GALICIAN–PORTUGUESE TRAITS IN CAXARO’S CANTILENA

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In his Saggi sulla letteratura maltense Oliver Friggiari affirms that Caxaro’s Cantilena evokes “la poesia mosarabica della Spagna.” 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 Fsdani of primordial importance and as such definitive. Such possibilities as author Caxaro’s variant quatrains or copyst Brandano’s awareness of gross transcription mistakes in the same quatrain and his correct recopying, resulting in lines 11–14 or a literary recomposition of lines 7–11 by Brandano which resulted in a superior styled version, 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’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 nitchadithum
Mensab fili gearing uelis nisab fo homoroc,

of the class of poems called cantigas de amigo (or cansó d’amic or cansó d’ami). The most remarkable fact in this class of poems is that the lyric 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 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 de 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 Joao Garcia de Guilhade began two of his poems:

Vistes, misas donas, quando noutro dia
ó meu amigo comigo falou,
foi meu queixox.

In the same period Sancho Sanches wrote the following:

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

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’ami.
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.

As freres do meu amigo
As freres do meu amado

briosos van no navio
briosos van [e] no barco!

E van-s [e] as freres
E van-se [e] as freres

d’aqüí ben con meus amores
Idas son as freres

Huañit hi mirammiti

Huañit hi mirammiti 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 melhora to semantically similar clauses, even though these are lexically different (chital tafal morchi and kititil 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 one. Giraut Riquer (1230–1300) wrote the following poem:

No. 1: prenazo lo fals jurat
que pec es maleneyat
Y ana delgada.

No. 1: prenazo lo mal marat
que pec es ez adornat
Y ana delgada.

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

Dizede-m’ora, filha, por Santa Maria:
Qual é o voss’amo que mi vos pedia?
Madr’, eu amostrar-vo-lo-ei.

Qual é [o] voss’amo que mi vos pedia?
Se mi-o vos mostrássedes, graciar-vo-lo-ia.
Madr’, eu amostrar-vo-lo-ei.

[S]e mi-o vos amostrádes, graciar-vo-lo-ia
E direrí-vi’l eu logo en que s’atrevia
Madr’, eu amostrar-vo-lo-ei.

As it can be observed in the poem referred to above, a stanza takes again what the other one left. Huañit hi 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 Huañit 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 Caxarо’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 Huañit (lines 7, 11, 14), vackit (line 10), Huañit (line 15). In their textual analysis Wettiger and Fadanini transcribed them by Wagheeth, 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 wagheeth? Is it possible that Huañit and vackit mean U wagheeth constituting elision similar to that occurring in Huañit meaning U hekk wagheeth? 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 ataifinda element of Galician-Portuguese poetry. Ataifinda is a metrical process by which verses are linked one to another till the end of the canso. The linking elements are normally conjunctions such as and, because, then, so, when, where. Rodrigues Lapa says that this verse method is “characteristic of our [Galician-Portuguese] poetry and is almost totally unknown to French and Provençal poetry.” The existence of en (lines 5, 9, 13) and halas (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 o’q’i
e diz que quer migo falar,
e sab’el que mi faz pesar,
madre, pois que lh’eu defendi
que non fosse per nulla ren
per u eu foss’ e ora ven.

If Caxarо’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 Mecchattilix mihallimin me chital 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 Caxarо’s poem doesn’t identify the weak points of the lyric’s love affair, they could range from the unsustainable extramarital relationship itself to the spying activities of the raqib and wåshi met in Andalucian Arabic poetry. Henri Péres 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; wåshi: détructeur ou calomniateur, qui se retrouveront sous des noms tout aussi stéréotypés chez les troubadours: gardador correspondra à raqib et laucengier à wåshi.
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:

Biddilhe inte i miken illi yeutihe
Min ibidill il-miken ibidil il vintura.

These lines form a complementary parallel where the predicate of the clauses [inte] biddilhe, . . . il miken and [min] ibidill 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 Geloubte; the Provençals called it conor.

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 fiinda. 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 hedan) 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-prén and atafinda, the impossibleextramartial 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

8 In Spina, op. cit., p. 383.
9 Pères, H. op. cit. p. 417.
10 Archaic Galician-Portuguese forms in -or did not have any gender inflection.
11 For ‘meus dominus’ which means ‘my lady’.
12 Pères. H. op. cit. p. 117.
15 Spina S. op. cit. p. 414.
16 Ibid.,. p. 227.
18 Ibid. p. 384.
20 In Moisés M. op. cit., p. 46.
21 Pères. H. op. cit.,. pp. 119.