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## INTRODUCTION

One Saturday afternoon in the mid-1980s I was browsing the stacks of the Georgetown University Library, trying to educate myself in the varieties of poetry written in Portuguese. After graduating from college, I had spent three years in Brazil, where I learned the Portuguese language and began translating a couple of contemporary Brazilian poets, but I was largely ignorant of the tradition behind those poets. Where to begin? I picked out two or three books at random before spotting, on a higher shelf, several tall tomes with *Cancioneiro* printed on the spines. Pulling them down and gazing at the pages, I unexpectedly entered a literary realm whose existence I'd never heard of: troubadour songs—*cantigas*—in Galician-Portuguese.

I was familiar with Ezra Pound's translations of poems by Arnaut Daniel, Bertran de Born, and other troubadours from Provence, and I had recently bought a copy of Paul Blackburn's splendid *Proensa: An Anthology of Troubadour Poetry*, but while I could certainly sense affinities between the troubadour tradition I already knew and the one I was just now discovering, it was the differences that were striking. One of them had to do with the settings. Not until the fifteenth century would Portuguese and Spanish navigators initiate the so-called Age of Discoveries, but I soon realized that in some of the *cantigas* from the 1200s the ocean was already an almost mythical and at times poetically hypnotic presence, variously suggestive of risk, possibility, and tragedy. Paio Gomes Charinho, a troubadour who spent time at sea as a naval officer, compared its devastating power to that of love:

Those who spend their lives at sea  
think there is no pain in the world  
as great as their pain, and no fate worse  
than a seaman's fate, but consider me:  
    the pain of love made me forget  
    the pain of the sea, so harsh and yet  
  
as nothing next to that greatest pain,  
the pain of love that God ordains.

And the cantiga continues, its haunting lament growing in intensity.

Another sea-inspired cantiga I noticed in my early forays is by one Meendinho, about whom nothing at all is known. His only surviving cantiga had nevertheless earned him a rank of honor among the approximately 150 Galician-Portuguese troubadours. This cantiga, unusually dramatic, belongs to a female-voiced genre peculiar to Iberia. Danger is announced at the outset:

Sitting in the chapel of San Simón,  
soon I was surrounded by the rising ocean,  
    waiting for my lover, still waiting.

Before the altar of the chapel, waiting,  
soon I was surrounded by the ocean's waves,  
    waiting for my lover, still waiting.

While the speaker faithfully waits, the waters keep rising until, at the end of the cantiga, we can almost envision her being engulfed:

Without a boatman, unused to rowing,  
I'll die, a fair girl, in the heaving ocean,  
    waiting for my lover, still waiting.

Without a boatman to row me away,  
I'll die, a fair girl, in the ocean's waves,  
    waiting for my lover, still waiting.



Yet another distinctive feature of Galician-Portuguese poetry—well illustrated by the Meendinho cantiga—is the use of repetition with small displacements and variations. There was a time not long before my discovery of the cantigas that I listened obsessively to an early composition by Philip Glass, *Music with Changing Parts*, and cantigas like Meendinho’s enchanted me for being similarly minimalistic. We might call them “poetry with changing parts.”

Lured in by the cited poems and others like these, as well as by poems very different from these—there are hundreds of satiric, sometimes quite bawdy cantigas—I decided to translate a selection of them into English, a task that quickly proved to be far more challenging than anticipated. When translating any poem, one must first identify where the poetry *is*. What makes it a valid, successful poem? In the cantigas, whose narrative and ideational content is rather slight, the poetry clearly resides in their formal aspects—meter, rhyme, musical repetitions, and so forth. Paul Blackburn did a marvelous job of conveying the spirit of the Provençal troubadours he translated by using a poetic-musical idiom of the twentieth century. In the case of the cantigas, many of which are genuinely naïve, I doubted that this method would yield similarly admirable results. It has so far proven impossible to convincingly replicate, in English, the complex rhyme schemes (not to mention other poetic complexities) of William of Aquitaine, Arnaut Daniel, Marcabru, and their peers, but to attempt something of the sort seemed to me the only viable path for translating the cantigas. Unlike with Provençal poetry, the simpler verse patterns and melodic grammar of the cantigas allow at least the possibility of their being successfully simulated. I strove to preserve those patterns and that grammar.

The proverbial advantage of leaving one’s poems in a drawer for many years and then returning to them as a cold, objective reader also holds true for translations of poetry. In 1995 I published, in England, a bilingual selection titled *113 Galician-Portuguese Troubadour Poems*, which has long

been out of print. Revisited by me twenty-five years later, not one of those translations has remained intact, and some have been drastically refashioned. I have also added eleven new cantigas to the mix. In these intervening years I have translated many other poets, from recent and not so recent centuries, but I still find that the cantigas require more technical and creative sweat—along with patient waiting for the serendipitous workings of chance—than any other poetry I've rendered into English. The greatest difficulty? To make them simply sing.



“Galician-Portuguese” is a modern coinage for the Romance language spoken in northwestern Iberia in the early Middle Ages. It is the ancestor of Galician and Portuguese, two distinct but closely related languages. As the Kingdom of Galicia (situated north of Portugal) was brought more firmly under the control of the Kingdom of Castile, especially from the fifteenth century on, Castilian Spanish supplanted the local language in official documents and other forms of writing. Even as a spoken language, Galician slowly lost ground to Spanish, especially in the large towns. During the nineteenth-century *Rexurdimento* (Renaissance), writers such as the poet Rosalía de Castro reasserted Galician as a written language, and although the Franco regime actively suppressed it in the twentieth century, Galician nowadays boasts a thriving literature. Portuguese has had a happier destiny, spreading southward in the peninsula as the Kingdom of Portugal pushed southward, and then to Africa, Brazil, and a few pockets in Asia. Today it is the world's seventh most spoken language.

Snatches of Galician-Portuguese appear in Latin administrative documents going back to the ninth century, but the earliest known texts written wholly in Galician-Portuguese are the cantigas of Iberian troubadours, active between the end of the twelfth and the middle of the fourteenth centuries. By then the separate national identities of Galicia and

Portugal were well established, and their languages began to diverge. So when we speak of Galician-Portuguese literature, we mean the sung poems called cantigas and nothing else.

Much of this literature, oddly enough, was written not in Galicia or Portugal but in the Spanish kingdoms of León and Castile—a fact eloquently demonstrated by the example of King Alfonso X, who became the ruler of both kingdoms in 1252. Known as “el Sabio,” the Learned, because of his fervent intellectual activity, Alfonso X oversaw numerous translations of scholarly Arabic and Hebrew works into Castilian and produced major treatises on astronomy and history, likewise in Castilian, but he wrote all his large output of poetry in Galician-Portuguese. To understand why, we need to back up a little in time.

Troubadours from Occitania<sup>1</sup>—the area of southern France where the poetry of *fin’amor*, “refined love,” originated in the late eleventh century—traveled in all directions during the twelfth century. With the onset of the Albigensian Crusade (1209–29), which saw Catholic zealots and French armies ravage Occitania to stamp out the heresy of the allegedly Gnostic Cathars, the troubadours would go abroad in even greater numbers than before. As early as the mid-1100s their influence had given rise to the *trouvères* of northern France while profoundly affecting the style of the *Minnesänger* in Germany. A few decades later troubadour movements sprang up in Italy and Catalonia, where the locals composed songs not in their native tongues but in Occitan.<sup>2</sup> In western Iberia, Peire Vidal and other troubadours arriving from beyond the Pyrenees naturally visited Santiago de Compostela, the capital of Galicia and the most

<sup>1</sup>The words *Provence* and *Provençal* have been used inexactly since medieval times to indicate the whole of southern France and the language that was spoken there. Nowadays the geographically and linguistically more accurate terms *Occitania* and *Occitan* are preferred.

<sup>2</sup>Occitan poetry would also inspire the Sicilian school, which flourished a little later and produced the first lyric poetry in an Italian vernacular.

popular pilgrimage site after Rome, but for financial patronage they tended to gravitate around the powerful royal courts of León and Castile rather than the poorer courts of Galicia and Portugal. It was nevertheless in these latter kingdoms, as the twelfth century turned into the thirteenth, that the new poetry found especially fertile terrain. Exactly how it happened remains a mystery, but a new court poetry—modeled after Occitan poetry but with some strikingly different features—emerged in the Galician-Portuguese language, which became the poetic *koiné* for much of Christian Iberia.

Although their *cantigas* have disappeared, we know there were early Galician troubadours who sojourned in Catalonia (where a tradition of *langue d’oc*<sup>3</sup> poetry had already taken hold) in the late twelfth century. The oldest surviving *cantiga* in Galician-Portuguese, probably written in 1196, was by a Portuguese nobleman, Joam Soares de Paiva, who was living at the time in Castile or Aragon. Perhaps he came into contact with some of the Occitan troubadours residing in those kingdoms, learned their poetic art, translated it into his own language, and took it back to Portugal. Equally revealing—for the story of how the *cantigas* might have evolved—is the case of Garcia Mendes de Eixo, a Portuguese nobleman who wrote a troubadour song in the *langue d’oc* during a period of exile in León, around 1215, and whose offspring included two troubadours, Gonçalo Garcia de Sousa and Fernão Garcia Esgaravunha, both of whom wrote their songs in Galician-Portuguese. As these examples show, the first seeds of Galician-Portuguese troubadour poetry came from abroad. But they did not really flower until the 1220s, when more than twenty poets of the new style were active in the courts of Galician and Portuguese noblemen. In the mid-1200s this poetic movement attained its full splendor, at the royal courts of Afonso III

<sup>3</sup>“Òc” is the Occitan word for “yes.”

(reigned 1248–79) in Portugal and especially Alfonso X (reigned 1252–84) in Castile.

The civil war in Portugal that led to Afonso III's accession, together with the military campaigns to reconquer southern Iberia from the Moors, caused a number of Portuguese troubadours to relocate to Castile, where many of them eventually ended up at the cosmopolitan court of Alfonso X, a proverbially generous patron. Troubadours from all over—Castile, León, Galicia, Portugal, and Occitania—flocked around the king, who seems to have been infatuated not only with their poetry but also with Galician-Portuguese, the language used for most of their compositions, though the transplanted Occitans continued to write in their own language. The king himself composed at least forty-four, mostly satiric troubadour songs, and he oversaw the composition of more than four hundred *cantigas de Santa Maria* (songs in praise of Holy Mary). A few years earlier Gonzalo de Berceo, a cleric from northern Spain, had written a collection of verses praising Mary in Castilian (*Milagros de Nuestra Señora*), but Alfonso's Marian songs, like his secular songs, were all written in Galician-Portuguese.

Alfonso's attachment to this language may be partly explained by the fact that he spent part of his childhood in Galicia, but he had another reason for appreciating this foreign idiom: it accentuated the artificiality of a literature into which the few, not the many, were initiated. The main audience for troubadour poetry consisted of other troubadours and the members of the courts that protected them. They were privy to the conventions that regulated the poetic discourse, particularly when love was the theme. In their love songs the Galician-Portuguese troubadours—like the Occitan poets they emulated—endowed certain words with special meanings. Thus *coita*, meaning “suffering,” referred specifically to the painful anxiety felt by someone in love. And *ben*, meaning “goodness” or “benefit,” served as a code word for the favor that a beloved might (or might not) show the lover.



Some say that the Occitan troubadours actually invented romantic love, with their poetry being both an idealization of this feeling and a projection of it. These poet-composers transferred the feudal concept of vassalage as well as the Christian idealization of Mary to the lover's relationship with his lady: he owes her his "service" as if she were his lord, and he adores her from a distance as one would the immaculate and inaccessible Virgin Mary. Certain of the troubadours were no doubt very much in love with their ladies, others less so, and in some cases their love was pure fiction. Joam Baveca, a Galician troubadour in Alfonso X's court, complained in one of his cantigas about certain colleagues who "do wrong to us who truly love" by swearing a love that's "merely feigned," so that "the ladies think we're lying too." But whether or not they were sincerely loved, the flesh-and-blood ladies of the court were virtually unrecognizable under the generic, model lady that was projected onto them and then venerated in song. The troubadours were thus able to have love—in what they claimed was its most elevated form—quite independently of there being a willing woman, and any lady would do, even one (indeed, *especially* one) who completely ignored him, impossible loves being the more noble and worthwhile.

Besides the love songs known as *cansos*, the Occitan poets also composed *sirventes*, which commented on society, on political situations, or on specific individuals, sometimes through satire. The Galician-Portuguese poets took the satiric mode to the heights, or depths, of malice and indecency. This was nowhere truer than in Alfonso X's court, where the troubadours poked fun at religious and political figures, chickenhearted soldiers, and promiscuous women, to name a few of the favorite targets. And they especially liked to cavil among themselves via dialogued cantigas known in Occitan as *tensons*—*tenções* in Galician-Portuguese. In the world of their cantigas the troubadours could

live great loves with aristocratic detachment and fight duels with words instead of swords.

The possibility of remaking the world must have been a great comfort to Alfonso X, many of whose real-life battles foundered. Although he succeeded in affirming Castile as the most powerful kingdom of Iberia, he failed in his bid to be elected Holy Roman emperor, had mixed results trying to suppress insurgent Moors and nobles, and was abandoned by his subjects when his own son rose up against him. It was an agitated reign. But in the literary realm the king could take satisfaction or at least some consolation, offsetting his defeats with the victory of well-rendered poetry, of which his “Song of a Man Weary of Scorpions” is an illuminating example. The narrator of this *cantiga* expresses utter disillusion with his life as a knight in arms, and he dreams of leading a simpler existence, selling oil and flour from a small boat that would ply up and down the coast. Though Alfonso’s outward circumstances had nothing in common with those of the disillusioned knight (described as a sentinel who made rounds), and though it would be absurd to suppose that he entertained notions of laying aside his crown to become a flour merchant, the poem seems to be obliquely autobiographical, linked to its author’s weariness at having to fight battles, crush revolts, and deal with a bitterly divided family. Some critics have suggested that this *cantiga*, written in the first person, has no connection at all with the king’s personal life but parodies, rather, a timorous soldier afraid to take up arms and go into battle. If they are right, then Alfonso’s ability to assume such a starkly different poetic persona stands out as an even more remarkable feat. Either way, poetry had asserted itself as another plane of reality—conditioned by religion and feudal society but autonomous, transforming, and in a certain way untouchable. The troubadour poetry that developed in Occitania and spread around other parts of Europe was one of the first expressions of the revolutionary individualism that was to shake the

church's foundations through heterodox reform movements and eventually lead to the Renaissance.

After the death of Alfonso X, in 1284, some of the troubadours of his entourage transferred to the court of King Dinis of Portugal, who had ascended the throne in 1279. The most prolific of all the troubadours, Dinis, like the king of Castile, led a double life in his cantigas, using them to reshape his experience but also, and above all, to afford himself the ennobling, exalting experience of poetry. King Dinis had a long and highly successful, mostly peaceful reign, lasting until 1325, but Galician-Portuguese troubadour poetry was now in decline. With the arrival of the Black Death, in 1348, the age of the troubadours came to an end on the peninsula as in the rest of Europe.



One of King Dinis's sons, Pedro Afonso, Count of Barcelos (ca. 1285–54), was among the last of the Galician-Portuguese troubadours. He was also responsible for compiling the massive *Livro das cantigas*, which built on a previous compilation, enlarged with more recently composed cantigas. Neither that original compilation nor *Livro das cantigas* has survived, but copies made from them and known as *cancioneiros*—songbooks—have preserved for us some 1,680 cantigas (not counting King Alfonso's *Songs in Praise of Holy Mary*). Almost all the music for these songs has unfortunately been lost.

Scanning the *cancioneiros*, even without reading or understanding a word, one can notice repeating shapes and patterns. The cantigas are almost all short but not too: three or four stanzas of from three to seven lines is the general rule. A majority of cantigas have refrains, apparently a legacy from the native song tradition. The texts without refrains are known as cantigas of *meestria* (mastery), because they require greater thematic development and technical skill, although they never attain the complexity of the Occitan songs that were their precursors. The cantigas with



refrains more often than not have six lines with three rhymes following an *abbaCC* pattern or, occasionally, an *ababCC* pattern, in which *CC* is the refrain. The songs of meestria usually have seven lines with three rhymes following one of various patterns, *abbacca* being the most frequent. Some of the cantigas have a closing couplet or triple known as a *fiinda*. Corresponding to the Occitan *tornada*, or the French envoi, it serves to conclude the argument of the cantiga, sometimes in the form of a punch line. In rare cases, the *fiinda* may have more or fewer than the customary two or three lines, and some cantigas have more than one *fiinda*.

Poor in strophic variety, the cantigas also present a reduced number of metrical schemes. And while the Galician-Portuguese poets occasionally succeeded in keeping the same rhymes from stanza to stanza (as in nos. 113 and 114), usually they preserved only the pattern. But if in some respects the Galician-Portuguese school seems a dim reflection of Occitan virtuosity, it shimmers thanks to its fascinating, original use of parallelism, a technique evident in the Meendinho cantiga discussed above. Loosely definable as “repetition with a difference,” parallelism takes several forms, the most poetically effective being the literal or linguistic kind, based on the principle of *leixa-pren* (let go-take up). Typically found in cantigas with refrains, it is beautifully exemplified in cantiga 77, by Pero Meogo:

Levou-s’aa alva, levou-s’a velida,  
vai lavar cabelos na fontana fria;  
leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Levou-s’aa alva, levou-s’a louçana,  
vai lavar cabelos na fria fontana;  
leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Vai lavar cabelos na fontana fria,  
passou seu amigo, que lhi ben quera;  
leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Vai lavar cabelos na fria fontana:  
passa seu amigo, que a muit'amava;  
leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Passa seu amigo, que lhi ben queria,  
o cervo do monte a áugua volvia;  
leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Passa seu amigo, que a muit'amava:  
o cervo do monte volvia a áugua;  
leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Stanzas 2, 4, and 6 repeat the information presented in stanzas 1, 3, and 5, but with slight variations, certain end words being substituted by synonyms: *velida* (fair) → *louçana* (pretty), *queria* (liked) → *amava* (loved). At other times, the last two words of the line change position: *fontana fria* → *fria fontana* (cold spring), *a áugua volvia* → *volvia a áugua* (stirred up the water). At first glance the even-numbered stanzas might appear identical to the odd ones preceding them, but the lines are never exactly the same. On the other hand, a line from each stanza is repeated verbatim two stanzas down, but with a displacement: the second lines of the first two stanzas become the first lines of stanzas 3 and 4, whose second lines in turn become the first lines of stanzas 5 and 6. The verbal house of mirrors is topped off by a refrain in which *leda dos amores* (happy with love) reechoes in inverse form as *dos amores leda*.

The ensemble of these poetic restatements has a mesmerizing effect, heightening the listener's (and nowadays the reader's) sense of the girl's rapture and innocence. It's as if the simple meeting of a girl with her lover were taking place on an otherworldly plane. This may seem an overstatement, but less so when we consider that the water, hair, and mountain stag—elements that recur in other cantigas—are charged with symbolic meaning.

Semantic parallelism, which is the repetition not of words but of ideas or subject matter, is well illustrated by cantigas 6 and 81. In these songs there is little or no narrative progress; the first stanza contains the whole story, and successive stanzas merely repeat the information in other words. While this kind of parallelism can dramatize the gravity of a particular feeling or predicament, it risks monotony.

A fragmentary treatise on the troubadours' art, found in the largest of the surviving *cancioneiros*, describes other poetic devices, which I explain in the notes to cantigas where they occur: cantiga 90 for a characteristic usage of enjambment (*atá fiinda*), cantiga 75 for the "missing rhyme" (*palavra perduda*), cantiga 82 for word doubling (*dobre*), and cantiga 16 for modified word doubling (*mozdobre*). The poetic treatise also describes (though part of this description has been lost) the three major types of secular troubadour songs: *cantigas de amor*, *cantigas de amigo*, and *cantigas de escárnio e maldizer*.



The *cantiga de amor*, which derived directly from the Occitan *canço*, dominated the output of the first Galician-Portuguese troubadours and enjoyed, in the courtly circuit, more prestige than other *cantiga* varieties. Scholars, however, have often passed harsh judgment on the *cantigas de amor*. "Tremendously monotonous, sterile and conventional in their ideas, expressions and metrical forms" is how they were characterized by Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos (1851–1925) in her critical edition of the Ajuda Palace songbook, the oldest of the surviving *cancioneiros*.<sup>4</sup> She had a point, but if we selectively pass over about half of the seven hundred or so *cantigas de amor* that have come down to us, we are left with a body of poetry that presents considerable interest and variety.

<sup>4</sup>Vasconcelos, *Cancioneiro da Ajuda*, 2:598.

The institution of feudalism arrived later and less decisively in western Iberia. It did not use feudal terminology in a systematic way, and while relations of vassalage were common enough, the associated rituals of homage (*immixtio manuum*, the oath of fidelity, the formal kiss) were less prevalent, less important. Knowing but a pale version of the feudal relation of lord and vassal, the Galician-Portuguese troubadours could produce no better than a pale version of the *canso* that was founded on that relation. They addressed the lady of their *cantigas de amor* as *senhor* (later feminized to become the modern *senhora* of Portuguese and *señora* of Spanish), but they didn't have a clear idea of the homage they owed this "lord" or of the benefit she owed him, her "vassal." The Occitan troubadour compared the beauty of his lady (*midons*) to nature's most splendid phenomena, and he invested her with the qualities of a powerful and life-giving lord; the peninsular poet merely accentuated his *senhor(a)*'s ladylike virtues, piling on limp adjectives like "fair," "sensible," and "worthy." Bernart de Ventadorn and his Occitan peers are condemned to frustration because the object of their love is a perfect ideal that would, if she yielded, become less than perfect, but they can at least delight in their praise of that perfection and can realize love on paper, as it were; the Galician-Portuguese poet rarely achieves such a sublime projection, so that his focus turns back on himself ("Poor me!"), and his rejected love knows no transcendence.

Courtly love becomes the occasion for an obsessive sadness in the Galician-Portuguese domain. The playful and exultant spirit of *langue d'oc* poetry—its *jo!*—gives way to a self-pitying litany of love's depressing effects. The poet loses sleep, goes insane, or (and this is the all-too-common trope) dies on account of his love. But he takes pride, at least, in his suffering. While admitting that the Occitan poets were incomparable versifiers, King Dinis held up his greater inner torment as proof that his love was more sincere (no. 114). If

“sincere love” implies self-absorption in one’s own feeling, that might explain some of the infelicitous poetry found in the *cantigas de amor*. But King Dinis did prove himself capable of focusing all his attention on the lady, in a panegyric he significantly described as a song “in Provençal style” (no. 113). A few other Galician-Portuguese troubadours managed to describe their ladies in original, concrete language, and Joam Garcia de Guilhade left us a unique love song about a green-eyed lady (no. 21). This same Garcia de Guilhade, refreshingly ironic and a disdainer of clichés, composed a nonconforming *cantiga de amor* in which (no. 26), after recalling all the men whose unrequited love makes them want to die, he exclaims:

But, my lady, while I may see you,  
I’ll always want to live  
and keep on waiting!

And there is nothing sad about Airas Nunes, who in the fourteen lines of *cantiga* 88 celebrates his love with a euphoric array of images from nature, which he hails as the inspiration for creating his songs.

The Galician-Portuguese troubadours, in any case, had good reasons for feeling glum, since for many of them a female partner was a practical impossibility. Because feudalism arrived late, it was only in the thirteenth century that the Portuguese aristocracy began to regulate the division of family wealth—or rather, its nondivision. *Morgadios* (akin to French *majorats* and English fee tails) assured that virtually all property would be inherited by the eldest son, so as to prevent the piecemeal breakup of landed estates and the scattering of family fortunes, along with family prestige. Younger sons were given supporting roles but expected to remain celibate. Aristocratic young ladies, meanwhile, were reserved for strategic marriages or else shuttled off to a convent. No wonder we find so many troubadours—a majority

of whom were noblemen, and very often amorously frustrated noblemen—obsessed with actual or hypothetical ladies forever out of their reach.

Whether they were forcibly celibate, forced into a marriage for the sake of a family alliance, or simply unlucky in love, the Galician-Portuguese troubadours could get their revenge through the *cantigas de amigo*, which are in some ways the exact inverse of the *cantigas de amor*. Adopting the female point of view, the *cantiga de amigo* is usually narrated by an unmarried girl or young woman who pines after her boyfriend, sometimes addressing him directly, or else comments on their relationship and on the hopes, anxieties, or disillusionments it arouses. The *coita*, or suffering, endured by the man in the *cantigas de amor* now becomes the woman's experience—if her beloved is far away. If, on the other hand, he's close by, the relationship can be pleasurable for both him and her. She might at times resist the advances of her *amigo*, but on the whole she's complicit. She meets with him at appointed times and places, and in some songs it's obvious that the two sweethearts do much more than chat and make eyes at each other—which is never the case in the *cantigas de amor*. In a *cantiga de amigo* by Joam Guilhade, the woman apparently breaks up with him precisely because he didn't make any advances; she's weary of keeping up their merely platonic relationship (no. 27).

Female-voiced songs written by men were not unique to the Iberian Peninsula. A few *trouvères* wrote *chansons de femme*, and the *Minnesänger* composed *Mädchenlieder*, but the voluminous output and distinctive character of the approximately five hundred *cantigas de amigo* have no parallel in other song traditions. That in itself suggests that they must have partly derived from a local, presumably oral tradition. Despite being integrated into a courtly poetry inspired by the Occitan troubadours, the *cantigas de amigo*, with rare exceptions, kept the refrain that is typical of folk music, and some of them mention dancing. It was the *cantigas de amigo* that brought parallelism into Galician-Portuguese

poetry, and the *leixa-pren* technique—whereby a stanza takes up a line from the preceding stanza before moving the ball forward—betokens a primitive, responsorial type of singing, with the repeated lines serving as an aid to memory. While the technically rigorous poems of Occitania almost never admitted a less than perfect rhyme, and the *cantigas de amor* only rarely did, the *cantigas de amigo* frequently resorted to assonant rhyme. In the Pero Meogo *cantiga* quoted above, we find *velida* rhyming with *fria*, *fontana* with *amava*, and *amava* with *áugua*.

The *cantigas de amigo* are in a certain way ritualistic, presenting concise moments of intense drama on an open stage: the outdoor world common to all. The woods, streams, lakes, and meadows, and especially the seaside are typical places where the girl longs or waits for her beloved, or actually meets him. Sometimes the setting is a local shrine in Galicia or Portugal—visited not for spiritually edifying purposes but to facilitate amorous encounters. In *cantiga* 84 a girl incites other girls to visit a small-town shrine so that they can dance for their gawking boyfriends while their mothers, inside the church, “light candles for our souls and theirs.” It’s not clear, in this case, whether the mothers know what their enamored daughters are up to. In some *cantigas* the mother is an enabler of her daughter’s passion; in others she advises caution; in *cantiga* 76 she displays an attitude of practical resignation. Not only the mother but also the girl’s female friends (sometimes called “sisters”) frequently appear in the *cantigas de amigo*, which are often dialogued.

The likelihood of an ancient female song tradition on the peninsula finds support in the *kharja* (exit), which was the final segment of the *muwashshah*, a poetic genre originating in tenth-century Muslim Iberia and adopted by poets writing in Hebrew as well as Arabic. The *kharjas* were lines of verse imported from other sources, including folk poetry, and some of them were written not in Arabic or Hebrew but in Ibero-Romance. Like the *cantigas de amigo*, the

Ibero-Romance *kharjas* are typically narrated by a girl in love. They are among the oldest examples of the ancient Romance language spoken on the peninsula.

Whether or not a remote connection exists between the *kharja* and the *cantiga de amigo*, it is inconceivable that the Galician-Portuguese troubadours invented this latter genre out of thin air—which is to say, solely on the basis of what they learned from Occitan troubadours, who knew no such genre. All the more curious, then, that the first generation or two of Galician-Portuguese poets wrote mostly *cantigas de amor*, some satiric poems, and only an occasional *cantiga de amigo*. This last type of love song grew popular only as time went on. Perhaps the Occitan *canso*—refashioned as the *cantiga de amor*—initially attracted most of the attention for being a novelty item, with local troubadours only later turning to and transforming their native lyric traditions. Those pre-troubadour traditions may also have included love poetry narrated by men—to judge by an early, not at all typical *cantiga de amor*, “You who from Montemaior have come” (no. 3), with incantatory, repeating lines and an exceptionally long refrain.

The Galician-Portuguese troubadours used native song traditions for their own purpose, which was to make imaginative, entertaining works for their aristocratic sponsors and for their own delight. While some of the earlier *cantigas de amigo* are naïve enough, there is nothing innocent about the girl in *cantiga 96* who doesn’t believe a word of the suitor who supposedly wants a private meeting “to simply talk.” The speaker in *cantiga 97*, resembling not a simple girl in love but the haughty lady we find in *cantigas de amor*, declares that her lover’s praise is only to be expected, because she’s good-looking and deserves it. And the narrator of *cantiga 25* also strikes us as an experienced woman, who warns others never to believe the suitor who claims to be dying of love, though she’d be glad to see one literally drop dead. On the other hand, the troubadours sometimes sing their own praises through the voice of the narrating girl, as in *cantiga*



45, where she brags about her boyfriend's skill as both a lyricist and a composer. These and many other *cantigas de amigo* owed as much to the troubadours' own ingenuity as to any indigenous lyric form.

The more than four hundred satirical songs known as *cantigas de escárnio e maldizer* lack the lyrical charm of the *cantigas de amigo* and the technical refinement achieved in the best *cantigas de amor*, but their thematic content and occasional outrageousness make them every bit as entertaining as the two genres of love songs. Love songs, appropriately enough, are one of the butts of their mockery. Pero Garcia Burgalês, for example, marvels at a fellow troubadour's ability to repeatedly die in his *cantigas de amor* and resurrect, just like Jesus, on the third day (no. 33). (Dying because of love, it must be said, was a stunt that commenced with the Occitan poets, though they did not abuse it so much.) And Joam Garcia de Guilhade, when hounded by a lady for a *cantiga de amor*, complied with a song (no. 28) that begins:

Ugly lady, you've complained  
that I never sing your praise,  
so I've composed a new refrain  
to sing your praise in my own way,  
and this is what my song exclaims:  
you're a crazy, old, and ugly lady!

The aforementioned fragmentary treatise on the Galician-Portuguese troubadours' art describes two different kinds of satiric compositions: the openly slanderous *cantiga de maldizer*, which uses transparent language, referring directly to its target, and the veiled *cantiga de escárnio*, which relies on double entendres and insinuation to ridicule its victim. In practice it's not always easy to distinguish between the two types, and most scholars group all the satiric verse together, often under the general heading *cantigas de escárnio*. But the fact that these subdivisions existed, along with

some other terminology for the satirical songs that I won't get into here, makes us wonder if this genre, like the *cantigas de amigo*, had an ancient history.

When directed at individuals, some of the Occitan *sirventes* could be scathing, but on the whole they can't compare with the *cantigas de escárnio* for sarcasm, vitriol, irreverence, and obscenity. Manuel Rodrigues Lapa (1897–1989), who produced the first complete edition of the *cantigas de escárnio*, called their ensemble a “moral sewer,”<sup>5</sup> suggesting a certain priggishness, but many a reader might blush at Afonso Anes do Cotom's wonderment that a woman named *Marinha* doesn't explode from the impact of his sexual parts so completely filling hers (no. 12; a *Marinha* also appears in *cantiga* 120), or at *Pero Garcia Burgalês's* account of *Maria Negra*, who goes broke from buying penises that rot as soon as she “sticks them” into “her smelly stable” (no. 36). The *cantigas de escárnio* also took aim at homosexuals, prostitutes, lascivious nuns and priests, and tedious or dull-witted individuals. But not all was sex and scurrility. There are songs that denounce the avarice and laziness of noblemen, as well as the corruption and hypocrisy of church officials.

Some *cantigas* are hybrids and resist classification. *Cantiga* 103, for instance, because of its brevity, its setting, and its use of the purest, most primitive form of parallelism, is in every respect a *cantiga de amigo* except for its male point of view, which makes it count as a *cantiga de amor*. Still other *cantigas* don't fit into any of the three main genres, not even as hybrids. A few troubadours wrote songs that, reflecting on the worsening state of the world, resemble the moral *sirvente* of Occitan poetry. Another poem type imported from France, the pastoral song, presents a shepherdess in dialogue with the troubadour, or she soliloquizes while he looks on in silence.



<sup>5</sup>Lapa, *Lições de Literatura Portuguesa*, 161.

Although composed, in all likelihood, by a group of troubadours under the direction of Alfonso X, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* don't really qualify as troubadour poetry, and not only because of their very different subject matter. Enormous stylistic differences also separate one kind of poetry from the other. Most of the Marian cantigas are narrative, make no use of parallelism, and have longish lines, often with fourteen or more syllables. Nearly all of them have refrains, as do a majority of the secular cantigas, but the predominant strophic form of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* was inspired by the *zajal*, a type of Arabic Andalusian song in dialect that somewhat resembles the French virelay. The several hundred *zajal*-like cantigas in honor of Mary begin with a refrain, whose rhyme is echoed in the last line of each stanza, in a scheme such as *AAbbba* or *AAbba* (where *AA* is the refrain). Very few examples of this sort of stanzaic form can be found among the 1,680 secular cantigas. And the metrical structures typical of the cantigas de amigo or cantigas de amor are, in turn, equally rare in the Marian cantigas.

It's worth remembering that the Occitan troubadours (whose ranks included many clerics) also composed devotional songs. These were lyric expressions of their own particular sensibilities, however, rather than made-to-order contributions to someone else's project.

The pet literary project of Alfonso X's later life, the Marian songbook was successively enlarged, from one hundred to two hundred to four hundred cantigas, most of which were composed between 1265 and 1282. As the collection grew, the songs were reordered to accommodate various numerical schemes. At the first doubling, for example, numbers ending in 5 were assigned to the longer songs. In all three versions, the numbers ending in 0 correspond to hymns of praise and supplication, with a shorter line and generally fewer stanzas than the narrative songs recounting miracles. And in the final version, the songs whose numbers end in 00 feature the first-person voice of Alfonso X.

Collections of miracles attributed to Mary and recorded in Latin became somewhat of a fad in the eleventh century. With the emergence of the preaching orders—the Franciscans in 1209 and the Dominicans in 1216—religious writings began to appear in vernacular tongues, and major miracle collections were produced in French by Gautier de Coincy (1177–1236), in Castilian Spanish by Berceo (ca. 1198–ca. 1264), and in Galician-Portuguese by Alfonso X. This last was by far the largest vernacular collection, chronicling more than 350 miracles. The stories were drawn from miracle collections in Latin, from collections associated with shrines in France and Iberia, and from local oral traditions.

Besides presenting a colorful panorama of typical as well as eccentric individuals from various social strata and from various countries, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* offer some surprising glimpses into medieval religiosity and moral attitudes. Telling examples are when the Virgin cures a sick monk by giving him milk from her breast, when she helps two robbers break jail because they promised to contribute nails to a shrine, and when she refills an empty wine vat for the benefit of drunk pilgrims who wanted to get drunker.<sup>6</sup>

Music for virtually all the Marian cantigas has thankfully been preserved in songbooks produced in Alfonso X's scriptorium. A miniature at the beginning of one of the more lavishly decorated songbooks depicts the king seated on his throne and flanked by two scribes, one of whom is writing while the other looks up from his parchment to listen. The monarch is glancing at an open book and appears to be dictating. To his far left there is a group of four clerics (singers?) examining a text, and to his far right a group of three musicians, probably jongleurs. Even if this isn't an accurate picture of how the songs were composed, it confirms that they were created through a team effort, with the king leading the team. There is pretty good evidence that Airas Nunes, a Galician cleric and masterful troubadour, was a

<sup>6</sup> Songs 54, 106, and 351, respectively, in Walter Mettmann's edition.

contributor to the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, and we can take it for granted that he was assisted by other courtly troubadours, who were both fluent in Galician-Portuguese and proficient versifiers.

But Alfonso X did not merely coordinate the work of others. Close to forty of the Marian songs allude to his family, his court, and events in his own life, suggesting that he himself was their author. By weaving so many personal details into the project, the king configured his life—for posterity—as a fundamentally spiritual journey.



Given the central place of the Virgin Mary in the medieval imagination, it would be logical to assume that the songs included in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* were destined for the general public, but it seems they never spread far beyond Alfonso's court. Despite all the resources allocated to composing and preserving the Marian cantigas, little effort was made to disseminate them. The reasons for this may have been circumstantial. The last few years of the king's reign were a fraught period, in which his son Sancho, backed by large swaths of the nobility and part of the church hierarchy, rebelled against him, making it hard if not impossible for him to promote the use of his cantigas in public worship. It's not entirely clear, however, that he especially wanted to promote them among the masses of faithful Catholics. Given that the people in his kingdom, Castile, spoke a related but different language, they might not have been receptive to devotional songs written in Galician-Portuguese. Whether by design or by chance, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* were a religious poetry for an elite, ironically relying on popular sources for their narrative content.

The secular poetry of the troubadours was even less likely to leave court. A few of the cantigas de escárnio may have circulated as propaganda on behalf of certain policy goals, such as the recruitment of soldiers for the Reconquista against the Moors, but what audience could courtly love po-

etry have found outside the immediate context that defined it? Troubadour poetry on the peninsula had a small audience, much smaller than in southern France, where there was a comparatively extensive network of noble courts, and this may be one of the reasons the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas*—subject to less critical review—were less impressive than the *cansos* and *sirventes* of Occitania.

I've been using the word *troubadour* broadly, to indicate any author of what we call troubadour poetry, or song, but some of the authors in fact had a lower social status, that of *jongleur* (*jograr* in Galician-Portuguese), a term that can conjure visions of accomplished musicians but also of jesters and jugglers. Confusion surrounding these terms existed already in the thirteenth century and prompted the troubadour Guiraut Riquier, who had lived for many years in Alfonso X's court, to address a poetic *supplicatio* to the king, begging him to clearly define the different roles played by the troubadour and the *jongleur*. Acceding to the request, the king issued a *declaratio* (written in Occitan by Riquier) in which he distinguished between various categories of composers and performers. Veritable troubadours, he stipulated, authored both the lyrics and the melodies of court poetry, and the best among them merited the title "doctor in the art of troubadour poetry." (Merited or not, no such title existed.) The court *jongleur*, on the other hand, was essentially a performer, singing what the troubadour composed, but he was not to be confused with the street *jongleurs*. Some of the street *jongleurs* were talented singers, admitted the king, but they lacked the necessary refinement to be accepted at court, so that it would be better to call them "buffoons," the name used in Lombardy for those who tamed monkeys, handled marionettes, imitated birds, and played the fool.

Some of the *jongleurs* were attached to a court, while others worked on a freelance basis, singing songs by sundry authors and receiving compensation from the nobles they entertained. And besides the male *jongleurs*, or *jograres*,

there were female *jograresas*, more commonly called *soldadeiras*, since they were paid in *soldos* (a unit of currency) for their performances, which included singing, playing musical instruments, and dancing. They were also reputed to be available for sex. A number of cantigas de escárnio mock the concupiscent behavior of soldadeiras such as Marinha (no. 12) and, especially, the notorious Maria Perez Balteira (nos. 17 and 72). This scoffing, however misogynistic, probably reflects the professional reality of these women, expected to dispense sexual favors as part of their job. Then too, the sexual mores among these performance artists, whatever their gender, seem not to have been especially strict.

Occasionally a jongleur was in the employ of a single troubadour, performing his songs and in some cases helping to compose the words or music. Juião Bolseiro and other jongleurs who composed their own songs were effectively troubadours, but upstarts often endured abuse from their class-conscious colleagues. Lourenço, a jongleur in the service of Joam Garcia de Guilhade, had to repeatedly defend himself against insults heaped on him by his master and by other troubadours, who found fault with the cantigas he composed.

More than a dozen females—*trobairitz*—produced cansos and sirventes in Occitania, but while it's possible that a few Iberian soldadeiras composed their own songs, the cantigas that have come down to us were all written by men, a majority of them aristocrats, some clerics, and still others (jongleurs) commoners.



The cantigas de amor, de amigo, and de escárnio circulated on loose sheets or scrolls for the benefit of the jongleurs who sang them and for the kings and nobles who were the troubadours' patrons. Individual songbooks were made for the cantigas of King Alfonso X, King Dinis, and possibly a few other troubadours. The songs from these various sources were subsequently compiled into anthological cancioneros,

two of which have survived, either in their original form or in copies.

The *Cancioneiro de Ajuda*, discovered around the year 1800 and at present kept in the library of the Ajuda Palace in Lisbon, seems to date from the very end of the thirteenth century. Although space for music was left below the first stanza of each cantiga, no musical notation was inscribed therein. The unfinished songbook includes 310 cantigas, virtually all of them cantigas de amor, with no indication of who composed them, but 246 of the songs can be found in one or both of the other *cancioneiros*, where the authors are duly identified.

Both the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional* (housed in Portugal's National Library) and the *Cancioneiro da Vaticana* (in the Vatican Library) were copied in the early sixteenth century from an older, now lost *cancioneiro* at the behest of the Italian humanist Angelo Colocci, who made occasional notes in the margins. No space was left for the music. Discovered in 1840, the Vatican songbook contains around twelve hundred cantigas, while the songbook belonging to the National Library of Portugal, discovered in 1878, contains some 1,560 cantigas.

Of the several surviving folios and fragments with Galician-Portuguese cantigas, two are especially important. The Vindel Parchment, named after the Spanish bookseller who discovered it in 1913 or 1914 in the binding of a fourteenth-century codex, contains the seven cantigas de amigo composed by Martim Codax (nos. 60–66), with musical notation for all but the sixth. The manuscript dates from the thirteenth century and is now housed at the Pierpont Morgan Library of New York. No less significant for the history of music is the Sharrer Parchment, belonging to the Portuguese National Archives and discovered in 1990 by Harvey L. Sharrer, an American professor and researcher. It is a single folio containing fragmentary text and musical notation for seven cantigas de amor by King Dinis, and it once



belonged to a volume of large dimensions, probably produced by scribes connected to Dinis's court.

The manuscript tradition of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* is far more straightforward. Four surviving song collections—three of them with musical notation—were produced under Alfonso X's supervision. One of the collections is in Florence; the other three are in Spanish libraries. A curiosity: among the first 149 folios of the second collection of Marian cantigas (housed in the library of El Escorial), the only one missing is the fortieth, which contained a song of praise to the Virgin Mary that appears, anomalously, amid the secular cantigas of Alfonso included in the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional*. We can imagine a filing error in the king's busy scriptorium, with the folio having been inadvertently inserted into a collection of his nonreligious cantigas and later copied into the larger, anthological songbooks.



Although words were central to the troubadours' art, music was an essential vehicle for conveying the words to the listener and enhancing their effect. Some of the cantigas—which were sung by solo voices, with or without musical accompaniment—must have been appreciated more for their melodies than for their words, so more's the pity that hardly any music for secular Galician-Portuguese troubadour poetry has survived. But the thirteen musically notated cantigas discovered in the twentieth century, despite providing models for just a handful of verse schemes, have allowed musicologists to make a few general observations. The Martim Codax cantigas de amigo appearing in the Vindel Parchment have simple strophic schemes, and their likewise short-range, rhapsodic melodies seem to confirm a preexisting tradition of popular song that was co-opted by jongleurs and eventually the troubadours. The Sharrer Manuscript, on the other hand, presents comparatively sophisticated melodic lines for its seven cantigas de amor by King

Dinis, with larger intervals and with more notes per syllable than in the Codax cantigas. The music for the Dinis songs is more elevated and less emotional, denoting influences from France but with its own musical originality. That said, King Dinis and his Galician-Portuguese peers produced more than a few *contrafacta*—cantigas de amor as well as cantigas de escárnio that were set to the music of Occitan or French troubadour songs. They were following a practice that was common among troubadours all over Europe.

With over four hundred melodies taking many different forms—zajal, rondeau, rondel, ballad—the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* are an unusually rich compendium and have become popular among performers of ancient music, compensating for the centuries-long neglect they fell into immediately after being composed. Musically speaking, these cantigas have a few points in common with their secular counterpart, evincing some influence from France, but they were more decisively influenced by Arabic Andalusian models.

I don't dare venture into the technical aspects of cantiga music, but I urge readers to listen to performance recordings of the cantigas by Martim Codax and King Dinis (available through the site *Cantigas medievais galego-portuguesas*) and of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (available through numerous internet sites).

The secular cantigas, quite apart from their musical significance, are the founding texts of two national literatures. Galician literature would soon languish in the so-called *séculos escuros*, the dark centuries, before reemerging in the 1800s, with the cantigas serving as crucial evidence of its ancient pedigree and poetic richness. The literature of Portugal, although it went through some dull periods, has generated a steady stream of poetry, drama, and prose, and a few of its writers, such as Luís Vaz de Camões, rank among Europe's finest. In the cantigas we can note certain qualities that would become hallmarks of Portuguese literature. I'm

thinking in particular of King Dinis's observation that the Occitan poets were better crafters of verse but that he and other writers of cantigas felt love more truly and sincerely. Already back then, a myth about the intensity and authenticity of Portuguese feeling was taking shape, and its consequences for the future of Portuguese literature were not always felicitous, since overt and unmediated sincerity quickly turns maudlin. It seems absurd to suppose that Portuguese people might feel more, or more ardently, than other people, but because that myth has been ingrained into the national psyche, it may be responsible for having made some writers more acutely *aware* of what they immediately feel. Whatever its exact origin, that awareness has certainly contributed to the greatness of poets such as Camões and Pessoa.

A companion myth to the Portuguese capacity-for-feeling myth is *saudade*, a reputedly untranslatable word that denotes melancholic longing, yearning, or nostalgia. The word, which also exists in modern Galician but not in Spanish, occurs for the first time in the cantigas, where it is spelled *soidade*. Longing and nostalgia are of course universal sentiments, but the Portuguese, who still today wax nostalgic for the age when their navigators ruled the seas, have turned *saudade* into a national leitmotif and philosophy of life. Perhaps it could not have been otherwise. Perhaps *saudade* is in fact a remote inheritance from illiterate young women in western Iberia who dreamed of a better life and an enchanting love while washing clothes at the stream and singing, in a wistful voice, *cantigas de amigo*.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>For my discussion of the origins of the cantigas, I'm indebted to António Resende de Oliveira and José António Souto Cabo. Resende de Oliveira has amassed evidence to support the idea that the cantigas de amor partly reflected a real frustration of aristocratic troubadours practically obliged to remain celibate. Giuseppe Tavani first stressed how the cantigas de amigo are, in certain respects, the converse of the cantigas de amor. I owe my summary observations on the music of the cantigas to Manuel Pedro Ferreira.

### *Notes on the Text and Translation*

The spelling of Galician-Portuguese was inconsistent, to put it mildly, and the copyists of the *cancioneiros*—working under pressure—occasionally garbled a phrase, or they abbreviated words and repeated lines in such a way as to obscure the author’s intentions. Scholars have arrived at a consensus about what the individual lines for most of the *cantigas* say, but their methods for transcribing them and standardizing the spelling vary widely. This book presents the *cantigas* as they appear on the online database *Cantigas medievais galego-portuguesas*, where modern Portuguese spelling conventions have been used to represent the sounds of Galician-Portuguese. This means that most double consonants and some double vowels have been eliminated; the letters *y* and *j*, when used as vowels with the sound of *i*, have been replaced by *i*; the silent *h* has been dropped from some words but added to others; and nasalized vowels, usually denoted in the *cancioneiros* by a tilde or by an unpronounced *n* following the vowel (for instance, *bê* or *ben*) have usually been transcribed with an unpronounced *m* following the vowel (*bem*), as in modern Portuguese. In addition to these and other changes in spelling, the editors of the database have spelled out the copyists’ frequent abbreviations. The resulting transcriptions have the great advantage of allowing readers with some knowledge of Portuguese to better grasp the meaning and pronunciation of the ancient language. For a more conservative approach to transcription, readers can consult the Galician online database *Universo cantigas*, where the work of editing the *cantigas* is still in progress. Both databases provide glossaries and prose summaries (in Portuguese and Galician) for many of the *cantigas*, as well as information on their original sources. The Portuguese database includes facsimile images of those sources.

Punctuation, practically nonexistent in the *cancioneiros*, is added by modern editors in accord with their interpreta-