deslaor* of it all – brings out the effect of a humorous anecdote, a comic punch line... in short, a caricature. We are left to wonder whether Torroella, in an ultimate twist of vitriolic irony, is taking aim to deal a definitive, deconstructive blow on the tradition that has served him as a source of inspiration.

Be that as it may, the «Cobla sparsa» reflects the attempt on the part of Torroella to transcend in his own way the woman question by showing how a virulent *deslaor* can be subsumed into an enthusiastic or hyperbolic *laor* or, vice versa, how the latter can be transformed into the former. It appears that Torroella has found a way of demarcating the last phase of the misogynistic strain in post-troubadour literature of the fifteenth century in the Castilian and Catalan domains. The «Cobla sparsa» attests to the discovery of a parodic device that functions as a double-edged sword of sorts. In the device the *laor* and *deslaor* factors interact, paradoxically, as two kinds of mirrors that concomitantly distort and refocus the essential features of a centralized image.

In the final analysis what Torroella comes up with is a compact and, by that token, emblematic statement of an esthetic of syncretism and relativization: the syncretism is evidenced in the conflation of two distinctive rhetorical functions – precisely those that pertain, respectively, to praise and un-praise; the relativization, on the other hand, is brought into effect by the clash between the factors concomitant to these functions – namely, the refined values of courtly ideals and the down-to-earth, not to say brutal, exigencies of the erotic drive. No doubt it would be of great interest to explore the various implications of this esthetic especially as manifested in March's two poems we have been discussing so far. Here, however, we cannot go into such a challenging and lengthy investigation. Instead, we will turn our attention to the pivotal image – the ambivalent portrait of woman that, as we have just pointed out, Torroella sketches out so suggestively. I propose to consider how that image is of essence in Act I of *Celestina* – an act which some critics attribute to an anonymous first author to be distinguished from the «continuator,» that is, the flesh-and-blood Fernando de Rojas (Russell, 1991: 24–37).

■ 4 Clashing Motifs – Fractious Dialogue

An analysis of *Celestina*, Act I, yields important evidence of the *laor-deslaor* motifs pertinent to the post-troubadour tradition that has been reviewed here. It is interesting to observe how these clashing motifs activate the

fractious dialogue from which emerge three leading figures: Calisto, Melibeia, and Celestina (the lover, the ladylove, and the whore). That same dialogue underscores, all the while, the foolishness and comic qualities that we find foreshadowed in the male protagonist. Unlikely as it may seem, Sempronio and Pármemo, two of the most «uncourtly» individuals that could be imagined, attest to the background of love-centered literature so exemplarily represented, as we have seen, by authors like March and Torroella. In fact, in Act I of *Celestina* those trusted but hardly trustworthy *criados* of Calisto's take on the role of confronting their master with those very issues that are paramount in March's and Torroella's representative compositions. We recall, for instance, Sempronio's caustic humor in response to what must be considered the most notorious sample of hyperbolic utterance. We are referring, of course, to Calisto's perverse profession of faith: «¿Yo? Melibeo só, y a Melibeia adoro, y en Melibeia creo, y a Melibeia amo» (Rojas, 1995: 93). As if such a blasphemy were not enough, the youth sees fit to underscore his feelings for Melibeia as follows: «Por dios la creo, por dios la confesso, y no creo que hay otro soberano en el cielo aunque entre nosotros mora» (Rojas, 1995: 95). Could there be a more apt illustration of Ausiàs March's notion of *escalf*? The term itself is an eloquent metaphor for hotheaded declarations that beg to be chastened one way or another. And a good chastening is what Sempronio provides for the occasion. Far from being scandalized, the hardboiled servant tones down, with a wry smile, any serious resonance the bombast might attain. Sempronio, as usual, does not mince words. In his retort he blends insult with his malicious chuckle as he insinuates that Calisto's intentions are even more reprehensible than those of the Sodomites of Biblical times, who schemed lurid acts with the angelic guests in the house of Lot: «Porque aquéllos procuraron abhominable uso con los ángeles no conocidos, y tú con el que confieffas ser Dios» (Rojas, 1995: 95). With good reason, then, the reader of *Celestina* may be reminded of March's *Cant* XXIII. The repartee between Calisto and Sempronio ends up unmasking in the speech of the obsessed lover the histrionics, speciousness, and hollowness – in short, the excesses of affectation – that March repudiates in those poets «qui per escalf / trespassen veritat.»

Pármemo's intervention is no less significant than Sempronio's in bringing to light points of affinity worthy of our attention. It is, indeed, remarkable that Pármemo takes up the very same motifs that Ausiàs March, in his outstanding *maldit* (*Cant* XLII), integrates into his own unusual rendition of *laor* and *deslaor*. As has been indicated, March introduces a highly

insulting epithet (*alcavota provada* of v. 33), leveled at Na Monboí. This *prima facie* evidence of *deslaor* needs, of course, no explication. What is truly ingenious in March's version is the admixture of the obvious with the unexpected. Incredibly, the *alcavota* herself transforms the offensive slur into a pleasing compliment.

A simple juxtaposition of but a few passages will make self-evident the parallelism that interest us here. Here is how March's poetic persona, in his direct address to Na Monboí, describes her response to the unflattering expletive:

Quan oireu «Alcavota provada»,
responeu tost, que per vós ho diran.
E puis per nom propi vos cridaran,
ja no us mostreu, en l'oír empatxada,
enterrogant, «Amics,» e què voleu?
«En dret d'amor voleu res que fer pusca?
Tracte semblant jamés me trobà cusca..
Presta seré a quant demanareu». (Vv. 33–40)

In presenting Celestina to Calisto, Pármeno launches into a series of observations that, albeit in much coarser terms than the ones used by March, could pass as a paraphrase, in the rough, of March's words. In the preamble to what turns out to be a rather extensive testimonial concerning the hag, whom he has just called «puta vieja alcoholada,» we hear Pármeno say:

¿Por qué, señor, te matas? ¿Por qué, señor, te congoxas? ¿Y tú piensas que es vituperio en la orjeas desta el nombre que la llamé? No lo creas, que así se glorifica en lo oír, como tú quando dizen: «Diestro cavallero es Calisto.» Y demás, desto es nombrada, y por tal título conocida. Si entre cient mugeres va y alguno dize «Putá vieja», sin ningún empacho luego buelve la cabeça y responde con alegre cara. (Rojas, 1995: 108)

Pármeno's remarks invite reflection on the diametric contrast between the denotation and connotation of «vituperio» – between, on the one hand, Calisto's literal and necessarily negative reading of the term and, on the other hand, Pármeno's positive interpretation, justified by Celestina's alleged reaction («responde con alegre cara») (Rojas, 1995: 108). Thus, Pármeno maneuvers an entire conversation upon a pivotal term («vituperio»), which he subjects to a considerable spin.

We hardly need an extensive reading and profound meditation to be struck by the shallowness of Calisto's declarations. Even when he goes into

what he purports to be his personal account of his beloved's beauty, he can do no better than recast the commonplace description of the ideal woman. Typically, he gets carried away in prolonged musings about such details as «dos ojos verdes, rasgados, las pestañas luengas, la boca pequeña» (Rojas, 1995: 101) or «[[l]as manos pequeñas en mediana manera, de dulce carne acompañadas, los dedos luengos, las uñas en ellos largas y coloradas, que parecen rubíes entre perlas» (Rojas, 1995: 101).

The passage alerts us to the superficiality and insubstantiality of the exchange between Calisto and Sempronio – precisely the exchange that pertains to the much-too-well-known arguments commonly integrated into the conventional *laor* and *deslaor* of women. We get the distinct impression that neither of the two men is really committed to his cause. Both of them, then, resort to the mouthing of hackneyed topics, but, in reality, their hearts is not in what they say. Now we begin to catch a glimpse of what June Hall Martin describes as «this enormous gap between what Calisto is and what he pretends to be» (Martin, 1972: 112–113). At the same time, we realize that the gap is but one aspect of a pervasive crisis – that epitomized by the dysfunctional dialogue we are given to contemplate.

The foregoing analysis invites reflection on the general layout of Act I of *Celestina*. We find, for one thing, that from the very beginning the stage is already set for a phenomenology that Martin sees unfold throughout the *Tragicomedia* specifically with regard to Calisto's grievous shortcomings. These call into question the sincerity or seriousness of his love, the refinement of his desire, the maturity of his character. As Martin explains in her own broad judgment on Calisto's conduct,

Calisto's essential problem lies within his own nature, and the constantly shifting tone of his language is a clue to a certain baseness in his character. His words lack the sincerity essential to the ideal courtly lover. His love lacks the power to ennoble him. And desire, rather than being refined as it grows stronger, tends to become coarser. (Martin, 1972: 101)

Act I provides a *mise en scène* for, also, Sempronio's and, by extension, Pármemo's conduct. Notably, what the author of Act I sets in operation is an intriguing interplay between seeming and being. As will become apparent in the rest of the *Tragicomedia*, Sempronio and eventually Pármemo strive, not unlike Calisto, for a degree of love they clearly are not capable of attaining. The fundamental difference, of course, is that Calisto, in matters amatory, falls short of expectations while his servants exceed them. All three, then, seem to be what they are not.

A sharp contrast to Calisto's *modus vivendi* may be witnessed in the attitude of Ausiàs March's persona. In *Cant XLII* March, upholds a *cavaller's* lofty values and looks askance at the presumptuousness of a *mercader*, whom he calls En Joan. En Joan's case holds in store an important lesson for both Calisto and Sempronio. In fact, March's *cavaller* finds the *mercader* contemptible and ridiculous precisely because the latter uses or abuses the manners of the courtier with the sole intent of putting up appearances («volgué's muntar en amar, cavaller» [v. 18]). There are obvious similarities in the behavior of both Sempronio and En Joan. Each realizes that the object of his love, be she Na Monboí or Elicia, is an «alcavota provada.» This shows, of course, that Sempronio is no less deserving of scorn than are the En Joans of this world. More importantly, the scorn for Sempronio redounds to the contempt due to Calisto, who, by association, stoops to the level of the uncouth servant.

We may well deduce that Calisto's conduct is at odds with the type of refinement fostered by the powers of what literary scholars have long advertised as *fin'amors*. The absence of that refinement is, then, foremost in the list of Calisto's flaws. Touching on this very point, Martin adduces a technical term she borrows from Maurice Valency and then provides her own explanation, which runs as follows: «But what is lacking in Calisto is the *mezura* required to keep himself under control until such refinement could take place. It is an essential quality; without it, the lover is, by courtly standards, doomed to failure» (Martin, 1972: 78). Martin even finds a striking symbol for Calisto's infraction of the code of *mezura*: «The falcon, who is not chained to Calisto's wrist, but is out of control, suggests Calisto's own ultimately uncontrolled passion for Melibea» (Martin, 1972: 78).

So, the main point is one of *mezura*, the overriding concern is the lack of self-control; the central issue is the correlation between Calisto's speech and his condition of a courtly lover manqué. It is still instructive to take yet another look at the portion of the Calisto-Sempronio dialogue that takes the form of a debate. At this point it is fair to say that the debate comes to a standstill, if it does not collapse completely, because the disputants cannot find a common ground for their discussion. While Calisto indulges in meaningless hyperboles in the praise of Melibea, Sempronio employs his caustic cynicism in disparaging the qualities of the maiden and of women in general. The disputants vie with each other in the hollowness of their argumentation: the master strives to sound sincere and the servant openly advocates self-deception as when he proffers the following advice to his lovesick interlocutor: «Ponte, pues en la medida de honrra; piensa ser más

digno de lo que te reputas» (Rojas, 1995: 99). It is much too clear that the two can only manage to talk, not *to* or *with*, but *at* and, eventually, *past* each other. We may take Martin's critique a step further and consider that Calisto has lost control of not only his passion but also his rhetoric and language itself. Concomitant with and as a consequence of his transgression against *mezura*, the language and style of *fin'amors* cannot be for Calisto tools of empowerment. They become, instead, a liability and a trap. The pernicious role of rhetoric and language in the entrapment of Calisto merits, no doubt, careful exploration.

■ 5 Dysfunctional Discourse in *Celestina* and the Latter Phases of Misogyny

An analysis of «Cobla sparsa» has brought to light certain aspects of indeterminacy, and these have been revealed as iconic of a paradoxical conflation of opposites: *laor* and *deslaor*, praise and vilification. Upon reflection we discern at the heart of the paradox an aesthetic kindred to the *sic et non* that Otis H. Green finds prominent in medieval tradition and operative in a particular kind of humor, which he calls «medieval laughter» (Green, 1963: 1: 5–71). A close reading of «Cobla» prompts us to enter into a discussion of specific points that complements the broad purview of Green's commentary. By contextualizing the «Cobla» within the dialectic of interaction between the «Maldezir» and the «Razonamiento... en defensión de la donas,» we see how Torroella reaches the paradoxical stage at which misogyny has spent its vehemence even as it attains the peak of its intensity. What we learn is that the vein of misogyny, practically exhausted, is symptomatic of a crisis of reason and ratiocination, and the crisis is implicit in the dysfunctional disputation we have just witnessed between Calisto and his servants.

If we shift our attention from Act I to the whole of the twenty-one-act *Tragicomedia* called *Celestina*, we discover additional factors conditioned by the crisis and the dysfunction in question. What looms ominous, indeed, apropos of Calisto's characterization is the disturbing divorce between the usual denotation of language and its connotative function in the mind and heart of a speaker such as Calisto, compelled by passion run amuck. Particularly relevant in this respect are Martin's comments that focus on Calisto's speech during his tryst with Melibea in Act XIX and include a reference to the encounter between Pármeno and Areúsa in Act VII. In the following passage Martin proffers insightful remarks precisely on the divorce mentioned above:

The scene seems to be even more debasing when one recognizes that it contains a strong echo of an earlier scene enacted between a servant and a prostitute in Areusa's bedroom. Yet in spite of Calisto's clearly carnal orientation, he still exhibits an excessive external adoration for Melibea... . He eternally overweighs the scales on the side of physical love and then attempts to make up the balance by an excessive rhetorical adoration. But the words are empty, weightless; the scales never attain a proper balance. And Calisto appears all the more absurd for his efforts. (Martin, 1972: 103)

The imbalance in Calisto's mind-set, the vapidity of his discourse, the absurdity of his behavior strike us as natural consequences of kindred flaws illustrated in the poems by March and Torroella. It is not hard to see how the crisis and dysfunction highlighted in the course of the present discussion comes to bear upon the parodical slant Martin recognizes in the portrayal of Calisto as a courtly lover manqué.

A few words are in order concerning the significant development of misogynist literature in some representative works by two Hispanic writers – namely, Francesc Moner and Luis de Lucena – who flourished in the second half of the fifteenth century. Moner envisages a therapeutic role for misogyny as a cathartic process, which, by venting off obnoxious emotions, leads to an enhanced self-knowledge and to the concomitant wholesomeness of mind and soul (Coccozella, 2010: 59–81). The therapy, however, is far from successful mainly because Moner has to confront reason's ultimate failure in the lover's quest for not only equanimity but also supreme happiness (the *Summum Bonum*). The lesson that Moner would have us learn is that reason's shortcomings make for an existential vacuum to be filled only by divine intervention. In the poem, *Sepoltura d'amor*, one of his major works, Moner explores the symbiotic bond between an allegorical personage, Experiencia ('Lady Experience'), and his own life converted into a text. By an extraordinary legerdemain of her own, Experiencia carries conversion to a metaphysical, not to say sacramental, extent by dramatizing the integration of the lover's life-text into Sacred Scripture especially as embodied in the Gospel. In Moner's *Sepoltura*, then, we appreciate, on the one hand, a misogynist strain that has run its course, and, on the other hand, as a natural consequence, a phenomenology of radical conversion that comes full circle from the fading out of emotional virulence to the fervor of an *imitatio Christi* underscored by the dramatics of Experiencia. And what Experiencia dramatizes is the awareness or self-consciousness about the inexorable limitations of rationality (Coccozella, 2010: 66–80).

I have mentioned, also, Luis de Lucena, a writer whose *Repetición de amores* has received a suggestive study by both Pedro Manuel Cátedra (1989: 126–141) and Antonio Cortijo Ocaña (2001: 198–207). What I find particularly pertinent to my present discussion is Cortijo’s solid argumentation concerning the affinities between said *Repetición* and Act I of *Celestina*.¹⁶ The affinities are posited in terms of the antifeminist trend that in Lucena’s *Repetición* stems, as Cortijo demonstrates, directly from Torroella’s «Maldezir» (Cortijo Ocaña, 2001: 202). Interestingly enough, the parodic and humoristic qualities highlighted by Cortijo conform to the focus of my own analysis. What comes to light from Cortijo’s reading is the pervasive mood of sour and bitter comedy shared by Lucena’s *Repetición* and Rojas’s *Celestina* by virtue of the same dialectic of *sic et non* that informs the *Cobla sparsa* and kindred texts we have just had occasion to review. Witness Cortijo’s definition of what turns out to be Lucena’s ingenious rendition of a common academic exercise – a learned essay of sorts – that scholars are wont to call *repetitio*:

La *Repetición*, bajo la aparente finalidad de alabar el género femenino, constituye en realidad lo contrario: es un ataque despiadado contra las mujeres, con las armas argumentativas del naturalismo amoroso y el discurso misógino, moderado por la ironía y el humor y elaborado como *contrafactum* paródico del ejercicio universitario de la *repetitio*. (Cortijo Ocaña, 2001: 202)¹⁷

The clever shift from *alabanza* to *ataque despiadado* is, of course, a close match for the dubious intention of the *laor* that in Torroella’s *cobla sparsa* masks the *deslaor*.¹⁸

16 Cortijo capitalizes on the circumstantial evidence of a probable relationship between Rojas and Lucena:

[S]abemos que Rojas fue estudiante en Salamanca por las mismas fechas que Luis de Lucena. Es plausible pensar que entre el número reducido de escolares que atendían clases de derecho en la Universidad de Salamanca hacia 1495 Lucena y Rojas se conocieran. (Cortijo Ocaña, 2001: 208)

Cortijo goes as far as to launch «una hipótesis arriesgada:» Was a member of the Lucena family the author of *Celestina*, Act I? For Cortijo’s argument in support of the hypothesis, see Cortijo Ocaña (2001: 208).

17 For an extensive discussion of the nature of *repetitio* see Cátedra (1989: 113–141) and Cocozzella (2010: 27–40).

18 A further example of this curious conflation of contrary attitudes toward women is provided by another poem by Moner, entitled *Bendir de dones*. Despite what the title leads the reader to expect, the poem contains an extensive misogynist section.

It is well to acknowledge the salient aspects of the multifaceted topic of misogyny that the insights and evidence adduced by Càtedra and Cortijo invite us to contemplate. We notice that, inherent in the topic, is the notion of an intertext of considerable proportions that encompasses the issues contributed by a wide array of writers. This impressive group ranges from Marcabru to Fernando de Rojas and includes, besides these authors, such representative figures as Ausiàs March, Pere Torroella, Francesc Moner, Luis de Lucena, and the anonymous author of *Celestina*, Act I, if one adheres to the theory of a multiple authorship for the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*. That of the intertext – a complex literary superstructure – is a notion we will do well to latch on to. Worth looking into is the intertext fashioned by a particular community of writers that flourished in València and Barcelona in the second half of the fifteenth century and, by virtue precisely of their intertextual commitment, may be considered the heirs of Ausiàs March. Borrowing the phrase that Brian Stock coined and endowed with a technical meaning, we may call the aforementioned community of writers a «textual community» – specifically, Ausiàs March’s «textual community.»¹⁹ We may add that the aforementioned group of March’s heirs bears close scrutiny for the significant role they played in the momentous period of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

■ 6 In Conclusion: Truth and Consequences

Even though Rodríguez Risquete does not recognize the «Cobla sparsa» as the work of Torroella, there can be little doubt that the curious one-stanza poem we have been analyzing is emblematic of the very dialectic of ambivalence that informs Torroella’s esthetics. We have come to realize that, indeed, «Cobla sparsa» may well hold in store the key to a fresh look at Torroella’s distinctive position in the debate about women. As a perusal of Weiss’s and Weissberger’s respective essay we have been referring to

19 One may derive inspiration and considerable food for thought from Stock’s definition of textual communities as «microsocieties organized around the common understanding of a script» (Stock, 1996: 23) and from Stock’s appeal to «[Max] Weber’s notion of subjectively meaningful social action, to which one adds a distinction between intersubjectivity, a feature of minds, and intertextuality, an aspect of writing» (Stock, 1996: 23). Particularly suggestive is the approach that Stock outlines in the following terms: «to investigate the relationships between individuals in groups that are actually using texts for literary or social purposes, while at the same time paying close attention to the historical context of their actions as well as to consequences» (Stock, 1996: 22–23).

clearly indicates, a number of prominent literary critics propose sundry approaches to the contextualization of that position. Weissberger proffers suggestive theories about the pervasive mood of male anxiety over the prerogatives presumed to appertain by some inexorable law of nature to the dominance of man over woman. Weiss delves into the factors that translate the viciousness of misogyny into the marginalization and utter silencing of women. Archer, on his part, calls attention to the double phenomenology attendant upon Torroella's «Maldezir»: first, the transference of a Catalan genre (the *maldit*) into the Castilian domain of the *cancioneros*; second, the transgression of some sacrosanct tenets in the code of *cortesía*.

To the perspectives eminently exemplified by the three scholars we have just listed, we may add the one stemming from the aforementioned esthetic of ambivalence as evinced in the «Cobla sparsa» and in Torroella's «Maldezir.» It is instructive to envision Torroella's ambivalence as a symptom of what Weiss calls «self-conscious use of poetry to create and ceremoniously act out an identity» (qtd. in Johnston, 1998: 249). Mark Johnston links Weiss's remarks to the notion to which Stephen Greenblatt in a landmark study on the outstanding English authors of the Renaissance gives wide currency under the term of «self-fashioning» (Greenblatt, 1973). By coining a special term of his own, Johnston adapts «self-fashioning» to the «subjectivation» inherent in the «occasional lyrics» of the *cancioneros* – the compositions, that is, typified by any poem that, as Johnston puts it, «gives a particular construction of its historical context, along with its contingent relation of power, configurations of ideology, and subject position» (Johnston, 1998: 250). We need not hesitate to consider either «Cobla sparsa» or Torroella's «Maldezir» as an occasional poem in Johnston's sense of the term, which, to quote Johnston again, «provides us with a point of departure for exploring the coincidences of its construction with other relations, configurations, or positions» (1998: 250).

In line with Johnston's explication, of considerable interest is the portrait of the auctorial persona that Weiss allows us to contemplate in his own vision of the process of «subjectivation.» In the following passage Weiss underscores the essential traits of that persona:

The masculine courtly subject is structured by a rhetoric of display and dissimulation that euphemizes his objective conditions within court society. The court was a place of artifice, intrigue, and uncertainty, and the successful courtier was by necessity a *vir geminus*, striving to exert control over an identity that was by definition at the service of others. (Weiss, 2002: 248)

In the light of Weiss's shrewd description, we may gauge, sharply profiled, a radical differentiation between Torroella's «rhetoric of display» and that of most other *cancionero* poets – especially those represented in the *Cancionero de Baena*. The crucial factor that comes to bear upon that differentiation is best described by the notion of *habitus*, a technical term and concomitant concept that Weiss borrows from Pierre Bourdieu.²⁰ What Weiss focuses upon is the *habitus* of dissimulation, a *modus operandi*, which, when conceived at the primordial level of self-fashioning, transmutes into a *modus vivendi*. Another way of envisaging the *habitus* that operates in the love-centered lyrics of the *cancioneros* is by taking into account the poetic intention that Baena himself reveals in no uncertain terms in the prologue to his famous florilegium. At heart is Baena's statement proffered as a prescription for the aspiring poet:

que sea [the poet] amador, e que siempre se precie e se finja de ser enamorado; porque es opynion de muchos sabyos, que todo omne que sea enamorado, conuiene a saber, que ame a quien deue e como deue e donde deue, afirman e disen qu'el tal de todas buenas dotrinas es doctado. (Baena, 1966: 15; quoted in Weiss, 1990: 51)

It takes but a brief reflection on the expression «se finja,» which constitutes the crux of Baena's precept, to come to an appreciation of Torroella's distinction precisely in terms of the differentiation we have just referred to. In diametric opposition to the self-fashioning of dissimulation that Baena openly subscribes to, the *habitus* championed by Torroella is fully congruent with Ausiàs March's abiding advocacy of the authenticity that would be marred by the ingenious stylistic devices «dels trobadors.» Needless to say, Torroella is beholden to the lofty standards of *veritat* that, as has been pointed out above, the revered master from València zealously endeavors to keep free from the blemishes of *escalf*.

20 It is useful to bear in mind the definition that Weiss sketches out in the following statement:

Crucial here is the notion of «habitus.» This is a set of dispositions that incline agents to think, act, and speak in a certain way appropriate to a particular field. These dispositions, which can be abstracted for analysis as the «rules of the game,» endow the agents with a practical sense (*le sens pratique*) of the field, its generative principles: They are learned but deeply internalized, and are often incorporated bodily as particular ways of speaking, holding the body, eating, etc. They provide the agent with a sense of controlled improvisation, of freedom within limits, of good (and bad) taste. (Weiss, 2002: 243)

In sum, the lesson to be learned from a study of «Cobla sparsa» and Torroella's «Maldezir» in the wake of March's influence has to do with the use of rhetoric as a strategy in pursuit of March's existential vision of truth as a *morada vital*, to use Américo Castro's famous expression. Key to Torroella's strategy is the poetics of ambivalence that reflects an epistemological approach, nothing short of revolutionary, to the indissoluble dyad of what is real and what is authentic. It is worth noting that, through the rhetorical and poetic modes of ambivalence, Torroella, not unlike March, sidesteps the intricate ways and byways of ratiocination, while he reflects firsthand the novel existential orientation, beyond ratiocination, toward coming to grips with that formidable dyad, Truth/Authenticity, by means of inspiration and intuition. It may be said that Torroella effectively assimilates March's skill at navigating the treacherous waters of dysfunctional language as cogently analyzed by Sarah Kay, Michael Gerli, Malcolm Read in, respectively, the *cansos* of the troubadours, Pedro Cartagena's lyrics, and the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*.²¹

For Torroella, then, 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. It may be said that, paradoxical as it may seem, through ambivalence Torroella gains a firm foothold into a text of self-fashioning and a rhetoric of self-authentication beyond the confines of ratiocination. We may identify that text and that rhetoric as the primary factors that facilitate what Read calls «phatic communion» (1983:

21 The gist of Kay's analysis has already been presented above. In his thought-provoking essay («Reading Cartagena: Blindness, Insight and Modernity in a *Cancionero Poeta*»), Gerli attests to Cartagena's keen intuition into the dysfunction at the heart of language, which, by its very nature, is based on the unstable and unreliable sign so that the lover's declaration, no matter how passionately and elegantly uttered, carries no proof for the authenticity of the sentiment it expresses. Particularly trenchant is Read's critique of *Celestina* apropos of, precisely, the shortcomings of language in promoting communication of one human being with another. Following is an eloquent sample of Read's point of view:

[A]t a time when linguists are attempting to pursue a strictly 'scientific', empirical methodology, and when it is fashionable to regard language as a distinctive sign of our inalienable humanity, Rojas forces us to take seriously the intuitive vision of language as a disease. In *La Celestina* he explores the consequences for society when language functions predominantly as a vehicle for neurotic fantasy, when the formalism inherent in social encounters becomes excessive to the point of negating spontaneity, and when the very medium through which members of the society interact is systematically distorted and abused. (Read, 1983: 96)

80), an ideal condition for full dialogic communication that Read himself finds sorely lacking in *Celestina*.

Inspired by Ausiàs March's veritable cult of Truth, Torroella projects the image of a dispassionate contender – one who can rise even above the fray concomitant to the debate about women. From his native Catalan tradition Torroella inherits his ataractic mind-set, which enables him to adopt a position of Olympian serenity, reflected in a poignant statement, such as the following:

A quien basta el conocer
de bien ver
lo que en mis coplas se dize,
verá que no contradice
ni desdize
bien de ninguna muger. (qtd. in Weiss, 2002: 248)

It is not unreasonable to surmise that Torroella's attitude of self-assurance provoked a reaction of resentment, if not downright hostility, among those coetaneous *cancionero* poets and kindred authors that took Torroella antifeminist persona at face value. Small wonder, then, that in *Grimalte y Gradissa* Juan de Flores should create a Torroella avatar that proves to be unassailable in his conviction, unbeatable in his argumentation, even when matched with the redoubtable Braçayda and her cohorts. What the episode devised by Flores dramatizes is the role played by the rhetoric of ambivalence epitomized in «Cobla sparsa» and «Maldezir.» Flores shows that such a rhetoric wins the day especially in the perspective of the new approach to truth it memorably harbingers.

The crucial issue, then, resides in the contention between Torroella's self-fashioning and Flores's fashioning of Torroella. That contention may well be the ultimate epiphany of an ambivalence, for which March and Torroella foreshadow the resolution eventually brought about by the new currents of thought evinced in the cultural horizon of the Renaissance. ■

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■ Peter Cocozzella, Binghamton University, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, USA-Binghamton, NY 13902-6000, <pcocozze@stny.rr.com>.

Resum: Un poema curt d'una sola estrofa, titulat «Cobla sparsa de lahor he deslaor», és emblemàtic de l'ambivalència que distingeix el «Maldezir de mugeres», composició característica de Pere Torroella, cèlebre autor català del segle XV. El present assaig és un esforç per a demostrar com l'alternança de *laor* i *deslaor* representa un paper destacat dins l'ample context del debat sobre les dones en la literatura quatrecentista tant castellana com catalana. A fi d'ambientar el debat, addueixo evidència en la poesia dels trobadors i en els cants d'Ausiàs March, l'incomparable poeta valencià. Al capdavant, la conjunció paradoxal de *laor* i *deslaor* reflecteix una fenomenologia de dues dimensions:

1) la disfunció retòrica que acaba en el diàleg rebec, il·lustrat al primer acte de la *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, obra coneguda també com *Celestina*; 2) el perfil de Torroella com personatge que s'auto-realitza a través d'un procés d'autenticació de l'experiència amorosa. ■

Summary: A short one-stanza poem, identified by the rubric «Cobla sparsa de lahor he deslaor,» is emblematic of the ambivalence that informs the «Maldezir de mugeres,» signature piece of Pere Torroella, renowned Catalan writer of the fifteenth century. The present essay is an attempt to demonstrate how the alternation of *laor* ('praise') and *deslaor* ('unpraise') plays a paramount role within the wide context of the debate about women in both Castilian and Catalan literature of the 1400s. For a background of that debate, I adduce evidence in the poetry of the troubadours and in the *cants* of the non-*pareil* Valencian bard, Ausiàs March. Ultimately, the paradoxical *laor/deslaor* conflation reflects a two-pronged phenomenology: 1) the tradition of dysfunctional rhetoric that comes to a head in the fractious dialogue illustrated in Act I of the *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, better known as *Celestina*; 2) the definition of Torroella's self-fashioning in terms of the process of coming to grips with the authenticity of a lover's experience. [Keywords: «Gender debate»; irony; *maldir*; misogyny; *repetitio*; «textual community»] ■