

◆ Chapter 7

Editing Problems of the *Romancero*
The Romantic Tradition

Pere Ferré

The *romancero*: Memory and Writing

Since the *romancero* is one of the genres belonging to the so-called oral literature, it may seem, at first, inappropriate as a subject in a volume entitled *The Politics of Editing*. One should remember, however, that the *romancero*, born as many other medieval genres, to be preserved by memory, found another way of life after the fifteenth century, when it started to become available in writing as well.

This new form of transmission is documented for the first time by a modest notebook belonging to a student of the Balearic Islands,¹ and throughout the fifteenth century several songbooks in manuscript form (the *cancioneros*) contain ballads or *romances* among their texts.² In the sixteenth century, *romances* fill large portions of printed volumes that were meant as compilations of whatever was considered to be a literary work, and also circulated in the very popular form of leaflets or chapbooks (*pliegos*), which were printed more or less everywhere and provided considerable profits to the typographers who found in them some of that century's best-sellers.

The *romancero*, then, has lived a double life from 1420 until now, preserved under two different forms that often crossed each other: manuscript or printed writing and human memory.

Establishing the Text of a *Romance*: An Act of Editing Politics

The problems faced when one tries to establish texts whose natural form of preservation is memory, may now seem clearer. To begin with, the act of writing down a *romance* using graphemes is already a matter of editing politics, not only because the form of preservation changes, but especially because it implies a kind of choice, giving to one version of the poem the solemn importance of the document. Frequently, the chosen version is not exactly a transcription of what was *heard* but much more the final result of a reelaboration, often built through the depuration of a group of versions; in other words, it is the result of an editor's choice between several lessons obtained of that text, plus the actual creation of his/her own lessons.

This is most likely the typical behavior of sixteenth-century editors. Let us consider, for example, Antonio Rodríguez-Moñino's statement about the *Cancionero de romances* of Antwerp (1550) and its editor's position:

A very brief prologue precedes the text and it makes clear that the work is the personal task of the printer. Says Martín Nucio: "I have undertaken the task of putting together in this *cancionero* all of the ballads known to me." . . .

Regarding exclusions, Nucio assures us that a few old ballads are missing which he omitted either because they were unknown to him "or because I did not find them to be as perfect and as polished (*cumplidos*) as I had wished." Other ballads printed by him have some errors, but these must be "attributed to the copies from which I gathered them for they were very unreliable, and to the softness of memory of some of those who dictated them to me for they could not remember them perfectly."

One can see clearly the two ways in which the *cancioneros* were formed: on the one hand there was the written tradition, on the other the oral. It is easy to imagine Nucio—or whoever charged him with the task—taking

notes dictated by some soldier from Extremadura, Castile, Andalucía, or la Mancha, ably stimulating his memory the same way in which, more than three centuries later, the forerunners of the resurrection of the *romancero* were to do, with Amador de los Ríos and Aguiló at the head of them.

Nucio also points out that he has done a bit of textual criticism: "I was careful to see that there were as few mistakes as possible, and it took more than a little work to bring them together and to amend and add to some imperfect ones." One must keep these words in mind in establishing variants among Nucio's texts, if these are chapbook versions that correspond to them exactly: we could be facing personal corrections. (12-13)³

These considerations could be made about many other sixteenth-century editors, not to mention, of course, those who did nothing but use in their editions texts already printed by their predecessors.

We should still consider, in order to underscore briefly the main points about the ancient printed tradition, the remakes of *romances* at the hands of poets and playwrights during Spain's Golden Age or *Siglo de Oro*. One thinks of Lope de Vega or Vélez de Guevara, for instance, who used the *romancero* in their plays, sometimes even developing the subject of one specific *romance* but more often including versions or fragments in order to conform to the public's wishes and tastes, or to correspond to the interests and reasons of State politics.⁴ Another point to remember is the favor granted during this period to certain themes as opposed to others, a matter excellently treated by Giuseppe Di Stefano but still deserving new approaches in order to clarify some of the ideological reasons behind the choice of those themes (see "Marginalia").

In none of the cases, however, was the concern of all these editors and users of the *romancero* to rigorously establish a text. The search for a scientific approach to this problem will come centuries later, precisely when positivistic criticism begins to face it. Even so, there is a discernible difference between positivistic thought and the actual politics of editing in this field, as one could easily verify by putting together, for instance, the opinions of Carolina Michaëlis de Vasconcelos and Diego Catalán. Their differences are certainly not superficial; on the contrary, they reflect a profound ideological antagonism.

To Michaëlis, a fair representative of positivistic thought, the modern traditional versions are convincing proof of the corruption inflicted to literature by the "common people" (see "Estudos"). To Catalán, however,

the ancient versions ordinarily suppose an act of appropriation of the poem-song on the part of the "learned" minorities, a conscious integration of that alien artistic object in the official artistic sphere. Consequently, as it is fixed through writing with a new intentionality, the song loses for us its primogenial poetic properties; the "document" masks the "being" of the poem that we seek to study. (452)⁵

Romanticism and the Editing of Ballads

The Romantic generation played a role of particular importance for the knowledge and revelation of a genre that survives since the Middle Ages: the Romantics were indeed the first modern editors of the *romancero*. I am not thinking now about those who followed in the Iberian Peninsula the steps of the northern and central European Romantics, by taking from the old *romanceros* and leaflets or chapbooks (*pliegos*) the ancient versions printed in the sixteenth century. I am instead referring to those who, corresponding to a new spirit, tried to listen to the living oral tradition of their own time. They understood the importance of ancient popular knowledge to the renewal of the idea of nation. In that knowledge the deepest sense of "genuine nationality" lay and from the popular community they learned their own expression. From the 1820s on, then, we find in the Iberian Peninsula a steady work of collecting and editing *romances*. The editions resulting from that work followed very specific criteria.

Garrett, the Pioneer

The pioneer in this type of activity in the Peninsula was the Portuguese Almeida Garrett (1799-1854), who published the first *romances* collected from the modern oral tradition in 1828,⁶ although he had initiated his research sooner, in 1824.⁷ In this way, Portugal was the first of the Iberian nationalities to reveal the *romancero*.

After *Adozinda*, Garrett included some separate versions in several publications until he eventually gathered and edited his *Romanceiro* in three volumes, between 1843 and 1851.⁸ The criteria he uses in this edition are the most diversified, and they are a good example of the Romantic conception of the politics of editing in this field.

In his first volume, we find side-by-side remakes of traditional *romances* and texts created by Garrett himself, which places the collection under the domain of poetic invention. The procedure is the same one Garrett used in 1828: he takes the Iberian ballads as inspiring themes and develops those themes as any other kind of Romantic poetry.

The second and the third volumes raise different problems, since the editor's retouching follows another kind of criteria. His words show clearly these new concerns:

Through the work that gave birth to this collection, it is my intention to fill in a significant gap in our literature. I do not wish to write a scholastic piece of work, and so be placed among philologists and collectors of antiques, adding one more volume to the shelves in their libraries. I wish to accomplish something useful, a popular book; and in order that it may be so, I must make it as pleasant as my knowledge and ability allow me. Let the academies produce the critical and chronological dissertations for the learned. Mine is a different task: to popularize the study of our primitive literature, of its oldest and most original documents, so that the literary revolution that has broken out in the country may have a guide, pointing out to the young minds among its ranks the real types of nationality they are looking for, and which should be searched for among ourselves, not among foreign patterns.⁹

The *romancero* becomes then a weapon at the service of the literary revolution proposed by the leader of the Romantic movement in Portugal. It is indeed a revolution submitted to poetics, to a specific poetics, as Garrett states:

For conscience's sake, those who raise the cry for freedom amongst a people should find out the rules, point out aims, provide the means for that freedom so that it does not turn out into anarchy. It is not enough to warm the hearts against usurpation and despotism; once destroyed, law must take its place. And the law should not come

from abroad: it must rise from one country's beliefs, memories, and needs, so that it becomes its natural law and does not replace usurpation by another.¹⁰

Traditional poetry has then the highest role to play in the formation of this new order, and that is why its transmission and knowledge become a priority for Garrett. The way in which this accomplishment should be achieved is also pointed out in his foreword. First, as we have seen, the national sources should be carefully studied and put to use:

What has to be done is to study our primitive poetic sources, the *romances* and the legends in prose, the fables and old beliefs, and old superstitions; to read them in bad Mozarabic Latin, half *Suevo* and half Gothic in obsolete documents; in the bad Portuguese of charters and ancient laws; and in the coeval Castilian—since Hispanic literatures were one till late in time. As for the tone and true Portuguese spirit, that has to be studied in the great national book, which is to say the people and its traditions, its virtues and vices, its beliefs and mistakes. And through these alone shall the truthful and legitimate national poetry be reborn, once it has been ripped, through classic influence, off the Shroud of barbarity where it was wrapped when it died and which it wore while still living.

Facing this aim, to gather and restore the folk songs, *romances*, ballads, or whatever one chooses to call them, is one of the first tasks we lacked. That's what I've done, or, at least, what I had in mind to do.¹¹

These paragraphs are the key to the volumes published in 1851: Garrett intended to compile a solid and comprehensive poetic catalog of what he considered to be national poetry for use by the young poets. The last two volumes provided the materials that would inspire the new poetry, according to specific rules; these rules were already applied in the first volume in 1843, by Garrett himself. In this way, the younger generation of poets in charge of building a new national consciousness out of the legitimate models of the past (and all this through poetry), would find in Garrett's *Romanceiro* a set of materials along with the recipes to use these materials as models in their own creations.

"Gathering and Restoring . . . Folk Songs"

The Romantic poets, as well as Martín Nucio back in the sixteenth century, could not conceive of editing a ballad without retouching it. The principles followed by the editors in the nineteenth century, however, were to be different.

The literary revolution proposed and led by Garrett is clearly in accordance with the Romantic conception of social changes obtained by means of popular education. Artists were social catalysts assuring the function of a complex relationship; they learned from the people and at the same time they taught them. So, on the one hand, Garrett, liberal politician that he was, speaks firmly of the impossibility of making a revolution without the people, but, on the other hand, he places the learned classes in charge of the ethical and aesthetic education of the lower classes. Within the people, or the "good savages," these artists would find genuine purity and habits and customs not yet corrupted by foreign contact, as had happened to the aristocracy. The people preserved the national culture, as well as a natural law that emerged in several forms of expression, most of all in artistic manifestations. This idealized entity called "the people," however, lacked the aesthetic preparation that the poets, according to Shelley, were supposed to transmit.

The project was, in a word, for the poets to drink from the clear source of popular culture in order to learn again the forgotten knowledge and then provide the source itself with the purified stream of their Romantic revolutionary products. This was the work Garrett tried to perform, or at least start, in his poetic catalog of 1851. The texts he presented were the result of his own work based upon several versions he had collected, when necessary, using lessons that had nothing to do with the true oral tradition.

An Example of Garrett's Remaking

In the second volume of Garrett's *Romanceiro* we find, on pages 21-24 and 32-35, two *romances* under the titles of "The Hunter" ("O Caçador") and "The Bewitched" ("A Enfeitiçada"), respectively. Those texts correspond to the themes of "The Enchanted Princess" ("Infantina") (*A caçar va el cauallero a caçar como solia*) and "The Baffled Knight" ("Caballero burlado") (*De Francia partio la*

niña de Francia la bien guarnida). Garrett knew both *romances* through the modern oral Portuguese tradition and through Agustín Durán's and Eugenio Ochoa's divulgence of those *romances*. Garrett even edits the Castilian versions in order to allow the confrontation with his own.

To a reader who may not be familiar with the traditional *romancero*, Garrett's texts would be just two more *romances* preserved by collective memory in the nineteenth century. A more specialized reader, however, will notice immediately how close the Portuguese versions are to the Spanish ones, and will remember that those two *romances* do not exist in pure forms in Portuguese oral tradition; they only survive today contaminated by each other. All of these reasons lead one to put in serious doubt the legitimacy of Garrett's versions. Let us compare, for instance, the following verses:

Oh, fear not, gentle knight!
There is no cause for fear.

Não te assustes, cavaleiro,
Não tenhas tamanha frima.
(Garrett)

Gentleman, do not look so surprised,
I bid you, be not so frightened.

-No te espantes, caballero,
ni tengas tamaña grima.
(Ochoa)

or the following:

-Oh, whoever lost what I'm losing
deep suffering should endure!
I take the law into my own hands.
Thence, here my life comes to an end.

-Oh, quem perdeu o que eu perco
grande penar merecia!
Justiça faço em mim mesmo
e aqui me acabo co'a vida.
(Garrett)

A knight that loses so much
deep suffering should endure:
I will be my own judge
and take the law into my own hands.
Let my hands and feet be chopped off,
my body dragged along the village streets.

Caballero que tal pierde,
muy gran pena merecia:
Yo mesmo seré el alcalde
yo me seré la justicia.
Que me corten piés y manos
y me arrastren por la villa.
(Ochoa)

The influence of Ochoa's version upon Garrett's is clear, especially when the last verses are missing in more than two hundred versions I know of this *romance* found in Portugal.

On the other hand, if we look now at Garrett's manuscript, we find the following version:

Hunting was the huntsman, in some shadowy woods,
When a maiden he saw seated on a cold crag.
- What are you doing, here, maiden, what are you doing,
[fair maiden?
- While in my godmother's arms, by seven fairies I was
[charmed

Here to linger for seven years, seven years and one
[more day.
Those years are over today, tomorrow the day shall be,
Will you, gentle knight, wish me to bear you company?
A long way had gone by, and the maiden smiling was.
- What are you laughing at, sweet maiden, what are you
[laughing at, fair maiden?
- I am not laughing at your horse, or at its garments
[either,
I am laughing at the knight and at his own cowardice;
For when having a maiden riding along, he did treasure
[her virtue.
- Back, back we ride, dear maiden, back we ride, fair maiden,
For my spur was lost behind at the fountain we drank from.
- Ahead, gentle knight, ahead, for back I would not ride;
If your spur is made of silver, a golden one my father would
[give you,
For at my father's dooryard gold is weighed every day.
- Fair maiden, do not take leave, tell me whose daughter
[are you, then?
- I am the daughter of the King of France and of Queen
[Constantine.
- To the Devil with all women and with those who trust
[them may!
I thought I was carrying a mistress, and a sister of mine
[I found.¹²

Without affirming that this manuscript version has not been subject to any retouching, I believe that it provides sufficient proof to show that the traditional version that Garrett knew presented both themes contaminating each other. Later they were separated in two different texts by Garrett, when he was preparing his edition, according to the Castilian versions he knew.

Contamination as Textual Corruption

In a study published in 1954, the French specialist Paul Bénichou wrote: "The mixture of texts in the oral tradition does not constitute a contamination or something irregular or disturbing as the word suggests. Rather, it is a type of invention and normal recreation" ("le mélange des textes, dans la tradition orale, n'est pas une contamination, avec ce que ce mot suggère d'irrégulier ou de choquant: c'est un mode d'invention et de récréation normale" [280]). Bénichou's observation focuses on the crucial point of the problem we are dealing with because for Garrett, as well as years later for the positivist Carolina Michaëlis,¹³ contamination is nothing but a corruption that needs to be corrected. That is what Garrett himself admits in a way when he declares, regarding his version of "A Enfeitiçada": "In some of our provinces it has, in its oral version, appeared combined with the previous *romance* 'Caçador' (The Hunter), and it is difficult to disentangle them" ("Em algumas das nossas provincias anda confundido, na versão oral, com o romance precedente do 'Caçador' e custa a desvenencilhá-los" [*Romanceiro*, II, 30]).

It is obviously false to say that "in some of our provinces" that ballad is mixed with the other. The "confusion," as Garrett calls it, is on the contrary totally systematic in modern oral Portuguese tradition. Daniel Devoto has already spoken to that same fact: "The ballad of 'la hija del rey de Francia y el Caballero burlado,' known since the fifteenth century, still lives in the oral tradition (generally contaminated, since much earlier, with two others: 'La Infantina' and 'Don Bueso')" ("El romance de La hija del rey de Francia y el Caballero burlado, conocido desde el siglo XV, vive todavía en la tradición oral [contaminado por lo general, y desde antiguo, con otros dos: La Infantina y Don Bueso]" [383]).

When he tried to *desvenencilhar*—to separate—the two themes, Garrett did not try to establish rigorously, in the philological sense, two different texts. This would be an absurd demand to make on the Romantic poet. On the contrary, what he did was just to respect a politics of editing conceived to present texts as close as possible to the primitive poetry, the "poetry of the stuttering age of people," as he puts it. Garrett has built, then, two poetic documents, purified of rough popular corruption, so they could be read by "readers of

all classes," and "enjoyed by the young people" (*Romanceiro*, II, viii).

This is, in fact, a political strategy visibly acting through editing criteria, and these criteria were constantly applied to the *romancero*. At a time when, in the name of the people, the liberal bourgeoisie tried to impose its ideology, replacing the absolutist aristocracy in the leading role, these details were certainly not to be neglected, as Garrett himself understood, and as his example documents.

Notes

1. This is the first *romance* to be documented in writing, copied by Jaume de Olesa around 1420. The original manuscript is now at the National Library in Florence, and has been published for the first time by E. Levi, "El romance florentino de Jaume de Olesa."

2. For knowledge of the manuscript versions of *romances* in the fifteenth century, see S. G. Morley, "Chronological List of Early Spanish Ballads," and the information given by Giuseppe Di Stefano in his "Estudio crítico," especially 54–56.

3. "Un brevísimo prólogo precede al texto y en él consta que la obra es tarea personal del impresor. 'He querido—dice Martín Nucio—tomar el trabajo de juntar en este cancionero todos los romances que han venido a mi noticia'

Con respecto a las exclusiones, asegura Nucio que faltan algunos romances viejos aunque muy pocos, que no puso porque no llegaron a su noticia 'o porque no los hallé tan cumplidos y perfectos como quisiera.' Otros de los que imprime tienen algunas faltas, pero éstas se deben 'imputar a los ejemplares de adonde los saqué que estauan muy corruptos y a la flaqueza de la memoria de algunos que me los dictaron que no se podían acordar dellos perfectamente.'

He ahí bien claras las dos vías de formación del *Cancionero*: de una parte la tradición escrita, de otra la oral. Poco trabajo cuesta imaginar a Nucio—y a quien encargase la tarea—tomando nota de los textos dictados por algún soldado extremeño, castellano, andaluz o manchego, excitando su memoria hábilmente, tal como tres siglos y pico después habían de hacer los adelantados de la resurrección del romancero con Amador de los Ríos y Aguiló a la cabeza.

Señala también que ha hecho su poquito de crítica textual: 'yo hice toda diligencia porque viesse las menos faltas que fuesse possible, y no me ha sido poco trabajo juntarlos y enmendar y añadir algunos que estauan imperfectos'. Hay que tener en cuenta estas palabras siempre que vayan a establecerse variantes de textos de Nucio no conocidos por pliegos sueltos que se correspondan *exactamente* con ellos: podemos estar en presencia de correcciones personales.'

4. It is interesting to observe how Lope de Vega transforms the *romance* dedicated to the death of Don Jaime's (the Duke of Braganza) wife, changing it completely in order to provide a happy ending. Vélez de Guevara, in turn, transforms a savage mountain girl, the protagonist of the *romance* "La serrana de la Vera," into a woman full of reasons to commit her cruel assassinations, and also

que às portas de meu pai se mede ouro cada dia.
 - Vinde cá, ó donzelinha; dizei-me, de quem sois filha?
 - Sou filha d'El-rei de França e da rainha Constantina.
 - Leve o diabo mulheres e mais quem nelas se fia!
 cuidei que levava amante e levo uma irmã minha.

I have modernized the spelling and I have used the long verse in the transcription of pages 142 and 147 of the manuscript.

13. See, for instance, the words of Michaëlis de Vasconcelos: "o triste mas grande, merecimento de publicações diplomaticas de taes recitações degeneradas consiste em patentear aos olhos dos eruditos documentos fidedignos e vivos do grau de fragmentação, obliteração, fusão e confusão a que vae chegando a poesia epico-lyrica do povo português e dos seus limitrophes, na Galliza e nas Asturias" (162).

Works Cited

- Bénichou, Paul. "La belle qui ne saurait chanter: Notes sur un motif de poésie populaire." *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 28 (1954): 257-281.
- Catalán, Diego. "El romancero medieval." *Comentario de textos, IV. La poesía medieval*. Madrid: Castalia, 1983.
- Devoto, Daniel. "Un ejemplo de la labor tradicional en el romancero viejo." *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 7 (1953): 383-394.
- Di Stefano, Giuseppe. "Marginalia sul Romanzero." *Miscellanea di Studi Hispanici* (1969-1970): 139-178.
- . "Estudio crítico." *El Romancero*. Madrid: Narcea, 1983.
- Garrett, João Baptista de Almeida. *Cancioneiro de Romances, Xacaras, Solãos e outros vestígios de antiga poesia nacional pela maior parte conservados na tradição oral do povo e agora primeiramente colligidos por João Baptista de Almeida-Garrett*. Univ. of Coimbra, MS 14657.
- . *Adozinda*. London: Em Casa de Boosey and Son e de V. Salva, 1828.
- . *Romanceiro e Cancioneiro Geral. I. Adozinda e Outros*. Lisbon: Typographia da Sociedade Propagadora dos Conhecimentos Uteis, 1843.
- . *Romanceiro*. Vols. II, III. Lisbon: Impresa Nacional, 1851.
- Levi, E. "El romance florentino de Jaume de Olesa." *Revista de Filología Española* 14 (1927): 134-160.
- Michaëlis de Vasconcelos, Carolina. "Estudos sobre o Romanceiro peninsular." *Revista Lusitana* II (1890-1892): 156-179.
- Morley, S. G. "Chronological List of Early Spanish Ballads." *Hispanic Review* 13 (1945): 273-287.
- Rodríguez-Moñino, Antonio. *Cancionero de romances (Anvers 1550)*. Madrid: Castalia, 1967.