A Formal Approach to *Cantiga* Sequences
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Abstract

This paper argues that a new, *formal* approach is needed to identify and analyze possible sequences of *cantigas d'amigo* and suggests that the beginning and end (and sometimes the middle) of a sequence will be formally marked. This assumes that sequences grew out of performance sets, and that songs with special formal features would have been placed in key positions. If there was a break in the performance of a set, the song just before or after the break (or both) might also be marked. Examples drawn from various sets are adduced to support this thesis.

1. Philological ontology

Are there or are there not sets of *cantigas d'amigo* which (following their order in the manuscripts) were organized for performance by their author (or performer)?[1] Are there, to put the question another way, *sets* that are *sequences*? The possibility, raised by Diez (1863: 97–98) and Lang (1894: lxiv), has been addressed on various occasions, especially in relation to the work of a few poets, such as Martin Codax (Reckert and Macedo 1996: 162–177; Ferreira 1986: 174–181) and Pero Meogo (Azevedo Filho 1974: 87–101), where dramatic or rhetorical coherence has seemed obvious to some (Tavani 2002: 146–157), non-existent to others (Weiss 1988). So far, methodological proposals have been few, each has centered on one set, and none has been reapplied to another. What we need is a general method applicable across the board, one that can be used to analyze the roughly thirty sets of five or more songs in this genre (Cohen 2003: 104–105) to see if they might be sequences. My aims here are to suggest such a method, to show how it works in a series of brief examples with limited scope, and then to show how it operates in two longer and more complex sets.

2. A formal method

The analysis of form (sometimes of the form of content) is as old as European poetics. Plato (*Phaedrus* 264C) says every discourse should be organized like a living being, with its own body, with head and feet, trunk and members, "suitably composed in relation to one another and to the whole".[2] For Aristotle (*Poetics* 1450b-1451a), a tragedy must be "whole, with a beginning, a middle and an end", and its overall form must be perceptible. The size may depend on the circumstances of

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[1] The requirement of consecutive order in the manuscripts allows for an obvious interruption or dislocation, such as that found in the set of 22 *cantigas* by Johan Garcia de Guilhade (Cohen 1996a, *nota introdutória*). The present study attempts no review of the bibliography (see Weiss 1988), but rather seeks to test a new approach. For the chronological, geographic and social contexts in which sequences developed, see Cohen (forthcoming c). For information about the poets, see Oliveira (1994: 303–440).

[2] Some Russian formalists favored the organism as a metaphor for the literary work of art (others preferred the machine or the system); see Steiner (1984: 68–98).

competitive performance, including the competence and attention span of the audience and externally imposed time limits.[3]

Until now, scholars looking for sequences have paid attention almost exclusively to content, trying to find dramatic or discursive coherence. But in looking for traces of organization we should begin by analyzing form, keeping just an eye on the action. We need to find form to prove existence.

My basic thesis here is this: the beginning and end of a sequence are marked (and sometimes also the middle). The underlying assumption is that sequences evolved out of performance sets, and the poet or performer would have placed songs with special formal features in first and last position, in order to make an impression on the audience. If there was a break in the performance of a set of (say) eight songs, then the song right before or just after the break (or both) would be marked.[4]

Markedness, as used here, is based on contrast: one form is marked in relation to other forms in the set, and can also be marked in relation to all other texts in the corpus of *Amigo* (or of the Galician-Portuguese secular lyric). Hence, we need to know how many times a given technique (*cantiga de maestria*, *dobre*, *palavra perduda*, etc.) occurs in the genre (or the corpus).[5]

Aristotle did not have to wonder if the art-works he wished to analyze really existed, or what their dimensions were. But we must demonstrate that it is possible to recognize, in certain sets of *cantigas d'amigo*, the boundaries —and so the existence— of works of art. This can be done by finding the formal techniques that mark and thereby institute those boundaries. We need to detect evidence of a governing intelligence in the formal organization of a set. Without such evidence, we have no case in the court of philology. Thematically-based arguments are unlikely to prove persuasive by themselves. But if we can find enough formal evidence, we can then proceed with reasonable confidence to a complete analysis of candidate sets.

3. Evidence of intelligent art-forms

Here are some examples of what I mean by formal organization with markers.

The six songs in the set of Pero de Veer seem to reveal evidence of organization (the number of strophes is given in parentheses).[6]

1.	aaB	(3)
2.	aabb	(1)
3.	aaBB	(2)
4.	aaB	(5)
5.	aabb	(1)
6.	abbaCC	(2)

The last song contains the most complex strophic form – complex relative to the other forms in this set (it is the only form with three rhymes).

Now, the number 6 divides 3 + 3; and if we take this set to consist of two halves, each of three texts, we find that in each half:

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[3] At the mention of time limits the Greek text is problematic. Aristotle here means that the amplitude of the *action* must be perceptible, not the size of the tragedy; but in the same passage he says that the physical extension of a work of art must be neither too small nor too large for the mind to apprehend.

[4] This would explain aspects of the formal data in several sets of eight *cantigas* (Cohen, forthcoming c).

[5] Cohen (forthcoming a) provides lists of examples of the principal virtuosic techniques in the genre.

[6] The numbering of the *cantigas d'amigo* comes from Cohen (2003) and the discussion here takes those texts as base (for relevant metrical and textual problems the reader is referred to the notes there; colometry is rarely problematic in the texts cited here; see, for example, Ulhoa 2, below).

1. The first text has the strophic form aaB and the highest number of strophes (three and five, respectively);

2. The second text has the strophic form aabb and consists of a single strophe;[7]

3. The third text has a strophic form with a two-verse refrain, aaBB and abbaCC, respectively, and consists of two strophes.

Here are the combinations of speaker and addressee in the set:[8]

1. Girl - Ø
2. Girl - Boy
3. Girl - Ø
4. Girl - Ø
5. Girl - B
6. **Mother** / **Girl**

The last song contains the only dialog, between girl and mother. Only there does the mother take the stage and speak. So the final text deploys both formal and pragmatic markers.

The series of final rhyme sounds in the set also bespeaks organization:

1. **ada**
2. al
3. i
4. ir
5. ei
6. **ando**

Only the first and last rhymes are feminine.

But we must look at more than one set and find features they have in common. In Pero de Veer, the strophic form in final position is relatively more complex, the last text is a dialog between mother and daughter (or 'girl'), and the series of poem-final rhyme sounds appears to follow a pattern. For each of these phenomena there are parallels.

For relative virtuosity in the design of the strophic forms in privileged positions (for the moment, first and last), let us glance at the set of seven *cantigas d'amigo* by Johan Lopez d'Ulhoa (f = *fiinda*):

1. abbaCDC
2. aaBB (=ababCC) + f
3. aaBB
4. abbaCC
5. aaBB
6. aaBB +f
7. aaBaB

The only refrain with three verses occurs in the first poem. The only intercalated refrain appears in the last. All other poems display aaBB except for the one in the middle, which deploys abbaCC

and is thus the only song other than 1 to include a third end-rhyme.[9] In 2, which has an overall form aaBB, there are internal rhymes in the distich, perhaps as part of an opening show of virtuosity.[10]

We find another example in the seven *cantigas d'amigo* of Pero da Ponte. Here are his strophic forms in order:[11]

    1. aaBCB
    2. ababcABC + f
    3. aaabAB + f
    4. abbaCC
    5. abbaCC
    6. abbaCC
    7. abbaCAC > CDC

Only the first, second and last texts have three verse refrains, and in the last text the rhyme scheme is abbaCAC in the first strophe, but changes to abbaCDC in the second and third, introducing an additional sophistication in strophic design at the end of the set.

These two examples should be enough to show that Pero de Veer is not alone in using the most complex strophic form in the last song. But complexity is relative. If for Pero de Veer abbaCC is a mark of virtuosity, for Pero da Ponte it is an unmarked form (as in 4, 5, 6) relative to the flashier strophic displays in the other texts, especially 1, 2 and 7.

I said that the dialog between mother and daughter is a pragmatic marker in the set of Pero de Veer. We find dialogs between the girl and her mother in final position in several other sets: Nuno Fernandez Torneol 8, Ponte 7, Roi Fernandiz 7, Pedr'Amigo de Sevilha 10, Pero Meogo 9. The distribution of personae in the set of seven *cantigas d'amigo* Pero da Ponte is noteworthy:[12]

    1. **Girl** / **Mother**
    2. Girl - Mother
    3. Girl - Mother
    4. Girl - Friends
    5. Girl - Boy
    6. Girl - Boy
    7. **Girl** / **Mother**

There are two dialogs –both of them between girl and mother– and they come first and last. As a partial precedent, we might note the places where the mother appears in the set of Bernal de Bonaval, an older and influential contemporary (see *CEM* 17). Although there is no dialog (daughter and mother do not speak in a single poem), the last two poems constitute a kind of exchange between the girl and her mother ("Can I go to see my boy?"/ "Not without me!") with which the set ends:[13]

    1. Girl - Friends
    2. Girl - Friend
    3. ? / Girl
    4. Girl - Boy
    5. Girl - Ø: Girl - Boy (included discourse)
    6. (Narrative voice): Girl - Ø

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[9] In the central text there is a subtle rhetorical feature: v. 1 begins *Eu fiz*; v. 14 (last verse before the final refrain) ends *fiz eu*. So, in the middle of the set, the last words mirror the first, but in reverse. Many such special effects adorn different dimensions of these songs.

[10] On internal rhymes, see Cohen (forthcoming b).

[11] Here the sign > means 'changes to'.

[12] 'Friend' refers to the girl's girl friend (or 'sister')

[13] Here the sign ? means that the speaker cannot be identified with certainty.

    7. Girl - **Mother**
    8. **Mother** - Girl

Another formal feature noted in Pero de Veer was the overall pattern of masculine and feminine endings in the final rhyme sound of the songs. Consider the pattern of poem-final rhymes in the set of Fernan Rodriguez de Calheiros:

    1. eu
    2. er
    3. ar
    4. **istes**
    5. en
    6. ei
    7. ei
    8. **ada**

Feminine rhymes appear only in 4 and 8: in the middle of the set and at the end – a clear pattern. The final rhymes in the seven *cantigas d'amigo* of Lourenço form this series:

    1. **ei**
    2. igo
    3. igo
    4. **eu**
    5. ada
    6. esse
    7. **a**

The songs in initial, central and final position —and only those— have masculine rhymes. And in all three places the rhyme-sound is a diphthong or vowel: *ei, eu, a*.

These other examples have been adduced to show that the organization we observe in the six *cantigas* of Pero de Veer is neither illusory nor coincidental. Each of the phenomena observed there can be supported by parallels. All these sets deserve further analysis; for now it is enough that they show evidence of formal organization.

So far, we have looked at relatively short sets (eight songs at most). What we need is to find a pattern that repeats, and by repeating confirms itself. A higher number of repetitions of the same pattern will be less easily dismissed as random by sceptics. A pattern that occurs three times in a set is more persuasive than one that occurs twice. If any given pattern were to repeat four or five times, who would call *that* a coincidence? That is why the longer sets offer, potentially, the most fruitful data.[14]

Let's now examine two such sets, those by Johan Baveca and Juião Bolseiro.

4. Marked subdivisions: Johan Baveca

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[14] For instance, in the 22 *cantigas* of Johan Garcia de Guilhade, the location of four *cantigas de maestria* in a symmetrical arrangement, in the second and sixth songs counting from both the beginning and the end of the set, provides compelling evidence for organization (Cohen 1996b: 27–36). The intentionality of the pattern is confirmed by the fact that the themes of these symmetrically placed songs also correspond: men's disregard for female beauty in 2 and 21; lovers' gifts and favors in 6 and 17.

The 13 *cantigas d'amigo* of Baveca display many remarkable features.[15] Whereas other poets regularly vary verse-length from one poem to another (even where the underlying strophic form is invariable, as in Torneol and Codax), Baveca holds the verse-length nearly constant, but comes up with a different strophic design for almost every song (his default strophic form, used three times, is abbaCC —which was complex for Pero de Veer). All told, there are two *cantigas* with *dobre*, three *cantigas de maestria* (one of them with *cobras doblas* —the only pure example in the genre), three *cantigas* with *fiindas* (only one of them a *cantiga de maestria*) and one *cantiga* with variation in the refrain (a rare technique, with only six certain examples [Cohen, forthcoming a]; cf. Zilli 1977: 116). But how do we divide up the number 13?

Simple arithmetic tells us that 6 = 3 + 3, 8 = 4 + 4, and 10 = 5 + 5 (in the set of Pedr'Amigo de Sevilha).[16] In larger sets we appear to find an extension of the same simple arithmetic. In the cases of Juião Bolseiro and Johan Soarez Coelho, with 15 texts each, the most obvious division is 15 = 5 + 5 + 5. If Johan Servando's consists of 16 texts (one is copied twice), then 16 = 4 + 4 + 4 + 4. And if D. Dinis has a set of 32 (Cohen 1987), he doubles that.

In the set of 13 texts by Baveca there seem to be three subdivisions of four, plus a closing poem: 4 + 4 + 4 + 1. This might mirror the structure of a *cantiga* with four strophes and a *fiinda*, if there is any truth in the principle (proposed by Cohen 1987: iv–v) that the "macro-poem" reflects on a large scale the design of a *cantiga*.

Formal markers (*dobre, cantigas de maestria, fiinda, coblas doblas*, verse-length variation —unusual in this set) signal the beginning and (less strongly) the end of each of three groups of four, plus the finale (13). This can be seen merely by observing where these phenomena occur in the set:

1. *dobre + fiinda* (with rhyme-words from refrain, inverted)
2. *dobre*
3.
4.   verse-length variation 10/10'
5. *maestria + fiinda* (with two new rhymes and one rhyme-word repeated)
6.
7.
8. refrain with variation   + verse-length variation 9'/10
9. *maestria + cobras doblas*
10.
11.
12. *fiinda*
13. *maestria*

With two successive *dobres*, the beginning of the set is doubly marked (compare the sets of Ulhoa and Ponte, above). The texts at the beginning of the second and third groups of four (5 and 9) are marked by being *cantigas de maestria* and in addition by a second compositional feature: a *fiinda* in 5; *cobras doblas* in 9. And the end of each group is marked, albeit to a lesser degree: 4, by verse-length variation; 8, by a refrain with variation, plus variation in verse-length; 12, by a *fiinda*.

We could take the analysis of this set much further, but this should suffice to make the general point that in sequences long enough to have subdivisions, the beginning or end of the subdivisions is marked (and sometimes both, as here).[17]

5. Overall design: Juião Bolseiro

Now let us see if we can detect formal organization in the 15 texts of Juião Bolseiro.[18] Two of his *cantigas d'amigo* (1 and 2) ―where a girl, awake and alone through the long night, bemoans the brightness and brevity of night-time play― are among the best known in the genre. Far be it from me to stress that these two all-time greatest hits happen to be the first two songs in the set, and akin to one another in pragmatics and rhetoric. Here we must keep to formal analysis, considering only a lonely dialog or the appearance of a persona to be potential pragmatic markers.

Are the beginning, end and subsections of this set marked? Can we make out three groups of five? Here is fairly full formal data, along with basic pragmatic parameters (speakers and addressees are given in the far right column):[19]

	RHYME SCHEME		STR.	VV.	I		II		III		IV		REFRAIN	
	BODY	REFRAIN			a	b	a	b	a	b	a	b		SP. - AD.
1	abbaCC	9'~10	9'	4	24	eira	ęus	ia	en	ece	or	ento	uz	IGO	G-Ø
2	abbCbC	10	6'/10'	3	18	er	en	ei	ou	ar	er			IGO	G-Ø
3	abbaCC	10'~10	10	3	18	igo	en	ando	on	isse	ei			I	G-M
4	aaB	13	6'	3	9	i		en		ar				IGO	G-M
5	aaBaB	10	10	3	15	ar		on		ir				I	M/G
6	abbaCC	10	10	4	24	an	on	ar	i	eu	er	ęr	or	ĘUS	G-B
7	aaBBB	15'	7'/15'/7'	4	20	igo		osa		ejo		esco		AÇA	M-G
8	abbaCC	10	10	3	18	al	i	ar	ol	ir	a			ER	G-B
9	abbaCC	8	8	3	18	or	i	ar	ez	ou	er			ON	G-Ø
10	ababCC	8	8	2	12	iu	ar	er	ęu					I	G-M
11	a*xbbaCC	10'~10	10	3	18	igo*	ęu	ejo*	al	ado*	on			I	G-B
12	aaBB	15'	7'	3	12	ia		ada		aes				IGO	G- Ø
13	abbaCC	10	10	2	12	i	al	ęus	er					EN	G-B
14	abbaCC+f	10	10	4+f	26	i	az	ei	a	ęr	al	or	en	ER	G-B
15	aaBB	15	7'	2	8	i		al						IGO	G-B

Consider the number of verses in each song. In each of the first two groups of five, the text in initial position (with 24 verses each) is the longest. In the third group, the shortest text of the set (8 verses) occupies the final position, just following the longest (26 verses).

But let's linger on the first two texts. Some rhymes in 1 are either rare or unique in the genre, and so *a fortiori* stand out in this set: *–eira, –eçe, –ento, –uz*.[20] No. 2 employs a rare strophic form

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[18] Reali (1964: 7) shows limited enthusiasm and less analysis; see Indini (1993).

[19] a*x = verse with internal rhyme but no end rhyme; f = *fiinda*; the sign ~ here means 'corresponds metrically to'. The open ę in ęr and ęu(s) is marked; the close vowel in er, eu, etc. is not. G = Girl; M = Mother; B = Boy; Ø = no addressee; G-M = girl talks to mother: M/G = dialog in which the mother speaks first.

[20] The rhyme sounds *–ento* and *–uz* occur only here in *Amigo*; *–eira* and *–eçe* are extremely rare. We need complete and accurate data on rhyme sounds and rhyme words in the genre, such as Parkinson (2002) has provided for masculine rhymes in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Such data presupposes, for each song in the

(only one other example in the secular lyric, by D. Dinis; see *Rep*. 187): abbCbC, where the first verse in each strophe ends in a *palavra perduda* (found in only four other *cantigas d'amigo*: Vinhal 2, Bolseiro 11, Armea 2, Dinis 36). Thus, both opening songs are formally marked. This may reflect a tendency: in organized sets of more generous proportions, the beginning tends to be marked with a prolonged display of technical virtuosity (witness the use of a *dobre* in Baveca 1 and 2; there the display continues into 3, whose rhyme scheme is unique: abbcbcA [*Rep*. 188.1]).

The use of ababCC in 10 marks that text, since it the only example of this form in the set. At the beginning of the third group of five, 11 is marked by a phenomenon unique in the genre: a verse with internal rhyme but no end-rhyme, which has therefore been considered a verse with *palavra perduda* (evidence of the subtlety of the internal rhyme is that some leading modern scholars missed it completely; see Cohen 2003: 410, note). And 15 concludes the set in the traditional strophic 'technology' of aaB and kindred forms: one kind of design appears in 4, 5, 7, 12 and 15; the other songs reflect another, 'higher' level of strophic technology (Cohen 2005, forthcoming c).

All this evidence seems to support the hypothesis that this set is a sequence subdivided into three groups of five *cantigas* each. Other facts corroborate this analysis:

> 1–5 have a refrain with an *i* vowel in tonic position in rhyme: *igo, igo, i, igo, i*;
> 5, ending the first set, is the only dialog;

> 11–15 have an incipit with an *i* vowel in tonic position in rhyme: *igo, ia, i, i, i*;
> 11, 13, 14 and 15 are all to addressed to the boy. [21]

By comparing different aspects of form we can see that the beginning and end of each group are marked, and that the first and the third groups are set off in ways that can only be revealed by a thorough formal analysis. Distinct dimensions of form and basic pragmatic parameters (distribution of speaker and addressee, use of a dialog) confirm the markedness of one text in relation to all others in the set (or in the corpus of Galician-Portuguese lyric, as is the case with 11). And this analysis takes no account of action or rhetoric, precisely the features of composition which have made several of Bolseiro's songs so well-known —and which are usually the basis of any attempt to analyze the organization of a sequence.

6. Can proof persuade?

The formal analysis of various sets appears to demonstrate that organized sequences do exist. Since the criteria employed here —form and pragmatic parameters (speaker and addressee, and the use of dialogs)— are relatively objective, philologists may finally be able to agree that some sets should be studied as sequences.[22] Eventually, a more extensive analysis may show that some sequences possess an unusually high degree of organization in form, pragmatics and rhetoric. If so, the sequences of Baveca and Bolseiro should be reckoned among them. But will preliminary evidence prove persuasive? Consensus does not produce knowledge (though it often seems to), but can we consider the case won until there is a consensus? Perhaps, for the moment, all we can do is trust that

corpus, a correct analysis of strophic design.

[21] In contrast, the boy is not addressed at all in the first group of five, and only twice in the second group.

[22] Differences in the interpretation of strophic form (Billy 2010; Cohen 2003: 43, forthcoming c) are sometimes hard to adjudicate and might affect the analysis of a given set. But since a song's context in a set is a legitimate component in evaluating its form (where ambiguous), colometry stands to gain from the study of sequences. Consider Servando 1, which should be taken as aaaBB with internal rhymes in the refrain (*pace* Cohen 2003: 369; see Cohen forthcoming b) partly because Servando is so given to aaB (5, 7, 8, 11) and its variants: aaBB (4, 9), aaaBB (13), aaBBB (6), aaaBBB (3, 14). For the same reason we could take Servando 2 not as ababCC but as aaB with internal rhymes throughout (Cohen 2003: 370 admits as much).

the data will stimulate further research. Someday, if the cumulative weight of evidence and argument compels an *opinio communis*, Galician-Portuguese lyric will be held to have the oldest organized sequences of love songs in any Indo-European vernacular language of the Middle Ages. By then the analysis will have been extended, and formal design will be reunited with the design of action and discourse —as Aristotle would have wanted.

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