

MANUEL DA COSTA FONTES, *FOLKLORE AND LITERATURE. STUDIES IN THE PORTUGUESE, BRAZILIAN, SEPHARDIC, AND HISPANIC ORAL TRADITIONS* (SUNY Series in Latin American and Iberian Thought & Culture), Albany, State University of New York Press, 2000. paper, 327 Pp.

Joseph T. Snow*

Folklore and Literature is a collection of entertaining yet scholarly writing with something for every student of oral Romance literatures. Its author is well-known for his extensive work in the Hispano-Portuguese ballad tradition and his cycle of studies on many other medieval and early modern works of popular poetry and prose (*Celestina*, *Lozana andaluza*). His expertise, accumulated over long years of direct contact with folk song and folkways, is on ample display in this ambitiously subtitled collection of eight studies, complete with appendices of full texts that were only partially referred to in the studies, useful end notes, almost thirty pages of works cited— a sign of the extensive preparation that informs this collection—and, finally, three indexes: [1] Ballads, Popular Songs, and Folktales; [2] Euphemisms and Metaphors (a specialty of the author); and [3] Subjects and Proper Names.

As the author recognizes, the studies in the volume do not appear here for the first time. Each has been published before, but in a different form. All “have been updated; several were conflated, supplemented and completely rewritten” (5). This extensive work of revising was undertaken for the purpose of unifying the studies in this volume, and I think readers will agree that the authors’s efforts greatly enhance the results. The studies are arranged according to a chronological survey of the folkloric question addressed: they range from the early twelfth-century *Disciplina clericalis* of Petrus Alfonsus and an erotic *cantiga d’escarnho* of Alfonso X from the thirteenth century through the fifteenth-century *Corbacho* and *Celestina* and up to and including works of Gil Vicente from the first third of the sixteenth century. The Gil Vicente works under Fontes’ microscope are the poem which opens the *Auto da barca do Purgatório*, titled *Remando vão remadores*, his religious *contrafactum* of the popular ballad of *Conde Arnaldos*, *Barca bela*, and the *Flérída* ballad which is used to round off his *Tragicomedia de don Duardos* (ca. 1525). And subsequent to *Flérída*, three new ballads that are inspired by *Don Duardos* found, respectively, in the Sephardic, Spanish and Portuguese ballad traditions.

While the timeline of 1100 to 1546 (Gil Vicente’s death) is ample enough, the oral (and written record of) literature encompassed here actually covers a span that reaches back to Eastern literature that enters Spain with the Muslim invasions of 711-718 and extends forward to ballads recently collected by the

* Dept. of Romance & Classical Languages. Michigan State University. East Lansing MI 48824-1112. USA.

author and others in Portugal, Canada, the Azores, Madeira, the United States and in Separdic communities. In absorbing these studies, the reader will be made familiar with the seemingly infinite temporal and geographic range necessary to produce a clearer picture of the transmission of folktales. Fontes, like so many others working in this field, shows an almost encyclopedic grasp of the materials available for making his case as he works, time and again, successfully to illustrate how writers “adapted and used folklore in their works [and] how modern folklore enables us to understand crucial passages of early works whose learned authors took for granted a familiarity with the oral tradition, thus enabling us to restore those passages to their intended meaning” (7). The volume’s achievements cut both ways for there are convincing examples, too, of how the folk often adapted written [learned] works for their own ways of oral transmission, subjecting them to the process of change, variant creation, and metamorphosis, in effect, re-oralizing such learned materials (as with *Flérída*).

Folklore has, first and foremost for its practitioners, a subtle and complicated means of helping us to understand better allusions that time has allowed us to become less familiar. In the opening study (“*Puputiriru: An Eastern Folktale from the Disciplina celericalis*”), the example in question treats of a varied group of (usually) three travelers who, before journey’s end, run short of food to share and all that remains is enough flour to make one small loaf of bread. They agree that the one to eat the loaf should be the one who excels in some way, in this specific case, by having the best dream. Two plan to cheat the third, but it is the third who manages to outfox his companions and gets to eat the loaf. An erotic variant of this twelfth-century tale was first heard by the author among Portuguese immigrants in Massachusetts in 1978 and that oral re-telling gave origin to the search so amply summarized here. Before we are done, the quest begins with a pre-Christian animal tale from a Buddhist anthology compiled three centuries before Christ, passing through Persian re-tellings, the *Disciplina* adaptation, congeners in France, Italy, Russia, Hungary Iceland and elsewhere. An American version features three hoboes (an American, An Italian, A Mexican) and, instead of the bread loaf, a slice of bologna. The Mexican wins the meat. A Brazilian version features Jesus, St. Peter and Judas, another has a Dominican, a Capuchin and a Jesuit, while a third – retold here– also uses ethnic immigrant minorities, a Spaniard, and Italian and a Japanese (the Italian wins the loaf). This tale took on surprising erotic turns fairly early, owing to the similar sounds of ‘bread’ (*pan*) and ‘baker’s girl’ (*panadera*), in which the original prize (bread) was replaced with a woman. Versions appear later in Portuguese and French versions, still recognizably the “bread-dream” folk tale.. Even Rabelais makes use of it in *Pantagruel* from where it passes to Nicolas de Troyes and others. Timoneda adapts it in Spain in 1564, drawing on oral tradition. Fontes, in tracing the

original tale's entry into Spain with the Moors, favors Spain as the birthplace of the second, or erotic, variant, and he cleverly traces the route of the tale as it wended its way through a welter of oral transmissions and into recorded texts, touching on societal values that may have caused some of the more interesting variant re-tellings. The conclusion seems inevitable when we reach it: "the modern Portuguese version recorded from an illiterate Azorean septuagenarian in Massachusetts has enabled us to shed light on the past, determining, with a fair degree of certainty, what the Iberian tradition that inspired Timoneda must have been like" (26).

Space limitations impel me to discuss just a few of the other studies more briefly. Equally as subtle in exegesis is the third study ("Martínez de Toledo's 'Nightmare' and the Courtly and Oral Traditions"), particularly rich in nuanced lexical retrieval. Here a collaboration between some modern use of metaphor and a knowledge of other, courtly usages of the same, allows the author to assign a jesting tone to the author's famous recantation at the end of the *Corbacho*, and thus depriving it of any serious turning back on what had come before, despite appearances to the contrary. The fourth study ("Knitting and Sewing Metaphors and a Maiden's Honor in *La Celestina*") is most intriguing: An original folk origin for the metaphors' more or less overt sexual associations is argued from the basis of modern Portuguese and Brazilian folk tales. It is the case here that what was known to *Celestina*'s readers and, therefore, not made explicit in the text has been preserved in surviving oral traditions recorded in Canada (from immigrants from Tras-os-Montes and the Azores) and in Brazil. The textual illumination is here beneficial especially to a deeper understanding of *Celestina*'s Act X, a case of oral tradition enriching a learned text for its modern readers.

The final two-thirds of the volume, following similar patterns of research, study and exegesis, show the deft handling of oral sources by Gil Vicente and how his reliance on folk stories survives into the present, in living balladry. The careful attention that Fontes lavishes on the permutations of the Conde Arnaldos ballad (first written down, it is believed, in 1440) as it is adapted in oral transmission, winding up as Vicente's lovely "Barca bela" (very much alive today in Portugal and Barzil) and which is then captured, altered but still recognizable, in Vicente's "Remando vão remadores" (1517), focuses on ways in which oral tradition affects learned works. The two final pieces explore *Don Duardos* and, together, comprise the longest sustained study in the volume. The ballad about the elopement of the English prince, Duardos, with the Byzantine princess, Flérída, divides and has different versions that are fostered in separate oral lines of transmission. But a mystery as to why the elopement takes place is clarified up in two new ballads invented as a response to the gaps in the *Flérída* ballad version included in *Don*

Duardos, and in another, Separdic ballad continues the action of *Flérída*. Each of the three, in its own way, is shaped by divergent views on romantic love.

The book is well-presented with scarce typographical errors. Every original text is also translated into English (except in the appendices). The extended use of double-column format for the purposes of comparing versions of ballads is a time saver the reader will appreciate. The notes to each study follow the complete texts. I found myself, between readings, having recourse to the book's very useful and complete index. In a monograph of such complexity with a voluminous number of texts and references, this is especially welcome. While I have not been able to include names of scholars whose work informs Fontes', these are also found carefully indexed. While Fontes has done his reading, and cites generously the work of others, I hope to have here conveyed the notion that all of these studies add to the literature on folklore and oral transmission in notable ways, especially in the area of the mutuality of "texts", oral to learned [written] and learned to oral. These are model studies others would do well to continue, and especially, perhaps, those scholars working with Petrus Alfonsus, Alfonso X, Martínez de Toledo, Fernando de Rojas and Gil Vicente, but certainly, not methodologically, limited to them. Scholars will, surely, be grateful to Manuel da Costa Fontes for his painstaking re-thinking of his original studies and for melding them into a sustained meditation on the rich interplay of folklore and literature.

