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The Religious Poetry of Bernat Fenollar, Joan Escrivà, and Roís de Corella in its Literary Context
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THE RELIGIOUS POETRY OF BERNAT FENOLLAR, JOAN ESCRIVÀ, AND ROÍS DE CORELLA IN ITS LITERARY CONTEXT¹

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This paper deals with two religious compositions in verse, the *Contemplació a Jesús crucificat*, by Bernat Fenollar and Joan Escrivà, and the *Oració* by Joan Roís de Corella,² and their relation to other works having the same characteristics. I will also make remarks on their preceding and subsequent tradition.

The topics addressed by both works have their origin in the spiritual context of the late fifteenth century, when the influence of the so-called *devotio moderna* converged with more traditional forms of spirituality, especially with the Franciscan piety. This spiritual environment had important representatives among Catalan writers, such as Ramon Llull, Antoni Canals, and Francesc Eiximenis.³ Another salient feature of fifteenth century and medieval spirituality is

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² The *Contemplació a Jesús Crucificat feta per mossén Joan Escrivà, mestre racional, e per mossén Fenollar* (referred to as *Contemplació* in the following pages) is preserved in manuscript 151 of the Library of the University of Barcelona and in various editions dated 1493, 1518, and 1565. More recently, the 1493 printing has been partially republished by Martí Grajales (1912).

The *Oració a la Sacratíssima verge Maria, tenint son fill, Déu Jesús, en la falda, devallat de la creu* (referred to as *Oració* in the following pages) is preserved in the codex of the Biblioteca Mayansiana (Biblioteca Universitària de València); in the 1493, 1518, and 1565 editions of *Lo Passi en cobles*, in which the *Contemplació* may also be found; in the 1495 edition of *Lo quart del Cartoixà*; and in the 1513 reprinting. After going through several editions in the nineteenth century, it became the subject of a critical edition by Miquel i Planas (1913). One of the most recent editions, that of T. Martínez (1994), is worth of mention.

I am currently preparing a critical edition of these texts, together with *Lo Passi en cobles*. In this paper, I refer to the version of both works which appears in the 1493 edition, because twelve stanzas of the *Contemplació* are missing from Martí Grajales's edition (1912).

³ I refer to Hauf (1990: 19-59), who explains that Catalan authors such as Eiximenis are taken as classics of Christian spirituality by important figures such as García Giménez de Cisneros at the end of the sixteenth century. This is why he states that the influence of the *Devotio Moderna* is quite uncertain in Catalan religious literature, whose authors are capable of exerting a comparable influence of their own. The reader who is interested in the presence of this movement in Spanish literature should consult the introduction to Diego de San Pedro's *Pasión trovada*, by S. Severin and K. Whinnom (1979).

its Christocentrism,⁴ which manifests itself in works such as the *vitae Christi*.

The devotionalist method of meditation on the mysteries of the Christian religion – with a special emphasis on those related to the life of Christ –, together with Franciscan spirituality, give rise to a series of works in which the reader is addressed and invited to meditate and contemplate. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literature in prose, such as the *Contemplació de la santa Quarantena* (before 1406) by fra Joan Eixemenó,⁵ excerpted from Ubertí de Casale's *Arbor Vitae crucifixae* Jesu by the author for the Aragonese king Martin the Human; the *Scala Dei* (before 1396),⁶ a devotionalary written for Martin's wife, Mary, by Eiximenis, the *Scala de contemplació* (between 1398 and 1400) by Antoni Canals; and the *Libre de contemplació en Déu* (before 1274) by Llull⁷ are some examples.⁸ One of the works studied in this paper, the *Contemplació*, may be considered to form part of this contemplative style.

The *Contemplació* is contained in 50 stanzas having ten verses each, which may be either pentasyllabic or decasyllabic. The odd-numbered stanzas were written by Fenollar and the even-numbered ones by Escrivà. The first stanza is a vision or a contemplation of Christ on the cross, followed by four stanzas that develop a reflection on the same theme. Starting at the sixth stanza, the authors feature various moments of Christ's life such as Palm Sunday, the capture of Jesus, Barabbas's, release and Pilate's sentence, in which Jews are presented as evil and traitorous. The Crucifixion (stanza 11) is followed by four stanzas that refer to the salvation that is brought about by this sacrifice of Jesus. From the sixteenth stanza on, the authors describe the last moments of the Passion: the prayer at Gethsemane, the falls of Christ, the prayer to God for mankind, the forgiving of the thief, and the death of Jesus. The reader is reminded of the poverty and humility of Jesus up to the last moment of his life. He shuts his eyes and the wound in his side, is the source of salvation. Up to stanza 40 the authors write about the death of Jesus and his blood as the salvation of mankind. By looking at Christ's expression, man has hope of being saved. Later, up to the last stanza, there is a contemplation of Christ's body.⁹ There are

⁴ On medieval Christocentrism, see Hauf (1991); his contributions concerning the life of Christ appear in Hauf (1990).

⁵ Edited by Hauf (1986).

⁶ See the edition by Elisabet Ràfols and Maria Lluïsa Wittlin (1985); Curt Wittlin (1995), and other contemplative works by Eiximenis, in Wittlin (1988).

⁷ I have consulted 1987 facsimil edition.

⁸ See also Wittlin (1995b).

⁹ On the tradition and the sources of the contemplation of the Jesus' body, see Hauf (1990: 387-390).

clear references to Mary's sorrow in stanzas 17, 28, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 43.

On the other hand, in Corella's *Oració*, Mary's lament takes place after the descent from the cross,¹⁰ and is made up of seven stanzas of eight decasyllabic verses, which show Maria weeping over the dead body of her Son. In addition to Mary's direct speech, there is, as in the *Contemplació*, a third person representing the Christian that prays and contemplates, as may be seen in the first stanza, which describes Mary's sorrow with Christ in her lap. Her tears, mixed with Christ's blood, cleanse the stains left by Adam's sin on every man. Mary's lament is accompanied by that of angels, the world, the sun and the heavens. The fourth and fifth stanzas contain the lament of Mary, in which she begs Jesus to be buried with him, because her life is unbearable without him. In the sixth stanza, the faithful, sorry for the offences Jesus received, offer him their lives. The last stanza, preceded by the word *Ffi*, is a continuation of the seventh; here, the devout people manifest their belief that Jesus is the "redemptor Déu."

The laments of Mary (*plancti Mariae*)¹¹ have a long tradition in Catalan literature, from the thirteenth-century anonymous lament "Augats, seyors qui credets Deu lo payre" (Izquierdo 1994), Llull's *Plant de la verge* (Romeu 1986), and the numerous laments appearing in the *vitae Christi* by Eiximenis, Isabel de Villena, and other works of the fifteenth century.¹²

Also in the fifteenth century we find Pero Martínez's poetic compositions which may be related to those ones that are the purpose of this paper: poems V *Contemplació com Jesuchrist portava la creu al coll*, which starts "Al rey Jesús donada la sentença"; and VI, *Com despullaren Jesús y, estirant-li lo cos, lo clavaren en la creu*, which begins with "Si be lo dol me tenia setjat" (ed. Riquer, 1946:114-121).¹³ In Riquer's words, it is a

[...] magnífica evocación de la pasión de Cristo, en la que él participa dialogando con el Salvador y con la Virgen, como ya hicieron en otra ocasión Leonart de Sors y otros poetas catalanes de aquella época.

Descontando a Ausias March, a Jordi de Sant Jordi y a Andreu Febrer, la obra poética de Pero Martínez es muy superior a la de los demás poetas catalanes del siglo xv. Es, indudablemente, el primer poeta sacro de

¹⁰ The numerous scenes where Mary appears in prose and in verse belong to the apocryphal tradition of the *Mariae Compassio* (Duriez 1914: 442-59). The lament of Mary, according to Young (1933: 360-459), is the nucleus around which Passion plays develop. He gives examples of *plancti* in the earliest Passion plays in Latin.

¹¹ See M. de Riquer and A. Comas (1980, 1: 200-01).

¹² Edited by Aramon (1962) "De gran dolor cruzel ab mortal pena"; (1963) "Vuy gran mati auzi vortz d'una trompa" and "Estan prostat axí com adorava."

¹³ These poems will be referred to as V and VI for the sake of brevity.

la literatura catalana medieval después de Ramon Llull. Creo que la influencia de este último se manifiesta en Martínez, sobre todo por lo que se refiere al Desconhort, y al Plant de Nostra Dona, cuyas situaciones se repiten en las poesías V y VI^o (ed. Riquer 1946:14-16).

Therefore, the lament genre influences other kinds of compositions, such as these poems by Pero Martínez that may be considered to be contemplations,¹⁴ because the narrator, in the third person, participates in the Passion scenes and reflects, repents, and prays.

The *Contemplació* may be considered a kind of prayer in which meditation and reflection have a central role. This is why in the first stanza, we read:

Qui, Déu, vos contempla, de la creu en l'arbre,
penjat entre ladres per nostra salut,
tancats té los ulls e lo cor de marbre,
ab ingratitut,
si tostemps no plora d'amor gran vençut,
pensant quina mort volgués humil prendre
per sols a nosaltres la vida donar,
ab cap inclinat los braços estendre
mostrant-nos amar,
en creu vos miram per tots abraçar.¹⁵

¹⁴ When writing on the prayer that brings 'tears of contrition', Hauf says:

És aquesta, segons sant Bonaventura, la forma d'oració més satisfactòria i plaent a Déu, i, tal com es presenta en l'opuscle que comentem (*El tractat del Moli Espiritual* de fra Antoni Canals), recorda de seguida l'estil i la tònica de la millor literatura cristiana afectiva, representada per les oracions i meditacions de sant Anselm i dels seus deixebles, i els soliloquis d'encuny agustinian, gènere que autors nostrats com Eiximenis solen designar amb el títol de "contemplacions", i que es caracteritza per l'abundància d'exclamacions i d'interrogacions retòriques, la repetició de verbs, i la insistència en una certa modulació dels períodes i en una gamma determinada de temes i motius que el temps i l'abús convertiran després sovint en 'floretes de devocionari'." (Hauf 1990: 200)

The lament and the contemplation also seem related when Isabel de Villena's *Vita Christi* describes Mary facing her crucified Son,

[...] fent un dolorós e molt piadós planct, convidant les ànimes devotes a plorar e tostemps recordar les acerbíssimes dolors del seu fill e sues e la immensa caritat per què les ha sofertes, dient-los: "*Ecce, anima christiana, hec est virtus salvationis tue: hec est causa libertatis tue: hoc est precium redemptionis tue.*" Volent dir: "Mira e contempla, ànima christiana, car en aquest arbre de la creu stà lo premi e virtut de la tua salvació: aquest senyor és causa de la tua llibertat e preu excel·lentíssim de la tua redempció. O! No li siau desconexents, fills de Adam! Mirau què ha soffert e què soffir, e en quanta pena és posat sol per amor de vosaltres; car aquest és Fill de Déu eternal, e per la sua excel·lent natura li és deguda tota honor e reverència, e per vosaltres s'és tant humiliat e empobrit que en confusable pena feneix la vida sua per deliurar a vosaltres de la mort eternal." (Ed. Miquel i Planas, 1916, 2: 372-73)

¹⁵ I am following the 1493 incunabulum for the transcription of the text. The last verse appears in the manuscript as "per que us desijam en creu abraçar"; this is Mary's

There is a relationship between these kinds of texts and Mary's laments because, as in the case of Però Martínez, the contemplation includes the figure of Mary. This type of meditation appears frequently in prose works. In the following, I will present a sample of poems that may be considered contemplations, as well as other works, in addition to the ones already mentioned that are representative of the genre *planctus Mariae*.

The *Contemplació* by Fenollar and Escrivà is quite extensive when compared to other literature in verse on the same topic, because the poem, focused in one scene, the Crucifixion, embraces all the episodes of the Passion and refers to other moments of the life of Jesus. Many stanzas are in close relation to those in the work that precedes them in the 1493 edition, *Lo passi en cobles*, written by Fenollar himself and by Pere Martínez.

Manuscript No. 151 housed at the Library of the University of Barcelona (BUB), entitled *Jardinet d'Orats*, contains, following the *Contemplació*, these three works by Miquel Stela:

– *Obre fete per lo magnífich comenador Stela de Barcelona Jesuchrist stant nuu, agenollat sobre la creu, tenint denant stesos per terra los turments de la Passió* (BUB, ms. 151, f. 25r (27r), 2 stanzas;

– *Oració feta en nom del comenador Stela a Déu lo Pare narrant tots los turments que Jesuchrist té denant* (BUB, ms 151, f. 25v(27v)-30v(32v), 22 stanzas.¹⁶

– *Obre feta per Miquel Stela de Barcelona intitulada Comèdia de la Segrada Paciò de Jhesuchrist* (BUB, ms 151, f. 32r (34r)-34v (36v). 14 stanzas.

These poems have elements that relate them to the *Contemplació*, and to the *Oració*, such as the invocations to the Lord or to Mary. The author, in the third person, contemplates as well the scenes of the Passion and complains:

Lo Pellicà vestit d'humana manta

és aquest Rey qui mor per nostra mort.

Los plants i plors cap trista lengua canta:

És tal dolor que no consent report. (T. Martínez 1990:96)¹⁷

same attitude in Isabel de Villena's work when Mary sees her crucified Son: "E la dolorosa mare qui ab tanta pena sostenia la vida sua, retornada de aquells grans esmortiments, véu lo fill posat en spectacle de tots los miradors, tan alt que tocar no'l podia. Acostàs tant com pogué a la creu, abraçant aquella per amor de aquell que en ella era penjar e [...]"

¹⁶ T. Martínez (1990), published these poems and another by the same author, also with a religious theme, *Glossa sobre los motius de Jesuchrist feta per lo comanador Stela* (BNP, ms. esp 229, f. 77r-77v).

¹⁷In relation with Corella, consider the following verses:

destrucció natura menassava,

Therefore, poems V and VI by Pero Martínez, dated 1463 by Riquer, may also be considered as contemplations, in which the author participates in various scenes of the Passion, addresses Mary or Jesus in several passages, or kneels to say:

"Agenolli'm dient: Ma sperança,
goig e delit y repós de ma pensa,
perdonau me car jo us he fet offensa
seguint lo món e sa folla semblança [...]" (ed. Riquer 1946:119)

The anonymous composition *Contemplant en lo crucifixi* (ed. Ferrando 1978:35) was printed in 1499 together with two more works by Narcís Vinyoles. It is composed of five stanzas with ten lines each, whose expression is very similar to the contemplation addressed in this paper:

Alçant los ulls en creu per a mirar-te,
caygut lo cap y coronat d'espines,
¿Qual tan cruel poria may contemplarte
que contemplant bé de plorar no's far-te,
vent córrer sanch les tues carns divines? (ed. Ferrando 1978:201)

This contemplation also appears at the end of the *Obres en loors de la santíssima creu*, printed in València in 1515 (Palacios 1975) and owes its origin to a poetic contest on the topic. The *Obres* consist of a set of 68 *Cobles en honor i glòria de Jesús, salvador nostre, i de la sua santíssima creu, en les quals se reciten moltes excel·lències i llaors d'aquella, fetes per Jaume Beltran i Vicent Ferrandis*, in addition to 7 introductory stanzas. This work on the topic of the adoration of the Cross, includes, as does the *Contemplació*, many references to the Passion, and reflections of the devout person in prayer:

Doncs, en tal gran pressa, si els vicis m'assolen,
los vostres sufragis vos prec m'aconsolen (Palacios 1975 a 6v)

Later, in the same work, we find a three-stanza poem that is also a contemplation, *A la sacratíssima Verge Maria de les dolors, contemplació feta per lo mateix Jaume Beltran*, followed by the poem *Estramps [...] a la "sacratíssima e immaculada verge Maria de la soledat [...]"*, and a lament of Mary by Beltran himself entitled *Exclamació de nostra senyora*, which resembles Corella's *Oració*.

Therefore, with precedents in the *plancti Mariae* and literature in prose by the devotionalists, the works addressed in this paper are related in their time because they were presented at poetry contests. In this respect, it should be remembered that the earliest samples of

poetry contest with a religious topic may be found in a set of fourteenth-century compositions written for Corpus Christi¹⁸ entitled *Cobles fetes per lo precors cors de Jhesu Xrist per alguns hòmens de València* (Pagès 1975). In these verses we find the same prayer tone found in the texts studied here:

O rey dels reys, qui, per la gran falensa
del primer hom, volguist pendre nexensa
ez en la Crots sofrir greu paciò,
vulles nos dar vera salvació. (Pagès 1975:195)

Miquel Ortigues' work *Plant de la verge Maria ab les dolors e labors de aquella, e la visitació de sancta Elizabet. E altres hobres [...]*, is described by Massó (1914:256-257).¹⁹ This work collects several texts related to the ones which are the subject of this paper. It begins with a long *Plant de la sacratíssima verge Maria [...]* "Estant la verge gloriosa" in alternate octosyllabic and tetrasyllabic verses, reminiscent of Corella's *Oració*, especially in the scene in which Mary wishes to die with her Son. The *Coples de la sacratíssima verge Maria, senyora nostra, contemplant lo seu gloriós fill Jesús mort e posat sore les sues castes faldes* "Mirau tots ab gran dolor" follow in 14 stanzas of octosyllabic verses and one *tornada*. This poem is another lament of Mary written in the first person that has many features of a contemplation, because in the words, expressed in the title: Mary looks at the various parts of Jesus's body to prompt the reader to pray and reflect. Later on, one finds an *Oració a les plagues de Jesús* "Gràcies vos fas senyor", a contemplation written in six stanzas whose specific motif is the wounds of Jesus on the cross. The same topic inspires the work of the Majorcan writer Jaume d'Olesa "Adoració de les cinch plagues de nostre senyor Jesu-Crist, estampada a València el 1515" (I am citing the *Cançoner Místic*, 1899) or Martí Pineda's work, *Contemplació de les set vegades que el nostre redemptor Jesús escampà la sua preciosíssima sang [...]* (Palacios 1975), another contemplation, this one about the blood shed by Jesus during seven moments of his life, six of which occur during the Passion.

lo sol, plorant, rompie-ls cabells seus,
els elemens cridant ab tristas veus (Martínez 1990: 97)

Plany-se lo món, cubert d'aspre celici
crida lo sol, plorant ab cabells negres. (Corella, *Oració*)

¹⁸ M. de Riquer and A. Comas (1980, 2: 122-24 and 3: 372).

¹⁹ Massó described the 1528 edition, which is also the one that I am aware of. There seems to be an earlier edition, dated 1511 or 1512.

Ortigue's text ends "A lahor e gloria de Déu omnipotent e de la gloriosa e humil verge Maria, mare sua, senyora nostra. Feneix lo presnt tractat apellat plant de la verge Maria, en lo qual ha moltes devotes orations e contemplacions de la Passió de Jesuchrist [...]" As does this work by Ortigues, the laments of Mary and the prayers and contemplations appear related to the religious literature of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.

Finally, it is worth mentioning Benet Hispano's work *Devota contemplació del cors sagrat de Jesucrist en l'arbre de la vera-creu* (I am citing again the *Cançoner Místich* 1899), printed in Majorca in 1512, which contains eleven stanzas with ten decasyllabic verses each, and has many verses that are clearly reminiscent of the *Contemplació*, which is the subject of this paper.

All of these works have in common, in addition to the thematic similarities, the use of particular rhetorical figures, images and ways of expression, and a similar vocabulary, which was probably widely used in profane poetry. The earliest forms that precede the literature on which we have focused are the works in prose by the devotionalists and the Franciscans, the *vitae Christi*, and works in verse, especially the *plancti Mariae*. One does find contemporary and later examples of laments and contemplations, some of which originate in literary contest. We deal, on the one hand, with prayers in which the main character is Mary, for example Corella's *Oració*, and, on the other hand, with prayers or contemplations concerned with the Crucifixion of Christ in particular and with the Passion in general, where Mary's presence is to a certain degree important.

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