En suma, y para terminar, creo que debemos felicitarnos por que Rafael Beltran haya puesto a nuestra disposición esta magnífica antología y creo que mi deber es invitar al público a leer estas *Rondalles populars valencianes*, por muchas razones, pero sobre todo porque, como dice Beltran en el párrafo que cierra la "Introducció general":

> Este género artístico contiene verdaderas joyas. Son joyas pequeñitas, si se quiere, sin embargo no por eso menos valiosas, y su conjunto nos proporciona, abierto y generoso, un verdadero tesoro literario que podemos disfrutar y compartir (32).

Reyes Bertolín Cebrián, ***Singing the Dead. A Model for Epic Evolution***, New York-Bern-Frankfurt/M-Berlin-Brussels-Vienna-Oxford, Peter Lang, 2006, 171 pp. ISBN 0-8204-8165-3

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The very promising title of this book invited a thorough reading: who knows something about the mystery of how the oral-literary genre of epic evolved? Regrettably, the reviewed work is a disappointment. It demonstrates the urgent need to put right the very basic methods of research and writing. As these went wrong in the reviewed book, its conclusions are not acceptable. In this short review the reviewer will not discuss whether or not the proposed hypothesis concerning the origin of epic stands test, but will discuss some general methodological points.

Definitions of concepts. An author can, of course, give any meaning he wants to an existing term which he uses, or to a new term which he invents. But, and this is a great "but", he has to describe his usage of the term, define it, and explain his reasons for this specific use. The reviewed book is lacking in this respect. It is concerned with the ethnopoetic genres of epic and lament. Yet, the reviewer misses definitions-descriptions of concepts in general, and of these two basic concepts in particular. The resulting confusion is clearly seen when the genres of Homer's and Hesiod's works have to be defined. Instead of defining the two entities (in the case of Hesiod a group of genres), the difference between them is "explained" as being the result of "migration and the consequences [of this migration, namely the abandoning of rituals] this brought with it [for Homer's works (p. 41), and the result of not migrating for Hesiod's works]." Obviously, this is not a definition of a literary genre in literary terms. Then what *is* an epic work? Should only the

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two Homeric written works, as finalized by the Alexandrinian scholars and recited in Antiquity, be considered "epic"? (see definition of "martial epic" in Jason n.d., chpt. 8). And what is meant by "tragedy has heroic content (p. 82)"? What is "heroic"? To kill a strong adversary in a duel? To commit suicide using a bomb with the intention of killing others? To risk ones life to rescue others? To withstand torture? To defeat ones own nature? (see Jason 2006).

As for the lament, the author postulates a kind of lament sung at the funeral which is actually praise poetry sung by men for men. Such a "praise lament" is not known either in Greece or anywhere else. The only example of a man lamenting a warrior's death by praising him which the reviewer could find is quoted in 2 Sam 1: 19–27 and 3: 33–34; and here too the praise is stated in very general terms and no specific deeds of the dead are mentioned, from which a narrative could develop. Pindar's praise poems for sport-champions are by no means laments.

Some other undefined labels include "war poem" (p. 65). What is that exactly? No word of explanation is given. In another place the Persian Shahname, written by a completely historical poet in the 10th century C.E. is taken as example of oral literature (p. 64, note 92). Then, what *is* oral poetry?

Assumptions and facts. The method of deduction, i.e. of postulating a certain fact or a certain relationship between two facts and from there going on to examine empirical facts in order to validate the assumption, is surely a valid method of inquiry. As an example of erroneous reasoning, let us discuss Mme Bertolín-Cebrián's assumption (which is old and not her own idea!) that "epic" developed from "laments" (p. 1). Instead of examining this idea, she turns this postulate into a proven fact. In the Introduction in chpt. 1 it is assumed that the genre of lament for dead heroes developed into the genre of epic. On this basis it is assumed in chapter 2 (p. 44), that "the song which Hesiod was singing at Amphidamas' burial (Works and Days, lines 655–657) was *probably* a lament for his [=Amphidamas'] death [my italics]." In Hesiod's work the text of this hymn is not given, i.e. it is not a fact that what Hesiod sang was a lament, but an assumption. In the very next sentence Bertolín-Cebrián takes this "probability" to be a fact, namely that it was a lament: "This is the type of lament that…" (chpt 2, p. 44). The reasoning "what else could it have been?" does not make an assumption into a fact. We do not know what it was that Hesiod sang. The next assumption stated as fact is that this lament told about the dead's heroic martial deeds, as: "This is the type of lament that *precedes* epic…" No facts support the assumption that the genre of lament preceded the genre of epic in any culture; it is found as part of epic and forms a narrative unit of the story about the epic battle, see Jason n.d., vol I, Part C, Epic Narrative Segments 31.1(f.1) and 32.2.2 and South Slavic examples there; for Iliad see, ENS 31.1(f.1): book 22: lines 405–435, 475–515 and for ENS 32.2.2,

Il. book 19: lines 282–303; 24: 725–745, 748–759. In all of these passages women lament their bitter fate. Nowhere are men lamenting and praising. Achilles does not lament for Patroklos nor does he praise Patroklos' deeds, but promises to avenge Patroklos' death, i.e. Achilles puts a challenge to himself, which is a normal part of the epic narration (see Jason n.d., vol. 1, ENS 4.0.3). Thus, the assumption that epic developed from laments-praises is an assumption based on the assumed (and not proved by facts!) existence of male laments-praises. This assumption is based on the erroneous idea that epic contains mainly praise of warriors. Another such unfounded assumption is that boasting (challenging oneself) is a source of epic (p. 70).

Use of opinions of previous authors. As is well known, whatever previous authors wrote should not be reiterated, still less used as proofs or illustrations of ones own ideas without first thoroughly examining it and its basis. Regrettably, the reviewed author does not follow this rule. She frequently quotes other authors without the slightest attempt to examine their propositions, as if whatever they say is sacred truth and established fact. A good example is the use Bertolín-Cebrián makes of S. Blackburn's daring *speculations* on the development of certain works in India, which he labels "epic," both Indo-European and Dravidian (not all of the works Blackburn discusses are of the *genre* of epic!). By the way, Blackburn presents his reasoning as speculations and not as facts (Blackburn 1989). While speculations, even daring speculations, are necessary and useful for production of knowledge, it is a mistake to take them for established facts as Bertolín-Cebrián does (pp. 54–55; pay attention to the misprint on p. 54 of "mokèa" for *"moksha"* = liberation [of the soul from the cycle of death and rebirth]).

Use of findings from other branches of scholarship. This use is full of pitfalls and has to be done very carefully. An example from the reviewed book will explain the point. On p. 16 a certain writer is rephrased in support of the author's theses: B. Walraven (1994: 94) apparently states that "It is a commonly held opinion among students of folklore that religious literature [oral or written? HJ] normally antedates the secular." In all my 40 years of work I have neither heard nor read such an opinion or the name Walraven. I looked it up and did not find him listed in bibliographies of folklore and ethnology; next I found that Professor Walraven is an expert in Korean language and culture, teaches Korean and has edited 2 popular books: a beautifully illustrated book (2003) on a Dutchman who was in Korea in the 17th century (this I saw) and another on Asian cooking (2001). The third book, the one which Bertolín-Cebrián quotes is on Korean shamanic songs (1994). Any comment on Prof. Walraven's expertise on folklore is superfluous; as I had no possibility to see the last book, which the author paraphrases, for all that I know, Professor Walraven may be innocent of the erroneous opinion.

Comparison of materials on which the scholar works with materials from other cultures. The author sees Greek literature pretty much in isolation,

as a unique case. Some attention is paid to several other Indo-European cultures, all of them medieval European, but for one case: the modern oral Indian culture (pp. 54–55, in Blackburn's interpretation). Discussed are early medieval: *Beowulf* (pp. 56–58, 101–102); *The Battle of Maldon* (p. 67); medieval: Irish (p. 52–53); and Spanish *Chronica Adefonsi* (p. 102). The rest of the world is ignored, but for modern oral African Zulu praise songs. Unfortunately for the author, African cultures do not feature the genre of epic, thus Zulu culture is irrelevant. If this or that European author looks at African culture through spectacles of his own culture, and looks there for epics, such authors cannot be taken seriously, as the genre system of African oral literature has not yet been worked out. Thus it is meaningless to speak of African epic. Analogies from other genres demand thorough knowledge of these other genres. The author uses ancient charms as example of a text which has lost its context and has been given a new context. This is wrong: both cases quoted (Merseburger Charm, early medieval German, and *Atharvaveda,* ancient India, pp. 16–18, 108) have been found written, ready for use, as they always were, namely a text to be recited in specific contexts, *with* the narrative. Two non-Indo-European ethnic groups are quoted: the Huns (Attila's death; possibly, as a lapsus linguae, p. 65–66: mourning customs around this Turko-Mongolian people are introduced as "Germanic") and praise poetry of the African tribe Zulu (pp. 53–54). No epic poetry is known for either of these.

Development of oral-literary /ethnopoetic(epo-)genres. The reasoning about the evolution of epic supposes that it is known how epo-genres in general originate and develop (see esp. discussion on p. 82–83). This, however is an illusion built on assumptions. All epo-genres appear for the first time before our eyes "like Athena in full armor" (p. 82). The simple reason for this illusion is that epo-literature is oral and thus perishable. It appears to us in ancient writings, when already very old, fully developed and mature (see e.g., Kramer 1963). Thus, no development, evolution or whatever else, of a "proto-epic" into an epic can be traced. The author's idea that the description of female grief included in an epic work is proof that epic developed from laments is as unfounded as are the other assumptions for the source of epic in the epic which the author mentions: boasts of a warrior (p. 70); distinction between ancestors and heroes (p. 77); choral presentation of works (p. 82); shift from song to recitation (p. 82) (all live epics known in the world are sung!); created from the "mythical aspect" (what is that?) which developed from the impossibility to perform rituals (p. 115); product of a dominant aristocratic ideology (p. 118). No word is lost on an explanation of how all these "sources" fit together and no example is brought of a text to show the stages of development from praise-lament to epic, which would be a "proto-epic." The example of pp. 54–55 of contemporary Indian oral epics is irrelevant in this respect as it speaks of developments *inside* the genre of fully developed epic. By the way, to suppose

that 10–8th century BC laments have developed into 7–6th century epics considerably shortens history. What about 3rd millennium BC Sumerian epics (see, e.g., Kramer 1963: 187–190)?

To sum up, the book is an excellent example of how *not* to reason and write a study.

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