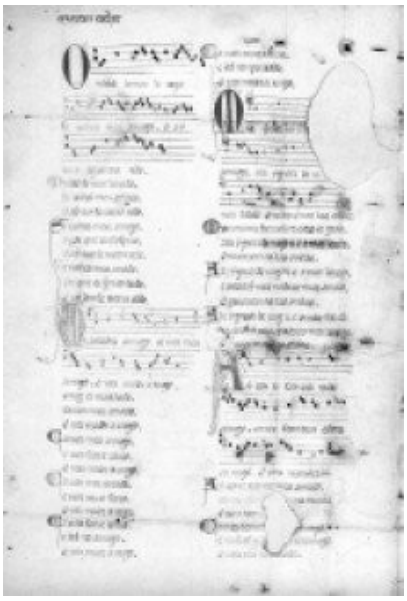

TROUBADOUR POETRY

(Portugal)

[Wednesday 30 June 2004]

While the poetry of the Provençal troubadours has been widely translated and justly appreciated, many readers are scarcely if at all aware of the *trovador* tradition on the Iberian Peninsula. Some 1680 *cantigas* (songs), written in Galician-Portuguese between the 12th and 14th centuries, have survived in a handful of *cancioneiros* (song books), the most important of which were discovered in the 18th and 19th centuries. The language of the *cantiga* reflects the vernacular spoken north and south of the Minho River, which divides Galicia from Portugal, and, for reasons that are still obscure, was the preferred idiom of lyric poets in every Peninsular region except Catalonia.

Galician-Portuguese court poetry, though inspired by its older counterpart in France, developed in different ways. It's true that the *cantiga d'amor*, in which a man sings to his beloved, tends to closely imitate Provençal and French models, sometimes with ho-hum results, but the more spontaneous *cantiga d'amigo* derives from a primitive song tradition on the Peninsula. Here the *trovador* assumes the role of a woman, usually of humble origin, pining after her lover, who is off at sea or otherwise absent. The themes tend to be repetitive, but the skilful use of parallelism can produce verses that grip by their rhythms and that were no doubt the more haunting when sung. The satirical *cantiga d'escarnho*, on the other hand, tends to be more virulent, and obscene, than what the troubadours across the Pyrenees composed.

The original *cantigas*, of whatever variety, bore no titles. Purists are asked to kindly overlook the titles given by the translator to the English versions presented here, but they should remember, as every one of the invented titles urges, that the *cantigas* were songs.

Presented here are the works of 11 individual poets:

ROI FERNANDEZ was a clergyman from Santiago de Compostela. One of his *cantigas* suggests that he accompanied Fernando III's army when it captured Seville from the Moors.

PAI GOMEZ CHARINHO (1225?-1295), a Galician noble from Pontevedra, served the kings Alfonso X and Sancho IV. He was Admiral over the Castilian navy, and the verses of his 28 *cantigas* often refer to the ocean. He was knifed to death by a close relative, apparently for political reasons.

AIRAS NUNEZ was a cleric, perhaps from Santiago de Compostela, who served in the Castilian court of Sancho IV from 1284-1289. His poems were strongly influenced by Provençal poetry, and though limited in number (15 survive), they touched a wide variety of themes. He almost certainly collaborated with Alfonso X on the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* and may actually have composed the larger part of them.

PERO MEOGO was a Galician, active in the 13th century. All nine of his *cantigas d'amigo* are graced by the presence of a mountain stag, which most critics understand as a symbol of male sexuality.

MARTIN CODAX may have been a Galician jongleur, active in the second half of the 13th century. His seven *cantigas d'amigo* seem to be related, telling the story of a girl's first love. Six of them are of particular interest for being almost the only *cantigas* whose musical notation has come down to us.

DINIS served as king of Portugal from 1279 until his death in 1325. A great patron of national culture, he founded his country's first university in 1290 – transferred from Lisbon to Coimbra in 1308 – and was himself one of the most prolific and talented poets of the Galician-Portuguese school. No less than 137 of his *cantigas* have been preserved in the Songbooks.

JOAM GARCIA DE GUILHADE was a low-ranking noble who made a living as a troubadour, apparently employing jongleurs to propagate his songs. Active in the mid-13th century, the heyday of the Galician-Portuguese school, Joam de Guilhade was one of its most prolific and inventive poets, with 54 surviving *cantigas* that employ a number of original images and large doses of irony.

AFONSO EANES DO COTON was a Galician noble who apparently fell on hard times, taking refuge in various Spanish courts and specializing in satiric, often pornographic songs.

PERO GOMEZ BARROSO was the bastard son of a Portuguese noble and a squire's daughter, but he managed to do better than his legitimate half brothers. He fought in the conquest of Seville from the Moors (1248) and served as Alfonso X's intermediary to pacify rebellious nobles in Granada (1273).

ALFONSO X, KING OF CASTILE AND LEÓN (1221-1284) produced a vast body of historical and scientific prose in Spanish but wrote his poetry in Galician-Portuguese. Besides his contributions to the profane troubadour tradition, Alfonso X "the Learned" compiled the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, a collection of 427 songs – many written by him – in praise of the Virgin Mary.

PERO DA PONTE authored at least 53 *cantigas*, many of which refer to the events of his time, as in several songs dealing with the defeat of the Moors in Valencia (1238) and Seville (1248).

POEMS

SONG ABOUT A GIRL AT A SPRING

She wakes up fresh, she wakes up fair:
she goes to the spring to wash her hair.
Happily in love, in love she's happy.

She wakes up fair, she wakes up fresh:
she goes to the spring to wash her face.
Happily in love, in love she's happy.

She goes to the spring to wash her hair:
her adoring boyfriend meets her there.
Happily in love, in love she's happy.

She goes to the spring to wash her face:
there she meets her enamored friend.
Happily in love, in love she's happy.

Her adoring boyfriend meets her there:
a mountain stag makes the waters stir.
Happily in love, in love she's happy.

There she meets her enamored friend:
a mountain stag makes the waters wave.
Happily in love, in love she's happy.

CANTIGA D'AMIGO

Levou-s'a louçana, levou-s'a velida:
vay lavar cabelos, na fontana fria.
Leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Levou-s'a velida, levou-s'a louçana:
vay lavar cabelos, na fria fontana.
Leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Vay lavar cabelos, na fontana fria:
passa seu amigo, que lhi ben queria.
Leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

Vay lavar cabelos, na fria fontana:
passa seu amigo, que a muyt'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 muyt'amava:
o cervo do monte volvia a áugua.
Leda dos amores, dos amores leda.

SONG ABOUT A RICH MAN UP FOR AUCTION

I saw a rich man being auctioned
by a dealer who called out loud,
“What do I hear for a rich man?”,
but not a buyer could be found
who wanted him at any price.
“For that man there,” they all cried,
“we wouldn’t put a nickel down.”

Anyone there could tell you why
the task of the auctioneer was futile:
the rich man never learned a trade,
and who would pay for a useless fool?
He doesn’t do any kind of work
that might to a buyer be of worth,
nor can he fix the simplest food.

When they put him up for sale,
indeed they asked the man himself,
“Well, rich man, what can you do?”
“Nothing at all!” the rich man said:
“I hate to work and hate to spend,
although I do like buying land,
if you have any you’d like to sell.”

After they had heard all this,
not one man or woman present
offered even the slightest pittance.

CANTIGA D’ESCARNHO

En almoeda vi estar
oj’un ricom’e diss’assy:
– Quen quer hun ricome comprar? –
E nunca hy comprador vi
que o quisesse nen en don;
ca dizian todus que non
daria hun soldo por ssy.

E d’este ricome quen quer
vus pode a verdade dizer:
poys non aprês nen hun mester,
quen querrá hi o seu perder?
Ca el non faz nen hun lavor
de que nulh’om’aja sabor,
nen sab’adubar de comer.

E, hu foron po-lo vender,
preguntaron-o en gran sen:
– Ricom’, que sabedes fazer? –
E o ricome disse: – Ren!
Non amo custa nen misson,
mays compro mui de coraçon
erdade, se mh’a vend’alguen –.

E poys el diss’esta razon,
non ouv’i molher nen baron
que por el dar quisesse ren.

SONG ABOUT A WORSENING WORLD

Things I knew I know no longer
in this world that’s changed so much,
and thinking about it I find I must
think in ways I never thought,
    for I’m seeing things I’ve never seen
    and hearing things I’ve never heard.

This world, God knows, is not the same
as what I remember from my youth,
and could I choose between the two,
I’d take the old one any day,
    for I’m seeing things I’ve never seen
    and hearing things I’ve never heard.

SIRVENTÊS

Do que sabia nulha rén non sei,
polo mundo, que vej’assi andar;
e, quand’i cuido, ei log’a cuidar,
per boa fé, o que nunca cuidei:
    ca vej’agora o que nunca vi
    e ouço cousas que nunca oí.

Aqueste mundo, par Deus, non é tal
qual eu vi outro, non á gran sazon;
e por aquesto, no meu coraçon,
aquel desej’e este quero mal,
    ca vej’agora o que nunca vi
    e ouço cousas que nunca oí.

I have no reason to fear death,
and in fact I'd like to die,
as there's no pleasure in this life
and no one I can call my friend,
for I'm seeing things I've never seen
and hearing things I've never heard.

I hope and pray God will accept
the way I think for my own part,
as I've decided in my heart
never to do good works again,
for I'm seeing things I've never seen
and hearing things I've never heard.

And I wouldn't give two cents to live
any longer here than what I've lived.

E non receo mia morte poren,
e, Deus lo sabe, queria morrer,
ca non vejo de que aja prazer
nen sei amigo de que diga ben:
ca vej'agora o que nunca vi
e ouço cousas que nunca oí.

E, se me a min Deus quisess'atender,
per boa fé, ?a pouca razon,
eu post'avia no meu coraçon
de nunca já mais neun ben fazer,
ca vej'agora o que nunca vi
e ouço cousas que nunca oí.

E non daria ren por viver i
en este mundo mais do que vivi.

SONG ABOUT THE PAIN OF LOVE AND SEA

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 sea, so cruel and yet

As nothing next to that greatest pain,
the pain of love that God ordains.
The pain of sea is a pain unto death,
but I discovered it can't compare
to the pain of love, which made me forget
my seaman's pain, terrible and yet

As nothing next to the greatest of all
the pains that are, were or will come.
Those who have never been in love
can't know the pain I feel, because
the pain of love makes one forget
all other pains, cruel and yet

As nothing next to the pain that exceeds
even the deathly pain of sea.

CANTIGA D'AMOR

Quantos oj'andan eno mar aqui
cuidan que coita no mundo non á
se non do mar, nen an outro mal ja;
mais d'outra guisa contece oge a mi:
coita d'amor me faz escaecer
a mui gran coita do mar, e teer

Pola mayor coita de quantas son,
coita d'amor, a que'-na Deus quer dar.
E é gran coita de mort' a do mar,
mais non é tal; e por esta razon
coita d'amor me faz escaecer
a mui gran coita do mar, e teer

Pola mayor coita, per bõa fé,
de quantas foron, nen son, nen seran.
E estes outros que amor non an,
dizen que non; mais eu direi qual é:
coita d'amor me faz escaecer
a mui gran coita do mar, e teer

Por mayor coita a que faz perder
coita do mar, que faz muitos morrer!

SONG AGAINST THE SEA

Whenever I look at the waves
that break below the bluffs,
I feel a pounding of waves
in my heart for the one I loved.
    Damn the sea
    that makes me grieve!

I never look at the waves
that beat against the shores
without being pounded by waves
in my heart for the one I adored.
    Damn the sea
    that makes me grieve!

Each time I look at the waves
that crash into the cliffs,
I feel a pounding of waves
in my heart for the one I miss.
    Damn the sea
    that makes me grieve!

CANTIGA D'AMOR

Quand'eu vejo las ondas
e las muyt'altas ribas,
logo mi veen ondas
al cor pola velyda:
    maldito seja l'mare,
    que mi faz tanto male!

Nunca vejo las ondas
nen as muit'altas rocas
que mi non venhan ondas
al cor pola fremosa:
    maldito seja l'mare,
    que mi faz tanto male!

Se eu vejo las ondas
e vejo las costeyras,
logo mi veen ondas
al cor pola ben feyta:
    maldito seja l'mare,
    que mi faz tanto male!

SONG FOR A BELOVED IN VIGO (II)

Word came today:
my friend's on his way,
    and I'm going, mother, to Vigo!

Today came the tidings:
my friend is arriving,
    and I'm going, mother, to Vigo!

My friend's on his way
and is alive and well,
    and I'm going, mother, to Vigo!

My friend is arriving
and is well and alive,
    and I'm going, mother, to Vigo!

He's alive and well
and is the king's friend,
    and I'm going, mother, to Vigo!

CANTIGA D'AMIGO

Mandad'ei comigo
ca ven meu amigo:
    E irei, madr', a Vigo!

Comigu'ei mandado
ca ven meu amado:
    E irei, madr', a Vigo!

Ca ven meu amigo
e ven san'e vivo:
    E irei, madr', a Vigo!

Ca ven meu amado
e ven viv'e sano:
    E irei, madr', a Vigo!

Ca ven san'e vivo
e d'el rei amigo:
    E irei, madr', a Vigo!

He’s well and alive
and is the king’s ally,
and I’m going, mother, to Vigo!

Ca ven viv’e sano
e d’el rei privado:
E irei, madr’, a Vigo!

SONG FOR A BELOVED IN VIGO (III)

Come along, sister, come with me now
to the church in Vigo, where the waters pound,
and we’ll look at the waves!

Come with me, sister, to spend some time
at the church in Vigo, where the sea lifts high,
and we’ll look at the waves!

To the church in Vigo, where the sea lifts high,
come with me, mother – will my friend come by? –
and we’ll look at the waves!

To the church in Vigo, where the waters pound,
come along, mother – will my friend come around? –
and we’ll look at the waves!

CANTIGA D’AMIGO

Mia irmana fremosa, treides comigo
a la igreja de Vigo u é o mar salido:
E miraremos las ondas!

Mia irmana fremosa, treides de grado
a la igreja de Vigo u é o mar levado:
E miraremos las ondas!

A la igreja de Vig’u é o mar levado,
e verrá i, mia madre, o meu amado:
E miraremos las ondas!

A la igreja de Vig’u é o mar salido,
e verrá i, mia madre, o meu amigo:
E miraremos las ondas!

SONG OF A WRONGED TROUBADOUR

Never have I seen such wrong
as what this nobleman does to me,
and everybody in these parts
knows exactly what I mean:
the nobleman, whenever he likes,
goes to bed with his lovely wife
and doesn't pay me the slightest heed!

He doesn't fear me in the least
but holds me in disdain instead,
for his wife, whom he adores,
will give him sons until she's dead:
what nerve he has to give his name
to the three children that I made
without giving me a shred of credit!

I feel such pain I'm sure it must
be worse than any other kind:
he takes my lady off to bed,
says she's his and spends the night
in peace without a second thought,
and when she bears a son or daughter,
he doesn't recognize it's mine!

CANTIGA D'ESCARNHO

Nunca atan gran torto vi
com'eu prendo dun infançon;
e quantos ena terra son,
todo-lo teen por assi:
o infançon, cada que quer,
vai-se deitar con sa molher
e nulha ren non dá por mi!

E já me nunca temerá,
ca sempre me tev'en desden;
des i ar quer sa molher ben
e já sempr'i filhos fará;
si quer três filhos que fiz i,
filha-os todos pera si:
o Demo lev'o que m'en dá!

En tan gran coita viv'oj'eu,
que non poderia maior:
vai-se deitar con mia senhor,
e diz do leito que é seu
e deita-s'a dormir en paz;
des i, se filh' ou filha faz,
nono que outorgar por meu!

SONG OF DISCOMFORT

I'll never again be cheered
by the chirping
and delicate songs of birds
nor by love or great riches
nor by weapons (whose perils,
I confess,
have come to make me tremble),
but only by a seaworthy vessel
to carry me with all good speed
away from this land's demon
heart, full of scorpions,
as my heart knows, being sore
from all their stinging poison.

SIRVENTÊS

Non me posso pagar tanto
do canto
das aves nen de seu son,
nen d'amore nen de mixon
nen d'armas – ca ei espanto,
por quanto
mui perigosas son,
– come dun bon galeon,
que mi alongue muit'aginha
deste demo da campinha,
u os alacrães son;
ca dentro no coraçon
senti deles a espinha!

I solemnly swear by God
I'll go
without a beard or a cloak,
I'll keep my heart closed
to love, and take no weapons
(which always
result in grief and disaster):
a boat is all I ask for.
And with it I will sail
along the coast, selling
oil and flour, fleeing
until my heart is free
from every venomous sting.

The gaming tables used to
amuse me
and I always loved to joust,
but those things bore me now,
and spending nights as an armed
guard
has also lost its appeal:
I would rather be a seaman
than keep on as a knight.
When I was young I plied
the waters, and it's my dream
to sail once more on the deep,
out of the scorpions' reach.

I still have this to tell:
the devil
will never be able to fool me
with vain thoughts of using
the weapons I've laid to rest
(best
not even to mention them,
as I won't use them again).
Alone, as a merchantman,
I'll sail in search of a land
where I know I can't be stung
by black and vicious scorpions
or by brightly colored ones.

E juro par Deus lo santo
que manto
non tragerei nen granhon,
nen terrei d'amor razon
nen d'armas, por que quebranto
e chanto
ven delas toda sazon;
mais tragerei un dormon,
e irei pela marinha
vendend'azeit'e farinha;
e fugirei do poçon
do alacran, ca eu non
lhi sei outra meezinha.

Nen de lançar a tavolado
pagado
non sõo, se Deus m'ampar,
aqui, nen de bafordar;
e andar de noute armado,
sen grado
o faço, e a roldar;
ca mais me pago do mar
que de seer cavaleiro;
ca eu foi já marinheiro
e quero-m'ôi-mais guardar
do alacran, e tornar
ao que me foi primeiro.

E direi-vos un recado:
pecado
nunca me pod'enganar
que me faça já falar
en armas, ca non m'é dado
(doado
m'é de as eu razõar);
ante quer'andar sinlheiro
e ir come mercadeiro
alg?a terra buscar,
u me non possan culpar
alacran negro nem veiro.

SONG OF LOVE IN THE SUMMER

How very much I love this summer,
its flowers, trees and sky above,
and all the birds that sing of love,
because I feel at peace and happy
and even handsome – that's what happens
whenever anyone loves another.

When I walk on certain shores,
under branches and through pastures,
if I hear birds sing with passion
then with love and all my heart
and all I know of troubadour art
I make up songs of every sort.

I feel happy, all of a sudden,
when I hear birds sing in summer.

CANTIGA D'AMOR

Que muyto m'eu pago d'este verão
por estes rramos e por estas flores,
e polas aves que cantan d'amores,
por que ando hy led'e sen cuydado;
e assy faz tod'omen namorado:
sempre y anda led'e muy loução.

Cand'eu passo per alg?as rribeiras,
so bõas arvores, per bõos prados,
se cantan hy passaros namorados
log'eu con amores hy vou cantando,
e log'aly d'amores vou trobando,
e faço cantares en mil maneyras.

Ey eu gran viço e grand'alegria
quando mhas aves cantan no estyo.

SONG OF THE FLOWER OF THE GREEN PINE

Flower of the green pine, oh flower,
do you have news of my lover?
Oh God, and where is he?

Oh flower, flower of the green branch,
do you have news of my friend?
Oh God, and where is he?

Do you have news of my lover,
who has proved himself a liar?
Oh God, and where is he?

Do you have news of my friend,
who did not come when he said?
Oh God, and where is he?

You ask me about your lover?
I tell you he's well, he's coming.
Oh God, and where is he?

You ask me about your friend?
I tell you he's coming, he's well.

CANTIGA D'AMIGO

– Ai flores, ai flores do verde pino,
se sabedes novas do meu amigo?
ai, Deus, e u é?

– Ai flores, ai flores do verde ramo,
se sabedes novas do meu amado?
ai, Deus, e u é?

Se sabedes novas do meu amigo,
aquel que mentiu do que pôs comigo?
ai, Deus, e u é?

Se sabedes novas do meu amado,
aquel que mentiu do que mi á jurado?
ai, Deus, e u é?

– Vós me preguntades polo voss' amigo?
E eu ben vos digo que é sã' e vivo:
ai, Deus, e u é?

– Vós me preguntades polo voss' amado?
E eu ben vos digo que é viv' e são:
ai, Deus, e u é?

Oh God, and where is he?

I tell you he's well, he's coming,
he'll keep his word - take comfort.
Oh God, and where is he?

I tell you he's coming, he's well,
he'll be here - patience! - in a while.
Oh God, and where is he?

E eu ben vos digo que é sã' e vivo
e seerá vosc'ant' o prazo saido:
ai, Deus, e u é?

E eu ben vos digo que é viv' e são
e seerá vosc'ant' o prazo passado:
ai, Deus, e u é?

SONG TO AN UNEXPLODING WOMAN

Just look at my confounded state –
Marinha, how you fornicate!
I am really quite astounded
that you haven't yet exploded,
for with my mouth I cover
your mouth completely over,
and with my nose I close
the nostrils of your own,
and with my hands I hide
your ears and brows and eyes,
and as the first sleep comes
my cock fills up your cunt,
and my balls your arse
– no man has my art!
How do you not explode, Marinha?

CANTIGA D'ESCARNHO

Marinha, en tanto folegares
tenho eu por desaguisado;
e sõo mui maravilhado
de ti, por non arrebentares:
ca che tapo eu daquesta minha
boca a ta boca, Marinha;
e con estes narizes meus
tapo eu, Marinha, os teus;
e co'as mãos as orelhas,
os olhos e as sobrencelhas;
tapo-t'ao primeiro sono
da mia pissa o teu cono
como me non vej'a a neng?u,
e dos colhões esse cuu.
Como non rebentas, Marinha?

ARTICLES

Galician-Portuguese Troubadour Poetry: An Unsung Literature

January 18, 2006

[July 1, 2004]

This comprehensive essay discusses the origins, themes and poetic devices of Portugal's – and Galician Spain's – oldest recorded poetry.

The reader should beware of this essay's title, which refers to the current status of what might just as well – and more accurately – be called troubadour 'song', since all of this poetry was indeed at one time sung. Unfortunately, virtually none of the music has survived. Two manuscripts discovered in this century contain musical notation for thirteen of these poems, but this is less than one percent of the total, providing models for a very limited number of verse schemes, so that no clear notion of this particular school of troubadour music has emerged. Should further musically notated manuscripts be discovered, musicologists may eventually arrive at a reasonable understanding of the melodic structures and rhythms employed, but until then we have little choice but to appreciate the surviving texts as read or recited literature.

Leaving aside the presently unanswerable musical questions, we are confronted in every line of these poems with yet another mystery: the language. Why did Galician-Portuguese, our modern-day term for the tongue formerly spoken in northern Portugal and the Spanish region of Galicia, become the leading language of poetry for most of the Iberian Peninsula? Why did Alfonso X "the Learned", King of Castile and León, write all of his numerous prose works in Castilian Spanish and all of his poetry in Galician-Portuguese? How explain that roughly half of the surviving 1680 Galician-Portuguese troubadour poems, dating mostly from the 13th century, were written outside of the land where this language was spoken? Galician-Portuguese poetry prevailed across the Peninsula in all but the easternmost kingdoms of Aragon and Catalonia.

Some scholars contend that Galician-Portuguese had intrinsically 'lyrical' qualities that caused poets to prefer it over Castilian and other Spanish tongues, but this view does not square with literary history, which saw a vibrant Spanish poetry develop in succeeding centuries (with names such as Garcilaso de la Vega, John of the Cross and Góngora), while Galician-Portuguese soon died out as a written language. Already in the time of Alfonso X (1252-1284) there was Gonzalo de Berceo, whose Spanish verses in praise of the Virgin were not inferior to the King's own *Songs in Praise of Holy Mary*, which had little to do with court poetry but which he nonetheless wrote in Galician-Portuguese. It is hard to understand why, particularly if we assume (though it is perhaps an erroneous assumption) that at least some of the Marian songs were meant to circulate among the general public, which was by no means bilingual. Even the elite reading public was probably not all bilingual, for one of the original Marian songbooks provides prose translations into Spanish for 24 out of the first 25 songs.

While it may be argued that Alfonso X used Galician-Portuguese for his poetry simply because it was the established norm, it is tempting to posit a secondary, 'psychological' or 'existential' motive. (I put these words in quotes because they are too heavy with the 19th and 20th centuries to be used without them.) He may have felt an active attraction to Galician-Portuguese – not for its intrinsic poetic properties but because of what it represented for him. For the King and for many others, Galician-Portuguese was after all a shared private language, a jargon particular to the universe of poetry, the special linguistic support for another dimension, one that was open only to the initiated.

We may imagine that the foreignness of the language made the world it created that much more exotic, artificial, other, and so that much more appreciated by Alfonso X, who did not fare especially well in the natural world, his reign being marked by a series of personal and military defeats which culminated in the rebellion of his own son and the defection of his subjects. Only in the literary realm could the learned King take great satisfaction or at least profound solace, transforming his setbacks into the victory of well-rendered poetry, of which his 'Song of Discomfort' is an outstanding example. There the narrator 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. Although not directly autobiographical, the poignantly expressed feelings of weariness and dismay are surely the author's own.

Through the supreme fiction of poetry, Alfonso X and other troubadours were able to transcend – at least for brief moments – their local world. 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 began in Provence and spread in all directions – northern France, Germany, Italy and Iberia – was one of the first expressions of the unrelenting individuality that was to shake the Church's foundations via heterodox reform movements and eventually lead to the Renaissance.

The Provençal troubadours were hearty travellers, going wherever they were well received, and the generous courts of Spain were a favoured destination. Their travels intensified toward the end of the 12th century, when the popularity of court poetry had already peaked in southern France, and after 1209 they began to emigrate for political-religious reasons, being persecuted by the Church (via a crusade and then the Inquisition), which associated them with the Albigensian heresy.

Marcabrun and other Provençal troubadours began to visit Castile and León already in the time of Alfonso VII, who ruled over the two kingdoms from 1126 to 1157. During the political split that followed, the troubadours were as welcome as ever, Alfonso VIII of Castile (ruled 1158-1214) taking in twenty or more under his wing, while Alfonso IX of León (1188-1230) seems to have done some poetizing himself. But it was after reunification, in 1230, that the court of Ferdinand III became a veritable breeding ground for Galician?Portuguese poetry, thanks to the intense contact between troubadours from Provence and from the western part of the Peninsula, where this poetry first started. The Galician?Portuguese songbooks, unlike the Provençal ones, rarely provide biographical information about the authors, but the earliest identifiable troubadours were for the most part members of the Galician and Portuguese nobility.

Born in Galicia and Portugal shortly before 1200 and spending its middle years in various courts but especially in Spain, Galician-Portuguese poetry returned to its first home after the death of Alfonso X in 1284. King Dinis (reigned 1279-1325) was himself a fine and prolific poet, with 137 surviving songs, and his court – the first lavish court in Portugal – became the other great centre for the Galician-Portuguese school. After Dinis's death, the by then old-fashioned troubadour poetry disappeared forthwith, on the Peninsula as in the rest of Europe, and Galician-Portuguese itself ceased to exist as a literary language until poet Rosalia de Castro resurrected it in the 19th century.

It was also in the 19th century that the two largest surviving *cancioneiros*, or songbooks, of Galician-Portuguese troubadour poetry were discovered in Italy. Copied in the early 16th century, probably from the same manuscript, one of these songbooks is now kept at the Vatican Library, the other at the National Library of Lisbon. A third anthological songbook, almost surely produced in Alfonso X's scriptorium, had already been discovered in 1759, and belongs to the Ajuda Library in Lisbon.

This 'new' corpus of medieval troubadour songs, known as *cantigas,* was the object of important studies, but it never received the international recognition of its Provençal and French counterparts. In recent years translations have been made into the various European languages, but there are still many reasonably well-informed readers who don't even know that an Iberian troubadour poetry exists, for critics and poets themselves have not paid it much heed. This comparative neglect has to do with a comparative approach: Galician-Portuguese versus Provençal poetry. The comparison is inevitable, since the former derived in large part from the latter and sometimes, indeed, seems to be

a poor copy. But in certain *cantigas* the foreign models were used in new ways, or new settings were provided, and othe *cantigas* depended more on the native song tradition, with its own set of motifs, scenarios, and technical devices.

Of the three major types of *cantigas*, the *cantiga d'amor* was the most direct offspring of the Provençal *canso*. Highly appreciated in the Iberian courts as a novel and prestigious cultural item, it is precisely this variety of *cantiga* whose poetic qualities look pale to us today. Poor in strophic and metrical diversity, and with much simpler rhyme schemes, the *cantigas d'amor* were also thematically less convincing than the *cansos*. The Provençal love song was founded on the feudal relation of lord and vassal, with the troubadour assuming a subservient position vis-à-vis his aristocratic, life-giving lady and lord. But feudalism was not such a powerful or well-defined institution in western Iberia, and although the poets there addressed the lady of their *cantigas d'amor* as *senhor* (later feminized to become the modern *senhora* of Portuguese and *señora* of Spanish), they lacked a clear notion of the homage they owed this "lord" or of the benefit she owed him.

The Provençal troubadour compared the beauty of his lady (*midons*) to nature's most splendid phenomena, while the Peninsular poet merely accentuated his *senhor(a)*'s ladylike virtues, pouring on limp adjectives like 'fair', 'well-shaped', 'chaste', 'sensible', 'discreet', and 'worthy'. The Galician-Portuguese poet rarely achieves sublime projection of his lady as a perfect, god-like ideal, so that his focus turns back on himself ("Poor me!"), resulting in a poetry that is at times 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. Still, the Iberian troubadours did introduce some original imagery. The sea, not often mentioned in Provençal poetry, makes for some of the most compelling Galician-Portuguese love songs. Roi Fernandez's 'Song Against the Sea' and Pai Gomez Charinho's 'Song About the Pain of Love and Sea' are certainly self-pitying, but also very moving. And a few *cantigas d'amor*, such as Airas Nunez's 'Song of Love in the Summer', celebrate love with no less *joi* than we find in langue d'oc poetry.

The other type of Galician-Portuguese love song, the *cantiga d'amigo*, developed out of a collective, indubitably oral tradition. Even after passing through the moulds of Provençal-inspired court poetry, the overwhelming majority of these songs kept the refrain that is typical of folk music, and a number of them mention dancing. Nearly always narrated by young, unmarried girls (though the troubadours who sang them were all men), the *amigo* of these *cantigas* is usually mentioned in the opening lines and may refer to a boyfriend, a lover, a would-be boyfriend or lover, or someone the girl would like as her boyfriend or lover. The *cantigas d'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, meadows, and especially the seaside are typical places where the girl longs or waits for her beloved, or perhaps actually meets him. Sometimes the setting is a local shrine in Galicia or Portugal, but there is nothing religious about the songs, which may have their roots in pre-Christian times.

Although they impress us as naïf compositions, the *cantigas d'amigo* have their own technical sophistication, manifested in the ingenious use of parallelism, which can be loosely defined as "repetition with a difference." Parallelism takes several forms, the most poetically effective of which is the literal or linguistic variety. Typically found in *cantigas* with refrains, it is well exemplified by Pero Meogo's 'Song About a Girl at a Spring', in which the even-numbered stanzas repeat the information presented in the odd-numbered stanzas, but with slight variations, end words being substituted by synonyms or else changing position. At first glance the even 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 three and four, whose second lines in turn become the first lines of stanzas five and six. The verbal house of mirrors is topped off by a refrain in which *Leda dos amores* [Happy with love] re-echoes 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 is 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 explore – as some critics have – the symbolic resonance of the water, hair and mountain stag occupying the stage.

Some of the *cantigas d'amor* (man's point of view) employed refrains and the parallelism associated with the *cantiga d'amigo* (woman's point of view, though the troubadours who sang them were all men) and deriving from a pre-existing oral female song tradition. Was there also an oral song tradition among men? Probably. A more doubtful matter is whether men before the troubadours sang songs from the woman's point of view.

Galician-Portuguese love poetry – resulting from a cross between imported Provençal models and an indigenous song tradition about which we can only speculate – was a worthy literary achievement that deserves to be considered in its own right, but if we are going to compare and find it less brilliant than what the langue d'oc poets produced, then we must also recognize that when it came to satiric poetry the Galician-Portuguese troubadours outshone their peers from across the Pyrenees. The *cantiga d'escarnho* (same Germanic origin as the English *scorn*) was more daring, more concrete, more varied, more vindictive and more sacrilegious than its Provençal cousin.

The Provençal poets, for whom form was sacred, were more sober in their art, expressing satire in the relatively dignified *sirventes*, of which four types can be distinguished: moral/religious, political, literary, and personal. The last of these could be vitriolic, particularly when it mocked inept jongleurs, but this was the exception rather than the rule. The Galician-Portuguese poets, in their turn, produced an occasional moral *sirventes* à la Provençal, often reflecting on the worsening state of the world (Pero Gomez Barroso's 'Song about a Worsening World', for example), but the majority of the *cantigas d'escarnho* abound with gleeful invective, sarcasm and obscenity. M. Rodrigues Lapa, organizer of the first complete edition of the *cantigas d'escarnho*, called their ensemble a "moral sewer", and though his is no doubt an old-maidish judgment, many a modern reader or listener will blush at Afonso Eanes do Coton's wonderment that a certain Marinha doesn't explode from the impact of his sexual parts so completely filling hers. Many other, equally graphic *cantigas* mock homosexuals, cuckolds, exorbitant prostitutes, and unchaste nuns and priests.

But the *cantigas d'escarnho* were not all sex and scurrility. Dozens of songs rail against the stinginess, cowardice or uselessness of rich nobles (see Pero da Ponte's 'Song About a Rich Man Up for Auction'), against the late or inadequate payment of soldiers and jongleurs, and against haughty ladies. And the dozens of troubadours who frequented Alfonso X's court loved especially to rail at one another, often on the flimsiest of pretexts. Despite the large number of aristocrats and clerics among them, these troubadours were on the whole not a very decorous lot. This is no guarantee of quality, of course, but it is at least a promising sign, given that true poetry never worried about good manners.