*Erín Moure*

Postface to

# O Cadoiro

poems


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# O Cadoiro
## postface

*(for Liberdade Aguirre)*

« Todos os discursos, qualquer que fosse o seu estatuto,
a sua forma, o seu valor, e qualquer que fosse o tratamento que se lhes desse,
desenrolar-se-iam no anonimato do murmúrio. » Michel Foucault

*O cadoiro* is, literally, *the place where falling is made.* In Galician, *cadoiro* is one word for waterfall. *Cataract*, perhaps. Thus, *the fall*. This to me is the place of poetry. For whoever writes poetry must be prepared, ever, to fall down.

And I did fall. Having already fallen into Galician and thus Portuguese, I had barely stood up again when I fell — or leapt — into one of the founts of lyric in Western Europe, the troubadour poetry of the medieval Galician-Portuguese songbooks, the *cancioneiros*. These songbooks hold what remains to us of the 200 years of medieval Iberian poetry, all written in Galician-Portuguese, predecessor of both modern Portuguese and modern Galician. Influenced by Provençal verse of courtly love, the Iberian peninsular cantigas also bent and amplified that lineage, incorporating indigenous elements, such as evocations of the sea, or the tradition of women's song.

The troubadour verse speaks to us in the first person singular, in a breach with the epic narrative mode and with ecclesiastical modes of praise. Gregorian chant, and Arab love poetry, preceded and infiltrated

it, just as Provençal poetry was concurrent with it. Richard Zenith, attentive translator of these Iberian cantigas into English,[1] in his *An Unsung Literature* (July 2004), wrote: "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." In this verse, the speaker's own subjectivity, own feelings, are the poetic "substance," yet these are quite consciously *constructed* by the poet, never "unmediated," always social, intended, and profane: directed toward another human, not to God. This human "turn" is at the very root of lyric, and the act of turning is a movement of incredible fragility and febrility — a turning away from God's love and its purported sufficiency toward a secular love which never purports sufficiency.

Three Iberian songbooks have come down to us. Together (for they are not entirely coincident), they hold three main types of poem: *de amor*, *de amigo*, *de escarnio e maldizer*. Courtly love; feminine longing for the absent lover; scorn and slander. Such ripples in language. After years of dreaming "Erín, go to Lisbon to read the books," I went to live in Lisbon in early 2004 to read these *cancioneiros*.

It was as if Lee Meriwether had let go of her clipboard and entered the Time Tunnel. Reading is already ever a wandering and in Lisboa, Olispoa, port of Odysseus, I entered the *cancioneiros*. The "fingerprints" of these books, their inscription, their orthography, their graphemes, took hold of me; how I loved the movements and jointings of the lines

[1] Richard Zenith's *115 Galician-Portuguese Troubadour Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995) is, alas, out of print. It holds the most extensive selection in English of the 1163 poems. . . . I'm hoping Zenith will be able to bring it back into print again.

 

and letters that lay bare the cadence of voices and the attention/inattention of the copying hand. In the *cantigas de amigo* of the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional*, and in the *cantigas de amor* of the *Cancioneiro de Ajuda*, I fell into such tapestries of word and sound, the "wallpaper"-repetitive sonorities of, yes, an unrequited love. Oh *cancioneiros*, oh ports of portucale, with a lilt of celtic marking the vernacular of vanished Rome. *Camiñarmos polas palabras. . . .*

The most extensive of these three songbooks, the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional*, holds over 1600 cantigas of all types. It was copied, or created, in the sixteenth century, 350 years after the cantigas were first written and, curiously, not in Portugal or Galicia but in Italy, from an earlier copy or perhaps two copies on *rótulos*, rolls, disintegrating at the time of transcription, which may have been contemporary with the troubadours. At the time of this copying, the first grammars of Portuguese were only just appearing; the written language was not yet as settled as our English is now.[2] As such, the cancioneiro's script follows the pace and expression of the troubadours' voices. In these songbooks poetry works against itself as mythic quantity, as transcendence, as voice; here, writing itself scratches the lyric.

By closely studying the poems in a lithographed reproduction of a photographic facsimile (the original too fragile) of the sixteenth-century manuscript, itself copied from an "original" and vanished apograph,

[2] The first Portuguese grammar, by Fernão de Oliveira, dates from 1536. The first Galician grammar in Galician, *Grámatica do idioma galego*, by Manuel Lugrís Freire, appeared in 1922.

and studying later transcriptions as well — critical/diplomatic but also modern anthologized versions — I hoped to respond with my own corporeal presence to questions that burned, and burn, for me:

*What is a work of art?*
*What is an archive?*
*What does it mean to "trobar" today?*



Reading the songbooks, I was very aware of reading a copy of a copy of a copy. With Derrida's *Mal d'archive* and Foucault's *Archéologie du savoir* echoing in me, I let the poems' so-called secondary effects absorb me — the many aspects of the poems eliminated by modernizing transcribers who diverge and alter them in their effort to make "content," "regularities of form," the "author's intent" appear. I began to recognize that the idea of an "original" poem is ever-elusive, the original exceeds our grasp *always*.

I looked to discern, in my own way, the first copyist's (who was of course never first at all) markings, looked for the surfaces the copyists might have seen, and then reproduced — and how they "made" the forms before my eyes. The original script — simple, smudged, worn — is beautiful; in it, the words' physical presence is a veritable record of breath and rhythms of speech, of accent. In this script and in its forms on the page, I looked at what propelled lyric, what made it *palpable*. What could not be standardized, so was later dropped. What was called an error.

The poems awed me with the liquidity of their repetitive sonority, the levels of non-meaning, of plaint, of vibratory extension. The way this

sonority breaks against the reader's own *langue de fond* as surprise and murmur. In that traverse or cut that a person schooled in one language experiences in reading another.

The cantigas opened other lyric doors to me, too. I discovered the medieval synchronic sense of time, a space where the solace of the Fichtean curve (with its rising action, conflict, climax, denouement) does not operate. As Portuguese scholar Stephen Reckert says:[3] "we see here the typical medieval disinterest for chronological sequence, often substituted by a vision of events that was simultaneous and pictorial." Narrative advances differently. The aspect of salvation and new life, introduced later into lyric by Dante in his *Vita Nuova*, is not yet present, and without the prospect of salvation — the resacralization of the profane — linearity does not function in the same overarching way.

The *cantigas de amor* especially and perversely drew me. They are the poems most influenced by Provençal verse, that is, by the conventions of courtly love, and express a kind of sexless longing where bodies never touched and names were never named: a sexual tension and withholding. These cantigas are so repetitive, predictable, yet within a few set phrases and conceits, schemes of very regular rhyme and metre, they induce such *saudade,* longing, *soidade,* loneliness. Their sonority is their beauty; their repetition is their glamour. They embrace

[3] Stephen Reckert and Helder Macedo, *Do Cancioneiro de Amigo*, 3rd ed. (Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim, 1996), p. 120: "reconhecemos o típico desinteresse medieval pela sequência cronológica, substituída amiúde por uma visão simultânea e pictórica dos acontecimentos."

banality on banality's terrain and then exit it on some other field entirely. What emerges is an expression of great peace and longing and breath and orphic variability. Variability, yes, for mastery was often shown by deviations, by a simple twist, a break, by a line that didn't rhyme. These disruptions of expectation, these disjuncts, marked delight, excellence.

The *cantigas de amigo* are much closer to what we today "know" of lyric — on the surface. Beneath it, there's a sexual mixage and usurpation — men writing in the voices of women, borrowing a longstanding local tradition of women's song that may predate Roman occupation and is still present in Galicia today. These poems are not "courtly" but "common" and, in them, concrete images emerge for the first time. In response, I wrote plaints of my own, enacting, mixing and echoing, translating but two or three poems and enclosing them among those that are sheer invention, and attributing my own poems impulsively to whichever troubadour's name was most proximate in my notebooks.

The forms and plaints of the cantigas thus seeped into my work, unseating forms, compelling variegated sounds and capacities, irregularities. So that, I hope, the cantigas, rife with ambiguities and errors, can resonate for us, too, in Canada, in English. With the *cancioneiros* as *fond* from which to draw sounds and layerings of interpretation, transcription, my sole aim was to transpose a tone and delicacy, a splendour, a visual pleasure. A wandering and turn.

The exchange from one language to another occurs, above all, on the level of tropes, soundscapes. At the same time, the poems incorporate formal structures of archive (use archival numbering, and the names of

troubadours, as part of what is "written"), the material substrate of the cantigas. Related texts, textures also enter them, push at or reveal aspects not of the original text but of my own transcription of the transcription in the photograph, printed on a printing press, of the transcription of the now-lost apograph we have never seen that we so confidently call the *original*. And subject to noise, to the noise of my own being and experience and language. They are, simply, poems.

And in a reverse tide, understandably, the troubadours started to infiltrate my other reading. In Jacques Derrida's *Mal d'archive*, which I read wandering the streets of Lisbon in the February rain, I discovered a *mal d'archive* that his words do not anticipate, one which in *tone* approaches the Galician/Portuguese untranslatable word *saudade*. Derrida "sounds like" the medieval *cantigas de amor.* As if cantigas, too, bear something of the Hebraic. As I worked, I began to corrupt and invent Derridean lament into the text'ure of the paper, creating three-dimentional readings, volumes, and even performances, interactions with other people, with stone walls, with spaces and texts and voices. As if I could learn better how the poems could work on the page by disturbing what we know of page itself. What I give you here is a synchronic band of libidinal space-time *where writing itself scratches the lyric* and where the thread of speech itself is palpable, illumined.

Giorgio Agamben wrote, "the troubadours want not to recall arguments consigned to a *topos* but instead to experience the very event of language as original *topos* . . . an absolute proximity of love, speech, and knowledge. The *razo*, which lies at the foundation of poetry and constitutes what the poets call its dictation (*dictamen*), is therefore neither a biographical nor a linguistic event. It is instead a zone of indifference, so to speak, between lived experience and what is poeticized, an 'experience of speech' as an inexhaustible experience of love. *Amor* is the

name given by the troubadours to this experience of the dwelling of speech in the beginning: and for them love is therefore the *razo de trobar* par excellence." [4]

Such was the place where I fell. It became "place" in the act of falling. A place where I could fall and keep falling. Where I wrote poems that were palimpsests, markings and echoes bearing the shiver of the archive. For origin is always already lost here, lost again and again, and its very losing makes origin possible. And if this fallen trajectory of origin stabilizes at all, it is somewhere far ahead of it. At the time of reading. No wonder we fall.

As Derrida urges: ". . . The question of the archive is the question of the future, of the future itself, a question of a response, of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow. If we wish to know what the archive is trying to tell us, we cannot know but in the time to come. Perhaps."[5]

*Perhaps.*

Is this the reason why I find myself, again, and ever, in the falling-down-place? The place poetry is made. The "not-yet." The very falling poses the question of the future. The Peninsular is not an island, but part of the Maine. Here, in its turning from the certainties of God to a human insufficiency, it is a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow. Mâine. And this, "peu importe qui parle."[6]

What I hope my poems open to readers, as they did to me, their first reader, is that a subjectivity, an I, an *eu*, in entering and being altered by

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[4] Giorgio Agamben, "The Dictation of Poetry," in *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), tr. from Italian to English by Daniel Heller-Roazen, p. 79.

[5] Jacques Derrida, *Mal d'archive* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), p. 60. Moure translation.

[6] Michel Foucault, *O que é um autor* (Lisboa: Vega, 1992). Tr. from French to Portuguese by António F. Cascais and Edmundo Cordeiro.

 

words, fallen, befallen, enters the *saudade* of world. Agamben's "whatever singularity." Norma Cole's "body of expectation." Fred Wah's "music at the heart of thinking." Robin Blaser's "image nation." Or his "cry of Merlin." Fanny Howe's "full heart." Lisa Robertson's "stuttered accoutrements." Chus Pato's "infinite of language." Choral. Nem sem chorar.

Erín Moure
Lisbon, 14 February 2004 / Fredericton, 12 April 2005
Montreal and Calgary, 22 November 2006

PS The cantigas of scorn remain a question of the future. Which is to say, they will appear in another book, another year.

# O meu Cadoiro —— Os nomes

## 161 troubadours, 150 years, 1693 known poems

1. Abril Perez
2. Affonss Aanes da Coron, Affonss Eanes da Coron *or* do Coton, Affonso do Cotom *or* da Coron
3. Affonso Fernandez Cebolhilha
4. Afonso Fernandez Cubel, Caualeyro
5. Affonso de Leon (El Rey Don)
6. Affonsso Lopez de Bayam (Don)
7. Affonsso Meendez de Besteyro, Affonso Meendez de Beesteyros, Affonso Meendiz de Besteyros
8. Affonso Paez de Bragáá
9. Affonso Sanchez (Don), Affonsso Sanchez (Don)
10. Affonso Soarez
11. Ayras Carpancho
12. Ayras Engeytado
13. Ayras Moniz d Asme
14. Ayras Nunes
15. Ayras Paez, Iograr
16. Ayras Paez Vuytoron
17. Airas Veaz
18. Alfonso de Castella e de Leom (El Rey Dom)
19. Aluaro Afomso
20. Aluaro Gomez
21. Anónimo (arte de trovar)
22. Arnaldo (Don)
23. Bernal de Bonaualle (Dom), Bernal de Bonaual, Don Bernaldo
24. Bonifaz de Genua
25. Calderyron
26. Cartuxo
27. Denis (El Rey Dom)

 

28. Diego Moniz
29. Diego Pezelho, Iograr
30. Diogo Gonçalves de Monte Moor o Nouo
31. Donzelas
32. (E)Steuam Coelho
33. (E)Steuam Falam, Steuan Fayan *or* Falan
34. (E)Steuan Fernandez Barreto
35. (E)Steuam Fernandes d Elvas
36. Esteuan da Guarda, Steuam de Guarda
37. Esteuon Perez Froyan (Dom)
38. (E)Steuam Rreimondo
39. (E)Teuam Trauanca
40. Fernan Fernandez Cogominho, Fernam Fernandez Cogominho (Don)
41. Fernan Figueyra *or* Figueyro de Lemos
42. Fernan Froyaz
43. Fernam Garcia Esgaraungha (Dom), Fernan Garcia Esgarauunha (Don)
44. Fernam Gonçalues de Seaura, Fernan Gonçaluiz de Seaura, Fernan Gonçaluez de Seabra
45. Fernam do Lago
46. Fernam Padrom
47. Fernan Paaez *or* Paez de Tamalancos (Dom), Ffernan Paez de Talamancos
48. Fernan Rodriguez de Calheyros, Fernan Rrodriguic de Calheyros, Fernan Rodrigiz de Calheyros
49. Fernan Rodriguis Redondo
50. Fernam Velho
51. Fernand . . .
52. Fernand Eanes
53. Ffernand Esqueo *or* Esquio
54. Galisteu Fernandiz
55. Garcia Martijz (Don)
56. Garcia Meendiz d Eixo (Don)
57. Garcia Perez
58. Gil Perez, Conde
59. Gil Sanchez (Don)
60. Golparro

61. Gomez Garcia (Dom)
62. Gonçal Eanes do Vinhal
63. Gonçalo Garcia (O Conde Don)
64. Johan, Iograr; Johan, Iograr, Morador en Leon
65. Joan d Aboin; Joham d Auoyn (Dom), Joham d Auoin (Dom), Joham Perez (d Auoin)
66. Johan Ayras, Johan Ayras de Santiago, Joham Ayras, Burges de Santiago
67. Johan Baneca, Baueca, Baueça *or* Baueta
68. Johan de Cangera
69. Joham Fernandes Dardeleyro
70. Joan de Gaya, Scudero; Johan de Gaya
71. Joan de Guilhade, Joham de Guilhade, Joham de Guylhade, Joham Garcia (de Guylade)
72. Joan Lobeyra, Joham Lobeyra
73. Joham Lopez d Ulhoa
74. Joham Muniz Camanez, Joan Nunez Camanez
75. Joham de Requeixo
76. Johan Romeu de Lugo
77. Johan Seruando
78. Joan Soayrez Ssomesso
79. Joan (Soarez) Coelho, Johan Ssoarez, Joham Soarez Coelho, Joham Soarez Coelho (Don)
80. Johan Soarez de Pauha *or* Panha
81. Joam Vasquiz, Joham Vaasquiz, Joham Uaasquez, Johan Vaasquiz de Calaueyra
82. Joan Velho de Pedrogaez
83. Joham Zorro
84. Johanne Meendiz de Breteyros (Dom)
85. Iosep (Dom)
86. Juião Bolsseyro, Juyão Bolseyro
87. Lopo, Iograr
88. Lopo Liaz *or* Lias (Dom)
89. Lourenço, Iograr
90. Martin Anes Morinho
91. Marin de Caldas
92. Martin Canpina

 

93. Martin Codax
94. Martin de Grizo
95. Martin Moya, Martim Möya
96. Martin Padrozelos
97. Martim Peres Aluym
98. Martym Soarez, Martin Soarez
99. Méén Rodriguiz Tenoyro
100. Meen Rruis de Breteyros (Dom)
101. Meen Vaasquez de Folhete
102. Meendinho
103. Monio *or* Nuno Fernandez de Mirapeixe
104. Nun Eannes Cerzeo
105. Nuno Fernandez
106. Nuno Fernandez Torneol
107. Nuno Perez Sandeu
108. Nuno Porco *or* Porto
109. Nuno Rodriguez de Canderey
110. Nuno Treez
111. Osoyr Anes
112. Pae Caluo
113. Pae de Cana
114. Pae Gomez Charinho, Paay Gomez Charinho
115. Pae Soarez, Paay Soarez de Taueroos
116. Pedr Amigo, Pedr Amigo de Seuilha
117. Pedr Anssolaz, Pedr Ensolaz
118. Pedro de Portugal (O Conde Dom)
119. Pero d Anbroa, Pero d Anbrõa, Pero Garcia d Anbroa
120. Pero Anes Marinho
121. Pero d Arm~ea
122. Pero Barroso
123. Pero de Berdia
124. Pero d Ornelas; Pero Dornelas
125. Pero Garcia
126. Pero Garcia Burgales
127. Pero Gomez Barroso, Pero Gomez Barroso (Don)
128. Pero Gomez Charinho

129. Pero Gonçaluez de Porto Carreyro
130. Pero Gotterrez
131. Pero Larouco
132. Pero Maffaldo
133. Pero Martijz
134. Pero Meendez da Fonsseca, Pero Mendez da Fonseca
135. Pero Meõgo
136. Pero da Ponta *or* da Ponte
137. Pero de Veer
138. Pero Uelho de Taueiroos
139. Pero Vyuyaez, Veuyaez *or* Uiuiaaez
140. Picandon
141. Reymon Gonzaluis
142. Rodrigu Eanes
143. Rodrigu Eanes d Aluares
144. Rodrigo Eannes Redondo, Rodrigu Ianes Rredondo
145. Rodrigu Eanes de Vasconzelhos *or* Vasconcelos
146. Roy Fernandez de Santiago, Roy Fernandez (de Santiago)
147. Roy Gomez de Breteyros (Don)
148. Roy Marques do Casal
149. Roy Martijz, Roy Martijz d Ulueyra
150. Roy Paez de Ribela
151. Roy Queymado
152. Rui *or* Roy Gomez, O Freyre
153. Sancho Sanchez
154. Tristan, O Namorado (Don)
155. Uaasco (Don)
156. Vasco Gil, Vaasco Gil
157. Uaasco Martinz
158. Vaasco Perez, Vaasco Perez Pardal
159. Vaasco Praga de Sendin, Praga de Sandim
160. Vaasco Rodrigues de Caluelo
161. Vidal, Judeu d Elvas