
PHILOSOPHICAL AND MORAL *PROBLEM LITERATURE* IN THE PORTUGUESE CHANSONNIER POETRY

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Resumen

En la poesía cancioneril cuatrocentista el amor es tema privilegiado y el género pregunta/respuesta se muestra particularmente adecuado para discutir cuestiones de naturaleza amorosa. Sin embargo, la lectura de las colecciones poéticas castellanas permite reconocer la existencia, en número inferior, de preguntas/respuestas que versan sobre temáticas filosóficas y morales. La situación no es distinta en el *Cancioneiro Geral* de Garcia de Resende, donde el género se caracteriza también por la coexistencia, en proporción idéntica, de las temáticas amorosa y filosófica. El propósito de este artículo es, analizando este tipo peculiar de composiciones en el corpus portugués, ver de qué manera esta modalidad de intercambio poético permite un tratamiento dinámico y original de cuestiones existenciales y de razonamientos sobre la falta de valores. Así, la interacción entre el interrogador y el autor de la respuesta permite alargar el ámbito de la pregunta, revelando otras interpretaciones posibles para el problema planteado. La pregunta/respuesta de naturaleza filosófica y moral constituye además un ejercicio donde los poetas testan su pericia a través de juegos retóricos que subvierten la argumentación del adversario.

Palabras clave: Pregunta/respuesta, filosófica, moral, poesía cancioneril, juegos retóricos, *Cancioneiro Geral*, argumentación

Abstract

Love is the privileged theme in 15th-century poetry chansonniers and *problem literature* is particularly adequate to discuss love matters. However, the analysis of Castilian poetical works allows us to acknowledge the existence of *problem literature* dealing with philosophical and ethical themes, albeit in lesser number. The situation is not different from the *Cancioneiro Geral*, by Garcia de Resende, where the genre is also characterized, in similar proportions, by the coexistence of love and philosophical themes. The aim of this article, which analyses this particular type of compositions in the Portuguese corpus, is to survey to what extent this poetical exchange allows a dynamic and original treatment of existential issues and a discussion about the lack of values. Consequently, the interaction between the questioner and the author of the answer allows us to broaden the scope of the question, revealing other possible interpretations for the suggested problem. Moreover, the philosophical and ethical *problem literature* also constitutes an exercise where poets test their expertise through rhetorical games that subvert the argument of the opponent.

Key words: *Problem literature*, philosophical, moral, chansonnier, rhetorical games, *Cancioneiro Geral*, argumentation

Love is the privileged theme in 15th-century poetry chansonniers and *problem literature* is particularly adequate to discuss love matters. However, the analysis of Castilian poetical works allows us to acknowledge the existence of *problem literature* dealing with philosophical and ethical themes, albeit in lesser number. The situation is not different from the *Cancioneiro Geral*, by Garcia de Resende, where the genre is also characterized by the coexistence of love and philosophical themes in similar proportions as those of the Castilian collections, thus attesting, albeit in a more discreet way, to the fact that courtly poetry was not immune to the increase of the interest in philosophy, stimulated in Portugal by the first princes of the dynasty of Avis and developed over the century under the patronage of various members of the royal family. The aim of this article, which analyses this particular type of compositions in the Portuguese corpus, is to survey to what extent this poetical exchange allows a dynamic and original treatment of existential issues and a discussion about the lack of values. Consequently, the interaction between the questioner and the author of the answer allows us to broaden the scope of the question, revealing other possible interpretations for the suggested problem. Moreover, the philosophical and ethical *problem literature* also constitutes an exercise where poets test their expertise through rhetorical games that subvert the argument of the opponent.

Joaquim de Carvalho states the emergence of a philosophical culture in a chapter devoted to the evolution of philosophy in Portugal during the Middle Ages. He underlines that this development took place in the 13th century, with the establishment of the University, the growth of the monastic schools and the contact with new forms of knowledge to which the students had access when they attended foreign universities (CARVALHO 1970: 346). However this philosophical culture consolidated during the rule of the dynasty of Avis and with the literary works of D. Duarte and D. Pedro—*Leal Conselheiro*, *Livro da Ensinança* and *Livro da Virtuosa Benfeitoria*—which are an ethical and political reflection based on Christian metaphysics (CALAFATE 1999: 411).

Along with their writings, the princes of the house of Avis encouraged a translation programme, sponsored by the development of several works that would contribute to the gradual emergence of the humanist movement, already visible in the Portuguese court in the last quarter of the 15th century. Others would follow on those first steps, thanks to the action of figures such as Queen D. Leonor, an educated sovereign, committed to the intellectual, artistic and recreational life of the court. She was a woman of deep piety and devotion (TOIPA 1994: 192), and she commissioned new translations moved by her desire to legitimize Portuguese as a language of thought and literary creation, promoting likewise the development of the printing press through the publication of such translations.

Framed by the aristocratic conception of culture and witness of the literary activity of the court, the *Cancioneiro Geral* by Garcia de Resende is in line with this context (SOARES 2011: 232). Although the prevailing poetic topics are sentimental and festive, philosophical and moral

reflection are modestly present, in part concretized within compositions in which poets turn to the genre of *problem literature*, generally used to deal with matters of amorous nature, which here is displaced towards a new topic.

Our corpus, composed of seven poetical sets which correspond, according to the edition by Aida Dias,¹ to the numbers 225, 349, 445, 475, 484, 493 and 545, deals with this theme. *Problem literature* belongs to the genre of dialogued poetry in which two or more poets are involved; one asks the question and the other responds. Poets who submit to this exercise—obliging the request of an answer—must respect the distinctive constraints intrinsic to this poetic form. Therefore the formal criteria, which must be followed, are the metric-strophic identities and the symmetry of the rhymes that must reproduce the rhymes of the original poem and their arrangement within a response-composition “por los consonantes”.² However, the correspondence of metre, rhyme and verse, is not enough to state that we are dealing with *problem literature*; in fact, there are various dialogued poetic forms which share these same criteria, total or partially.³ In addition to the formal criteria in order to identify *problem literature* compositions, Antonio Chas introduces the functional perspective, which allows to consider the role played by each of the composition elements, assigning to the question and the answer a particular and independent function, although both—question and answer—are a single unit of meaning (CHAS AGUIÓN 2002b: 96). Concerning the type of questions Antonio Chas states:

la obligada formulación de un interrogante a uno o varios destinatarios con la esperanza de ser contestada, consustancial a la pregunta cancioneril, puede materializarse de muy diferentes formas, siendo las posibilidades de concretización las siguientes: pregunta disyuntiva o dilemática, solicitud de consejo o remedio, pregunta libre y adivinanza (CHAS AGUIÓN 2000: 43-65).

Both disjunctive question and riddle can both be found in the analysed poems, including also a peculiar type, which although sharing some of the traits of the free question, in particular, its relationship with scientific and theological issues—and, in the case of Portuguese chansonniers, philosophical and moral ones—turns to be different, for unlike in the free question, the respondent does not have much freedom to reply. Since this type of question is in close connection with the issues motivating it, it facilitates the formulation of a more theoretical thought, therefore designate it as meditative-reflexive.

¹ The textual citations of the *Cancioneiro Geral* by Garcia de Resende refer to the edition by Aida Dias, published between 1990, the first volume, and 2003, the sixth. Each citation is followed by the information on the volume and its corresponding pages. Since in this edition the numbering of the verses restarts in each new page, we will also indicate the pages on which they are located together with the line numbers.

² Regarding the formal characteristics of *problem literature* see among others, LE GENTIL 1981: 459-460; CUMMINS 1965: 11.

³ In glosses, poets have to adapt the rhymes of the new poem to the first one, and the lines of the new poem must be perfectly in accordance, which corresponds, in part, to a composition “por los consonantes”. In the Portuguese chansonnier, there is a particular poetic form, the *ajuda*, a composition elaborated in order to help another poet which, although sometimes adopts completely the model of the initial poem, is generally characterized by reproducing at the end of the four-line stanza the rhyme scheme of the beginning of the song or the initial *vilancete*, or the second series of rhymes from the original poem.

In composition 225 (DIAS 1990b: 54-58), João Gomes da Ilha demands “u vive razam” (v. 14, 54) in a series of fifteen octaves of pentasyllabic lines. Throughout the corpus of *problem literature*, this is the only case in which the pentasyllabic line is used. The pentasyllabic structure introduces a fast rhythm, slightly intermittent, translating the anguish of the poet who wants his question answered, also enhanced by the anaphoric repetition of the interrogative indirect object pronoun “se”. However, the presence of the pronoun throughout the fifteen four-line stanzas of the poem reveals the concern of João Gomes da Ilha, discovering where is the “razam”; in the background, what he proposes is a consideration on the essence of reason. In each four-line stanza the poet places several questions about what is “razam” and its manifestations, but his queries have the appearance of assertions, which sustain the underlying critical and argumentative subject of the poem. In the lines “se é no senhor / se mais no vulgar” (v. 4-5, 55), developed after a series of peaceful questions relating the “razam” to the “bem falar” (v. 22, 54), “bem sentir” (v. 23, 54), and “exercitar / o que justo for” (v. 2-3, 55), the reproving tone is evident, for, without any transition, the poet suggests that the “razam” can be either with the men of the highest social status or with the populace, but not with both. Furthermore, the position at the end verse of “senhor” (v. 4, 55) and “vulgar” (v. 4, 55) reinforces the opposition between the two social categories and, through this antithetical pair, the idea that the “razam” can only be associated with one of them. In the third and fourth verses, the poet continues with this antagonistic theme; in the first case, he asks if the reason is “aquerida a fim do proveito, / se soo no direito é constituída” (v. 6-9, 55); in the second, if its master is “mais oo poder, / se mais aa vertude” (v. 18-19, 55). On the one hand the whole poem is built involving the *communicatio*, which allows the author to engage in a *disputatio* with the poets who are required to answer, and are provided with various options of reply, yet, above all, shows a reflective attitude concerning what is reason, justice, and how it manifests. On the other, the poet positions himself as a censor by establishing his argumentative structure on the basis of antithetic relations that refer to a positive pole, representing what reason should be, and a negative pole, denouncing what it should not be.

Disjunctive questions, proposing two antithetical response hypotheses, favour the dialogue around the matter at hand. In fact, although the disjunctive question does not allow a great development of the subject, once the framework for the answers are drawn, the opposition of the different points of view introduces the debate between the author of the question and the poet who respond. In accordance with Pierre Le Gentil, Antonio Chas notes that:

La pregunta disyuntiva es heredera en último término del *partimen* provenzal, variedad de debate en estrofas alternas con imitación de rima, como el *jeu-parti* francés, caracterizada por la formulación a uno o, más raramente, a varios interlocutores de una cuestión dilemática a través de dos posibilidades opuestas entre las que se le instaba a seleccionar una, comprometiéndose el autor de la pregunta a defender la opción no seleccionada. (CHAS AGUIÓN 2000: 44)⁴

⁴ On the origins of the question see the section devoted to Pierre Le Gentil in his classic study of Iberian lyric poetry (LE GENTIL 1981, I: 461-469). The article by Gema Vallín is also useful once she establishes interesting analogies between chansonnier debates and the *jeux-partis* from the *Puy* of Arras, tracing their origin not only to Provençal *partimen* but also to the poetry of the school of Arras (VALLÍN 2011).

However, these traditions were mainly related to sentimental topics, which is not the case of the three disjunctive questions included in our corpus. Their theological themes, in 545, actually consisting of two questions, one posed by Tristão da Silva and the other by Sancho de Pedrosa, and philosophical content, in 484, where both poets evoke the transience of time, approach them to the scholastic *quaestio disputata*. Bernardo C. Bazan defines the *disputatio* as “une méthode dialectique qui consiste à apporter et à examiner des arguments de raison et d’autorité qui s’opposent autour d’un problème théorique ou pratique” (BAZAN 1982: 34). Although the questions of the *Cancioneiro Geral* do not correspond to the academic context, the similarities shared with the *disputatio* confer a greater relevance to the subject they deal with, allowing to subtract the genre from the strictly amorous sphere, whilst at the same time it can be associated with the *quaestio disputata*, with which it maintains, in these cases, an apparent affinity.

The *quaestio disputata*, a method of medieval education, as Olga Weijers notes, is the result of the emancipation of the *questio*, which was part of the *lectio*, through the *disputatio*, and appears as its written version (1995: 25).⁵ The master was, generally, the author of the text. He presided the dispute introducing a unity of style and a rigorous organisation, favouring *determinatio* to the detriment of the discussion, although sometimes it is difficult to perceive if the *quaestio disputata* derives from a real *disputatio* or belongs to the literary genre it progressively became. As a matter of fact, as underlined by Olga Weijers, “le procédé de la *questio disputata* a été employé à des fins de recherche et de composition aussi bien qu’à des fins didactiques” (WEIJERS 1995: 39). In this way the *disputatio* is an expository method, which allows the search for a solution to the suggested problem, highlighting the various prisms through which it can be tackled.

Problem literature approaches the *quaestio disputata* by means of examining a specific matter, promoting the discussion about it. By offering response options to the interlocutor the role played by the author of the question resembles that of the master, who provides his students with the possible arguments in order to achieve the truth. The other actors in a *disputatio* were the groups constituted by the *respondentes* and the *opponentes*: the former proposed a temporary solution to the problem and the latter answered. As stated above, the *problem literature* within the Resende chansonnier does not belong to the academic context, yet, as masters, the poets wanted to introduce a theme that would be later developed by the recipient of the question, assuming the role of either the *respondens* or the *opponens*, although in this case, these two functions are bonded, due to the fact that the responding poet, when choosing one of the options proposed by the questioner, can adduce counter-arguments to the assumption suggested by the formulation of the question.

Problem literature compositions with riddles are not very common in Portuguese chansonniers: no more than six from a total of forty. We have selected in our corpus two questions with riddles,

⁵ Besides the cited study regarding the *quaestio disputata*, see also other works by Olga Weijers devoted to intellectual practices in the earliest universities (1996: 61-91).

in this case of a mythological character; the first is composition 493, concerning the *topos* of the reconciliation between weapons and letters, and the second, 475, giving praise. Riddles are a particularly suitable method for poets because they can show their erudition, as María Teresa Miaja de la Peña points out:

[I]a adivinanza es ante todo una comunicación entre dos sujetos: el que emite el reto (enunciador) y al que éste va destinado (destinatario). Entre ambos se establece un juego dialógico que se convierte en un desafío de saber. El enunciador es el que domina y dirige el reto, en tanto que el destinatario lo juega, lo adivina. El enunciador plantea la adivinanza conoce la respuesta; pide al destinatario un ejercicio de imaginación, de concentración y de desentrañamiento, con lo que queda establecido el juego intelectual, mismo que suele ser cerrado entre el emisor y el receptor. Este último puede ser único o colectivo (MIAJA 2005: 447-448).⁶

The meditative and contemplative questions in the Portuguese chansonniers lead the respondent to provide an answer that corresponds to the model provided by the question. In these cases, it is not about choosing a viewpoint over another, nor to solve a riddle, yet to reply to the poets' suggested question. In addition, the respondent has no freedom when answering, since he has to remain within the frame of the content of the question or the topic the questioner wants to expound on. This type of demand introduces a reflection on moral and philosophical issues that the recipient must continue in his composition in order to extend the debate.

Thus, the interaction between the questioner and the author of the response can enhance the scope of the original question. The disjunctive question of composition 445 (DIAS 1990b: 362-363), in which there are three hypotheses directed to the respondent, is a good example. In fact, in this composition Fernão Brandão asks João Rodrigues de Sá about his motivations to go "pera alem". The various reasons recalled by Fernão Brandão contain a critique to those who participate in the African campaigns due to material reasons or the desires to accomplish their social ascent, as demonstrated by the following lines:

mandai-me, senhor dizer,
 porque fique descansado,
 se levais maior cuidado
 de morrer,
 se de virdes murmurado.
 E se fama ou nobreza,
 se cristão, se gentileza,
 qual vos toca nesta ida
 e tambem se vossa vida
 nela padece tristeza. (v. 11-22, 362)

⁶ On the interaction between riddles and learned poetry, and more precisely their relationship with *problem literature*, see CHAS AGUIÓN 2002a y 2012: 29-46.

Antonio Chas in his article on disjunctive question as a vehicle for amorous matters discusses an example, which also contains three terms of the *Cancionero General* of Castile, stating that:

las preguntas de este cancionero, encaminadas siempre a solicitar al destinatario que se decante por la mejor, o la peor de las dos posibilidades antitéticas que se le ofrecen, aunque éste, en contra de todo lo previsto, también puede proporcionar una nueva solución o negarse a dar solución. (CHAS AGUIÓN 1997: 508-509).

In the case of composition 445, the question encloses a criticism, since Fernão Brandão seems to refer to the set of reasons motivating João Rodrigues de Sá to enrol in the African campaigns. The respondent refuses to answer and, based on the proposed terms, he provides another solution: without denying the fame acquired in the past, he states that does not seek recognition any more; yet he admits that the “lembança do pasado” (v. 2, 363) makes him stronger. João Rodrigues de Sá, by not rejecting directly the accusations of Fernão Brandão manages to mould the critical tone of the demand under the form of a disjunctive question, yet in doing so he strengthens the censorial position of Fernão Brandão.

Furthermore, the genre of *problem literature* allows multiple interpretations of the problem in question. In composition 484 (DIAS 1990b: 462-463), António Machado considers the issue of the fleeting nature of idling—“pois passa tam sem vagar / o folgar por nossa vida” (v. 1-2, 462)—and invites João Rodrigues de Sá to reflect on the fact concerning “haa-de lembrar / quando for mais sem medida, / o fim que tem de leixar. / Ou se se deve perder / correndo desenfreado” (v. 3-8, 462). In other words, the poet asks whether we should remember the delight and the joy provided by idling or it is better to forget it when it is over. In his response, João Rodrigues de Sá introduces the notion of pleasure, stressing that it is false and ephemeral. Regarding remembrance, the poet adds that we must always bear in mind the men of the past in order to acknowledge at present what the future will become. Differing with the questioner who raised the issue using the term “folgar” which refers to blithe, happiness, João Rodrigues de Sá uses the word “prazer” which leads to a further philosophical approach than the word “folgar”, contributing to the enrichment of the reflection. In this sense, *problem literature* corresponds to what Palémon Glorieux explains in relation with the *quaestio disputata* in his essay about teaching in the Middle Ages, noting that it became a very valuable tool, for it required students to clarify their reasoning, coordinating it, always refining their expression; he also adds that it constitutes both an argumentative and dialectical exercise, and a magistral contribution which allowed doctrinal progress (GLORIEUX 1968: 124-127).

The answer of Diogo Brandão in composition 349 (DIAS 1990b: 236-237) proposes a reorientation of the reasoning from which Rui Gonçalves de Castel Branco formulates his question. The poet poses a moral question about the bewilderment of society, wondering about the reasons why “com rei justo e santo / medram os que taes nam sam / e os dessa condiçam / muito menos e nam tanto?” (v. 10-13, 237). By invoking the divine authority—“mas pois temos a rezam / de

doutores aprobada, / que tem Deos sem arrar nada / o coração do rei na mão” (v. 22-25)—Diogo Brandão confirms the virtuous features of the royal figure, ascribing a dignified and charitable value to the adjectives “justo” and “santo”, which had been partially lost in the demand, for it suggested a criticism to monarchy by means of reporting the benefits enjoyed by those who lack honesty. We can also read in these lines a subtle reference to the concept of *rex imago dei*, which dates back to the 13th century and must be understood in the context of a “*métaphysique unitaire et continuiste qui place le prince au centre d’un réseau serré de correspondances entre terre et ciel et l’assujettit à des devoirs stricts*” (SENELLART 1995: 146). To refute the relativization of the monarch’s exemplariness suggested by his antagonist, Diogo Brandão, establishing a link between God and the king, makes him an intermediary between the celestial and the earthly dimension, proclaiming the monarch’s dependence on the divine.⁷ The lines by both poets contributed, in addition, to define a picture of the king as “sage” at the background of the dispute, according to the conception of theoreticians and moralists, who insisted, as underlined by the historian Jacques Krynen, on the need to reconcile the possession of the virtues with their exercise, basing “sagesse” on the intellectual capacity of the ruler (KRYNEN 1993: 207). The interest of the question by Rui Gonçalves de Castel Branco and the answer of Diogo Brandão lies, therefore, in the fact that a reflection concerning the royal figure is introduced by means of a literary game, which is not unaware of the model of monarch established by the Avis dynasty, especially with D. Duarte, the “Rei Filósofo”, conforming with the idea that “l’exercice du pouvoir est autant affaire de foi et de morale que de raison, d’intelligence et de science” (KRYNEN 1993: 217).

Yet composition 349 is also interesting because it evidences how *problem literature* can be interpreted by its practitioners as a space of destruction of the argument built by the adversary, performed with the intention of showing his poetical skills. Starting with the *captatio benevolentiae*, Rui Gonçalves de Castel Branco makes a compliment to Diogo Brandão in a praising verse, underlining his wisdom within a classic and stylish exercise. Antonio Chas relates the structure of the questions of love to that of epistles, showing that both literary forms share similar constituent parts (CHAS AGUIÓN 1996). The *exordium* follows in its main features what is exposed on the oratory manuals (CHAS AGUIÓN 1996: 380) and, as asserted in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, its finality is to achieve “atentos, ut dociles, ut beniuolos auditores” (ACHARD 1999, libro I, 6). The first ten lines by Rui Gonçalves de Castel Branco correspond to what the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* describes: the poet pursues to attract the benevolence of the recipient. From this point of view, the respondent’s answer is interesting, since once the initial praise is subverted, which is one of the possible manifestations of the *captatio benevolentiae*, the respondent announces an interpretation *a contrario* of the arguments of the questioner. Diogo Brandão also answers in a laudatory tone, yet, in our opinion, with a slight touch of irony. The poet says: “Vai assi

⁷ In her edition on the poems of Diogo Brandão, Valeria Tocco points out in a footnote, that the poet turns to the topic of the divine origin of royal power in order to legitimize the king and his actions, emphasising that “[e]m consequência disso, também os casos sobre os quais Castel Branco se debruça, pertencendo ao desígnio de Deus manifestado através da acção do rei, são de aceitar incondicionalmente, mesmo que nos causem estranheza” (Tocco 1997: 103).

d'altenaria / tam sobido vosso voo / que nam sei quem sendo Joo / em saber responderia. / Sem falar lijunjaria, / como vós em me louvardes, / nacestes soo pera dardes / os remedeos desta via” (DIAS 1990b: v. 14-21, 237). In the first line of the response, the reference to the “altenaria” can be misleading, the word means both the quality of the bird that flies high and haughtiness. In lines 18 and 19, Diogo Brandão opposes his praises to those of Rui Gonçalves de Castel Branco saying that he does not speak “lijunjaria”. Obviously, this line represents a characteristic of the genre: he, Diogo Brandão, is not a sycophant as Rui Gonçalves Castel Branco, understanding that the latter can only repeat the conventions of the genre by exaggerating flattery. However, this line can also be understood as an indirect denounce of the artificiality of this discourse. In this first stanza by Diogo Brandão, there is a deconstruction of the praise of Rui Gonçalves de Castel Branco. The second verse begins with an adversative formulation, which inscribes the answer in a context of disagreement with the message of the question. The appeal to the authority of the doctors in theology “Mas pois temos a rezam / de doutores aprobada” (v. 22-23: 237) with the reaffirmation of the divine origin of royal power, legitimizes the monarch and his actions, for they are dictated by God, asserting the iniquity of the question.

In composition 545 (DIAS 1993a: 58-60), Tristão da Silva asks a religious question concerning the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. To the doubts of the questioner, Sancho de Pedrosa counter “Para cousa tam real, / pois estaa jaa bem provado, / que posso mais alegar / em vos querer reprovar, / pois nenhũ em actual / n’Ela nunca foi achado.” (v. 22-27: 59). The respondent reaffirms the precepts of the Christian doctrine, using an argument sustained on the *praeteritio*. In fact, when he ascribes his response within the framework of obligation—“sojeito vou a trovar” (v. 18: 59)—recurring to the lexicon of legal proceedings, such as “bem provado” (v. 23, 59), “alegar” (v. 24, 59), “reprovar” (v. 25, 59), yet associated with the idea that there is nothing to answer, Sancho de Pedrosa is not only actually answering, but also questioning the validity of the demand. The rhetorical question “que posso mais alegar” and the causal subordinate translate the futility of any demonstration concerning the immaculate nature of the Virgin.⁸

Rhyme games become for responders a way to support their subversive attempts. One of the formal criteria of *problem literature* is the obligation to respect the rhyme scheme imposed by the question, that is, answering “por los consonantes”. In fact, the endings of the final words of each line rhyme, establishing a network of correspondences between the question and the answer, which emphasises the opposition of ideas. In this way in composition 545, the rhymes ending with *-ado* allow to oppose the terms “provado” (v. 23, 59) and “achado” (v. 27, 59) to “enleado” (v. 2, 59), and “pecado” (v. 6, 59); the rhymes finishing with *-ar*, “alegar” (v. 24, 59) and “reprovar” (v. 25, 59) to “decrarar” (v. 3, 59) and “singular” (v. 4, 59). Within the question the *-ado* rhymes refer to the confusion and doubts in relation to the Original Sin, whilst in the

⁸ The presence of hyperbatons in the lines “pois nenhũ em actual / n’Ela nunca foi achado” (v. 26-27, 59) must be enhanced, allowing the poet to place in a prominent position the absence of sin in the Virgin.

response, they refer to the unsuitability of demonstrating the purity of Mary, once her immaculate conception is proven. The *-ar* rhymes also reinforce the veiled counter-argument of Sancho de Pedrosa, who rhymes the legal lexicon, “alegar” (v.24, 59) and “reprovar” (v. 25, 59), associated with the idea that it is not necessary to debate on the purity of the Virgin since it is an established truth, expressed with the verb “decrerar” (v. 3, 59), which is inherent to the demand. The terms “autual” (v. 26, 59) and “oreginal” (v. 5, 59) emphasise the dogmatic value of the purity of the Virgin, since it was never questioned.

The wit of the poets is not only supported by the subversion of the question, yet also due to the use of the classical culture as a way to display their knowledge, proposing the interlocutor to solve a riddle. Juan Casas Rigall states that:

desde la teoría aristotélica, el valor del enigma como portador de agudeza es claro: exige la adivinanza reflexión intelectual; su desentrañamiento es la culminación del proceso. En este sentido, es éste sin duda uno de los recursos que mejor encajan en el ámbito de la *perspicuitas-obscuritas* retórica. (CASAS RIGALL 1995: 96)

In the corpus of *problem literature* we have analysed there are two compositions that combine classical subjects and riddles. In composition 475 (DIAS 1990b: 450-451), João Rodrigues de Sá addresses a riddle-question to D. Miguel, yet he begins with a praise to the recipient before issuing his challenge. The praise does not focus on poetic skills, at least not directly, but on the “eloquencia e doutrina” (v. 2, 451) of D. Miguel and his mastery of Latin and Greek and the “linguagem” (v. 3, 451), describing the profile of a humanist.⁹ By praising the knowledge of the recipient of his question, the poet rises himself to the same level, giving himself praise and also asserting the excellence of his education, as evidenced by the proposition of the riddle. In fact, as stressed by Ana María S. Tarrío (2000: 317), the formulation of the riddle has similarities with the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny and Isidore. The proximity of these works allow us to suggest that João Rodrigues de Sá was aware of them, contributing through the presence of the riddle within the text, to construct a self-image of a literate, expert in Latin, and possessor of a culture and education which underlines his affinities with the model of the scholar at the court of D. Manuel.

In composition 493 (DIAS 1990b: 470-473), under the subject of the African campaigns, the question posed by João Rodrigues de Sá and directed to Aires Teles concerning his journey to Azamor evokes the *topos* of the need to reconcile weapons and the letters. Ana Maria S. Tarrío notes:

La exhortación a la poesía de la composición 493 [...] se suscribe en el molde cancioneril con una invención, disposición y *intentio* globales fieles a la preceptiva retórica clásica y con la actualización de numerosos *exempla* que sirven como argumentos de apoyo a su tesis: la conveniencia de la conciliación de armas y letras, la excelencia en fin de la ‘nobleza de espíritu’ (TARRÍO 2000: 332).

⁹ Concerning the praise of D. Miguel in this composition see the analysis by Ana María S. Tarrío (TARRÍO 2000: 313-317)

The integration into this question of the rhetorical patterns of invention, arrangement and *intentio* may constitute an attempt of the poet at constructing a figure characterized by erudition and ability, dominating the rhetoric exercise as practiced by the ancients. Concerning the *exempla* used by the poet to support his thesis, the one of the literate soldier, Ana Maria S. Tarrío affirms that, far from being a novelty, it enjoyed wide circulation, yet she adds:

Con todo, es novedoso el perceptible movimiento desde la alegoría de carácter abstracto y teológico hacia el símbolo de naturaleza más retórica y, por otro lado, la integración de estas figuras al servicio de un determinado modelo cultural aristocrático, el de un poeta-soldado intelectualmente más ambicioso que los modelos nobiliarios precedentes (TARRÍO 2000: 335).

From our point of view, this reorientation of the classical *exempla*, which involve contact with a scholarly culture that foreshadows Renaissance Humanism, establishes a construction process of the figure of the poet as a man of superior wisdom.

The presence of the intertext that refers to the works of the *auctores* allows these compositions to illustrate the new brightness of the Portuguese court writing and render, at the same time, the consciousness of the vernacular language as a vehicle of literary construction (GOMES 2010: 180).

In conclusion, we can state that the impetus of the Avis dynasty on the philosophical thinking in the Portuguese court did not have an immediate and widespread impact on the literary production of the 15th century. The *Cancioneiro Geral* shows it at the end of the century, since very few poems deal directly with moral and philosophy, which makes even more interesting the existence of a set of compositions belonging to the genre of *problem literature* in the collection of Resende, concerned about various kinds of doctrinal matters. This study attempted to show that *problem literature* suits the approach to philosophical and moral matters, encouraging interaction between the questioner and the responder. In addition, the different types of questions—disjunctives, riddles, or as in the Portuguese case, meditative-reflective—allow a different management of the topic introduced, whether by proposing several hypotheses of response, as the first type does, or introducing a riddle by inviting the poet to meditate on the subject of the question. Moreover, the approach of the disjunctive questions to the *disputatio* offers the poets the possibility of conferring to the question a further theoretical and reflective dimension by either adapting the method of medieval teaching, or reviewing classical rhetoric principles, with a rather humanistic orientation.

Problem literature was the assertion of the primordial wit within the framework of courtly poetry, ideal for the materialization of this attempt. The subversion of the adversary's argument resourcing to multiple rhetorical processes, and the demonstration of their own wit, are the main characteristics of philosophical and moral *problem literature*, which additionally respond to two different goals: first, to develop the discussed subject and, second, to acknowledge the worth of the poet which not only manifests in amorous matters.

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