



**Arthur Terry, *Three Fifteenth-Century Valencian Poets*, 'Papers of the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar, 24', Department of Hispanic Studies Queen Mary and Westfield College, London, 2000, 64 pp.; ISBN 0 904188 66 3.**

*Three Fifteenth-Century Valencian Poets* collects papers given to the Medieval Hispanic Research Seminar at Queen Mary and Westfield College (1994-5).<sup>1</sup> The modesty of the title and slender size of this volume should not lead one to underestimate its contents. The first essay ('Introspection and Imagination in Ausiàs March' [pp. 7-23]) begins by asking the question: 'What did it mean for a fifteenth-century poet to write in the first person singular...?'. Terry uses Paul Zumthor's findings to rectify the tendency of earlier March scholarship to overemphasise the poet's originality. In fact, Ausiàs March (1400-1459) is often quite determinedly conventional. Citing a passage once seen as typical of the poet's obsession with self-analysis (XLIII: 1-24), Terry says:

The long description of the physical effects of timidity is conventional to the extent that the details of the individual symptoms might come directly from any medieval treatise on the passions... The result, is not so much introspection in the modern senses as the creation of an 'I' which gives focus and power to what Paul Zumthor calls a 'registral commonplace'. (p.10)

This significant observation isn't pushed too far: 'a powerful ego seems on the point of bursting through the schemes of analysis' (p. 11); and it is this that makes it possible to speak of a 'jo essencial', as Marie-Claire Zimmermann has argued with conviction (see *Ausiàs March o l'Emergència del Jo*, València-

<sup>1</sup> This review was written before Arthur Terry's death. It is here printed as it was originally written.

Barcelona, 1998). In this way Terry's own discussion of the vexed issue of 'self' in March's poetry introduces the related and complementary question of the imagination.

By contrasting medieval definitions of the faculty of imagination (*imaginatio*) with modern or post-Romantic notions, March's understanding of the term is approached with useful references ranging from modern authorities to a passage from Jean le Bel (1290-1370). Terry connects the philosophical description of the imaginative faculty as a focal point for the creation of mental archetypes (or ideas in the memory) with the rhetorical figure of *frequentatio* (cf. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, iv. xl. 52). For the explanation of March as a master rhetorician this lends added weight to Robert Archer's earlier theory of simile (see *The Pervasive Image: The Role of Analogy in the Poetry of Ausiàs March*, Amsterdam, 1985). As Archer contended, and as Terry here explains, the similes that appear so often in March exercise an organic function within the poems as a whole. The medieval theory of imagination is linked to the Aristotelian tradition of thinking in pictures: 'these particular mental pictures are March's way of suggesting what cannot be fully conveyed in simple, expository verse' (p. 16). The remainder of the essay pursues further some interesting paradoxes and tensions, adducing convincing evidence for this important hermeneutic key, especially in LXXXVII and XCII.

The second paper: 'Jordi de Sant Jordi and the Ethics of Chivalry' stands in relation to the whole as the central panel in a triptych. Terry explains his reversal of chronology (placing Ausiàs March before the slightly elder Jordi de Sant Jordi (...1416-1424), probably born sometime in the 1390's), on the grounds that March is in his view the greater poet – but the felicity of this arrangement only serves to underpin the happy union connecting these two men. Penned with disarming simplicity, this exhilarating essay strikes to the core of the poet's relation to the ideology of chivalry. Bearing in mind what has already been explained in the first paper – the purpose of the faculty of imagination – the second essay helps explain further

the centrality of this troubadour discipline and its renovation by the court poets of Alfonso V (1418-1458). Terry cites one poem that begins 'Jus lo front port vostra bella semblança', which in Terry's translation is: 'Beneath my brow I bear your countenance'. The poem is 'an object lesson in the medieval imagination' and is quoted in its entirety. 'The image of the woman is conveyed to the mind – the seat of the imagination – by the senses, where it remains even though the woman herself is absent (p. 31)'. This psychic connection to the beloved is cultivated through the faculty of the imagination. As a vital component of the esoteric love ethic (*fin'amor*), Jordi de Sant Jordi and his fellow poets pay fitting homage to it in their poetry, and show the ideal was still very much alive. Although there is some evidence to suggest a link with Italian traditions which also sometimes refer to archetypal imaging, Terry observes that the Catalan-language poets were significantly independent. Jordi's *Presoner* is also included, and both receive full commentary.

In the third paper the focus shifts to Joan Roís de Corella (1435-1497). An original poetic mind surfaces from the analysis of several poems and one which still works well within the medieval rhetorical scheme. A sensitive reading of *Plant d'Amor* allows the poet's rhythmic sensibilities to emerge. With *Plant* and *Sepultura* commentary elucidates difficult references. He considers the 'dignified melancholy' of Corella as a poet of unconsummated love. That Corella had a wider experience of sex is shown instructively by reference to the *Juí de Paris*. Again, inspiring insight is provided when several devastating sallies of heavily rhetorical prose are quoted and then explained with clarity. The overall effect of Terry's engagement is one of disentanglement. This is no easy task given the complex web of connections that unites Corella's poetic activity to his wider artistic project. One important conclusion in reference to *Tragèdia de Caldesa* can also be noted: the work is not a sentimental romance. Instead, we learn that the prose passages serve to preface the two poems which form its climax. March's

influence is also keenly felt, particularly, and most interestingly, in the prose works. 'There is much more to be said about the influence of Ausiàs March...'; 'Nor have I said much about Corella's immediate context as a writer (p. 54)'. But he does make his main point convincingly: Corella seems 'to fall entirely within the medieval tradition, and his secular poetry follows naturally from Ausiàs March and Jordi de Sant Jordi' (p. 54). We also learn that in some respects Joan Rois de Corella's work demonstrates key differences to these earlier poets; and that one should expect it to. Corella wasn't an aristocratic adventurer like Jordi and the young Ausias March, but a preacher with strong humanist leanings. Indeed, the traditional interpretation places Corella 'with one foot firmly in the Renaissance'.

The wider implications of *Three Poets* for the literary history of Valencia, and indeed, for the peninsula as a whole are far-ranging. One reference to *Tirant lo Blanc* demonstrates the extent to which fifteenth-century Valencian letters can still benefit from critical work. In relation to *Triumfo de les dones* Terry makes the following comparison:

The rejection of chivalry is in marked contrast to the attitude of Joanot Martorell, who, it has been argued, still believes in the values of chivalry even though they are in decline (p. 41).

The question may then be more a difference of context than attitude, in the strict sense.

**Alexander Ibarz**

\* As noted, I wrote this review years ago. I am grateful to JOCS for seeing fit to publish it now, and I will take this opportunity to dedicate it: *ad memoriam Arthur Terry magistri optimi linguae litterarumque catalaunicarum / a la memòria d'Arthur Terry el millor mestre de la llengua i de les lletres catalanes.*