

MARCABRU IN MOTION: ‘DIRE VOS VUOILL SES  
DUPTANSSA’ IN *CHANSONNIERS A* AND *C*, AND IN  
MAFTRE ERMENGAUD’S *BREVIARI D’AMOR*

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*Marcabru: A Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Simon Gaunt, Ruth Harvey, and Linda Paterson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000), pp. 237-50 for *A* version; pp. 251-63 for *C* version. Henceforth referred to as *Marcabru*.

Matfre Ermengaud, *Le Breviari d’amor de Matfre Ermengaud: Tome V*, ed. Peter T. Ricketts (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), citations of *C* at ll. 28225-67).

“Dire vos vuoill ses duptanssa,” a stinging attack on the corruptions of love and the vile acts committed by lovers, is a poem that lends itself readily to adaptation, addition, re-ordering, and reworking, either by the poet himself or by other troubadours, scribes or commentators. There is a great variation among the manuscripts in terms of the material featured and its organization. Some codices include supplementary stanzas which are not considered by critics to be “by Marcabru.” To examine this, I shall compare the shorter version in *chansonnier A* (Rome, Vatican Latin 5232), the longer version in *C* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, français 856), which contains some such “additional” material, apparently not by Marcabru, and finally the quotations of verses from *C* in the Matfre Ermengaud’s *Breviari d’amor*.

Why does the poem have this plasticity? There is a simple format to each stanza, which gave a model on which more could easily be constructed. There are only two rhyme sounds in each stanza, and every line contains seven syllables, apart from the refrain “Escoutatz,” which has three syllables. The *A* rhyme features in the first three lines and in the fifth, before “Escoutatz,” which gives the *B* rhyme, always in *-atz*. Each stanza also closes

with a rhyme in *-atz* in the sixth line. Hence the overall scheme is A7' A7' A7' B3 A7' B7 (note that the A rhyme lines are feminine; they have an unaccented eighth syllable, which does not figure in the syllable count). For Marguerite Switten, "melody and text converge angrily around a small number of sounds within a tightly circumscribed musical space" (pp. 42-43). This serves as a vehicle for Marcabru's poetic bites as he returns in each stanza with new attacks on love and wicked lovers (mainly, it turns out, women). The pattern of constant B rhyme and an A rhyme changing from stanza to stanza figures a movement of repetition with variation: over and again, fresh tirades on the same theme. The version in manuscript *A* uses a new A rhyme every time, whereas the longer version in *C* sometimes repeats the rhyme sounds, although not the rhyme words. The A rhyme also takes on different valences in each stanza. Sometimes, the choice of rhyme sound favours a particular grammatical form, with interesting consequences. Thus stanza IV of *A* runs:

Dirai vos d'amor cum migna:  
a vos chanta, a cellui gigna;  
ab vos parla, ab autre cigna.  
– Escoutatz! –  
Plus sera dreicha que ligna  
qand ieu serai sos privat.

(ll. 19-24)

Here we have a sequence of three verbs describing love's deceptive actions: "migna," "gigna," and "cigna," denote flirtatious and playful gestures and behaviour. But, after the refrain, the fourth such rhyme word "ligna" is a noun, breaking this sequence, reflecting grammatically the poet's boast that he can bring love into line. Similarly, the pairs "a vos...a cellui," "ab vos...ab autre," embodying love's deceitful criss-crossing movements, are brought sharply to a halt by "Escoutatz." Thus there is a series of wicked actions and then their correction by the poet.

In stanza VI, the effect is different:

Anc puois amors non fo vera  
pos triet del mel la cera;  
anz sap si pelar la pera  
– Escoutatz! –

doussa-us er cum chans de lera –  
si sol la coa-n troncatz!

(ll. 31-36)

Here, “vera” (true), an adjective, is rhymed with three nouns: “cera” (wax), “pera” (pear) and “lera” (lyre). Gaunt, Harvey, and Paterson suggest that the wax image may come from Hugh of St. Victor, who uses wax and honey as signs for the beauty and seductive words of harlots (see *Marcabru*, p. 247). Honey is seen as characteristically sweet by Isidore of Seville (*Etymologies* XX.ii.36), and is perhaps a cipher for all that is alluring, whereas wax connotes wax tablets and thus writing, so the deceptiveness of language may be evoked. The folk etymology that has the word “sincere” deriving from Latin “sine” (without) and “cera” (wax) may also be relevant: to be sincere is to be without wax, unfalsified, unadorned, and pure. The pear, in turn, has erotic connotations in the *fabliaux*, and in some thirteenth-century texts is the fruit that Eve gives to Adam, causing the Fall, but peeling a pear is a mark of sophistication: so some elegant seduction is alluded to here. Finally, the lyre gives out a sweet and alluring sound. The sequence of rhyme words itself enacts the way in which the refined sensuality offered by love give it the appearance of truth, because “cera,” “pera,” and “lera” are acoustically assimilated to “vera.” This tricks the lover just as it does the listener.

In stanza VIII, we have four nouns:

Amors es mout de mal avi;  
mil homes a mortz de glavi;  
Dieus non fetz tant fort gramavi  
– Escoutatz! –  
fol no-n fassa lo plus savi  
si tant fai qe-l tenga al latz.

(ll. 43-48)

The idea of love’s “avi” (forefather) suggests that it has a long history of wrong-doing. This is a diachronic cut, something like the *gestes* in the *chansons de geste*, where lineage is a moral category: there are good and bad lineages, who endlessly repeat the same actions. Love’s “avi” drives it to kill a thousand men with a “glavi” (sword), slicing through the treasured knowledge of Latin—the

“gramavi” being an expert in “grammaire,” that is, Latin—and, in the final rhyme of the sequence, the “savi” (wise man). Thus no amount of human expertise can provide any defence against love. The “avi” rhyme itself enacts this cutting motion.

To cite just one further example of the patterning which the A rhymes create: in stanza IX, the rhyme in “ada” favours past participles agreeing with “amors” and with other abstract feminine nouns:

S'anc amors fon car comprada,  
er es en viltat tornada;  
virginitat a passada  
– Escoutatz! –  
puois al prendre es alargada:  
des era vos en gardatz!

(ll. 49-54)

Here, the repetition of “ada” heightens the sense of decline from an ideal past and loss of qualities once prized, and prepares for the final line’s warning about the future.

The B rhyme unites the refrain and the final word of each stanza, creating a tight unit of meaning. “Escoutatz,” strongly differentiated from the other lines in the melodies for this poem (see Pollina, Switten), and the sixth line are independent from the rest of the verse in terms not only of rhyme but also of versification, both being masculine lines. In some cases, they, along with the A rhyme line they sandwich, constitute a reply to the first three lines of the stanza; elsewhere, the reasoning flows on across the refrain. We are invited to “listen,” either to the poet or to some general piece of wisdom, or to witness a truth about love, which is often something resembling a proverb, for example, “Qui ves proessa balanssa, / semblanssa fai de malvatz.” (ll. 5-6), or “Cel non sap vas cal part fuja / pois que del fuoc es gastatz.” (ll. 17-18). “Escoutatz” is often immediately followed by “qui,” “quascus,” or “quan,” or else by “plus” or “mas,” as part of the enunciation of a general trend: “he who,” “whoever does,” “whenever you,” “you are more or less...” Elsewhere, it is trouble wrought by wicked love or a wicked woman that is brought out: this is what happens to you when you trifle with love. The rhyme sound *-atz* favors substantives “malvatz,” “privatz,” “chatz” and past participles “cuitatz,” “gastatz,” “troncatz.” These two grammatical forms

embody the effects of love: the verbs show its actions, the nouns the transformations it causes.

There is an attempt to tell the truth of love in each case: it fails, and then there is a new attempt. And, of course, because the B rhyme is an easy rhyme (there being countless nouns ending in *-atz*, as well as verbs which can be conjugated to do so), it was possible for it to remain the same in every stanza in every version. New stanzas could be quite straightforwardly coined and integrated. The B rhyme therefore unites the entire poem in all its manifestations. Hence there is a base element, with a varying superstructure; hence the openness to extension and adaptation. However, in all manuscripts, the first two stanzas are the same, in the same order. They provide a stable base for the rest; they are the star under which all the material is to be read:

Dire vos vuoill ses doptanssa  
 d'aqest vers la comenssanssa;  
 li mot fant de ver semblanssa.  
 – Escoutatz! –  
 Qui ves proessa balanssa,  
 semblanssa fai de malvatz.

Jovens faill e fraing e brisa  
 et amors es d'aital guisa,  
 que pois al saut es aprisa  
 – Escoutatz! –  
 que chascus n'a sa devisa,  
 ja pois no-n sera cuitatz.

(ll. 1-12)

The first stanza links “vers” and “ver,” to “semblanssa,” making the whole question the play between truth, seeming, appearances and reality. This central theme remains through the different manifestations of the poem and is the key to its role in the *Breviari*. Is the poem true? Can it carry a truth about love? Does the poet know more about love than others? The second stanza, in turn, sets the tone for the general theme of decline, by linking love to youth: both are broken. What hope can there be for the future in any world without youth? The intense, polysyndetic sequence “faill e fraing e brisa” draws our attention sharply to the demise of youth,

and the picking up of “pois” by “ja pois” in the final line accentuates the eschatological tone of the whole piece.

There is one concern throughout the poem—love—but because love is an unknowable, unthinkable, unconquerable force, we witness repeated failed attempts to grasp it. Thus non-knowledge is one theme: there is “non sap” (l. 17); “ni sap mas” (l. 41); and the statement, already cited, that there is no man so wise that he could prevent himself being driven mad by love. And in this light too, we might understand the following comparison: “Cel qui ab amor barata, / ab diables se combata!” (ll. 37-38). Love in this poem, then, is like the Real in Lacanian theory: it is felt in its manifestations and effects, without ever being known in its essence. The only knowledge that can be generated about love is of the order of metaphor and analogy. Love cannot be known directly. We can know *what love is like*, *what it does*, but never *what it is*. Hence in the poem, we circle something that cannot be appropriated by the intellect. Of course all poems have elements of circularity as well as linearity because of the repetitions in them: metre, rhyme and other features shape a dense acoustic network that allows meaning to flow in many directions. In this poem, it is the description of an elusive object that drives a circular movement of repetition with variation.

What attempts are made to understand love? There is no solid base for the generation of such understanding, just a series of analogical relationships to nature, law, humans, animals, etc. Love is compared to other natural forces, such as to fire:

Amors fai cum la belluja  
que si mescla ab la suja,  
c’art lo fust e la festuja.

(ll. 13-15)

This may well be a reference to the fires of adultery, darkened by the addition of soot. Elsewhere, love is related to other abstractions, such as to youth, but comparisons to animals are also given: thus love licks like a “chatz” (l. 30); behaves like an “ega” (l. 55); and stings more gently than a “mosca” (l. 65). Love is repeatedly personified too. It has habits: “fai cum” (l. 13); “migna” (l. 19); “solia” (l. 25); “usatge” (l. 55). And finally, it has a lineage: “mal avi” (l. 43). Thus there is an attempt to understand love in terms of its morals and behaviour.

Elsewhere, knowledge of love is projected back into the past: “amors solia esser dreicha” (l. 25). Love was once straight, but in the present it is twisted. But later, this hope is thwarted: “Anc...amors non fo vera” (l. 31). Elsewhere, it is suggested that love might once have been expensive, but is now cheap: again, the past is thrown into doubt. Is this evidence of a decline, or has love always had a low status? Here, there is a commercial language for understanding love, but in other stanzas, there is an ethical or spiritual one: “diabes” (l. 38); “la letra” (l. 69, in the sense of Scripture).

Who is to blame? At times it seems that love is an impersonal force that submits everyone to its wiles; elsewhere, love is assimilated to the woman, and her trickery. This happens in particular when love is humanized: it is simultaneously feminized, too, whereas men are its victims. However, this is complicated when love is aligned with the poet: love “sos digz aplana et endoscha” (l. 63), the planing and smoothing of words being metaphors for poetic craft in Arnaut Daniel and elsewhere. Further ambiguity about love is found in the lines “amors es d’aital guisa / que pois al saut es aprisa” (ll. 8-9), where there is an assault, in which all men seem to participate. Love is invaded and occupied by them, and they take the spoils. Thus, overall, there is no stable, gendered human manifestation for love. It defies all kinds of binary oppositions: victim/assailant, male/female, animal/human, and abstract/physical. The to-and-fro movement of the poem adds to the sense of the coming and going between different levels of discourse, and between different manifestations of love. Sometimes the stanzas combine, such as V and VI, but elsewhere they seem to function as autonomous units, and all sense of progression towards a moment of understanding is whisked away.

What are the particularities of this version, *A*, within the manuscript tradition? *A* is broadly biographical or personal. It opens with a first-person statement: “dire vos vuoill” (l. 1), and this is picked up in “dire vos d’amor cum migna” (l. 19), in the stanza ending with a promise that the poet will correct love’s indiscretions. Later, the poet’s own knowledge becomes the focus: “Cuiatz vos q’ieu non conosca / d’amor s’es orba o losca?” (ll. 61-62). And finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is the ending. Stanza XIII of *A* makes the truth of the whole poem Marcabru’s experience. It is bizarre. It suggests, paradoxically, that Marcabru

knew the truth about love precisely because he never experienced love:

Marcabrus, lo fills na Bruna,  
fo engenratz en tal luna  
q'el sap d'amor cum degruna,  
– Escoutatz! –  
qez anc non amet neguna,  
ni d'otra non fo amatz.

(ll. 73-78)

Marcabru was born in circumstances that gave him privileged knowledge about love. And only by being immune to love's effects can one know the nature of love; those affected by love cannot know it. The biographical gloss given here has been vital: it is cited in the *vida* in *K* and has shaped critical accounts of Marcabru as a misogynist poet.

How is *C* different? It is longer; it contains much more material than *A*—23 stanzas rather than 13—and much of its material features in no other manuscript. This is countered by the repetition of rhyme sounds, which creates tighter phonological links between the materials present. But the end of the poem is missing in the manuscript: stanza 23 has no ending. There is overall less of a biographical focus to *C*: though the same first-person stanza verses appear, they play a comparatively small part in the whole, as the poem overall is longer. “Amors” is the subject and opening word of more stanzas. And crucially, the final stanza of *A* here features in the middle of the poem, so its importance is somewhat diminished: it arguably ceases to be the key to the whole work. Greater importance is given overall to the poem as a vehicle for generalizing statements about love, and it is therefore less of a poem about Marcabru's life, more of an attempt to define love in all its attractions and horrors. However, the poetic persona of Marcabru—expressed across his corpus of poems—seems to have inspired some of the additions. *L'œuvre*, it seems, is being adapted better to fit the image of *l'homme*.

To examine a selection of material absent from *A* and in many cases unique to *C*: the pessimism of Marcabru would appear to manifest here:



Fams ni mortaldaz ni guerra  
no fai tan de mal en terra  
quon amors qu'ab enguan serra

(ll. 13-15)

These lines also continue the thematic strand of comparing love to abstract forces.

Other condemnations of love allude to its capacity to disobey rules and norms, such as “Amors es d’aita[l] figura / non siec razon ni mezura” (ll. 97-98), or “Amors es ardida cauza; / entrebresca cada pauza” (ll. 79-80). Thus love is prideful and arrogant. It is also associated with theft and poison in stanza XIX. The motif of slavery and the idea of love as a cruel master or mistress feature in stanzas VI and XI. Stanzas VIII and XVIII are vulgar and obscene (“cons”, l. 48; “vieg”, l. 107), lowering the tone of the entire piece but associating it with other offensive Marcabru works. Stanza X adds the common Marcabrunian motif of the woman with two or three lovers, and the associated concern about the loss of purity of lineages that results: the “linhatges mesclatz” (l. 60).

Desire is shown to break through structures of order and knowledge, resulting in a world where nothing has a secure essence that can be reckoned with. Thus in stanza XI:

Amors es tan vaira-pigua  
qu’ab semblant de ver noyrigua  
totz selhs que cuelh en sa higua.  
– Escoutatz! –  
Ab tan greu las los estrigua  
que greu n’es hom destacatz.

(ll. 61-66)

The coinage “vaira-pigua” (l. 61, “piebald-mottled”) conflates two separate ideas, and two images of bad love found elsewhere in Marcabru (see *Marcabru*, p. 262), and thus enacts love’s impure, hybrid and inferior nature. The corrupt language manifests the corruptions of love: see also the formations “bec-de-tartugua, / buffa-fuec, salier-issugua!” (ll. 103-4), which may have been inspired by the idea of Marcabru as an innovator and producer of neologisms. Just as these words are perversions of language, so love offers only a “semblant de ver” (l. 62). Here we reconnect with stanza I’s concern about truth and truth-seeming. Can we

distinguish true truth from something which only has the appearance of truth? The use of “higua” (l. 63), the area where a tax is levied, also brings back the theme of love as a master: the lover is subject to love’s taxations and jurisdiction.

One innovation is a different use of the ‘Escoutatz’ refrain; in stanza XX, it seems to be followed by the wicked words of the deceptive woman: we are invited to listen to her rather than to the poet:

Aitant quant l’avers li dura  
met coart en l’ambladura,  
pueys li ditz tal desmezura:  
– Escoutatz! –  
«Lo tieu diest e-l mieu endura»,  
e «Siec los autres malvatz».

(ll. 115-120)

The final stanza, or what is the final stanza in this incomplete version, contains a statement about the nature of love pertaining to all time, which features in full in *A* (stanza VI, see above): “Anc pueys amors no fon vera” (l. 133). In *C*, then, the poem terminates with an eternal claim about truth rather than on a personal one, as in *A*.

All in all, the version in *C* might be considered an attempt to make this poem more of a Marcabru-poem, to add elements corresponding to his poetic persona and beliefs as found in his other works. In the end, the poem is made more Marcabru than Marcabru, more like the real thing than the real thing itself. But it also shifts the focus away from the poet’s own life and attempts to deliver a series of truths about love that are wide-ranging in their scope and import.

Finally, then, I shall examine what happens to the poem in the *Breviari*. There are three quotations of this poem, corresponding to three of the stanzas of *C*. The increased vituperation of the *C* version appears to have inspired Matfre’s view of Marcabru as the ultimate maligner of love and ladies: stanza XX (“Aitant quant l’avers li dura,” cited just above) is quoted by Matfre’s opponent in the debates as support for a misogynistic argument accusing women of foul trickery (ll. 29607-12). But most interesting is the use of stanzas III and XVI in an exchange between Matfre and his opponent, the “Maldizen,” who

quotes Marcabru's declaration that love causes more harm than famine, war or pestilence. Though Matfre too sees Marcabru as exceptional—acknowledging his status as the champion of “maldire” (slander)—he then quotes Marcabru, from the same song, against himself: as Marcabru confessed, he never loved a woman for long. I shall quote the entire exchange here:

AISI PARLON LI MALDIZEN

Encaras dizon lh'emvejós  
que tan blasmon los amoroš:  
– Nos havem un autre gueren  
qu'a digz mals d'amors per un cen,  
non a dig dels autres negus;  
augatz doncs qu'en digš Marcabrus:

Fams ni mortaudatz ni guerra  
no fan tan de mal en terra  
quo amors qu'ab engan serra.

– Escoutatz! –

Quan vos veira sus la berra  
no-n sera sos huels molhatz. –

RESPON MATRES ALS MALDIZENS

Ar, senhor, sia hieu escoutatz!  
Anc En Marcabrus non hac par  
de maldire, per que no-m par  
quez ell sia dignes de fe,  
quar d'amor no poc saber re  
quar domna lunh tems non amet  
segon qu'el mezeis coffeset  
en aquel mezeis cantar cert,  
e digš aichi tot adz ubert:

Brus Marcz, le filhs Marcabruna,  
fon engenratz en tal luna  
que sab d'amor quo engruna  
– Escoutatz! –

Pero anc non amet una  
ni d'autra no fon amatz.

Doncz aquestz malaventuratz,  
pus que non amet un dia,  
no poc portar guerentia  
d'amor, s'era mal' o bona,  
qu'amors mals ni bes non dona  
adz ome si non ama be;  
per sso sos mals digz no val re  
quar no poc far guerentia  
de sso que re no sabia;  
quar de dreg es, per ma testa!  
que qui vol be far enquesta  
d'alqun home, s'es mals o bos,  
deu enquerr' ab sos cumpanhos,  
ab vezis et ab conoichens,  
quar mielhs sabo sos noirimens  
no fan ceilh d'autrui proensa  
que non han sa conoichensa

(ll. 28225-67)

For Matfre, Marcabru is not “dignes de fe,” not a “guerentia” of the truth of love. Love does not offer anything—good or bad—to a man who does not love well: so the vilification of love is worthless because no one can testify about something that they do not know. If you wanted to know whether a man was good or bad, you would have to ask those who knew him well. It would therefore be ridiculous to take as an authority on love someone who never knew love. It is noteworthy that Matfre does not dwell on the verse saying that Marcabru was born under a star that gave him knowledge of love, but rather focuses on the statement after the refrain, which is taken to deliver the truth.

Quotations from most troubadour poems in the *Breviari* are intermittent, with chunks of poetry thrown back and forth (see in particular Kay, Nicholson). But our poem is quoted twice in succession. This is a unique moment where *the same poem* is used by opponents in the debate. Two whole stanzas, competing units of meaning, are used. The poem's biographical moment is deployed to annul the truth-claims made in the rest of the piece. Matfre's reply picks up the *-atz* rhyme on which the Maldizens's Marcabru quotation closes, thus integrating it into the rhyme scheme of rhyming couplets. Wittily, Matfre uses “Escoutatz” here, replicating the refrain of the Marcabru poem in such a way as to mark the

moment when we stop listening to Marcabru and start listening to Matfre. For Matfre, the poem defeats itself. His own quotation of it rhymes “no fon amatz” with “malaventuratz”: Marcabru was a poor unfortunate, not an authority. Yet the idea that the poem is to be understood biographically is not questioned, so it is considered to be true on that level. Neither speaker doubts this. However, whereas the Maldizens thinks that Marcabru is an expert on love, bad love in particular—and quotes Marcabru’s opinions to back up his own—Matfre quotes the biographical stanza to deny this negativity. Matfre is arguing throughout for the power of love as an ennobling force, a morally-improving force, hence Marcabru is his enemy here. Of the other quotations from Marcabru in the *Breviari*, the two from “Cortesamen vuoill comensar” (poem XV, at ll. 32244-49 and 32251-56) seem to be approving nods to Marcabru’s definitions of courtliness and moderation, but these are attributed to “N’Ucs de la Bacalaria,” rather than to Marcabru. Another Marcabru quotation, associating courtliness with good love, on the other hand, is attributed to him (“Lo vers comenssa,” poem XXXII, at ll. 32206-14). Finally, the quotation from “L’iverns vai e-l temps s’aizina,” poem XXXI, at ll. 30995-1001, uses Marcabru’s slander against women who do not understand *fin’amor* as a negative exemplum: this is how women should not behave.

Whether Marcabru is enemy or ally, in none of these instances does there seem to be any doubt that the poems are the genuine expression of the life and opinions of someone called Marcabru; this stands in contrast to that modern criticism which has sought to find irony in Marcabru’s poems. Perhaps Matfre adopts a common rhetorical tactic when quoting from “Dire vos vuoill,” taking his opponent’s words in a literal, flat way, destroying any nuance in them. Marcabru and the Maldizens are made into straw men to be knocked down by Matfre. The biographical stanza thus becomes the meaning of the poem once more, although Matfre is seemingly not worried by the contradictions of the verse he quotes. Hence the ability of the poem (the *vers*) to speak the truth (the *ver*) remains the key question here. Is it true in what it says about love? For Matfre, knowledge has to come from personal experience; for Marcabru, it is a position of non-experience, a place as an outsider that affords the possibility for an objective assessment. Does love blind the lover, or open his eyes? The debate in the end is one between subjectivity and objectivity: Matfre refuses the possibility for objective analysis and insists that

all human knowledge is subjective. This corresponds to his scheme of quotations: all knowledge is embodied in poets. Marcabru's status as someone immune to love does not make him impartial; rather, it prejudices him against love. He speaks ill of it because he did not enjoy it.

This scepticism brings to light the fragility of the poem's repeated attempts to move from the particularity of personal experience to universalizing statements about the nature of love, and reveals the poem to be a discourse on truth. Marcabru's and Matfre's attempts to establish what can be known about love ultimately lead them to examine the problems of knowledge itself. Therefore the citations in the *Breviari* are not just appropriations of the poem, but commentaries that release its potential as an epistemological meditation. Because the poem is quoted twice, on opposing sides of a debate, we are sent back to the original object as a field of contestation where incompatible discourses and vocabularies were deployed in attempts to explain and understand love. Matfre's swipe at Marcabru detracts from the poet's own credibility, but it is an acknowledgment of the importance of his poem, as a powerful and ambivalent dissertation on love. Love, it seems, can never be known scientifically, only experienced subjectively, but because it is a subjective matter, no one can claim the right to speak objectively of it. Therefore Marcabru is at once an authority on love, and someone who has nothing valid at all to say about it. Love is an object that will always frustrate the intellect that tries to master it, but poetry, where competing meanings run in every possible direction, might just be the best venue for discussing it.

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