

GALICIAN-PORTUGUESE TRAITS IN CAXARO'S CANTILENA

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In his *Saggi sulla letteratura maltese* Oliver Friggieri affirms that Caxaro's Cantilena evokes "la poesia mosarabica della Spagna".¹ In this paper I would like to show some possible traits that the Cantilena's composition may have in common not only with the poetry of Al Andalus but also with Galician-Portuguese medieval poetry.

In the first place I would like to consider the text found by Wettinger and Fsadni of primordial importance and as such definitive. Such possibilities as author Caxaro's variant quatrain or copyist Brandano's awareness of gross transcription mistakes in the same quatrain and his correct recopying, resulting in lines 11-14² or a literary recomposition of lines 7-11 by Brandano which resulted in a superior styled version³, should be considered, in my view, revealing but conjectural. The text is the only one directly available to the reader and, as in narrative, through it the reader acquires knowledge of its object and the process of its production. It may be briefly said that the text of this XV Century poem in twenty preponderantly couple-rhymed verses (aa bb . . .) presents the following scheme: an invocation (1-2), the narration of an unhappy love event and the lyric I's situation thereby (3-6), its delusion (7-10, 11-14), and its attempt to try and reverse the misfortune (15-20).

The paragraph introducing Caxaro's poem reminds one of the *razó* of Provençal and Galician-Portuguese Medieval poetry. The *razó* is the Provençal name for a shortened biography in prose at the beginning of the poem. These biographies were introduced during the 13th Century when the Cancioneiros began to be compiled.

Another thing that reminds one of Galician Medieval poetry is the opening lines:

Xideu il cada ye gireni tale nichadithicum
Mensab fil gueri uele nisab fo homorcom,

typical of the class of poems called *cantigas de amigo* (or *cansó d'amic* or *cansó d'amiet*). The most remarkable fact in this class of poems is that the lyric I assumes the rôle of a woman who sings her love misfortunes either to her mother, or to her companions, or to her neighbours or to other women. The Galician-Portuguese poets (who flourished especially between 1252 and 1284) distinguished the above from the *cantiga d'amor* or *cansó d'amour* where the lyric I is a man addressing his lover. Caxaro's *Cantilena* has a typical woman-to-lover stereotyped lament invocation. Some examples of the opening lines of the 13th Century *cantigas d'amigo* may be useful, where it will be seen that the invocation and the complaint are proper to this type of poem. In the first half of the 13th Century João Garcia de Guilhade began thus one of his poems:

Vistes, *mias donas*, quando noutro dia
o meu amigo comigo falou,
foi mui queixos'⁴

In the same period Sancho Sanches wrote the following:

Amiga, bem sey do meu amigo
que é mort' ou quer outra dona bem.⁵

If Peter Caxaro's invocation is a feminine construct used by the poet, nevertheless, the house building sustained metaphor and its diction throughout the rest of the poem has a masculine flavour. This is the opposite of what happens in Galician-Portuguese poems of this kind where the poet fulfills till the end the rôle of a woman. Caxaro's diction betrays his sex and partially interrupts the process of a *cansó d'amic*.

Calb mehandihe chakim soltan ui le mule (line 13) has a very deep significance and makes Caxaro's poem somewhat nearer to the Galician-Portuguese poems. Neither the man with an "ungoverned, kingless and lordless heart" nor the woman is identified in the poem, not even by a pseudonym called *senhal* by the Provençals and *ism mustâr* by the Andalucian Arabic poets. The pseudonym (whose function was to keep secret the man's and woman's identity, since this type of love was based on extramarital relations) is rare in Galician-Portuguese poems, as in the Minnesang, even though the poets obeyed the secrecy code. This secrecy code is presumed to be Caxaro's intention when he made use of the triple adjective synecdoche.⁶

The contents of lines 4 to 6 are the consequence of what the Provençals called *dan* or *aunta*, the harm that the beloved inflicted on the lover. If the *Cantilena* is a *cantiga d'amigo*, the fictional I is a woman lamenting the lack of love because of her lover's indifference, his absence or his preference for another woman. However, the metaphors of the deep well, the broken steps, death by drowning and the stormy sea are not extant in Galician-Portuguese Medieval poems. Only the well and the fountain are a commonplace in this genre. As a meetingplace of girls and lovers these elements have a sexual connotation.

The desperate situation depicted by the lyric I in lines 4-6 shows to what extremes the predominance of love reduces the lover. Andalucian Arabic poets use such phrases as *hukm al-hubb* (the dominion of love), *din al-hawah* (the religion of love), *sultan al-hawah* (the power of love). The struggle between Platonic love (called *'udri* and *hubb 'udri* by Andalucian poets) and carnal love is at the root of medieval poetry. In Guillaume of Aquitaine (1071-1127) there are already the two contrastive terms *amigua* and *dompna*.⁷ Achille Pellizzari in *La Vita di Guittone d'Arezzo* says

I Provenzali, per consiliare i concetti, che sembravano contraddittorii dell'amore per la donna e del culto di Dio, avevano ricorso alla teoria dell'amore puro e dell'amore misto. I poeti del dolce stil nuovo resolsero, invece, l'antitesi inalzando la donna ancor più che non avessero fatto gli occitanici e quasi divinizzandola.⁸

The indifference of the beloved and the agonistic factor in the lover's conscience provoked what in the Minnesang is called *Kumber* or *Sorge* which is the unhappiness opposed to the *joy* (joie). With regards to Andalucian poems Henri Pérès remarks: "Innombrales sont les vers où l'on trouve soit le mot *wadid* (douleur de l'amour, amour douloureux), soit celui de *tarab* (joie) ou ses synonymes: *farah*, *suroûr*, *masarra*".⁹

The element of the "ungoverned, kingless and lordless heart" provokes a satirical factor. As the *om liges* or *home lige* is conscious of his service with regards his feudal lord, he has also a "feudal" relationship to his lover deep in *coita* or sexual attraction. The *senhor* (the woman)¹⁰ complains about this lack of veneration and considers it a breach of feudal relations. That is why she remarks that his heart is lordless since she should be the queen of his heart.

Medieval poets called the beloved *midons*,¹¹ equivalent to the Andalucian terminology of *sayyidi* and *mulayya* used in this context.¹²

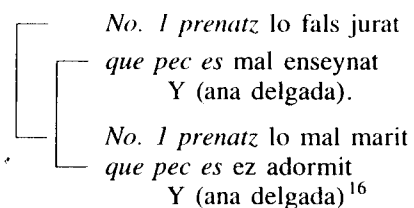
Whatever is the textual status of lines 7-10 and 11-14, they doubtlessly form a sort of refrain. The rhyming seems jumbled up and chaotic: deaf; ghed. However there is the parallelism typical of the *cantiga d'amigo* in its original form. Classification is difficult in Galician-Portuguese *cansós* but there are instances of

schemes in which lines are repeated with a variant word or clause. The following is a 13th century poem. Its two stanzas are very similar—the underlined words are semantically similar though the words are different.

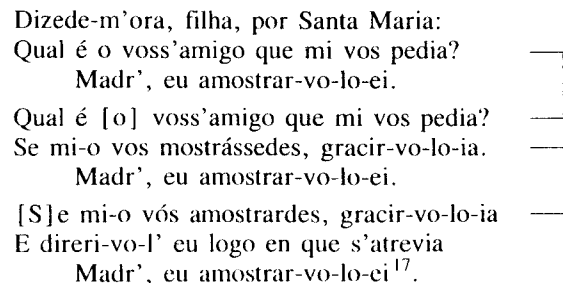


*Huakit hi mirammiti*¹⁴ in variant manifestations is the leitmotif of the refrains and of the poem. It appears four times (lines 7, 10, 11, 14) symmetrically positioned in the first and last lines of the refrains. Lexically and semantically lines 7 and 14 and lines 9 and 13 are identical and parallelistic. The first hemistichs of lines 8 and 12 are practically identical and are coupled by the adversative conjunction *melma* to semantically similar clauses, even though these are lexically different (*chitali tafal morchi* and *kitatili li gebel*). It seems that the parallelism in these refrains is what Galician-Portuguese poets called *leixa-pren* (Leave and take again).

Leixa-pren is a metrical scheme which consists of the subordination of a stanza to the previous one. The poet may begin a stanza reproducing the last line of the previous stanza or he may simply repeat at the beginning of the stanza a word or a clause of the previous one¹⁵. Giraut Riquier (1230–1300) wrote the following poem:



In the *Cancioneiro da Vaticana* there is a poem by Nuno Fernandes Torneol (13th Century) which illustrates this process:



As it can be observed in the poem referred to above, a stanza takes again what the other one left. *Huakit hy mirammiti* of line 11 takes the *vackit hi mirammiti* left on line 10. In their turn, lines 11 and 14 take the lines 7 and 10 left by the previous stanza. Practically line 15 begins with *Huec ucakit hi mirammiti* repeating the current phrase of the previous verses. The *leixa-pren* device probably had its origin in the popular poetry corresponding to choreographic movements which in turn may have been a result of medieval liturgical Latin poetry. It should be admitted, however, that there are only slight vestiges of *leixa-pren* in Caxaro's poem since this poetic device is restricted to the refrains and to the first line of the last stanza only.

One of the most intriguing factors in the poem are the words *Huakit* (lines 7, 11, 14), *vackit* (line 10), *Huec ucakit* (line 15). In their textual analysis Wettinger and Fsadni transcribed them by *Waqghet*, of course, with the exception of *U hekk waqghet* of line 15. Is it paleographically and orthographically possible that the conjunction *u* (expressed five times in the poem) may be linked to *waqghet*? Is it possible that *Huakit* and *vackit* mean *U waqghet* constituting elision similar to that occurring in *Huec ucakit* meaning *U hekk waqghet*? If this interpretation is possible and since these expressions are characteristically posited at the beginning of verses linking the stanzas, then, it may be possible that there is extant the *atafinda* element of Galician-Portuguese poetry. *Atafinda* is a metrical process by which verses are linked one to another till the end of the *cansó*. The linking elements are normally conjunctions such as *and, because, then, so, when, where*¹⁸. Rodrigues Lapa says that this verse method is "characteristic of our [Galician-Portuguese] poetry and is almost totally unknown to French and Provençal poetry"¹⁹. The existence of *fen* (lines 5, 9, 13) and *halax* (line 18) may corroborate this because they link the verse to the previous one and to the following one. A short extract from a poem by Dom Diniz (13th–14th Century) illustrates this method:

Meu amigo ven oj'aqui
e diz que quer migo falar,
e sab'el que mi faz pesar,
madre, *pois* que lh'eu defendi
que non fosse per nulha ren
per u eu foss' e ora ven.²⁰

If Caxaro's poem admits the interpretation given above, it is possible, then, that characteristically Galician poetic traits are again extant, even though in a very restricted range.

Verse *Mechtatlix mihallimin me chitali tafal morchi* of lines 8 and 12, contains a very important bipolar antagonism: the innocented workers on one hand, and the loose clay, the split stones and the weak foundation, on the other. Even though Caxaro's poem doesn't identify the weak points of the lyric I's love affair, they could range from the unsustainable extramarital relationship itself to the spying activities of the *raqib* and *wāshi* met in Andalusian Arabic poetry. Henri Pères writes:

On ne peut manquer d'être frappé par la fréquence avec laquelle les poètes parlent de personnages symboliques portant le nom de *raqib*: observateur ou espion; *wāshi*: détracteur ou calomniateur, qui se retrouveront sous des noms tout aussi stéréotypés chez les troubadours: *gardador* correspondra à *raqib* et *lauzengier* à *wāshi*²¹.

If Caxaro's poem is really a *cantiga d'amigo* the feminine lyric I confesses her delusion with regards to the flimsy possibilities (symbolized by *tafal morchi*) of an already untenable difficult situation.

In spite of the difficulties encountered, the lyric I does not seem to be at a total loss:

Biddilihe inte il miken illi yeutihe
Min ibiddill il-miken ibidil il vintura.

These lines form a complementary parallel where the predicate of the clauses [*inte*] *biddilihe* . . . *il miken* and [*min*] *ibiddill il miken* produces a change from the adjective clause (*illi yeutihe*) to a noun phrase (*il vintura*), iconically representing the lyric I's hope of change of fortune in the future. They thus show that the lyric I sees a light at the end of the tunnel and a hope in a sea of troubles. In the Minnesang this hopeful sentiment was called *Gedinke*, *Trost*, *Zuoversiht* or *Geloube*; the Provençals called it *conort*.

It may be possible that the last three lines of Caxaro's poem can be denominated the *envoi* of the *cansó d'amic*. Even though normally these lines should be shorter than the poem's stanza lines they really conclude the poetic message giving it a final touch of hope. In Galician-Portuguese terminology this is equivalent to the *fiñda*. Continuing its sustained metaphor the lyric I has the probability of changing its misfortune on a symbolically different piece of land. And even this piece of land can have a variety of qualities (and so, of opportunities) which may give the lyric I the joy it needs. Self-deception apart, it knows, however, that cohabitation (*tamara?*) is the better part (*hactar min hedann*) of the enterprise.

Most probably Caxaro's medieval poem is unique in Maltese literature. Moreover, during this period Malta was a polyvalent melting pot and so it received more influences that can perhaps be accounted for. Indicators qualifying Caxaro's poem as a *cantiga d'amigo* with a fictitious female lyric I, the use of certain feudal nomenclature, the concept of the predominance of love, the concrete delusion situation, the technical devices of *leixa-pren* and *atafinda*, the impossible extramarital relationship and the hope at the end, mark this medieval poem with certain Galician-Portuguese traits intertwined with Andalucian Arabic influences. It certainly doesn't possess the dynamic vigour of the *zejel* nor the rhetorical force of the *planh* (dirge) nor the graceful idyllic contents of some *cantigas d'amigo*. Nevertheless, it certainly transmits in an ancient uncouth tongue the sufferings and hopes of a woman in love.

NOTES

- 1 Friggieri, Oliver. *Saggi sulla letteratura maltese*. Malta: Malta University Press, 1989 pp. 17–18.
- 2 Brincat, G. "Critica testuale della Cantilena di Pietro Caxaro" in *Journal of Maltese Studies*, 16 (1986) p. 12.
- 3 Cassola, A. "Sull'autore del vv. 11–14 della Cantilena di Petrus Caxaro" in *Melita Historica*, 3 (1986) pp. 199–202.
- 4 Correia, N. *Cantares dos trovadores galego-portugueses*. Lisbon: Editorial Estampa, 1976 p.128.
- 5 Spina, S. *A lírica trovadoresca*. Rio de Janeiro: Grifo, 1972 p. 346.
- 6 Pérès H. "La poésie arabe d'Andalousie" in *L'Islam et l'Occident* Paris: Cahiers du Sud, 1947. p. 117. See also Monteverdi, A. *La poesia lirica provençale*. Roma: Edizione dell'Ateneo, 1954. p. 83.

7 Heer, F. *The Medieval World*. London: Sphere Book, 1974, pp. 154–155.

8 In Spina. op. cit., p. 383.

9 Pérès. H. op. cit. p. 117.

10 Archaic Galician-Portuguese forms in *-or* did not have any gender inflection.

11 For "meus dominus" which means "my lady".

12 Pérès. H. op. cit. p. 117.

13 Correia N. op. cit. p. 200.

14 Just for mention and without implying any mutual influence or otherwise, the *Wife's Lament*, an 11th Century poem written in Old English has an almost identical line: "Fallen is this house". Cfr. Cosman C. (Edit) *Women poets*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988.

15 Spina S.-op. cit. p. 414.

16 Ibid., p. 227.

17 In Moisés M. *Dicionário de termos literários*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1982, p. 304.

18 Ibid. p. 46. See also Spina, S. op. cit., p. 384.

19 Rodrigues Lapa, M. *Lições de literatura portuguesa*. Coimbra: Editora, 1952. p. 190.

20 In Moisés M. op. cit., p. 46.

21 Pérès. H. op. cit., pp. 119.