

Peter Sirr

SWAY

*Versions of Poems
from the Troubadour Tradition*

Sway
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 6 October 2016.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 85235 687 3 *paperback*
978 1 85235 688 0 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Sway receives financial assistance
from the Arts Council.



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*Ist trobador, entre ver e mentir,
Afolon drutz e molhers et espos . . .*

(Cercamon)

(These troubadours, between truth and lies,
corrupt lovers, women and husbands . . .)

for Enda and Freya

Nothing Song

Farai un vers de dreyt nien

Nothing: great subject, fit for a poem.
Here's one: not me, not anyone, not
love, youth, any
of that. Nothing at all.
I wrote it in my sleep riding home, my
horse-poem.

I don't know when I was born.
I'm not cheerful, and not angry.
No stranger here, no native either.
If you ask me
I was carried off and roughly magicked
on a dark night.

Hard to know if I'm asleep or awake, please
knock on my door and tell me.
I know I'm in heart trouble,
afflicted, sore. There again, put
the pills back in the box: why
should I care?

Timor mortis does its trick.
They say (they always say)
the cure is on the way.
Call the doctor, call the nurse,
give them the prize if I improve,
otherwise not.

I have a friend, I've never seen her,
a vision beheld, the purest dream.
She never pleased me, nor ever
let me down. No matter,
no Normans or Frenchmen
darken my door.

I never saw her, still I love her.
Do I contradict myself?
Don't worry,
judge and jury have left the room.
The thing is
I love another: nicer, prettier. I love her more.

I don't know where she is,
in the mountains, on the plains.
Nor can I say
she's done me wrong. Quiet, so;
and since it pains me to stay here
I'll be on my way.

Well, that was it. I don't know
who I was singing for.
I'll send it to someone who'll send it on
to someone somewhere in Anjou
who one day, out of the blue,
will send me the key.

(Guilhem de Peiteus, 11th/12th century)

The Hawthorn Branch

Ab la dolchor del temps novel

Now the season's new
and woods come into leaf
now the birds try out
in their different tongues
verses of a fresh song
surely we too can reach for
what we most desire.

No message, no news comes
from the place
where all my hopes are
so my heart lies suspended
neither sleeping nor laughing
and I can hardly move
not knowing which way
leads to her.

Our love is like the hawthorn branch
trembling on the tree
at night
in rain and ice
until the morning comes
skittering through the green leaves.

I remember
when we ceased our combat
how great the gift she gave.
She gave her ring
she spoke of love
God grant I live till my hands reach
under her cloak again.

but I will serve her two years or three
and then she'll know the truth.

Not dead, nor alive, nor do I
recover or feel what I suffer.
I can't tell love's future,
if she'll love me or when;
only she has the pity. No one else
can raise me up or let me fall.

When she maddens me I dance
or stand openmouthed like a fool.
It is my pleasure to be laughed at,
mocked to my face or whispered about
because after the bad will follow the good
and quickly follow if it pleases her.

If she won't have me, then I should have died
on the first day of my servitude.
God, how sweetly she struck me down
when I saw love's semblance
so locked in the prison of her eyes
I can never look elsewhere.

Miserable, still I rejoice
for if I shrink from her or court her
then I'll be true or I'll be false
as she likes it, faithful or tricky,
rough and ready or all courtly
trembling or cool and easeful.

She can do with me what she wants

and so I say, I, no one, Cercamon,
he is no courtly man, nor ever can be
who despairs of love.

(Cercamon, 12th century)