



AUTHOR

Joseph T. Snow

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JOSEPH T. SNOW

Six Galician-Portuguese Satires by Alfonso X, in English

The purpose of these six translations of Galician-Portuguese satires by Alfonso X is to open a window onto the serious and sometimes ribald satires so popular in thirteenth-century Spain. Poets were also performers, even though other lesser caliber singers could perform them. The six satires include two debate poems where the poets compete even as the second speaker is required to produce the very meters and rhymes of the first speaker. Two more focus on poetic rivals, Alfonso X and Pero da Ponte. Alfonso satirizes Pero for having stolen his songs from another poet, thus 'burying him' while Pero parades about in pure arrogance. As king, Alfonso did battle with the remaining Moorish stronghold in Spain and several satires deal with soldier-vassals who proved to be cowards and one of those is translated here. In the final one Alfonso imagines the role of a highly discouraged military man whose sole desire is to go back to being what he had been before, a sailor.

Prologue

I am here presenting in English translation six satires in Galician-Portuguese composed by Alfonso X, king of Spain (1252-1284) and, in all probability, also originally performed by him. Spanish was used for epic poems, such as the *Poem of the Cid*, and for the erudite rhyming quatrains known as *cuaderna vía* as in the works of Gonzalo de Berceo (pre-1264). However, in Alfonso's thirteenth century, lyric poetry in the western two-thirds of the Peninsula was composed in Galician-Portuguese, while in the western third of the Iberian Peninsula, Catalan was the language of lyric poetry and prose.

In attendance at Alfonso's court, there was always an international cohort of poets who entertained: there were many Portuguese and Castilians performing in Galician-Portuguese — a few Catalans (Cerverí di Gerona was the best known of these) and several dozen Occitan poets such as Raimon de Tors, Sordel, Folquet de Lunel, N'At de Mons and Guiraut Riquier (who spent a full decade at Alfonso's court and collaborated with him).¹ In addition, there were Jewish and Muslim poets singing in their native languages. Taken together, these numerous poets formed a multilingual chorus, many of whose texts survive today. These texts are mainly available to scholars who study the medieval literature of these languages. Little by little, however, some are becoming better known to non-specialists, in modern translation.

¹ Recently published is my study, 'Guiraut Riquier and Alfonso X's Classification of Fellow Performers, High and Low, in their *Declaratio* (1275)', *Tenso*, 35 (2000), 47-63.

There were three main genres of secular poetry composed in Galician-Portuguese: (1) the *cantigas de amor*, love poems with a male voice that had their origins in the *fin amors* of the Midi poets who composed and sang in Occitan from the late eleventh century through the late thirteenth century; (2) the *cantigas d'amigo* (songs of a friend), brief poems voiced by a female—even if composed by male poets—and were native to the peninsula; and (3) the *cantigas d'escarnho e mal dizer*, satirical, offensive and even obscene, insulting poems aimed at a great variety of society's many individuals, both high and low, both men and women. This style of poetry had already enjoyed a centuries-long history with both Juvenalian (ludic and playful) and Horatian (harsh and serious) satires.

Alfonso X as poet, both religious and secular (profane)

Alfonso X adopted the persona of a troubadour poet who, seeking to earn his future salvation, compiled over his thirty-two year reign a repertoire of 420 Marian compositions known to us as the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. It contains 359 narrative poems celebrating miracles performed by the Virgin Mary through her intercession with God the Father (90%), 42 lyric poems celebrating her divine attributes in *loores* or songs of praise (10%), plus 19 additional *cantigas* in an appendix. All 420 have been made available in English.² The complete manuscript of T-I-1 of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, held in El Escorial (with 195 of its 200 compositions extant),³ is known as the *Códice Rico* (The Rich Codex) and it has been made available in Castilian translation, alongside the Galician-Portuguese originals.⁴ This manuscript contains as well music and sets of vignettes that retell in miniatures each of the *cantigas*, the narratives as well as the songs of praise.

The profane poetry in Galician-Portuguese, in the three genres described above, were collected in a sixteenth-century anthology compiled by A. Colocci. It contains 1,567 poems that have survived.⁵ Alfonso X is the author of 45 of these poems, most of which are satirical in nature and have only sporadically been translated into English. Eventually, my goal is to publish them all in English.

I recently translated into English and published seven satires by Alfonso X involving women and they are a reflection of the general misogyny of the Middle Ages.⁶ I now offer six additional satirical poems by Alfonso X to *Xanthos*. I do not attempt to reproduce rhymes or duplicate rhythms in these translations, instead I deal with meanings and the natural flow of English. The poems are printed in facing columns, with my translations on the right. I suggest reading each translation first and then the commentary I have provided following each one. I will offer some final comments in an Epilogue.

² *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise: A Translation of the 'Cantigas de Santa Maria'*, trans. by Kathleen Kulp-Hill (Tempe: Arizona Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000).

³ At some point the final folios with the last five *cantigas* went missing.

⁴ *Las 'Cantigas de Santa Maria': Códice Rico, Ms T-I-1*, ed. by Laura Fernandez Fernandez and Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza. 3 vols. (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 2011), i (ed. by Elvira Fidalgo Francisco).

⁵ Known as Colocci-Brancuti, Colocci's manuscript of 335 folios was rediscovered in 1878 in the library of Count Paolo Brancuti. Since 1924, it has been housed in the Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (Lisbon).

⁶ J. T. Snow, 'The Seven Satires of Alfonso X Involving Women, in English Translation', *La Corónica. A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures and Cultures*, 48.1 (2019), 129-154.

XXIII⁷

- 1 -Sinner, [...] us vein quer
un don que'm donez, si vos play:
que vul vostr' almiral seer
en cela vostra mar da lay;
- 5 e sy o faz, en bona fe
c'a tota[s] las naus que la son
eu les faray tal vent de me
or [... totas [...on].
- Don Arnaldo, pois tal poder
10 de vent' avedes, ben vos vai,
e dad' a vós devia seer
aqueste don. Mais digu'eu: ai,
por que nunca tal don deu Rei?
Pero non quer'eu galardón;
- 15 mais, pois vo-lo ja outroguei,
chamen-vos 'Almiral Sison'.
- Lo don vos dei molt merceiar
e l'ondrat nom que m'avez mes,
e d'aitan vos vul segurar
- 20 qu'an faray un ven tan cortes:
que mia dona, qu'es la melhor
del mond' e la plus a[vi]nent,
faray passar a la dolçor
del temps, cum filias alteras cent.
- 25 -Don Arnaldo, fostes errar,
por passardes con batarês
vossa senhor a Ultramar,
que non cuid'eu que i á três
no mundo de tan gran valor;
- 30 e [j]uro vos, par San Vicent[e],
que non é bon doneador
quen esto fezer a ciente.
- 'Sir, I come to ask of you
a gift you can grant, if it pleases you:
I wish to be your Admiral
of your far off sea; and
if granted, I will in good faith,
for all of the ships that harbor there,
provide them my own good wind
and they all [...]*'
- 'Don Arnold, since you possess
so strong a wind, it bodes well,
and I will grant you this
request. But I ask: Ayyy!
Has no other King granted such a gift?
I wish no thanks for what I do,
but, now I have granted you this,
let them address you as Admiral Bustard.'*
- 'I ought to thank you for this reward
and the honorable title you've given me,
I therefore wish to reassure you
that I will make a wind so courtly
that my lady, the best
and most gracious in the world
will sail along with the sweetness
of time, cum filias alteras cent.'*⁸
- 'Don Arnold, you have erred,
in taking with your winds
your lady to foreign shores,
for I think that no more than three
there be so fair in the world
and I swear to you by Saint Vincent
that he is not a courtly suitor
who would do this in good conscience.'*

⁷ The numbers of these five satires are those provided in the excellent edition of Juan Paredes Núñez: 'El cancionero profano de Alfonso X el Sabio; Edición crítica con introducción, notas y glosario', *Verba: Anuario Galego de Filoloxía*, anejo 66 (2010). The Galician-Portuguese texts are reproduced, with permission, from the *Base de datos da Lírica Provana Galego-Portuguesa (MedDB)*, version 3.6.2 (Santiago de Compostela: Cento Ramón para a Investigación en Humanidades) <<http://www.cirp.gal/meddb>>.

⁸ The translation reads: 'as have done [before] a hundred maidens (girls)'.

The four strophes are spoken in alternation, and the rhymes of the speaker in strophes 1 and 3 (Don Arnaldo) had to be replicated by the speaker in strophes 2 and 4 (Alfonso). This composition's metrical structure is based on an earlier composition by the Occitan poet, Bernart de Ventadorn: 'Can vei la lauzeta mover' (Paredes Nuñez, p. 171) and is a *cantiga de maestría*, a debate between two poets.

The granted request of Arnold is made into a mock reward: the title given by the King is clearly humorous, as the bustard is the heaviest of birds that fly, but it makes a sound that a medieval listener likens to the sound of farting. The strong wind in this and other satires is meant to be understood as farting (breaking wind). That Arnold will use this 'honor' to transport his lady to foreign shores is reprimanded by Alfonso (strophe 4) as lacking in dignity and inappropriate for a king's courtier. A smile is produced when the public recognized that the king asks for no gratitude for the honor bestowed, but that Arnold is swept away with his new admiralship, boasting of his 'courtly wind' (l. 20). The gratuitous attribution of farting to describe the winds that Don Arnaldo can command is at the heart of this satire.

XXVI

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | -Non me posso pagar tanto
do canto
das aves nen de seu son,
nen d'amor nen de mixon
nen d'armas -ca ei espanto,
por quanto
mui perigo[0]sas son-,
come dun bon galeon,
que m'alongue muit' aginha | <i>I cannot fully enjoy
 the song
 of the birds or their tunes,
 nor of love nor of work
 nor of arms – as I have fear
 since all arms
 are very treacherous:
 like a good ship
 to quickly get me away
 from this cursed meadow
 where the scorpions abide;
 for deep in my heart
 I have felt their thorny spikes!</i> |
| 15 | 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 | <i>And I swear by Holy God
 that I'll not
 wear mantle nor a beard
 nor will I have ought to do with love
 nor arms, as both heartbreak
 and tears</i> |
| 20 | ven delas toda sazón;
mais tragerei un dormon,
e irei pela marinha
vendend' azeit' e farinha;
e fugirei do poçon | <i>accompany them always;
 but I'll take a small craft
 and go about the marina
 selling oil and flour;
 and there flee from the poison</i> |

- 25 do alacran, ca eu non
lhi sei outra meezinha.
- Nen de lançar a tavlado
pagado
non sōo, se Deus m'ampar,
30 adés, nen de bafordar;
e andar de noute armado,
sen grado
o faço, e a roldar;
ca mais me pago do mar
35 que de seer cavaleiro;
ca eu foi ja marinheiro
e quero-m'oi mais guardar
do alacran, e tornar
ao que me foi primeiro.
- 40 E direi-vos un recado:
pecado
nunca me pod'enganar
que me faça ja falar
en armas, ca non m'édado
45 (doado
m'éd de as eu razōar,
pois-las non ei a provar);
ante quer' andar sinlheiro
e ir come mercadeiro
50 algũa terra buscar,
u me non possan culpar
alacran negro nen veiro.
- of the scorpion, for I know it
has no other medicine.*
- Nor does throwing my lance
at targets
please me now, so God help me,
nor does taking part in tourneys;
and by night going about armed.
Unhappily
I do so, and make my rounds;
but the sea pleases me more
than being a knight:
for I was once a sailor
and I wish to avoid in future
the scorpion, and return
to being who I was before.*
- And I'll tell you this:
sin
can never deceive me
or make me speak
of arms, for it is not in me
('tis vain
of me to speak of arms
as I am never going to use them);
I want to go it alone
and become a merchant
seeking a new land,
where they cannot find me
the black or white scorpion.*

Though many scholars compare this poem with another by Alfonso, in which the speaker expresses a desire to leave the land behind and roam the seas ('Non me posso pagar tanto', Lapa 10), this poem seems not to be as much autobiographical as a composition in which this 'I' voice is not happy with what he is limited to doing and wishes only to begin a new life elsewhere. In this satire, the speaker assumes this role and his main enemy is contained in the metaphoric prickly and poisonous scorpion (*alacrán*) condemned at the conclusion of each strophe. Do these venomous scorpions signify repugnant duties and obligations forced upon him, depressing him so much that he thinks only of being far away from them?

These scorpion-enemies are multiple (l. 52) but in any case, they now represent a poison, a thorn piercing his heart, creating an unpleasant environment for living life as he so earnestly desires. There must be other places (l. 50) where he will never be thought to have participated in the required performances of a soldier-knight (ll. 2-4, 17-20 and 27-33) in which bearing arms or jousting with them is a principle and unwelcome duty.

He fantasizes, dreaming of owning a boat and selling simple goods (ll. 21-23) or even changing countries (ll. 8-10), but his current scorpion-infested land must belong to his past, while the unknown (ll. 48-50) seems more appealing. This satire presents the reader with a depressed and suffering soul, rejecting his soldierly life and lack of options, but various commentators, as I noted above, do not see the poetic voice as being that of Alfonso X.

XXXI

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Pero da Pont'á feito gran pecado
de seus cantares, que el foi furtar
a Coton, que, quanto el lazerado
ouve gran tempo, el x'os quer lograr,
5 e doutros muitos que non sei contar,
por que oj'anda vistido e onrado.</p> | <p><i>Pero da Ponte committed a big sin
in 'his' songs, which he stole
from Coton, for, despite treating
him ill a long time, he made them his,
and so many others, I cannot count:
now he is honored and wears finery.</i></p> |
| <p>E poren foi Coton mal dia nado,
pois Pero da Ponte erda seu trobar;
e mui mais lhi valera que trobado
10 nunca ouves'el, assi Deus m'ampar,
pois que se de quant'el foi lazerar
serve Don Pedro e non lhi dá en grado.
E con dereito seer enforcado</p> | <p><i>Coton was born on an unlucky day,
as Pero da Ponte inherits his songs;
he had been better off never making
them, so help me God,
since for all his hard work on them
Pedro sings them, never thanking him.
By rights, Don Pedro should be hung</i></p> |
| <p>deve Don Pedro, por que foi filhar
15 a Coton, pois-lo ouve soterrado,
seus cantares, e non quis ende dar
ũu soldo pera sa alma quitar
sequer do que lhi avia emprestado.</p> | <p><i>by the neck, for having robbed
Coton, after he had 'buried' him,
of his songs, refusing to offer
one coin to save his soul, not even
for all he had 'borrowed' from him.</i></p> |
| <p>E porend' é gran traedor provado,
20 de que se ja nunca pode salvar
come quen a seu amigo jurado
bevendo con el, o foi matar:
todo polos cantares del levar,
con os quaes oj'anda arrufado.</p> | <p><i>Thus is he proven a great traitor
who can never be saved,
as one who invites a close friend,
drinks with him, then 'kills' him:
so that he could steal all his songs,
with which he now parades about proudly.</i></p> |
| <p>25 E pois non á quen no poren retar
queira, seerá oi-mais por min retado.</p> | <p><i>As no one wishes to be his accuser,
I will henceforth be his accuser.</i></p> |

Each verse is decasyllabic and the rhyme scheme has but two rhymes: *-ar* and *-ado*, each strophe repeating the rhymes of the previous strophe: *a b a b b a*. This satire by Alfonso is *ad hominem*, directed against a contemporary poet, Pero da Ponte, whom he reviles mercilessly. One voice only speaks and while it was perhaps rumored that Pero

da Ponte claimed some songs composed by Coton as his own, the king exaggerates by equating this act as a kind of murder. In effect, Pero ‘buries’ Coton, having tricked him, pretending to be a friend and then ‘stealing’ his songs with no acknowledgment or words of gratitude. In so doing, Alfonso predicts that Pero has lost his soul for the privilege of parading about arrogantly with songs composed by another. The satire directed against Pero da Ponte may possibly suggest that Coton was the better poet.

XXXIII

- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1 | Pero da Ponte, paro-vos sinal
per ante o demo do fogo infernal,
por que con Deus, o padre spiritual,
minguar quisestes, mal per descreestes. | <i>Pero da Ponte, I summon you
before the devil of the infernal fire,
because God, the Spiritual Father,
him you failed, denying him gravely.</i> |
| 5 | E ben vej'ora que trovar vos fal,
pois vós tan louca razon cometestes. | <i>I see now you lack composing skill,
for so crazy an idea you defended.</i> |
| | E pois razon [a]tan descomunal
fostes filhar, e que tan pouco val,
pesar-m-á en, se vos pois a ben sal | <i>And since you pursued a
cause of so limited worth,
it will grieve me, if you fare well</i> |
| 10 | ante o diaboo, a que obedecestes.
E ben vej'ora que trobar vos fal,
[pois vós tan louca razon cometestes]. | <i>with the devil whom you obeyed.
I see now you lack composing skill,
for so crazy an idea you defended.</i> |
| | Vós non trobades come proençal,
mais come Bernaldo de Bonaval; | <i>You do not compose like a Provençal
but rather like Bernaldo de Bonaval;</i> |
| 15 | e poren non é trobar natural,
pois que o del e do dem'aprendestes.
E ben vej'ora que trobar vos fal,
[pois vós tan louca razon cometestes]. | <i>thus it isn't natural composing,
but learned from him and the devil.
I see now you lack composing skill,
for so crazy an idea you defended.</i> |
| | E poren, Don Pedr', en Villarreal, | <i>Therefore, Don Pedro, in Villarreal,</i> |
| 20 | en mao ponto vós tanto bevestes. | <i>you drank too much in a bad hour.</i> |

This second satire vilifying Pero da Ponte, can be dated after 1255, the establishing of Villarreal (l. 19) by Alfonso X (Paredes Nuñez, p. 233). This poem is constructed with three strophes and a refrain, repeating the same rhymes: *a a a b / a b*, once each to conclude the three strophes and with an echo-like closure in the final two verses using the same *a b* refrain rhymes. Note that Alfonso employs again decasyllabic verses but just two rhymes, as in his first satire of Pero da Ponte. This satire now places Pero in league with the devil, thus committing the greatest impiety: denying God. The ‘cause of so little worth’ (l. 8), the ‘crazy cause’ (ll. 6, 12, 18), is linked to his singing the songs of Coton and if, thanks to your union with the devil, you get away with this (ll. 9-10), I will be greatly saddened.

Worse, Pero's composing is not natural (l. 15), given that the devil is supporting him, a partner in his songs. Then there is the added negative comparison with an undistinguished Galician-Portuguese troubadour, Bernaldo de Bonaval (ll. 13-14), emphasizing the contrast between 'antinatural' and the more 'natural' lyrics of their admirable Provençal forerunners. Alfonso, we know, was a fervent admirer of the Occitan poets and that his respect for their poetic art underscores his biting satire of the 'unnatural' art of a fellow poet, Pero da Ponte and, by virtue of an additional insulting comparison with the failings of a poet of low esteem, Bernardo de Bonaval.

The *envoi* or final thrust of the satire (ll. 19-20), may refer to the previous satire of Pero da Ponte, who steals Coton's poems in a friendly drinking bout, thus 'burying' him.

XL

- | | | |
|----|--|---|
| 1 | O que foi passar a serra
e non quis servir a terra,
e ora, entrant'a guerra
que faroneja? | <i>He who crossed the sierra
and refused to serve his country,
and now, with war all about,
how must he feel?</i> |
| 5 | Pois el agora tan muito erra,
maldito seja! | <i>Well now he errs so willfully,
damn him!</i> |
| 10 | O que levou os dinheiros
e non troux'os cavaleiros,
e por non ir nos primeiros
que faroneja?
Pois que ven conos prostumeiros,
maldito seja! | <i>He who accepted the funding
and did not bring his knights,
to avoid being in the vanguard,
how must he feel?
But he accompanies the rearguard,
damn him!</i> |
| 15 | O que filhou gran soldada
e nunca fez cavalgada,
e por non ir a Graada
que faroneja?
Se é ric'omen ou á mesnada,
maldita seja! | <i>He who took much money.
and never organized mounted troops
so as to avoid going to Granada,
how must he feel?
If he is wealthy or commands a batallion,
damn him!</i> |
| 20 | O que meteu una taleiga
pouc'aver e muita meiga,
e por non entrar na Veiga
que faroneja?
Pois [el] chus mol' é que manteiga,
maldito seja! | <i>He who filled his saddle bags with
little of value and lots of hypocrisy
so as not to enter the Vega of Granada,
how must he feel?
Such a one is softer than butter,
damn him!</i> |

Alfonso followed in his father's (Fernando III) footsteps in his attempts to recover and

repopulate with Christians those lands still under Muslim control.⁹ In this satire, Alfonso displays his ire four times in as many strophes for all cowardly men who avoided providing troops and joining him in the front line in his battle for Granada, the last strong outpost of Muslim rule in Spain. There is a built-in refrain in verses 4 and 6 of each strophe which build in force until the fourth and final ‘Damn him!’ The use of the singular includes all the so-called commanders of armed warriors who were specifically funded but failed either to show their faces, or ordered their soldiers to stay in the rearguard of Alfonso’s royal army instead of joining the battle in its vanguard. Alfonso takes on these leaders and their cowardice and their hypocrisy and damns them all! Their supposed battle readiness and valor were all a façade and Alfonso’s ire leads him to explode in this well-crafted satire, damning them all.

XLIII

- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| 1 | -Rei Don Alfonso, se Deus vos pardon,
desto vos venho [aqui] preguntar;
[se]quer ora punhade de mi dar
tal recado, que seja con razon: | <i>‘Don Alfonso, may God forgive you,
for what I have come to ask of you;
at least try to give me such an
answer that it will be reasonable:</i> |
| 5 | Quen dá seu manto, que lho
guard’alguen,
e lho non dá tal qual o deu, poren,
que manda [end’] o Livro de Leon? | <i>He who gives his mantle to another
for safekeeping
and it is not returned as it was given,
what says the Book of León of this?’</i> |
| 10 | -Don Vaasco, eu fui ja
clerizon
e de grado soia estudar;
e nas escolas, u soia entrar,
dos maestros aprendi tal liçon:
que manto doutren non filhe per ren;
mais se o m’eu melhora, faço ben,
e non são, por aquesto, ladrón. | <i>‘Don Vasco, I was once apprentice to
a clergyman
and studied government decrees
and in the schools I would attend,
I got from my teachers this lesson:
not to accept a cloak from another;
but if I do and improve it, I do right,
and am not, therefore, a thief.’</i> |
| 15 | -Rei Don Alfonso, ladrón por atal
en nulha terra nunca chamar vi,
en vós, senhor, nono oistes a min,
ca, se o dissesse, diria mal;
ante tenho-o por trajeador | <i>‘Don Alfonso, for such a deed I
never heard anyone called a thief,
nor you, Milord, heard such from me,
were I to say so, I would be wrong;
I hold him to be a conjuror</i> |
| 20 | -;se Deus me valha!, nunca vi melhora
quen assi torna pelliza de cendal. | <i>(God help me, I never saw better
who returns a cloak, silk and fur-lined.’</i> |
| | -Don Vaasco, dizer-vos quer’eu al | <i>‘Don Vasco, I wish to tell you more</i> |

⁹ Fernando had, by 1248, reconquered Cordoba, Jaén, Murcia (with the help of Alfonso) and Seville. Alfonso, on his father’s deathbed, promised him that he would continue the recovery of Spanish lands still held by the Moors, thereby justifying his mocking satires of cowardly soldiers, his sworn vassals. Ours is one of several that take them to task.

	daqueste preito, que eu aprendi: oí dizer que trajeitou assi	<i>I learned about this matter: I heard that a king of Portugal</i>
25	ja ũa vez un rei en Portugal: ouve un dia de trajeitar sabor e, por se meter por mais sabedor, fez [...] cavaleiro de Espital.	<i>once made such magic work: one day he was pleased to cast a spell and thinking himself the cleverest, made [so and so] a Knight Hospitaller.'</i>

This is one more debate poem, a *cantiga de maestría*, and like XXXIII above, the speaker in strophes 1 and 3 (Don Vasco) requires the speaker in strophes 2 and 4 (king Alfonso) to use the same meters and rhymes he employs. Each strophe rhymes thus; *a b b a c c a*. It dates from 1252-1255 (Paredes Nuñez, p. 301), early in Alfonso's reign. The cloak at its center is involved in multiple circumstances. The query of Vasco involves the claim that Alfonso had borrowed a cloak but when he returned it, it seemed to be a new cloak, much improved. Taking up this situation, Don Vasco accuses the king of being a magician (l. 19), but not a thief who may have kept the borrowed cloak and substituted for it a different one.

Alfonso elaborates on things he learned as a student (ll. 10-11), one of which was that it is a positive act to return a borrowed item in better shape than it was when borrowed (l. 13). Not to do so would be the act of a thief (l. 14). Vasco is at great pain to claim his innocence in naming Alfonso anything other than a conjuror (ll. 15-19), and certainly not a thief.

Having been called a magician or conjuror (l. 19) by his interlocutor, Alfonso turns the tables on Don Vasco—who was, in fact, a documented Knight Hospitaller—by adding another tidbit he had learned. He then takes up the story of an unnamed king of Portugal who fancied himself a conjuror and practiced magic with pleasure. Believing himself to be the best, he placed a cloak on an unnamed (l. 28) person, thus making him a Knight Hospitaller. Is the unnamed Knight Hospitaller in fact Don Vasco?

The contest is that Vasco calls king Alfonso a conjuror through his replacing a borrowed cloak with a silk fur-lined version. Alfonso, knowing the past of his fellow debater, tells him of the conjuring act performed by a Portuguese king who took a cloak and draped it over the shoulders of a man (not named, but who must be the speaker, Don Vasco), a magical act that raised the man's social status to that of a knight. The two cloaks involved here are the hub of the contest, the query about one and its legal meaning (l. 7) proposed by Vasco in the initial strophe, and the one-upmanship displayed by Alfonso in the foreknowledge of the knight's cloak worn by his questioner.

Epilogue

There are many things these (and other) translations can provide readers, and in this instance, we mean readers of English. The first of these is getting to know better more authors from the rich European past. The second would be the acquisition of some knowledge of what themes interested them enough to express them in literary ways. In

the specific case of poetic satires, what points of comparison and contrast, of metaphor, of contradiction and exaggeration, of gross obscenities and sexual ambiguity provide some of the diverse means of defining the relationship of raucous humor that links the author-poets to the members of their society that laughed, smiled and applauded them in royal courts, public plazas and even marketplaces.

Many notions of humor we might think of as modern from our own reading of contemporary texts, although we then can, in reading older works in translation, come face-to-face with the fact that these notions of humor have been around for centuries. The Biblical adage *nihil novum sub sole* (Ecclesiastes 1:19) that simply states that ‘there is nothing new under the sun’ refers to one’s contemporary perceptions that much of what is learned—and which is new to the individuals involved—is in fact not ‘new’ but has been around far longer than one had realized.

Homer’s *Iliad*, the Greek and Latin classics, Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, Petrarch’s sonnets, and Cervantes’ *Don Quijote*, to name but a few famous literary giants, are widely studied both by specialists in the original language and by students and readers in modern translations. The great literary themes, ideas and situations—while not repeated exactly—instead present an infinite variety of expression which makes reading a variety of works so stimulating to the mind. Thus, comparison and contrast become essential tools of the analytic mind.

Prose works have been more often translated than poetical works. That does not lessen in any way the appeal of poetry; it merely alludes to the fact that poetry—and especially early poetry—contains meters and rhymes that rarely can be duplicated in a translation. My rendering of the six poetic satires of Alfonso X shows clearly the pros and cons of how far short of the originals English translations can be. What can most effectively be rendered is the content of each of them and the attempt to retain the intent (but not the sound or the scansion) of the jibes, the mocking in the *ad hominem* poems vilifying Pero da Ponte, the scorn shown those anonymous military men who failed in their obligations as the king’s vassals to help him in his reconquest of Muslim Granada, and his clever staging of his victories in the two debate poems. Time passes and languages and sensibilities in cultures evolve. Translations perform a valuable service, providing a window through which we can still see and appreciate older literary fictions, be they prose or poetry.

One of the chief aims of the Galician-Portuguese poets was impressing other poets with their skills and earning their admiration and, in all probability, this was as important to them as was entertaining their audiences. We have here but a small sampling of Alfonso’s 45 poems, but other respected contemporary poets in fact praised his poetry (Cerverí di Girona and Guiraut Riquier among them), and I can but hope that these few satires might create in my readers a desire for more of Alfonso X’s Galician-Portuguese secular poetry in English translation.

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