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A Reading of Troubadour Insult Songs: the *Comunals* Cycle

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The sizeable corpus of insult songs in the troubadour lyric, the so-called *sirventes personnel* and *sirventes joglaresc*, has been an intermittent object of discussion over the years, being regarded as essentially marginal. Such scholars as Jeanroy and Thiolier-Méjean have expressed the most consistent view:¹ these pieces are occasional, often crude, pieces of invective for which no-one would claim much merit as poetry. Even when considered as the fictions they so often are, their interest is still regarded as essentially historical, or occasional.

However, these songs may resist classification. Pierre Bec's anthology of burlesque and obscene poetry excludes the *sirventes personnel* - with the exception of a *sirventes en jargon* that happens to be *personnel*, and a single Guillem de Berguedà piece - in favour of parodies or fictional *tensos*; neither does the corpus fit well in Karen Wilk Klein's definition of partisan or political songs in *The Partisan Voice*.²

This paper will focus on a particular aspect - I hesitate to call it generic - of the *sirventes personnel*: its concern with the process and rhetoric of insult, given that some of these cycles cannot be read as strictly political in function.

The manipulation of invective and direct attack in poetry is quite well-studied. In terms of satire, personal attack conforms to the functions of insult that have been traced by anthropologists, for example, Flynn.³ Insult is used first to provoke a direct response, either another poem, perhaps in the same metre, or physical attack. This results in flytings, shouting matches or exchanges of challenges.

Its second function, more broadly, is to control. This may be done by inspiring shame in the addressee but not necessarily action, for example through lampooning. Alternatively, the insult creates a feeling of superiority in the audience, when aspects it perceives as negative are projected onto the addressee, for example in the process of

scapegoating. For some, the ultimate original function of such attacks was to kill the addressee, by imposing a curse. This would explain why some troubadour insult-songs (for example those of Guillem de Berguedà) end by projecting death, castration, mutilation or silence on the addressee. On a symbolic level at least, the struggle is to the death.

If these two functions are combined, the purpose of insult songs emerges as a competition with the aim of symbolically defeating the opponent through the manipulation and projection of traits agreed by this social group to be negative. In so doing, the exchange reaffirms the conventions of good and bad that determines this group's perception of itself, which may be termed its ideology. In other words, it creates the illusion of a collectivity by constructing a negative mirror image it symbolically kills.

Aside from exchanges of songs and *coblas* between distinct speakers, such as the exchange between Dalfin d'Auvergne and Richard I Lionheart,⁴ certain songs in the lyric exist as cycles of monologues. They address a man (usually) who does not respond, and is not expected to produce a poem in exchange. Guillem de Berguedà is the chief exponent of such cycles, against Peire de Berga, Ponç de Mataplana, and the bishop of Urgel.⁵ Lavaud's edition of Peire Cardenal includes one cycle of three songs against Esteve de Belmon.⁶

These cycles display a recurrent pattern. They identify a single victim, and apply a string of accusations that often have no logical pattern. Guillem de Berguedà accuses the bishop of promiscuity, priapism, impotence and describes him as a eunuch. The songs' attacks focus on a threat, that of castration for the bishop, of penetration for the unmarried Mataplana, and cuckoldry for his direct rival Peire de Berga.⁷ The fact that these opponents are inscribed as necessarily speechless makes them defeated from the start. The symbolic castrations and humiliations imposed on them in the songs reinforce this condition of the game.

The question presents itself at this point of what may be the nature of this game. Martin Aurell interprets insult songs as either symbolic warfare aiming to contain violence, or as preliminaries to armed conflict, in line with the epic's shouting matches prior to combat, or the later Catalan *lletras de batalla*, written challenges exchanged by knights. However, these models all depend on reciprocal insult.⁸ The point of a shouting match or a flyting is that one speaker will be defeated, or spurred to attack, by another. In insult cycles with no respondent, competition is presumably nil, since the outcome is pre-

determined.

In tracing the development of the *tenso*, Jeanroy suggested that the form may have originated from exchanges of songs, performed sequentially, to alternating stanzas within a single song.⁹ The earlier, irregular, form would have survived in exchanges of *coblas* and cycles of personal *sirventes*. He notes, as does Aurell, that the dynamic tends to be one of challenge and riposte, either in real conflict or in ritualized entertainment. In this context, the exchange serves as a space for the negotiation (or renegotiation) of status, of power relations based on verbal, as opposed to military or territorial criteria. The outcome of these exchanges depends on the decision of no external arbiter (unlike the *partimen* structure), and does not involve the audience in wider debate; the contest ends when one speaker can find nothing more to say, and therefore cannot strike back. These exchanges seem closed to audience participation, since the focus does not move from the rehearsal of personal slurs. In the light of this, their intended reception would seem worthy of consideration.

Some cycles are evidently political propaganda in song form. Bertran de Born's attacks on Alfonso II of Aragon's public and private character are addressed to his opponents' armies.¹⁰ Denigration of the other side is written into ideological rallying cries, such as the Crusade songs of the period and the attacks on clerks during the Albigensian wars.

Might these insult cycles therefore be mere calls to take arms against personal enemies in petty local conflicts? Peire Cardenal's Esteve cycle aims ostensibly to make him repent and send him in penance to Compostella. Reception of Guillem de Berguedà's songs is determined by the fact that, as de Riquer discovered, he may indeed have murdered one of his addressees, Ramon Folc III de Cardona.¹¹ The violent career narrated in his *vida* is not simply a fiction, but the context of composition and of initial dissemination.

The question of reception does therefore have some relevance to the cycles' dissemination and reception. Méjean's assumption that the *sirventes personnel* was occasional and short-lived in performance terms begs the question of the songs' presence in manuscripts. Guillem de Berguedà's most personal *sirventes* are collected chiefly in manuscripts D, I and K. These sources are admittedly early in terms of manuscript evidence, but indicate that the songs were considered worthy of anthologization over 50 years after composition, in northern Italy. The cycles are not so well represented in Catalan manuscripts

such as Sg, in which Guillem's corpus is small. By inference, therefore, these occasional poems had a shelf life of over half a century and success with an audience probably unfamiliar with the state of local tensions among Catalan nobles in the 1170s.¹² This indicates that they represent more than the occasional record of personal quarrels and were received as entertainment by an unrelated audience.

It is worth noting that Guillem de Berguedà's songs are not provided with *razos* to explain their references and ideas. Unlike Bertran de Born's *sirventes*, they were presumably held to be capable of standing on their own, irrespective of historical context.¹³ This raises questions about their treatment in performance. If these songs were not perceived as anecdote, and not provided with a historicizing framework, their interest may instead have lain in the unfolding process of insult. In performance, the focus would presumably have been on the display of verbal skill, and the speaker's attempt to turn his poetry on his opponents and, as Ben Jonson put it much later, 'rhyme 'em dead'.¹⁴ The death of the addressee is strictly textual, but nonetheless effective as entertainment.

Berguedà's and Cardenal's cycles build up a network of references that hints at a narrative. In the Esteve cycle, a picture of the addressee's crimes, especially the massacre of his own relatives over dinner, is elaborated with flourishes hinting at cannibalism, brutality and animalistic behaviour. Berguedà's Peire de Berga cycle moves from threats of cuckoldry, via a couple of anecdotes, to boasts that he is now Estefania's lover, the whole over four songs. The Mataplana cycle has as its end the *planh* in which Guillem withdraws all his previous slanders. The song is, however, preserved only in MS T, and has been transmitted separately. Without this dramatic flourish, the cycle stands as a sustained piece of character assassination, once again with a core set of accusations surrounded by comic developments and associations.

Perceiving these cycles as dramatic units rather than a campaign sustained over time makes it possible to envisage a performance context in which they would stand as a narrative in their own right. This is certainly the outcome projected by Cardenal, when he tells Esteve to perform all the songs together as his confession.

Such a reading can play havoc with a literal approach to the lyric. There is no reason, for example, to suppose any length of time, certainly not several years, should separate Marcabru's *Empeaire* poems (Dejeanne, XXII, XXIII.).¹⁵ One song is a piece of political propaganda, the other plays on threats of insult if the patron turns out

to be a disappointment. Performed together, the songs function as a *laus et vituperatio* opposition rehearsing commonplaces about patronage, while broadcasting propaganda for the *Reconquista*. It is typical ideological strategy to praise the authority figure all the better to criticize him. Certainly in terms of transmission, the sense of there being a cycle of songs, specifically of insult songs, depends on simultaneous performance, an approximation of narrative progression, and a privileging of the rhetoric of insult over extra-textual references.

The 'Comunals' cycle

I propose to examine one rather neglected cycle of insult songs, addressing a certain Comunal, exchanged between Garin d'Apchier and Torcafol. These songs are edited by Friedrich Witthoeft, in his collection of *Sirventes joglaresc*.¹⁶

Suzanne Thiolier-Méjean excluded the *Comunals* cycle from her essay on the *sirventes joglaresc*, on the grounds that the songs do not share this hypothetical sub-genre's traits - direct address to and discussion of the repertoire and skills of a *jongleur*.¹⁷ Méjean's argument about this subgenre is tendentious in the sense that she clings to a literal reading of the songs. They are insults, but written 'dans l'intérêt d'un jongleur', to advertise his talents to a potential patron. Quite why this entertainer should advertise himself with a reference consisting of a famous poet's criticism of his ignorance and physical repulsiveness is a question her essay never fully addresses. She admits that they are fictions, but cannot conclude as to their function.

This cycle has elements of the so-called *sirventes joglaresc* as defined by Witthoeft and Méjean. *Comunals* is directly addressed in the first line of five of the ten poems. This figure is mocked as a composer of *sirventes*, and *jongleurs* are mentioned in several pieces.¹⁸ He is described as ugly, weak and old, traits found in other songs in this group. However, the songs also address Comunal as a ruffian who attacks monasteries, as well as an ambitious lord and an elderly *drut*.¹⁹ Méjean, Stronski and Jeanroy have all concluded that this cycle builds up a personal attack akin to Berguedà's and Cardenal's cycles, but one that is difficult to delineate.

The name *Comunal* indicates something that is held in common, or common ground, perhaps an open field for others' interaction.²⁰ It is much likelier, therefore, that Comunal is, as Appel and Witthoeft assume, a reciprocal *senhal*, not an external figure. However, R seems

to have read *Comunal* as an external addressee, a scapegoat for the two speakers, who shuttle this object about, and parade their skill at invective in doing so. This may reflect later performance and reception, by speakers not implicated in the context of composition. By inference, the cycle could have been received as a complete fiction. In terms of studying the immediate context of composition, and analysing the cycle for any linking threads indicating a vestige of debate, the idea of a reciprocal *senhal* seems more acceptable.

This cycle is dated c.1194-97 by Witthoeft,²¹ a dating endorsed by Stronski's historical research and Appel's note that the IK version of *Veills Comunal ma tor* includes a line-for-line parody in stanza 3 of the first stanza of a famous Peire Vidal *sirventes*, *Aissi viu a gran dolor* (Anglade, XXXVIII, dated c.1194-97). Metrical models are Raimbaut d'Aurenga, Raimbaut de Vaqueiras and Peire Vidal, which may again point to the late twelfth century.²² The *vida*, which claims Garin d'Apchier invented the *descort*, suggests a similar dating.²³ According to Stronski, Garin d'Apchier, 'gentils castellans de Jauvadan', from the diocese of Mende,²⁴ may have been Garin I de Châteauneuf, seigneur of Apchier, or his son to whom he ceded his lands, in 1180, and who held the title until c.1207. Since the songs are obsessed with old age, it is tempting to identify him as the first, older man, who gave up his title.

The title *comtor*, found in *Comtor d'Apchier rebuzat*, but not in the *vida*, seems to have been in family use c.1207.²⁵ Although Garin d'Apchier seems to have held lands in the Gévaudan,²⁶ place-names refer to the Vivarais (present Ardèche) region. A certain 'Countess of Béziers and Burlatz' (Witt.12), perhaps the famous patroness at Béziers (c.1171-1190s),²⁷ seems to locate him, as does the mention of En Randos, probably a patron to the Monk of Montaudon and mentioned by Elias de Barjols, who seems to have been based at Châteauneuf (c.1193).²⁸

L'autrier trobei and *Veills Comunal ma tor* share rhyme schemes with Peire Cardenal songs, while *Membrari.us del iornal* (which does not name *Comunal*) refers to Montfort and shares its form with a *vers* by Guiraut Riquier, 'Anc mais'.²⁹ This may suggest that part of the cycle is from the thirteenth century, and refers to the Albigensian conflict. However, *Veills ... ma tor* includes a parodic *contrafactum* of Peire Vidal, while *L'autrier trobei* has no intertextual relations with *Anc no vi Breton ni Bavier* (Lavaud, XLIV).³⁰ Both are probably modelled on a lost *canço*. I prefer to keep a dating c.1195, and to

exclude *Membrari.us* from the cycle, at least, if not from its attribution, since it does not continue the exchange at all.³¹

Geographical names seem specifically to refer to the Vivarais (East of the Gévaudan) and the central region between Largentièrre and Montlaur.³² Stronski suggests the Apchier lords may have been vassals of the Montlaur barons, and that the songs describe a quarrel over dowry-lands in the Vivarais, some distance from the family base in the Gévaudan.

Any attempt to identify Torcafol as a member of the Tournel line must remain unprovable, given the state of the songs' attributions. The name is evidently a sobriquet, derived from *torcar* (for example, the term *torcacul*) punning with the term *tornafollis* or *torcafollis*, referring to fortifications, perhaps a turret.³³ This establishes a suitable balance between coarse mockery, found as a world-upside-down *topos* in the *Roman de Fauvel*, here creating the name 'Wipe-the-Fool's-Arse', and seigneurial warfare.

The cycle consists therefore of a set of attacks on a name inscribed as common ground, between an identifiable nobleman and a speaker using a sobriquet that combines warfare with coarse humour. The songs seem to recount conflicts that hinge on personal ambition and land-grabbing, with frequent references to attacks on monasteries. This seems to have been a popular secular activity in the region at this time.³⁴ Torcafol has a jongleuresque sobriquet, but does not express any solidarity with the jongleurs that are mentioned in the cycle.

The songs are concerned with jongleurs and with the circumstances of composition and performance, as well as with seigneurial ambitions and the management of inherited lands. There are references to attacks on monasteries and to pillage.³⁵ Adultery, maybe a *moilleratz drut* idea is a concern, in the context of old age, the binary opposite of *Joven*.³⁶ The cycle is obsessed with Comunals as 'veills, flacs' and 'rebuzat'. Old age, weakness in fighting and lack of control over language - *rebuzar* is the equivalent of the modern French *radoter*, to ramble or drivel on in conversation³⁷ - are the mirror opposites of the good qualities the songs depend on, youthfulness, vigour in warfare and eloquence (or at least the power to make words effective).

Problems of attribution.

This exposé must take into account the formidable difficulties posed by this cycle's attributions and editions. Most of the texts in Witthoeft's edition suffer from occasionally eccentric punctuation;

Appel's contemporary edition of the songs has proved more helpful in this respect.³⁸ Working with the two editions together, the problems of attribution and manuscripts become a little more manageable.

Appel sought to correct the manuscripts' disagreements by attributing all poems he considered crude to Torcafol, whom he assumes to be a *jongleur*. This leaves Garin d'Apchier with the ownership of the *coblas* and a couple of longer songs, but fails to make the cycle any easier to follow. Pillet-Carstens noted the problem and provided double numbers for most of the songs.³⁹ The outcome may be tabulated in this way:

Table 1.

SONG	G Apch.	Torc	attr. Appel	Manuscripts
Aissi com hom	162, 1			DIK GAP, R anon
Comunal veillz	162, 2	443, 2a	Torcafol	DIK GAP, R anon
L'autrier	162, 3			D, Da GAP.
Mals	162, 4	443, 2b	Torcafol	Da GAP.
Mos Comunals	162, 5	443, 4	Torcafol	DIK GAP, R anon
fragment, <i>vida</i>	162, 6			IK GAP.
Veillz Comunals	162, 7	443, 5	Torcafol	D GAP.
Veillz...ma tor	162, 8			D GAP, IK Tor, R a
Comtor d'Apchier		443, 1		D, Tor, R Co/
Comunal...rima		443, 2		DIKR Tor
Membrari.us		443, 3	GApchier	D GAP, Da Tor

MS R complicates matters further by presenting some of the songs as anonymous and under the rubric '*tenso*'.⁴⁰ Attributions are shared between Torcafol and Garin d'Apchier for two songs, and R, according to Witthoeft, attributes *Comtor d'Apchier* (443,1) to Comunal, introducing a third speaker into the debate.

In recreating the context of transmission, it is necessary to establish some sort of order in the songs. Appel traces a group in the cycle that seems to have been transmitted together (numbered 1, 2 and 3 in table 2, below). The order in performance would have been an attack by Torcafol (1), followed by a reply by Garin d'Apchier (2), each using the *senhal* reciprocally and culminating with Torcafol's victory (3), when he unmasks his opponent and addresses him with his real name. This follows the order in DIKR, if *Comtor* is moved to the end in DR's grouping.

Veill Comunal ma tor (3) shares a rhyme scheme with a set of

coblas, which seems to be composed in answer (4). The longer poem is a *contrafactum* of Peire Vidal's *Aissi viu a gran dolor* (Anglade, XXXVIII), and must come before the *coblas*.⁴¹

Appel suggests a second group (5, 6). The remaining songs and *coblas* are preserved as one group in MS D, and have little direct relation apart from the inclusion of the name Comunal at some point. The cycle seems to dissolve into variations on a theme, of Comunal as a figure associated with jongleurs and disruption, to the point of nonsense (7-10).

The order of the cycle may therefore be tabulated as a set of small exchanges performed in sequence, as follows:

Table 2.

1. Mos Comunals fai ben parer (Garin d'Apchier, 162, 5/ 443, 4).
 2. Veill Comunal ma tor (Garin d'Apchier, 162, 8).
 3. Veillz Comunal, plaides (Torcafol, 162, 7/ 443, 5); 2 *coblas*.
 4. Comtor d'Apchier rebuzat (Torcafol, 443, 1).

 5. Comunal veillz, flacs, plaides (Garin d'Apchier, 162, 2/ 443, 2a).
 6. Comunal en rima clausa (Torcafol, 443, 2).

 7. Aissi com hom (Garin d'Apchier, 162, 1).
 8. Mals albergiers (Torcafol, 162, 4/443, 2b).
 9. L'autrier trobei (Garin d'Apchier, 162, 3).

 10. Membrari.us (Garin d'Apchier/ Torcafol, 443, 3).
-

The long poems are concerned with competition, as each speaker attempts to silence the other via an empty sign, Comunal. The unmasking that structures the first group does not end the exchange, since a set of *coblas* in the same metre take up the challenge again. One interesting feature of the cycle is that insults are repeated from one song to the next, not so much to be developed as to be knocked back and forth, in a rally of accusations. The frequent references to tournaments and board-games in the exchange reinforce the impression of a match.

The *coblas* have a more anarchic feel, as if an established pattern is taken up and used until its potential is exhausted. The accusations are diluted, and fragments of ideas recur, until some of the pieces come to resemble a *fatras* more than a *sirventes*.

In considering the reception of the cycle, it may be useful to assume that the *tenso* rubric in R is not a mistake, but rather reflects an assumption by receptors in the period that such exchanges were dialogues.⁴² There is evidence of such an assumption in *Mos Comunals fai ben parer*:

e non a amic ni seignor
que no.l teingna per enoios
mas tant quant ditz nostras tensos. (vv.8-10)

[And there isn't a friend or a lord who doesn't regard him as annoying except for when he recites our *tensos*.]

The cycle as an exchange: problems of reading and performance.

In *Comunal veills, flacs, plaides*, Garin d'Apchier addresses Torcafol as a composer of bad songs; the two men are attached somehow, since the greater patron he mentions addresses her complaints to him, Garin, rather than the performer, Comunal, masking Torcafol:

Anc un bon mot non fezes
non i ages dos malvas,
per qu'ie.us tolrai vostre ses
mon chan, ab que.us formias,
quar chantatz ab vilania,
que.ill comtessa me.n chastia
que ten Beders e Burlas,
que ditz que vos rebusas. (vv.9-16)

[You never composed a good word but there were two bad there, which is why I shall remove yours without my song, with which you formed yourself, for you sing badly, for the countess reprimanded me for it, who holds Béziers and Burlatz, and says you talk drivel.]⁴³

The idea of Comunal 'forming himself' with a word or a song, appears throughout the cycle. The attack in *Comtor d'Apchier rebuzat* ends on Torcafol removing Apchier's name as a consequence of

reaching the end of the song:

Pos del chantar em al som
aisi. eus desampar lo nom. (vv.33-34)

[Since I am at the end of my singing, in this way I disinherit you of the name.]⁴⁴

The attack on the *comtor* echoes Marcabru's criticisms of Audric in *Senher N'Audric* (Dejeanne, XXb), while presenting him as defeated in the game as well as socially:

Comtor d'Apchier rebuzat
Pos del chan vos ai laissat
recrezut vos lais e mat,
luenh de tota benanansa
vencut de guerr' e sobrat,
comtor mal encompanhat
ab pauc de vin e de blat,
plen d'envey e de carn ransa. (vv.1-8)

[Fallen *Comtor* of Apchier, since I have tired you of the song/singing, I leave you forlorn and mad (or checkmate),⁴⁵ far from any well-being, defeated in war and overcome; ill-allied *comtor*, with little wine or wheat, full of envy (or *enuet*, annoyance) and rancid meat.]

The idea of old age here becomes a direct result of the process of the exchange, as well as an obvious trope for ideological bankruptcy in terms of the courtly lyric. Garin is defeated physically, militarily and in song. The term *mat* brings in the idea of a game. Elsewhere, Torcafol is accused of dominating the board by cheating at dice (*Comunals veill, flacs, plaides*).

The element of competition in the songs hinges on the power each speaker holds over the other via the songs themselves. Garin says he will remove *Comunal ses/ mon chan*, or maybe, remove his *ses*, his mind, with his *chan*, the song structure he has provided for him. *Comunal* is neither Torcafol nor Garin d'Apchier: with the exception

of a mistake in R, he has no existence outside the song, not even in the rubric. In other words, he cannot perform, either as person (Garin) or as *persona* (Torcafol). He can only be addressed, and therefore only exist in the *chan*. This is made explicit in *Comtor d'Apchier rebuzat*, where the speaker says, 'so I remove the name'. Not content with ending the songs by mutilating, anathematizing or burning the addressee, these poets threaten to annihilate him altogether by excluding him from the *chan*, his field of existence.

The cycle develops variations on certain words and ideas. The term *rebuzat/rebusir* is exploited to its full potential, of talking drivel, falling in worth and moving backwards. The idea of locking up land, with extension to *trobar clus* references, may also be traced. Torcafol taunts his addressee by saying that a *clus* poem precludes an answer:

Comunal en rima clausa
on ia no.m respondrez, so.m cuich,
farai serventes aora,
e dirai vostra semblansa. (v.1-4)

[Comunal, in closed rhyme, in which you won't reply to me, I think, I'll compose a *serventes* now, and will speak your description.]⁴⁶

In *Mos Comunals fai ben parer*, the pun is developed; if Comunal is a thief, keeping sheep pasture under lock may make him hesitate. Comunal is a thief of rhyme schemes in the cycle, with one direct borrowing within the exchange (3,4) and heavy appropriation of extant schemes otherwise. The act of making a song impossible to appropriate would therefore constitute both a victory and a means of concluding the exchange:

E s'ieu lo voill ben dechazer,
que.l voilla tolre mon chantar,
ia non er qui.l don a maniar
ni.l voilla albergar un ser.
Per que metrai.l chan dinz seraill,
per qu'el sovent trembl' e badaill;
que la vercheira de sa oissor
vendet, don son gai maint pastor.

Car lai vivi, ab sos lairos,
emblan las fedas e.ls moutos. (vv.11-20)

[And if I want to bring him down well, so that he'll want to remove my singing, there'll not be anyone to give him any food, nor to put him up for the night. Which is why I'll lock up my singing, because of which he often trembles and hesitates; for he sold his wife's dowry-lands, which has made many shepherds happy. For there he lived, with his thieves, stealing the ewes and the sheep.]

A competition is inscribed, since the opponent will wish to 'take away his song' and must therefore be locked out, exiled offstage into the mountains, among unmelodious sheep. The cycle's insults make poetic theft strictly equivalent to sheep-stealing outside the song, and elsewhere to adultery and monastery pillaging. There is a constant shift between text and a set of contexts, all of which are concerned with pilfering.

The references to cutting off songs, and elsewhere skin, nose, or eyes are in keeping with what Méjean calls an obsession with mutilation in the *sirventes personnel*. It could be assumed that this is a lord addressing a professional *jongleur*. This would be reductive, however. The cycle moves across the social sphere; both addressees are variously presented as a *jongleur*, a brigand, a knight and a landowner. Garin d'Apchier may be designated by a full name and noble title, whereas Torcafol has a sobriquet, but the distinctions between them are blurred. It could even be argued that they are two facets of the same speaker; in terms of performance, it is easier, however, to envisage two speakers.⁴⁷

Méjean assumes that references to mutilation are typically addressed to *jongleurs*.⁴⁸ There is no support for this in the songs. Mutilation is more likely to refer to secular punishment for theft or robbery, or to violent conflict. In the cycle, dismemberment is part of the process of outdoing the opponent by symbolic reduction on all fronts.

The songs construct a figure, Comunal, that is on the one hand a lord attacking monasteries (or the leader of a band of men), fallen on hard times with the onset of old age. His army is ridiculous, and has such a bad reputation that it is beset with deserters; it seems to be condemned for its attacks on monasteries. Overall, the accusations

made in the reply are of being a *creba-mostier* of the sort consigned to Hell by Marcabru in *Pus mos coratges s'es clarzitz* (Dejeanne, XL,v.18).⁴⁹ On the other hand, a Comunal emerges who is a court-dwelling *jongleur* and cheat at dice, who depends on lying for his success, but fails to entertain his audience. Throughout, Comunal is the representation of failure; he becomes a figure of failure and disruption, needing no introduction, in the *coblas* :

Aissi com hom tra l'estam
as envers, q'era adreich,
e si cum meno.l carreich
li bou, qant trao.l legnam,
un nou sirventes fai, N'Uc,
de mon Comunal astruc,
qui chascus torna en desdeing
e destorz son entresseing. (vv.1-8)

[As one puts the weaver's chain upside down, that was upright, and as oxen lead the cart, when they carry firewood, I make a new sirventes, Sir Uc,⁵⁰ about my lucky Comunal, who disdains everyone and distorts his emblem (insignia).]

Comunal is created as an object to be described, and excluded from responding. In *Comunal, veills, flacs, plaides*, Garin says he is tired of replying to Comunal's awful songs, 'tant faitz malvais serventes / que del respondre sui las' (vv.3-4) only to specify that these are in fact his own, and that he is directly responsible for their lack of success with the audience (vv.9-16, quoted above). Both speakers devote themselves to silencing a figure they are keen on claiming to have invented in the first place. For Garin d'Apchier, it becomes clear that Comunal may in fact be himself; the other poem does after all accuse him of having dropped the defence of Apchier lands (in *Comunal en rima clausa*, vv.11-13).

Comunal is therefore a scapegoat like the *jongleurs* addressed in the *sirventes joglaresc*, whose names either resemble their addressees, such as Gasc for Gausbert de Poicibot, or who have all the problems impeding any performer's success, such as age, lack of skill, hoarseness, or bad breath. It may be more useful to ask not why a good poet should address a bad *jongleur*, but why a troubadour should

create a 'not-me' figure that happens to resemble him in every respect, except for the name, which is an obvious stage-name, one that conceals another. In the *Comunals* cycle, a pair of speakers concerned with questions of success at court, in warfare and with local pillaging, as well as with success in poetry and a fear of elderly decline, build themselves a pattern that enables them to exercise these questions and, in so doing, to exorcise them by making them vehicles for self-promotion.

Audience reception relies on the consensus that youthfulness (*Joven*), success in arms and poetic supremacy (as troubadour rather than as a despised *jongleur*)⁵¹ are desirable, and constitutive of a social group. The cycle consists of the affirmation in the negative of the ideology of secular, rural landowners, through the creation of a 'not-me' figure with the added advantage of being blank from the start, and therefore polyvalent.

The cycle itself moves around a specific historical figure, region and problems, but overlays them with a tissue of false names, poetic competition, tournaments and game-playing to the extent that attributions and addressees become blurred, and the cycle may be received as an exercise in invective that eventually vanishes into meaningless word-play, with neither winners nor losers, except in terms of the rhetoric of insult.

Table 3: order and metric schemes of the cycle.

1. 162, 5/ 443, 4. *Mos Comunals fai ben parer*, Frank 592, 33. abbacdde, 8... er, ar, aill, or, os. Shares metre and rhymes with R.Vaqueiras, 392, 23, (Linskill, 8). MSS DIKR. SIRVENTES, 5 coblas. GAPchier?

2. 162, 8. *Veill Comunal ma tor*, Frank 74, 1. aaabbc'bc'dddd, 666666'66'6666. or, ir, ia, ic. One of a group of 6 sharing rhymes. Model: P.Vidal, 364,13, (Anglade, 38). MSS DIKR. SIRVENTES, 5 coblas. GAPchier.

3. 162, 7/ 443, 5. *Veillz Comunals plaides*, Frank 74, 5, see above. es, ir, ia, os. The only e.g. of these rhymes. MS D. 2 COBLAS. Torcafol?

4. 443, 1. *Comtor d'Apchier rebuzat*, Frank, 46,3. aaab'aaab', 7777'7777'. at, il, om, ansa. One of 4, but does not share rhymes. No obvious model. MSS D, R SIRVENTES, 5 coblas. Torcafol.

5. 162, 2/443, 2a. *Comunals, veill, flacs, plaides*. Frank, 362, 5, 77777'777, ababc'c'bb. es, às, ia. Closest in form to B.Born, 80, 45, (Paden, 44), c.1191. MSS DIKR. SIRVENTES, 5 coblas. GAPchier.

6. 443, 2. *Comunal, en rima clausa*, Frank, 869,3, abcdefee, 7'87'7'87'88. ausa, uich, ora, ansa, utz. Model: R.Aurenga, 389, 15, (Pattison, 13). MSS DIKR. SIRVENTES, 5 coblas. Torcafol.
 7. 162, 1. *Aissi com hom tra l'estam*, Frank 577, 267. abbaccdd, 7... am, eich, uc, eing. In a group of 7, including P.Vidal, 364, 16 (Anglade, 33) and the exchange between Dalfin d'Alvernhe, 119, 8 and Richard I, 420, 1 (Brackney, 1 and App.A, 1). MS Da. 2 COBLAS. GAPchier?
 8. 162, 4/ 443, 2b. *Mals albergiers dinarada defen*, Frank 352, 1. ababcbc, 10... en, ut, al. Only other e.g., Cercamon, 112, 1b (Jeanroy, 2), is not related in metre. MS Da. 1 COBLA. Torcafol?
 9. 162, 3. *L'autrier trobei lonc un foguier*, Frank 496, 2, abbaacca, 8... ier, es, er. Shares rhymes with P.Cardenal, 335, 5 (Lavaud, 44, p.260). MSS D, Da. 3 COBLAS. GAPchier?
 10. 443, 3. *Membrari.us del iornal*, Frank 592, 57, abbccdde'e', 77777777', al, os, ais, an, udā. Frank is doubtful about the scheme. Close to G.Riquier *vers*, 248, 12 (Pfaff, 41). MSS D (GAp), Da (Tor). 1 COBLA. Uncertain date and attribution.
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NOTES.

¹ Alfred Jeanroy, *La Poésie lyrique des troubadours*, 2 vols, Toulouse 1934, II, pp.182-99, especially pp.182-84 and Suzanne Méjean (sic. in this reference), 'Contribution à l'étude du *sirventes* joglaresc', in *Mélanges de philologie romane dédiés à Jean Boutière*, 2 vols, Liège 1971, I, pp. 377-95. Her *thèse d'état*, (published as Suzanne Thiolier-Méjean) is concerned essentially with moralizing poetry and does not study the *sirventes* personnel. She suggests that the *sirventes* may have originated as personal attack, which was subsequently refined to address political and moral issues, *Les Poésies satiriques et morales des troubadours: du XIIIe à la fin du XIIIe siècle*, Paris 1978, pp.23-24, 29. I have not yet had access to her latest publication, *La Poétique des troubadours: Trois Etudes sur le sirventes*, Paris 1993.

² Pierre Bec, *Burlesque et obscénité chez les troubadours: pour une approche du contre-texte médiéval*, Paris 1984 Karen Wilk Klein, *The Partisan Voice: A Study of the Political Lyric in France and Germany, 1180-1230*, The Hague, Paris 1971, pp.37-49.

³ C.P. Flynn, *Insult and Society*, Port Washington 1977. This short study summarizes much disparate research by establishing certain common patterns and *functions*, while noting there is next to no universal *form* of insult, p.15-20; see pp.39-44 for models of social stratification through insult.

⁴ Emmert M. Brackney, *A Critical Edition of the Poems of Dalphin d'Alvernhe*, PhD. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1936, 1 and Appendix A, 1 (p.31). See also pp.xxxviii-xli for an account of Dalphin's 'poetic tilts'.

⁵ Martin de Riquer, *Guillem de Berguedà*, 2 vols, Abadía de Poblet 1971, II, nos. I-III, V-VI (Peire de Berga), X-XIII (Ponç de Mataplana), VII-IX (Urgel).

⁶ René Lavaud, *Les Poésies complètes du troubadour Peire Cardenal*, Toulouse 1957, nos XVI, XXVI, XXVII.

⁷ See note 5 for references.

⁸ Martin Aurell, *La Vielle et l'épée: troubadours et politique en Provence au XIIIe siècle*, Paris 1989, pp. 89-91, notes a 'théâtralisation des conflits' is a constant function of insult exchanges.

⁹ *La Poésie lyrique*, II, pp.247-58.

¹⁰ *The Poems of the Troubadour Bertran de Born*, ed. William D. Paden, Tilde Sankovitch and Patricia H. Stäblein, Berkeley 1986, nos. 21, 22, dated c.1183.

¹¹ See de Riquer, *Guillem*, I, pp. 56-67, especially 56-7.

¹² *Ibid.* II, pp. 7-26, especially the table, p.10. MSS D, IK have 15-17 songs in all, against Sg's 4, of which 2 are unica. The *vida* is in MSS A,IK only.

¹³ Bertran's *razos* are transmitted in MSS F,IK. IK has no *razos* for Guillem's corpus. One *cobla* attributed to Guillem (de Riquer, XVI) is transmitted in a *razo* for Bertran de Born, 80, 35 (Paden, 22); this may indicate that the two poetic oeuvres were transmitted together at some point. On the basis of a rapid overview of the editors' notes, it seems that Bertran's corpus is also more represented in the thirteenth-century Italian strand than in the later Languedoc tradition (@ 35/47 against @ 23/47).

¹⁴ This phrase is a key element in Robert Elliott's influential argument that satirical invective is directly related to the archaic curse; here, an allusion by the playwright to the legend that Irish poets killed rats by cursing them, see *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*, Princeton 1960, p.36, p.47, from Jonson's *Poetaster*, which also refers to Ovid's violent curse-poem, *Ibis*, p.127.

¹⁵ These songs are re-edited by Roncaglia in 'I due sirventesi di Marcabruno ad Alfonso VII', *Cultura Neolatina* 10, 1950, 153-83.

¹⁶ Friedrich Witthoeft, *Sirventes joglaresc: ein Blick auf der*

altfranzösische Spielmannsleben, Marburg 1891, nos. 12-21, pp.55-65.

¹⁷ Méjean, 'Contribution', p.395; see pp.378-80 for discussion of problems of definition. Stanislas Stronski reached a similar conclusion after his examination of the cycle in 'Recherches historiques sur quelques protecteurs des troubadours', *Annales du Midi*, 19, 1907, 40-56, 54.

¹⁸ See, for example, *Comunal*, *veillz, flacs, plaides*, vv.1-4, *L'autrier trobei*, stanza 1.

¹⁹ See *Comunal en rima clausa*, vv.17-40, *Mos Comunals fai ben parer*, vv.21-50.

²⁰ Levy lists a number of different meanings for the term, *PSW*, I, pp.313-14, but all carry a sense of 'communality', or 'common-placedness'.

²¹ Witthoeft, *Sirventes*, pp.21-28, 35-37.

²² See table 3 at the end of this paper.

²³ Jean Boutière and A.H. Schutz, *Biographies des troubadours: Textes provençaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, 2nd edition, with I.-M. Cluzel, Paris 1964, LIII, pp.343-4, MSS IK. Jeanroy disputes this claim in *La Poésie lyrique*, II, p.330, n.2.

²⁴ Boutière and Schutz, *Biographies*, p.343.

²⁵ 'Comtor, parvus comes', v.2840 in *The Donatz Proensals of Uc Faidit*, ed. John Marshall, London 1969; a rank beneath viscount and above *seigneur*. For a discussion of the etymology and use of this title, which appears simultaneously in Catalonia and Auvergne c.1060, see Stronski, 'Protecteurs', p.53; Jean Anglade, *Histoire de l'Auvergne*, Paris 1986, p.96; Christian Lauranson-Rosaz, *L'Auvergne et ses marges du VIIIe au XIe siècle: la fin du monde antique?*, Le Puy-en-Velay 1987, pp.112-13, 337-38; Pierre Bonnassie, *La Catalogne: du milieu du Xe à la fin du XIe siècle*, 2 vols, Toulouse 1976, II, pp.785-89. Witthoeft's interpretation of the term as a *commanderie* leader, *Sirventes*, p.35, is erroneous.

²⁶ See the *vida*, p.343. Linda Paterson summarizes the Auvergne poetic field in *The World of the Troubadours*, Cambridge 1993, p.96.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p.98. Her fictional title appears in Arnaut de Maruelh's *vida*, Boutière and Schutz, *Biographies*, VII, pp.32-3.

²⁸ Stronski, 'Quelques protecteurs', pp.50-54.

²⁹ This song is not edited by U. Mölk in *Guiraut Riquier: Las Cansos*, Heidelberg 1962, but is n. 41 in S. Pfaff, *Werke Guiraut Riquiers*, Berlin 1853, vol.4 of Mahn's *Werke des Troubadours*, 4 vols., Berlin 1846-53. See table 3 at the end of this paper.

³⁰ Lavaud, *Peire Cardenal*, pp.260-67. The scheme is also used, with different rhymes, in *Tan vei lo segle cobeitos* (XXXIII), pp.200-04. Lavaud thinks Garin d'Apchier's *sirventes* is the model for Peire's, but given the peculiarity of this piece, this is unlikely.

³¹ This song seems anomalous also in that its metrical form may be borrowed from a Guiraut Riquier *canço*, Frank, 592, 57, as is suggested by Thiolier-Méjean, *Poésies*, p.53, n.5. It may therefore be a much later piece, though its presence in MS D and Da (Witthoeft's terminology) does not place it much later than c.1254.

³² *Histoire du Vivarais*, ed. Gérard Cholvy, Toulouse 1988, see map pp.90-91.

³³ PSW, VIII, pp. 282, 298, 'eine Art Befestigungswerk'. The form *tornafollis* occurs in c.1348, cited in Du Cange, *Glossarium*, VIII, p.128, defined as 'Propugnaculi genus'.

³⁴ Anglade, *Histoire*, p.96.

³⁵ See *Mos Comunals fai ben parer*, which contains all these elements.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, vv.41-50, mocks Comunal for his impotence, 'Anz lo pot laisser domneiar/ Et estar ab leis a lezer' (43-44).

³⁷ In the *Petit Dictionnaire*, p.316, Levy is doubtful about this definition, but certain of the additional senses: 'reculer; empirer; radoter?'. For *rebuzat*, he gives 'déchu, dépravé'. Overall, the word displays a multiplicity of meanings.

³⁸ All with the exception of *Comunals en rima clausa* are edited in 'Poésies provençales inédites tirées des manuscrits d'Italie', *Revue des Langues Romanes*, 34, 1890, 5-35, pp.12-30. The Torcafols poem is in *Provenzalische Inedita: aus Pariser Handschriften*, Leipzig 1890, pp.305-07.

³⁹ Alfred Pillet, Henry Carstens, *Bibliographie der Troubadours*, Halle 1933, pp.136-37 and 402-03.

⁴⁰ 162, 1; 162, 2/443, 2a; 162,5/443, 4 and 162,8. The exception is 443,1, which according to Witthoeft is attributed to Comunal.

⁴¹ Peire Vidal refers to Montlaur as a *domna's* lands in *Pos ubert ai mon ric tezaur* (Anglade, XLV), dated c.1205, v.25. Ernest Hoepffner identifies this woman as Eleanor of Aragon, countess of Toulouse c.1204 onwards in *Le Troubadour Peire Vidal: sa vie et son oeuvre*, Paris 1961, pp.174-77. D'Arco Silvio Avalle in his edition of the song, accepts previous identifications by De Bartolomaeis and Schultz-Gora with Adelasia, the

wife of Manfred II de Saluzzo, but does not explain the link with Montlaur, *Peire Vidal: Poesie*, Milan, Naples, 1960, II, p.291. A *tenso* with Blacatz, also from the c.1192-1205 period, includes the lines (my italics) 'Blacatz, no tenh ges vostre sen per bo/ Quar anc partits plait tan *descomunal*/Qu'eu ai bo sen e fin e natural/En tot afar, per que par be qui so' (Anglade, XLIV, vv.9-12), in answer to Blacatz' criticism of being *velhs*, old (v.6).

⁴² In discussion after this paper was presented, Dr John Marshall pointed out that the rubrics in MS R use the term *tenso* to refer to debate and disputes, for example applying it to exchanges of *coblas*. I am grateful for this clarification.

⁴³ All citations from the cycle in Appel's version, unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁴ PSW, II, pp.212-13, gives a legal definition of *dezamparar* as disinheriting a wife or children. The cycle's concern with selling a wife's dowry lands (*Mals albergiers*, *Mos Comunals*, v.29) seems to confirm such a reading. Otherwise, the sense of abandoning or giving up would seem to apply: the speaker makes GAPchier abandon the name.

⁴⁵ PSW, V, p.140 gives *mat* as either heavy and compact, or mad. I prefer the second sense. The FEW, 6.i., pp.518-24, gives a range of definitions, including dull, weary and flaccid, as well as insane. The *Petit Robert*, p.1164, notes the Arabic-derived term *mât*, 'dead', for 'checkmate'.

⁴⁶ Levy, PSW, VII, pp.547-50, gives a broad range of definitions, all of which carry a sense of external appearance or likeness, including (p.548) that of proverbial (fictional?) devices in didactic works. *La sua semblansa* (p.549) means 'himself', but the sense in this poem seems to be of appearance, or perhaps 'the type of person you are'.

⁴⁷ In discussion after this paper was read, it was suggested that Torcafol could serve as a cover name for a number of poets, in the event that this cycle was a game pursued over time, with the constant participation of Garin d'Apchier. This hypothesis is unverifiable, but may explain these songs' insistence on the speakers' presence (there are no references to the songs being sent to the interlocutor), if a space is provided for one poet to take over from another *in situ*.

⁴⁸ Méjean, 'Contribution', p.384.

⁴⁹ The IK, C, E texts all have this term. Version A gives 'rauba-mostier', which confirms the sense of 'monastery-looter'.

⁵⁰ Witthoeft's text. Appel gives 'ailluc', which I do not understand. Neither note any variants. I have opted for Witthoeft's version as a *lectio*

facilior, but am aware that the MS itself may hold further surprises.

⁵¹ On the vexed question of the status of the *jongleur*, see Ruth Harvey's article, 'Joglars and the professional status of the early troubadours', *Medium Aevum*, 62, 1993, 221-41. The dating of this cycle corresponds to a period before the professionalisation of the *jongleur* traced by Aurell in the Provence and Barcelona court, but there seems to be an association of the idea of a *jongleur* with a manual worker, or a gambler, in other words, with *vilania*.