

Pedro M. Piñero Ramírez (ed.), *La eterna agonía del Romancero. Homenaje a Paul Bénéichou. Actas del Encuentro Internacional sobre el Romancero (Sevilla, 25-27 October, 1999)*, Sevilla, Fundación Machado, 2001. 510 pages. ISBN: 84-88544-79-0

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Tribute is paid to the late lamented scholar of French literature (Tlemcen, September 19, 1908 - Paris, May 14, 2001), whose crucial work on oral tradition analyzed creativity in the *romance*, with this splendid volume of articles, discussions, and status quo reports on the Peninsular and Sephardic *romances*. The editor's orientation to this comprehensive overview of the current state of the tradition inaugurates the homage, and is followed by a note from Paul Bénéichou that offers regrets for his unavoidable absence from the congress, assesses the promise of the congress program, and shares his thoughts on the *romance* tradition today and future avenues of research. Nine full-length ballad studies by leading scholars (pp. 39-204) precede transcriptions of six wide ranging round table discussions among the most accomplished students of the *romance* — editing, classifying, collecting, teaching, and evaluating them — from which common and uncommon aspirations emerge (pp. 205-96). These extraordinary discussions bring together an unprecedented number of key scholars who reflect on the essential problems of the field. The volume is completed by sixteen in-depth reports on recent fieldwork (1970-2000) in the autonomous political regions of Spain, in Portugal, and among the Sephardim; each gathers together notice of recent fieldwork, published collections, future working directions, relevant bibliography, and, represents, in fine, a diagnosis of the resilience, or demise, of the tradition (pp. 297-507).

Summaries of the nine articles mentioned are presented below.

— Margit Frenk (“El romancero y la antigua lírica popular”) composes a biography of early hybrid lyric-narrative forms before their eventual eclipse by the sixteenth-century *romance*. The multiforms are classified, and the probable mechanisms of generic interference rehearsed — the relative merits of confluence and influence attract attention. Finally, there is well-grounded speculation on the aesthetic motivations for the ebb and flow of specific forms' historical productivity.

— Alan Deyermond (“Las imágenes en el romancero fronterizo: un estudio de cuatro tradiciones”) explores the role of the frontier in the balladistic imagination: mere scenario or historical substrate and socio-artistic catalyst? A meticulous comparative analysis of Castilian *romances* (twenty-one), English and Scottish ballads (twenty), Serbo-Croatian ballads (ten), and Chinese ballads (four of Han dynasty provenance) shows the relative frequency and distribution of image, simile, metaphor, symbol, personification, and metonymy within and between the corpora. This careful study lays solid groundwork for future comparative enterprises.

— Giuseppe Di Stefano (“El Romance de la muerte de don Fadrique y modelos temático-narrativos entre romancero y cancionero”) examines the epitaph motif, the disembodied moralizing voice of the perennially betrayed victim, in ten poetic iterations. Refined critical interpretation of its structural and rhetorical articulations shows how deictic shifters modulate between the mode of realism and the mode of the fantastic. The analects of funerary autobiography include Egyptian sarcophagi, the titular *romance*, and poetic analogues: *Yo me só el infante Enrique* of Pedro de Escavias, the *Cantar de los Comendadores de Córdoba*, *dezires* of Juan Agraz, and other titles by Íñigo López de Mendoza, Villasandino, Juan Alfonso de Baena, and a relatively obscure fray Miger. Close textual analysis amply rewards the perseverant reader of this wide-ranging article.

— Sylvia Roubaud Bénéichou (“El romancero en los Libros de caballerías”) traces the treatment of balladistic material in the historical development of the *Libros de caballerías* and reflects on the eruption of lyric forms into medieval and renaissance prose — from the knight/*pastor*/troubadour figure reminiscent of the biblical shepherd/poet/king David to the complaints of *La Diana*. Multiple affinities of content, theme, and narrative technique linking *romances* and *Libros de caballerías*, a critical touchstone, are reassessed, and the reciprocal transfer of narrative material between ballad and novel is evaluated. Relatively scarce in comparison with the vast quantity of *Libros de caballerías*, the examples adduced show that the prose authors preferred the erudite and artistic *romance*, sonnet, and eclogue over the *romance viejo*. The classic novelistic adaptation of the romance, the complaint sung by a lovelorn knight/shepherd, quit of arms and court, was formulated by the playwright Feliciano de Silva. The brilliant ballads by Jorge de Montemayor excepted, the *romance* suffered novelistic ignominy until achieving artistic

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plenitude with the novelistic genius of Cervantes, who perceived sympathetic resonance of form and matter in the *romance viejo*.

— Pedro M. Piñero Ramírez (“‘Mozos codiciosos de honra, pero más enamorados’: la floración última de la caballería medieval en el romancero fronterizo”) addresses the historical and poetic reality of the Moslem-Christian borderlands with a comparative reading of chronicle accounts of the Christian defeat at Montejícar (1410) and the version related by the *romance Ya se salen de Jaén*. Anthropological, historical, and poetic implications depicted in the contrasting narratives identify honor, fame, eroticism, wise counsel, and failed *sophrysyne* as actants moving the balladistic tragedy and cautionary tale.

— José M^a Alín (“Romancero y cancionero: préstamos textuales”) confronts multiple excerpts of *romances* and *coplas* that illustrate the relative paucity, formal features excepted, of texts common to the two genres. Examples of partial borrowing, one or two initial verses, final verses, a stanza, or a complete calque, lend support to several broad conclusions: the influence of the *copla* on the *romance* increases substantially beginning with versions collected during the 1950s; the modern *copla* and *romance* share numerous affinities. The displacement of traditional communal activities by mass media, the vast wasteland, and new habits of contemporary life vitiated the *romance* tradition leaving shreds and tatters to be stitched together in strophic and polystrophic forms.

— José Manuel Pedrosa (“Los padre maldicientes: del Génesis, La Odisea y El Kalevala a la leyenda de Alfonso X, el romancero y la tradición oral moderna”) offers a substantial review of the paternal curse, fatal unless neutralized, as narrative device in ballad, epic, and chronicle, going far afield to comb bypaths of malediction as a verbal measure of social governance. Here enchantment is made equivalent with curse and the pool of narratives witnesses thereby considerably increased. Several source texts name an enchantment by the term “curse”, but the commutation is not examined. To the titular references are added examples from diverse traditions: the broadside, the Mexican corrido, renaissance *exempla*, classical fables, modern peninsular legends and tales, a symphonic tone poem, Mesopotamian myth, Greek mythology, a legend of the insular Bubi of Equatorial Guinea, a complex of aetiological examples culled from contemporary Navarra, Columbia, Chile, the Paraiyar in Tamil Nadu, and Madagascar, a story from *The thousand and one nights*, the Afro-Cuban tale of the curse of Oggún, and Brazilian taboo and euphemism on naming the mother. The concluding paragraphs justify the curse-type coextensive to the descendants of the accursed, *Exodus* 20.5, from a socio-cultural perspective: the need to guarantee familial continuity and solidarity. However compelling that rationale may be, the curse-type in question is known to derive from a self-curse clause common in ancient Near Eastern treaties and contracts: the curse and its effects being held in abeyance for as long as the contractual terms are performed, even unto the third and fourth generation.

— Samuel G. Armistead [“Seis cantos de boda judeo-españoles (MSS. de Américo Castro)"] edits six Moroccan wedding songs recorded by Américo Castro during the winter and spring of 1922-1923; among them are texts representative of the previously undocumented oral tradition in Xauen. These fascinating texts are meticulously presented with variants, glossary, pinpoint identification of sources and analogues, thorough analysis, and a full contextualization. This attractive sampler of the Castro manuscripts promises more treasures that are to be presented in a forthcoming edition.

— Enrique Baltanás (“Más sobre García Lorca y el romancero: *Thamar* y *Amnón*, poema culto y balada popular”) identifies those elements of Lorca’s poem that distinguish its aesthetic from that of its putative source in Andalusian oral tradition.

The round table session devoted to editing reviews various practices and trends: types of editorial intervention, proliferation of regional collections (autonomous political entities), the merits of exhaustive and selective editions, supplying accurate melodic and rhythmic versions of authentic musical settings, memory and the mechanisms of oral transmission. The success, and future, of umbrella projects such as *ASOR* (*Archivo Sonoro del Romancero*), *AIER* (*Archivo Internacional Electrónico del Romancero*), and *AIER-Textos* is also debated.

The classification session follows the history of different classificatory schemes: the Menéndez Pidal systems, the highly regarded and eminently useful classification developed by Professor Armistead for the *Catálogo-Índice*, and the systems rehearsed in *AIER*, *CGR* (*Catálogo*

General del Romancero), and *IGER* (*Índice General del Romancero*). Classification is first and foremost a practical matter.

Far-ranging discussions of recent fieldwork explore many traditions in decline, and others newly emergent, and argue for the development of improved models of the mnemonic mechanisms that lie at the very heart of living traditions. Similarly, a call is made for drawing up ethnographic atlases that will incorporate multiple exponents of oral traditions. Further work on the etic and emic dimensions of oral literature is a desideratum. The role of modern recording devices and different methodologies, anthropological, are debated, and the idiosyncratic role of the field researcher in fabricating the scholarly simulacrum of living traditions, the sole representation known to many students, are explored. A model questionnaire and methodology are presented, together with the highly encouraging report of successful collecting campaigns carried out by secondary-school students among their families. Opportunities for the study of *romances*, and other forms of oral traditions, in present day university curricula vary widely across Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Rumania, and Germany, from infrequent to consistent.

The comprehensive session on ancient and modern traditions addresses terminology, *romancero antiguo, viejo, artístico, erudito*, and considers editorial motives and marketing schemes. Why, for example, does Martín Nucio allude, in the prologue of the *Cancionero de romances*, sin año, to “la memoria de algunos que me los [romances] dictaron que no se podían acordar dellos perfectamente” when it can be shown that many printed versions derive from broadsides?

The final round table, a *status quaestionis* of modern oral tradition, gets underway with a paradoxical axiom “el romancero es víctima de su propia riqueza y de su propio interés” (p. 285), done in by negligent and uncomprehending editors and a general failure to acknowledge orality in any degree, primary, secondary, or other. The scope of the discussion widens, however, and other topics are examined: the history of modern collecting, the ceaseless confluence of generic currents that transform themselves, analysis of the *romance* as story, the unique individual versions of *romance* crafted by gypsy singers, cross-pollination of printed and oral varieties of the *romance*, ascendancy of the *décima* as a popular productive form, and, finally, the eloquent and instructive metamorphosis of *La dama y el pastor* from *romance viejo*, then *romance nuevo* (sixteenth century), to be recast as a *villancico* to which the majority of modern traditional versions may be traced. A crucially important question is raised [cf. the strong echo (p. 347 n. 13)]: “cómo está la continuidad del Seminario Menéndez Pidal [?]” (287), but total silence is the only response offered.

The sixteen status reports which close out the volume constitute an invaluable research tool, one that permits ready accession to a clear understanding and appreciation of the current status of the various branches of a tradition that is both living and dying. This section alone would vouchsafe the utility of this volume.

It is hoped that the thumbnail sketches presented above will suggest, to research librarians among others, that the considerable care and effort given to the preparation of this volume pay a magnificent dividend: a diagnosis from the best scholars in the field of the present-day constitution of the *romance* in oral tradition. The editor is to be congratulated for bringing a very useful volume into print: it is a fitting tribute indeed.