2 Foix's Fragmentary Quest for Total Knowledge

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2.1 Experimental Essays of the Modern Intellectual: "Meridians"

Foix was an engaged poet and, for the first half of his life, a very active public commentator. In 1922, the birth of a new political movement and the usual resorts of modern propaganda provided him with a platform for his political columns and literary critiques. Foix became the director of the cultural section of the old newspaper *La Publicidad*, recently acquired by Acció Catalana, a political faction that aspired to rejuvenate and reunite both progressive and moderate Catalan nationalists. The rebaptized *La Publicitat* served as a partisan newspaper throughout Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-30) and the Second Spanish Republic (1931-39), and its activities ceased when the fascist army occupied Barcelona in January 1939. *La Publicitat* disappeared forever, and with it most of the poet's chances to agitate public opinion.

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Foix's contributions to *La Publicitat* included foreign and local press reviews, political commentaries, passionate articles about aeronautics, occasional poetic pieces, book reviews, and short essays on literature and philosophy. He grouped his articles under different headers, depending on their common themes, and between December 1928 and October 1932, he wrote almost four hundred pieces under the title "Meridians". These brief notes were either anonymous or signed by a stylized, pseudo-classical form of their author's surname: 'Focius'. Usually consisting of a collage of literal quotations and paraphrases from other poets, artists, and intellectuals, Foix regarded the "Meridians" as gateways towards the global marketplace of ideas. The notions and events he curated were intended to engage in ongoing aesthetic or moral discussions. His goal was to widen the horizons of his readers and, at the same time, gain a foothold in international literary, artistic, and philosophical debates.

To the poet, the term 'Meridian' referred to the influence exerted by a cultural irradiation center, a city or an entire culture, over another city or culture that depended on it (Guerrero 1996, 177). The immediate antecedent of this meaning is to be found in the 1927 public polemic between two intellectual circles based on both sides of the Atlantic. On the one hand, Jorge Luis Borges and the contributors of the magazine *Martín Fierro* (1924-27), and on the other, Guillermo de Torre's circle at *La Gaceta Literaria* (1927-32). The former questioned the cultural ascendancy of Madrid and Spain over Latin America and sought to counterbalance it by emphasizing their intellectual affinity with French and Italian cultural *milieus* (Fleming 2010; cf. Martí Monterde 2024).

The choice of the word 'Meridian' was also forcibly mediated by Foix's predilection for the Latin world, which had been framed for decades – for example, by Jean Moréas and Charles Maurras' École Romane – as the intellectual antithesis of Northern European aesthetics. Foix wished for Catalan culture to become an autonomous node in the modern, Romance cultural net. One of his strategies, in that regard, was to assert the family resemblance and continuity within the medieval literary heritage of Western Mediterranean, ranging from Occitan troubadours and Tuscan poets to Catalan, Balearic, and Valencian writers. He owned a copy of Jean Moréas' *Réflexions sur quelques Poètes* (Mercure de France, 1912),[1] in which the author introduced his reflections on Petrarch with verses by Vauquelin de la Fresnaye, a sixteenth-century poet, to emphasize the Occitan-Catalan origins of Romance splendor:

1 *Foi-8-501*, BNC, Biblioteca de Catalunya. Barcelona.

> De notre Catalane ou langue provençale
> La langue d'Italie et d'Espagne est vassale
> Et ce qui fit priser Pétrarque le mignon
> C'est la grâce des vers qu'il prit en Avignon. (Moréas 1912, 50)[2]

On March 18th, 1932, the pseudonym Focius wrote a "Meridian" about some passage he had read ten years earlier. He reviewed "an article by Dora Marsden about 'Art and philosophy' that appeared in *The Egoist*":

> Marsden's point of view was that the artists express themselves obscurely because they have nothing to say that would allow them to be clear. […] If art and philosophy must shape life, they will have to institute the criteria that separates the real from the appearance. For Marsden, this proof is clarity. ("Art i filosofia", 18-03-1932, 3)

According to Enric Bou, Foix's patchwork functioned as a negative of his own aesthetic thought (Bou 2024, 56-9). His paraphrases highlighted his concern about clarity in poetic expression. With Marsden's words, Foix attacked the vagueness and mimicry of the "vane artist": "genius minds explain; they do not conceal, they offer themselves" ("Art i filosofia", 3). Several aspects of this seemingly inconsequential note are significant and will prove relevant throughout this study. Above all, the exact meaning of the pair 'obscurity' and 'clarity' in the hands of a poet so often regarded as a *sui generis* hermetic surrealist. But also, the relationship between poetry and life, or, to follow Foix's own fragments by Marsden, the role of poetry – alongside philosophy – in shaping life. And the complex criteria for distinguishing the real from appearances, one of the oldest philosophical debates of the West, which he approached with an expanded claim to reality that included appearances but required a renewed creative habit.

In a previous "Meridian", for example, Foix followed Philippe Soupault's arguments in favor of the fantastic in literature, and specifically in favor of the role it played in popular dime novels and *feuilletons*, featuring detective Nick Carter or crime mastermind Fantômas, inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's "wonderful poetry". These contrasted with English crime fiction – chiefly that of Arthur Conan Doyle:

> We must deplore – Soupault adds – that this trend of mediocre and mechanically written novels will hinder the arrival of the fantastic modern that had been glimpsed. In the age of photography, we cannot be imposed a reality that is just apparently real. We want to see, not believe. The literary, musical, cinematographic-pictural

2 "From our Catalan or Provençal language | the language of Italy and of Spain is vassal | and what made the young Petrarch remarkable | was the grace of the verses he learnt in Avignon".

> arts request today's fantastic, that nobody has yet been able to discern. ("Del fantàstic", 26-11-1929, 5)

Over a month later, Foix returned to the same topic, in a review of Emmanuel Berl's invective against Leibniz's systematism. Berl defended denegation as a form of resistance to universal constructs, championing poetry's engagement with sensory hallucinations as the only viable alternative:

> Lacking the energy to accept the annihilation of the object it observes, the eye closes, and only the poet is able to perceive the emergence of a universal, against which his dreaming protests. ("Només el poeta", 04-01-1930, 5)

These few examples showcase the centrality of appearances in Foix's reflections on poetry. The real provided by realists, photographers, or systematists seemed insufficient for an eye attuned to the sensory, the phantastic, and, above all, the fragmentary. Foix was, like other modernists, concerned about the impossible conjunction of lived experience and the "metonymic quality" of artistic and scientific realism, defined by Moritz Baßler (2018, 4) as the "total and automatic dependence on well-established linguistic, cultural and generic frames that enable a kind of automatic understanding". This concern echoed Nietzsche's warning in *The Gay Science*, whose aphorisms and seemingly disconnected fragments link, however, creative practice and a sacrificial form of speculation:

> *Life not an argument.* – We have arranged for ourselves a world in which we are able to live – by positing bodies, lines, planes, causes and effects, motion and rest, form and content; without these articles of faith no one could endure living! But that does not prove them. Life is not an argument; the conditions of life might include error. (Nietzsche 2001, § 121, 117)

Derived from presocratic *gnōmai* (γνῶναι), proverbial literature, Pascal's *Pensées*, and other popular and erudite sources of wisdom from the West and the East, the apotheosis of fragment as a genre and vehicle for the communication of philosophical ideas occurred during Romanticism, as Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenäums-fragmente* (1798) showcase. Fragmentarism antagonized the architectonic philosophical systems of the Enlightenment:

> Confronted with the problem of *Darstellung* – how to construct an adequate representation of transcendental knowledge – the Romantics insisted that the only possible manner of doing so was in parts. (Hui 2019, 418)

Beyond the aesthetics of juxtaposition, common to several strands of the historical avant-gardes and to modernists, from Woolf to Borges, or the poetics of pseudonymity in Pessoa, Cendrars, and Jacob, among others (cf. Martens 2017), ineludible fragmentarism also informs philosophical and aesthetic radical innovations, such as Benjamin's *Denkbilder* and Heidegger's existentialism.[3]

Foix's works pendulate between two contradictory poles: on the one hand, the creative will to compose a poetic image of himself and the world that avoids the constraints of insufficient realism. Such an effort would validate poetry's heuristic and moral value in the construction of new ways of relating to oneself and others. On the other hand, however, the looming and unavoidable, even certified, experience of the futility of his purpose. Fragments will hardly ever allow the poet to attain any stable vision of totality beyond themselves (cf. Bou 2024, 24-5). An approach to Foix's poetic objects as fragments will unfold throughout the following two chapters, but his long-standing poetic project, the *Diari 1918* (*Daybook 1918*) is also noteworthy in this regard, because it will help contextualize the two mentioned creative poles, as well as their connective tissue – namely, the poetry research.

2.2 Elusive Personality in the Unfinished, Total Project: *Daybook 1918*

In 1981, the nearly eighty-year-old Foix agreed to the publication of a book titled *Daybook 1918*. Some years earlier, the publishing house Edicions 62 had launched a popular and widely distributed collection titled *The best works of Catalan literature* (MOLC), directed by Joaquim Molas, an influential scholar and critic. Volume 31 of MOLC (1980) was an anthology of Foix's poetry in verse, selected by the poet and critic Pere Gimferrer, who had written the first book-length study about his poetry in 1974. This *Daybook 1918*, volume 67 of the collection, included a substantial selection of prose poems taken from his books and periodical publications.

The title *Daybook 1918* had been an enigmatic presence, mostly in the form of absence, at least since Foix's first published book, *Gertrudis* (L'Amic de les Arts, 1927). In it, some prose texts were gathered under a section titled "Daybook 1918 (Fragments)". Three

3 Far from being a closed matter, in the second half of the twentieth century, the epistemic constitution and value of the fragment, as well as the presumed ontological primacy of the whole, have been critically scrutinized by a plurality of voices and traditions encompassing philosophers of history and art, such as Theodor W. Adorno (2005, 18), original, creative essayists such as Édouard Glissant (1990, 103-45), and poets like Anne Carson (2005), to name just a few examples.

sections of his second book, *KRTU* (L'Amic de les Arts, 1932), were also drawn from this personal diary, according to the author (cf. Veny-Mesquida 2004, 27). Decades later, Foix published *From "Daybook 1918"* (Joaquim Horta, 1956), prefaced by a prologue called "The Author's New Reasons":

> *The poems – likenesses or appearances – collected in this book are fragments of the "Daybook 1918", which consists of 365 short prose texts.* (*DD18*, 187)[4]

His subsequent books of prose poems, *The Star of Mr. Perris* (Fontanella, 1963), *Darrer comunicat* (Last Communiqué [Edicions 62, 1970]), and *Near at hand…* (Edicions 62, 1972), were also partial installments of the unknown diary. The 1981 edition of *Daybook 1918* included only 203 texts, however, and the poet often wondered whether other poems, old and new, might also belong to it (Bou 2024, 124-8). The poet's grand project, coveted by editors, publishers, and readers, would remain unfinished and, above all, shrouded in philological mystery and speculative interest.

Scholars agree that in his youth, between roughly 1909 and 1925, Foix scribbled diaristic entries in some notebooks, collecting anecdotes, visions, and thoughts. In many cases, these were early drafts of prose poems that he would later revise and publish. The reason to fixate 1918 as the date of the diary was never clarified, but it coincided with the year of the poet's first mature publication: "Peculiar Narration", an oneiric short text that appeared in the magazine *Trossos* on March 1918 and would later be included, after revision, in *Gertrudis*, as "Plaça Catalunya – Pedralbes" (*G*, 21).

These personal notebooks ended up becoming a myth, and friends and critics alike long wondered whether they contained a complete and accurate version of a *Daybook 1918* that was allegedly forthcoming. At some point between 1974 and 1980, when inquired by Molas and others about the possibility of publishing the notebooks, he burned them (cf. Quintana i Trias, Bou 2020). In addition to the reasonable doubt that these papers do not constitute a complete diary of the year 1918, the poet's deliberate imprecision in the identification, ordering, and attribution of the materials belonging to his long-standing project is a particularly interesting phenomenon. Bou contends that the poet's statements regarding *Daybook 1918* should be approached with skepticism, as Foix's poetic ideal might precisely require the project to remain both present and absent at once (Bou 2024, 128).

4 Guerrero (1996, 84) and Bou (2024, 43) have suggested that this number references other poetic annual cycles valued by Foix, such as Petrarch's *Canzoniere* or Ramon Llull's *Llibre d'amic e amat* (Book of the Lover and the Beloved).

The prose poems in *Gertrudis*, *KRTU*, *From "Daybook 1918"*, *The Star of Mr. Perris*, *Last Communiqué*, and *Near at Hand…* are not diaristic entries *stricto sensu*. As the editors and commentators have abundantly pointed out, they are neither dated nor written in 1918 (Veny-Mesquida 2004, 153-63; Bou 2024, 128-31). According to Antoni Martí Monterde (1998, 185), the productive persistence of the unfinished *Daybook 1918* implies a constant reassessment of the ways to dwell within the poetic word. Under this prism, the prose texts of the diary, just like the "Meridians" did with loan words, produce and discover new poetic objects, images, and thoughts. Their aim would be to satisfy the poet's desperate need of comprehension, regarding both his own personal identity and his poetic endeavor. With reference to Pessoa's posthumous *Livro do desassossego* (1982), whose blurred boundaries and multiple different editions let critics and readers enjoy a dense and intercommunicated web of texts, Bou highlights the kaleidoscopic nature presented by *Daybook 1918*, with the aid of Martí Monterde's words on the poet's fragmentarism:

> *Daybook 1918* is an unfinished work, a living work open to many readings and readers, not a lie, but containing a truth defined by Antoni Martí's words: "every prose text of the *Diari 1918* – we should rather say each one of Foix's poems, even – constitutes a fragment of an infinite experience, a sort of a brief adventure that hosts, in its fragmentary condition, all the elements of the global reflection to which it is incardinated" (Bou 2024, 134-5; Martí Monterde 1998, 147).

The incompletion of *Daybook 1918*, and its indetermination, are a reminder of the role that fragmentarism plays in Foix's aesthetics, on the one hand. On the other, this book also represents a creative bind between his literary production and his journalistic endeavor, which, as the "Meridians" showcase, relied on the accumulation of images and intuitions – both personal and borrowed – in a sincere effort to engage with reality through nuanced, intricate, and profoundly real, albeit fragmentary, poetic objects. This is perhaps the most relevant creative feature of Foix's poetry research, as a closer inspection of his poetry will precise.

2.3 Allusive Clarifications? Two Lullian Epigraphs in *The Unreal Omegas*

2.3.1 Real and Fantastic Likenesses

Foix rarely commented on the precise meaning of this or that other image in his puzzling poems, but his friends and interpreters continually asked him to reveal the factual details that had generated the verbal miracle. Instead, Foix introduced his works with very carefully selected, allusive paratexts. These offer interpretive clues that are as hermetical as the verses themselves. In addition to prologues and proemial words, as well as erudite and popular epigraphs, among these paratexts are long prose titles for some poems. All thirteen poems in his second book of verses, *The Unreal Omegas* (L'Amic de les Arts, 1949), are preceded by these long narrative titles. The second poem of the collection bears a remarkably straightforward and yet enigmatic title:

> CREIXELLS AND I MAPPED, AT DUSK, THE OROGRAPHY OF IMAGINARY PLANETS AFTER DEBATING THE CHRONOLOGY OF PLATO'S "DIALOGUES". AS WE STARTED THE MOTORCYCLE TO HEAD BACK HOME, PALMIRA ARRIVED, WEARING AN EXTRAVAGANT CRIMSON VELVET DRESS, AND THROUGH FALSE ROUTES AND LIFTING BRIDGES, SHE LED ME TO THE BALL (*LIO*, 2: 118)

Taken literally, no element of this title is especially fantastic. The sudden accumulation of events with no precise narrative coherence, however, hints at the images being successive, non-linear, dream-like appearances. *The Unreal Omegas* is often considered Foix's most densely symbolic work. Its poems are formally diverse, but they are preceded by a short text called "Excuses". The poet declared that the long prose titles are the actual prologue of the volume and that, by using them, he "tries to clarify the intention" of each composition (*LIO*, 115). In the "Excuses", he addressed the fragmentary condition of the selection, which appears connected to his way of understanding the poetic endeavor as a form of research:

> *The 13 poems included in this book are part of a larger collection. The author, who does not dare to alter, for the time being, his position as a poetry researcher, by favoring their inclusion in two volumes, believes he is facilitating their reading and, hopefully, their understanding.* (*LIO*, 115)

The poet's preoccupation with the possibility of being understood reveals that his research is no solitary enterprise, but that its communicative outcome is crucial. Right after these "Excuses", moreover, Foix created yet another intermediary instance between the readers and his poems by reproducing two quotations of the Majorcan medieval philosopher and theologian Ramon Llull (1232-1316).[5] These two epigraphs refer to the issue of comprehension and, more particularly, allude to the obscurity that looms over the processes of comprehension. As the critics have abundantly pointed out, this theme is nuclear to Foix's poetics in *The Unreal Omegas* and throughout his works, but a closer examination of the citations will provide introductory remarks about the position of his poetic objects in the axis clarity-obscurity.

The first epigraph reads:

> *From real likenesses descend fantastic ones, just like accidents, which depart from substance.* (*LIO*, 116)

It is drawn from the fourth book of the *Tree of Science* (Rome, 1295-96), the "Imaginal Tree". This whole 'tree' is, according to Llull, "about likenesses and impressions" (Llull 1917, 4: 151). Llull is a philosopher best known for having invented a combinatorial device, the *Art of Finding Truth*, with which anyone could, allegedly, answer the questions of all sciences without any further authoritative support, whether scholastic or biblical, and so discover and argue for the sustained presence of God in the creation. The underlying operative mechanisms of his *Art* required the user, or *artista*, to align all faculties of the soul, namely intellect, memory, and will, to the adoration of God, that is, to his intellection, recollection, and love. Thus, the philosopher envisaged a practical way of moving humankind to contemplation and of providing rational arguments to strengthen the foundations of Christian faith against heathens and disbelievers.

In the *Tree of Science*, Llull addressed the various sources and faculties involved in human understanding. The imaginal tree comes after the elemental, the vegetal, and the sensual trees, and while these three are 'real', the fourth one correlates with them analogously in form and function:

> The imaginative power, therefore, constitutes the point of contact between material reality and the rational soul and its organ is, in fact, situated between the anterior and posterior parts of the

5 Ramon Llull's sizeable influence on Foix has been addressed by Molas (1992), Rosselló Bover (2016), Cabré (2017), and Bou (2024), and has been the subject of my doctoral dissertation (Castella-Martinez 2023).

> brain, being all of a piece with the organs of sense, with the intellect and with memory. (Rubio 2008, 384)

In a pedagogical treatise known as *Doctrina pueril* (1274-76), Llull addressed the twofold function of imagination:

> [T]he soul with the imagination takes and puts in common everything offered to it by the five bodily senses, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, and offers it in fantasy to the intellect. (Llull 2005, 85, 5: 233)

Amador Vega (2002, 90), commenting on this paragraph, highlighted that these two moments of the imaginal activity correspond to a "reproductive or synthetic" stage, which collects "everything offered to it by the five bodily senses", and a "productive or creative" moment – in modern terminology –, in which a unique image is delivered in fantasy, which would be the site of the beginning of intellections: the images of fantasy become thus indispensable elements to processes of intellection and contemplation.

Llull's cosmovision, his contextual specificities, and his expressive needs, are of course very different from Foix's, and the quotations reflect that: he willingly altered their punctuation and decontextualized them to emphasize what was at stake for him personally in them. It is worth noting that, in the Lullian text, Foix finds an argument for the continuity between imagination and reality. The imaginative faculty discovers the potential presence of its own products in reality, with the aid of the senses. The fundamental hypothesis of this study regarding Foix's poetics is that he refuses to separate reality and fantasy into two binary, opposite planes. This is defended by the poet to Clara Sobirós in the celebrated letter that opened his *Obres poètiques* (*Poetic Works* [Nauta, 1964]), which is both a paratext and a poetic text by its own right:

> *[A]lways remember that I'm a witness to what I tell of, and that the real, from with I depart and live, with my insides burning as you know, and the unreal that you think you'll find there, are the same. Just as you are another and there are two of you – or more – and you have and are known by a single name: Clara*. (*LCS*, 5-6; Rosenthal, 3-4)[6]

Patricia J. Boehne (1980, 129) argued for the stylistic relevance of this passage:

6 This letter, written in 1964, reflects Foix's deep affection for the pseudonymous "Clara Sobirós", an experience he described as akin to "total love", as Carme Sobrevila, who published other writings addressed to "Clara", has explained (Sobrevila 1998).

> This 1964 statement summarizes Foix's personal ideas on his own style. He has bared his intimate preoccupations within the context of an *exemplum*, glossing his prose within the actual composition in an artful manipulation of multiplicity.

But the functional analogy between imagination and the other powers of the soul, and their relationship of filiation, only complicates the poet's terms regarding the difficulty of understanding his poetry, as well as the difficulty of understanding poetry at all.

When Friedrich Nietzsche recalled, in *The Gay Science*, that reality does not admit separation between the fantastic and the human, he also pointed out that naming was to be understood as a creative power "in order to *destroy* the world that counts as 'real', so-called 'reality'!", because "it is enough to create new names and valuations and appearances of truth in order to create new 'things'" (Nietzsche 2001, § 58, 70). If Foix perceived all poetization as a product of fantasy filiated from reality, a subsequent interrogation would follow, regarding the real nature of the fantastic likenesses that poetry tries to contain and aspires to understand. To Gaston Bachelard, all forms of dreaming are practical confirmations of the existence and unity of the real world, as revealed by the creative power: "I dream the world, therefore the world exists in the manner I dream it" (Bachelard 1968, 136; cf. Vogl 2015). Foix thematized this thought, among many other places, in his first book of poems, *Alone, and Mourning* (L'Amic de les Arts, 1947), together with a nuanced distance and prudence:

> And to walk through the shady dell,
> To listen to the whimpers of dews
> And to ask myself, doubtful, what is fictitious:
> The ravenous senses – smell, touch and eye
> That make my life gay – or the number, raw,
> And dry, and naked in divine nakedness?
> (*SIDD*, "At a Smooth Field…", 84, vv. 7-11)

2.3.2 Obscure Likenesses and Lofty Understanding

Turning now to the second of the Lullian epigraphs that open *The Unreal Omegas*, the unresolved relationship between reality and imagination is explicitly linked to the problem of comprehension. It reads:

> *The darker the likeness, the higher understands the intellect that understands the likeness* (*LIO*, 116)

This quotation is extracted from a novel called *Book of Wonders* (Paris, 1287-1289), usually known by the name of its protagonist,

Fèlix. This book follows Fèlix on a journey as he encounters hermits, sages and other wise people who share with him vast and detailed knowledge about the world and God. The peculiarity of this novel is that, just like in the "Exemplifying Tree", the fifteenth of the *Tree of science* (Llull 1923, 15, 341-448), all knowledge is rendered by way of exemplifying likenesses and moral narrations. The recurring narrative mechanism revolves around Fèlix's awe and astonishment at the wonders of the world and his unquenchable desire to understand it, fulfilled by the other characters.

At one point in the second chapter of the novel, Fèlix asks a hermit, "What is the being of the angel, and what is the thing that the angel is" (Llull 2011, 2, 14, 148). Twice Fèlix confesses his astonishment before the hermit's allusive narrations, and he complains about the difficulty of learning through likenesses. In the face of Fèlix's resistance, the hermit declares that he is willingly using allusive – and elusive – analogies to capture his attention, as well as to leave a lasting impression on him and stimulate his intellect. Difficulty is deliberately and strategically designed to require great effort on the part of Fèlix's intellect. Examples and likenesses do not offer direct solutions, but rather force the wanderer to depart from oneself and confront the world's secrets. They will require Fèlix to put into motion all the faculties of the soul – intellect, memory, and will – to transcend the limitations of one-sided understanding.

In this process of understanding by means of love, and loving by means of understanding, Fèlix and the reader grasp one of the underlying mechanisms of the *Art of Finding Truth*: "that the intellect wants what the will understands" (Vega 2002, 126). Llull's predilection for the didactic obscurity of examples aligns with the general purpose of his work. Ultimately understanding their enigmatic "good morals" serves to achieve a righteous delectation, which must always be connected to its final cause: understanding, loving, and remembering the ultimate truth, God (Badia, Santanach, Soler 2013, 413).

Without any sophisticate comprehension of Llull's gargantuan *Art of Finding Truth* or its philosophical and theological foundations, it is worth noting that Foix acknowledged the auxiliary function of Llull's examples, which he appreciated and enjoyed, as revealed by his review of the *Book of Wonders* for *La Publicitat*:

> The fable, the tale and the novelistic narration, on the one hand, and the use of rhyme and rhythm, on the other, are the means often employed by Llull to impact the reader's fantasy and awaken in them the interest for the topics he addresses. Contrarily to common belief, Llull is a practical man who never loses sight, almost never, of his immediate goals. ("Llibre de les Bèsties de Ramon Llull", 27-08-1933, 4)

There is a striking parallelism between Fèlix and the hermit, on one side, and between Foix and his readers, on the other. From the moment he began publishing his prose texts and verses in periodical publications and books, his interpreters highlighted their resemblance to surrealist expression and the hermetic *trobar clus* of the troubadours (Guerrero 1996, 147-8). These affinities hint at Foix's participation in a global creative tendency inclined towards difficulty and obscurity, preconized by Arnaut Daniel, the *stilnovisti*, and Góngora, and postulated by Johann Georg Hamann as a mode of reasoning against the grain of the Enlightenment.

Julien Benda reflected upon this tendency in *Du poétique*, and, like Dora Marsden, warned against what, according to him, might be aristocratic arrogancy masking actual indolence: "We search and maybe we find something, but we often regret having found it, for what we have found is miserable" (Benda 1946, 235). On the other side of this debate, however, T.S. Eliot's famous remarks about his times in *The Metaphysical Poets* (1921) seem to fit Foix's poetics: "We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*" (Eliot 1951, 289). To what he added: "Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results" (289).

Diverse critics and theorists have addressed the study of difficulty and hermetism as a characteristic trait of modern poetry, from Rimbaud and Lautréamont onwards.[7] Giuseppe Bevilacqua highlighted the co-implication of encrypted and explicit language in Paul Celan as a creative means to avoid the sterility of literary affectedness and to put into practice a communicative intention of one's own (Bevilacqua 1996, xiv). According to Michael Riffaterre (1982), difficulty does not split signification from meaning, but precisely from the absence of meaning, because it fosters consecutive readings and perspective shifts mediated by literary figuration. Under this light, the approaches to significative polysemy as connatural to poetic language[8] do not relativize difficulty but provide the necessary hermeneutic tools to face the deliberate significative experimentation of contemporary literature.

With an emphasis on negativity, opacity or equivocality, the creative strategies of twentieth-century poets pursue forms able to eschew the tropes of the inexpressible limit and of linguistic insufficiency, but they may also indulge in their thematization so that they

7 See, for example, Steiner 1978; Baldini 1989; Coqui 2015; Cussen 2022.

8 Such as the ones by Blumenberg ([1966] 2001a, 114-18; [1979] 2001b, 193-6) and Kristeva (1985, 60-71).

become patent (Wolosky 1995).[9] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a key figure in contemporary phenomenology, posited that the original and irreducible objectivity of artistic creations generates the speculative tension that both constrains and enables the possibility of understanding the incarnations of vision that transcend conceptual representation (Merleau-Ponty 1964, 105). In *Thomas l'obscur* (1941, revised in 1950), Maurice Blanchot had called for the dissolution of the traditional, metaphysical teleology regarding light and shadow, whereby the latter was an accident and a defective state of the former (Rosenbrück 2020, 93).

The philosopher Oliver R. Scholz is wary, however, of the metaphorical use of the semantic field of 'obscurity', as it belongs to the "prehistory and protohistory of hermeneutics" and, when used to explain the difficulties of comprehension, constitutes a tautological, insignificant circle (Scholz 2015, 97). The author cites a threefold classification of the possible difficulties in comprehension and the hermeneutical approach they require, by Jay F. Rosenberg (1981): to *complexity* corresponds analysis, to *incoherence*, integration, and to *indetermination*, more precise articulations. It will be necessary to outline the significance given by Foix to the metaphor of darkness to acknowledge his specific expressive needs and to detect, even if the proposed categories tend to overlap, that the author presents abundant aesthetic evidence of his will to encrypt and reveal a reasonable order – his own poetic proposal – under the signs of incoherence.

2.4 Likenesses as Objects of Poetry Research

In an essay known as "Some Considerations on Current Art and Literature", Foix defended the sincerity of his practice, and disallowed his affinity with the surrealists:

> When I write my prose texts – most of which I am averse to accepting as Surrealist, since I attempt to fix images of a living reality – I behave sincerely toward myself and my reader. I am therefore sincere insofar as I communicate experienced situations without fraud. From a strictly literary point of view, furthermore, I would dare to affirm that I am true. Still, I am convinced, on the level of

9 The notorious disagreement between Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida over Antonin Artaud's poetics is a good example of this debate, because it outlines the points of tension between hermeneutical speculation and deconstructive criticism. While Blanchot (1959, 51-8) argued that Artaud's mad cries expressed the powerlessness of exteriorization and thus offered new spaces for thought, Derrida (1967, 341-68) understood the tortured writer's glossopoiesis, neither imitative nor discursive, as a vanishing point for negative dialectics, and as the destruction of any possible articulated repetition, any stability, and, consequently, any positivity.

> ideas, that this realism and this verism are not a universal reality. They are, in other words, neither the notion of Reality nor the notion of Truth. (*AC1927*, 2; Venuti, 136 [OC 4, 32-3])

In this regard it is worth quoting a classic appreciation made by the critic and editor Jaume Vallcorba:

> The apparent, surrealist opacity is nothing but a superior form of realism, in which the poet departs from real facts, subtly metaphorized, to build the framework of the poem. This has largely been the practice of a most ancient literary tradition, which, narrowed down to a strand most appreciated by Foix, the troubadours, we shall call "trobar clus" or "closed form". (Vallcorba 2002, 96-7)

Nevertheless, the relationship between the darkness of likenesses and the difficulty of the comprehension process might illuminate new meanings of Foix's identification with the Lullian astonished Fèlix. As mentioned above, *From "Daybook 1918"* opened with an explicit statement by Foix on the fragmentary and poetic condition of his prose texts, called "*poems – likenesses or appearances*" (*DD18*: 187). In the proemial words of *The Star of Mr. Perris*, the poet insisted: "appearances or likenesses, says the author" (*EDP*, 250), to which he added:

> J.V. Foix insists on telling us that his likenesses or appearances are the result of a disinterested experimentation that he enjoys as much as if he dared to try the adventure of a game of chance. (*EDP*, 250)

Foix did not only retrieve from Llull the notion of "likeness" to address his own practice of metaphorization, but he was also persuaded to circumscribe the results of his experimentation to the categories of "likenesses or appearances". He declared to Clara Sobirós: "*I move among appearances, and yours, multiple, dominates*" (*LCS*, 5; Rosenthal, 3). In his conception of poetry, likenesses do not convey the natural relation between an image and its referent, as per the realist standard (Bangert 2018, 128). Poetic likenesses resemble reality because their objects appear, proliferate, and transform in a similar way. Each likeness, due to this link to the whole reality, indetermined but unitarian, is a sign and a revelation of a possibility: that of describing reality partially and in fragments. Since he favored dark likenesses as means to uplift understanding, the role of such likenesses in his poetic proposal deserves to be addressed in depth.