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Written on the Wind: An Introduction to Auralture

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"Literature" and "Auralture"

Visual arts such as painting or sculpture are inseparable from the media in which they are created because they cannot exist outside their form; a painting does not exist without a surface nor a sculpture without material. Verbal art, on the other hand, can exist in two different forms, an oral and a written one. The oral form can be independent and recognizable even when, before recording came into use, its existence was ephemeral. The written form may have originally been the means of giving audible art permanence, but since the birth of writing the oral form has suffered from the handicap of its transient nature. The permanence of the written word, in contrast with the spoken word, resulted in a more tightly defined art form than the ephemeral oral narratives. This disparity led to the the perception that narrative evolved from an oral form to a predominantly written art.

In the performance of a play it is easy to separate the text from the presentation, as these two forms of art are very different. But the Spanish medieval oral art form of *cantares de gesta*, before they became manuscripts, included the unwritten text as part of the presentation, making it difficult to separate the oral rendition from the manuscript version that eventually followed. Modern scholars, being unable to listen to a twelfth-century *juglar* sing the *Cantar de Mio Cid* and having access only to a fourteenth-century manuscript, have considered the written form as the work itself. But there existed an oral form of the same narrative, changing from day to day and from *juglar* to *juglar*, which, in spite of its fluid and ephemeral nature, was a form of verbal art in its own right. While similar in many ways to its written counterpart, this type of art form is characterized by a continuous re-creation of itself in constantly changing variants. Whether the one manuscript version is considered to be the work or we assign the idea of the work to the elusive collection of oral narrative variants depends on our definition of "literature." Unlike painting or sculpture, each fixed in its medium, verbal art can exist in two inherently different forms.

For over a century scholars of medieval literature have argued, sometimes acrimoniously, whether the romance epic is the creation of an individual or the product of an oral tradition. The "individualist" group was championed by Joseph Bédier, while Ramón Menéndez Pidal was the main proponent of the "neo-traditionalist" theory. A necessary condition to the still unresolved argument was that the subject of discussion is a single work of "literature." It is the object of this paper to propose that because verbal art can exist in two inherently different forms, in the case of the romance epic we are dealing not with one but with two different works of art: the manuscript work given permanence by an individual "author" and the oral work continuously recreated in changing variants by a legion of "authors." From this perspective one would be a work of literature, the other a work of "auralture."

The concept of dividing what has generally been considered a single art does not apply to all oral traditions. But as I hope to demonstrate in the Spanish epic, it is a way of interpreting this verbal art form with greater distance from its written versions than has been the case to date. The parallel streams of Spanish literature and historiography, originating in the twelfth century, from where episodes have survived as ballads or *romances* to the present day, will show that it is possible to do so. If the principle of two verbal art forms can be accepted, it would cast an entirely new light on the individualist versus neo-traditionalist controversy.

The Case of Spanish Epic Narrative

Medieval Spanish narrative poetry is customarily divided into two irreconcilable categories, epic songs and the written poetry of the clerics.[1] According to A. D. Deyermond, this is "one of the firmly entrenched doctrines of Spanish literary history" (1965:111). The former is associated with popular, heroic, bellicose, and blood-drenched narratives; the latter with learned, hagiographic, and adventure stories. Because the epic songs were studied through manuscripts, this doctrine propagated the belief that the differences stemmed from the popular versus the learned character of the texts. Such a perception failed to recognize that the most significant difference stemmed from the aural nature of the epics and how their ephemeral existence differed from that of the written word. The manuscript versions taken to represent the Spanish epic reflect only one of a myriad

[1] The two types are known in Spanish as the craft of the minstrels, *mester de juglaría*, and the craft of the clerics, *mester de clerecía*.

number of unwritten versions, and therefore only a part of the whole. As written works, it is correct to label them "epic poetry" in the framework of literature, but they differ from the aural epic just as the corpus of variants of a traditional ballad differs from a single printed version of the same.

It is the purpose of this paper to show that the epic narratives are an oral-aural art form independent of, but closely related to, the written epic poems. Although the term "literature" is customarily used to denote the totality of artistic creation with words, the different characteristics of orality and writing sometimes make it necessary to speak of the one separately from the other. Distinguishing the aural works from the written should limit the meaning of the term "literature"—as its etymology implies—to artistic creations in writing. It would then be necessary to provide a new term to designate the oral-aural works in their unwritten environment. Recognizing the dual aural and written nature of these poems enables us to see that to consider the written versions to be *the* Spanish epic is to trivialize the existence of the oral-aural component. Since the poems existed before the spoken dialect had developed a stable written form, it is evident that orality was their primary habitat and that the extant manuscripts should be considered only a manifestation of this phenomenon rather than the work itself.

Before there was writing there was storytelling. In the words of A. B. Lord, "The art of narrative song was perfected, and I use the word advisedly, long before the advent of writing. It had no need of stylus or brush to become a complete artistic and literary medium" (1960:124). Eventually, when human beings learned to give narratives permanence through writing it became possible to store and retrieve them more reliably, but the gain in stability changed the nature of the art. The written word became the basis for the parameters of literature, and the properties of writing, fixity and delimitation, became the basic criteria for the concept of literature. When aural narratives came to be studied through manuscripts, these criteria were applied to works that had been created and had matured orally. The invisible aural precedent, an unknown number of unwritten variants, was mostly ignored.

Modern scholarship discovered the origins of oral narrative in Spain through manuscripts.[2] The exploration of these texts should have been the

[2] Discovery of the manuscripts dates from the late eighteenth to the early twentieth century. The manuscript of the *Poema de Mio Cid* was first edited by Tomás Antonio Sánchez in 1779. The *Mocedades de Rodrigo* was recognized as an epic poem by Eugenio de Ochoa in 1844, while cataloguing the Spanish manuscripts in the Royal

archeology that led to the unwritten forms. But the narratives, discovered in writing, were studied as literary texts, and the concepts of stability and permanence, alien to the oral-aural works, were applied to them. The aural units in their written form were seen to have well defined boundaries. Thus the oral-aural narrative was interpreted in terms of the manuscript versions and explained using concepts and vocabulary from written literature.

Current scholarship has learned much about oral-aural literature.[3] We know that, originally, it existed in a latent state between manifestations, even though scholarship has emphasized its articulation (oral) over its existence (aural). We know that, in aural form, the content is fluid, adapting to the singer as a liquid adapts to its container, the story changing with the performer in content as well as in the number of episodes.[4] Each

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Library in Paris. In 1917, the *Roncesvalles* fragment was brought to the attention of Menéndez Pidal, who edited and studied it (Menéndez Pidal 1917).

[3] It is important to distinguish here between two different but related areas of knowledge, one having to do with oral composition of long epic songs by a single individual and the other having to do with the continuous process of re-creation of a ballad or *romance* by a sequence of separate individuals. For the first case, *The Singer of Tales* by A. B. Lord in 1960 presented irrefutable evidence to demonstrate one mechanism of artistic creation capable of producing long "aural" works without the use of writing. Although the Castilian epic does not conform to the same pattern as Lord's heroic songs, the plausibility of oral-aural creation and existence, for very long narratives, has been established. For the second case, the current state of knowledge regarding the Spanish ballad tradition, or *Romancero*, is constantly reaffirming its aural existence. The following statements from recent articles are typical of the current position: "From the Middle Ages up to today, *romances* continue to be poems that are stored in the memory of custodians of traditional culture and are transmitted by word of mouth . . . from one generation to another without any need to resort to writing" (Catalán 1987:400); and "La poesía oral constituye un proceso en constante devenir; cambia sin parar; ajusta y varía interminablemente sus fronteras; se asocia y desasocia incansablemente con otros y diversos temas narrativos; en fin, no conoce en absoluto la fijeza del texto escrito. Y no hay texto en el sentido que se entiende desde la perspectiva de una literatura escrita" (Armistead 1992:12).

[4] An excellent illustration of the fluid nature of a given *romance* is Paul Bénichou's study of *La muerte del príncipe Don Juan* (1968). Bénichou examines the content of forty-six versions of one *romance* and establishes geographical groupings where important features of the story coincide and, at the same time, contrast with the other groups. The principal variations are: (a) the identity of the central character, a young man on his deathbed who usually, but not always, is identified as the prince, Don Juan; (b) his relationship to a woman visitor—in some versions his wife, in others his lover; and (c) the identity of his other visitors—whether his father, his mother, or both. From the historical story of Don Juan on his deathbed, leaving his young and pregnant

manifestation of an aural work is unique to the singer and the circumstances. Yet to this day we lack the vocabulary to express these facts concisely and unequivocally. The concept of a given "version" is tainted, like our entire vocabulary, with the rigidity and the fixed boundaries associated with the written word. The dozens of written versions of a Spanish ballad (*romance*) may represent hundreds of oral variants and yet be only one aural work.

Both by its discovery in manuscripts and by the use of writing to capture its ephemeral nature, aural literature cannot be studied without the written word, but to keep in mind the real nature of this phenomenon it is appropriate to use a term that does not refer to the root *littera*. "Aural literature," literature written on the wind, may be designated as *auralture*: a verbal art form that began before the advent of writing and existed without it. It existed as epic songs, and as *romances* it still exists in a latent state, manifesting itself in ephemeral performances occasionally captured in writing.[5] The term "auralture" differs from "oral literature" in that when

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wife in the care of his parents the Catholic Monarchs, the plot becomes, at the other extreme, that of an unidentified young man making arrangements with his mother for the assistance of his mistress after his death.

[5] The concept of a latent state was first used by Menéndez Pidal in reference to the evolution of certain linguistic phenomena. Subsequently he found the concept useful also to explain the origins of Romance literatures and, in another context, the invisible existence of the *Romancero*. The following quotations illustrate the first two of these uses: "Pero esto es lo mismo que sería el querer explicar el origen de las lenguas románicas tomando como base el bajo latín medieval, prescindiendo del latín vulgar por ser hipotético, y, sin embargo, cuantos estudian esos orígenes de las lenguas neolatinas reconstruyen eruditamente el latín vulgar sobre sólidos fundamentos, sin poseer de él ninguna obra escrita. [. . .] Ese latín vulgar vivió en estado latente, sin que nadie pensara en escribir la lengua que todos hablaban" (Menéndez Pidal 1991:426). And, under the section entitled "Latencia de la literatura primitiva," Menéndez Pidal adds: "Partiendo, pues, de que un pueblo de la Romania no pudo interrumpir el solaz de la canción, imperativo permanente, es suposición indispensable que, al lado de la poesía latina escrita por los clérigos en la alta edad media, hubo una poesía popular, propia para los recreos de todo el público iletrado que no hablaba sino el latín vulgar, o la naciente lengua románica, poesía vulgar que en los primeros siglos nadie pensaba escribir" (*ibid*.:429). In either case, the idea of a latent state is tantamount to an unwritten existence, which Menéndez Pidal applies to the collective whole of a linguistic phenomenon or literary genre. As far as I have been able to establish, he does not apply the concept to individual works, prefering, in this case, always to speak of lost *cantares* without specifying whether he means the loss of a manuscript or of an unwritten work. In the present study I have extended the use of latent state to cover the unwritten existence of any individual aural work, as conceived, for example, by Lord's oral-formulaic theory. See also Menéndez Pidal 1950 and 1963.

applied to the romance epic by individualist scholars, "oral literature" suggests an art transmitted orally but existing in writing, whereas "auralture" emphasizes that retention and transmission are both independent of writing. From this it follows that each oral manifestation is a new version of the work. While in literature a version may differ somewhat from the original—since both have written texts it is possible to study the relationship between them—in auralture it is impossible to relate a version to its "original," because the oral version has a fluid and ephemeral existence and the "original" exists without fixed content or boundaries.[6] In their natural habitat neither the audible "version" nor the aural "original" exists in a form that permits comparison. To study auralture as literature, it is necessary to capture both the performance and the "original" in written form, an oxymoronic endeavor. The written versions of aural works are snapshots—a visual record of an oral process—whereas the audible "original" remains inherently invisible.

To illustrate these ideas let us consider the *Cantar de Mio Cid* as a work of auralture. It existed in aural form(s) during the centuries when the Spanish epic was a living genre.[7] During the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries it was presented innumerable times to different audiences under changing circumstances. Each performance was a flexible, individual oral version of which no record remains. We have no way of knowing the form or number of such manifestations. Yet on one occasion a scribe prepared a written version, perhaps by transcribing a performance or by recreating it from recollections. The result was a poem that appears to have a reasonable resemblance to an oral presentation. A copy of this version has come down to us as the *Poema de Mio Cid* (hereafter *PMC*), a work of literature. In accordance with our definitions, this poem is a different entity from the narrative song of the oral tradition, the aural *Cantar de Mio Cid*, (hereafter *CMC*). The poem, however, is the principal route by which we can approach the aural work. The *Poema* is a work of literature, the *Cantar* a work of auralture.

Another important work of auralture, the *Cantar de Fernán González* (hereafter *CFG*), probably coexisted for centuries with the *CMC* but has not survived in epic form. The extant *Poema de Fernán González* (hereafter

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[6] It should be noted that the process described is not the same as the performance of a written text. Different productions of a play do not alter the play itself.

[7] While an aural work is inherently amorphous, having a protean content and boundaries, and we can think of it in the singular, each manifestation is a different version and, therefore, we must think of them in the plural.

PFG), written in the four-verse isosyllabic and monorhymed stanzas of the clerics, does not resemble an oral performance at all. For this reason it is considered, and correctly so, a work of literature. In either case, the latent work has become visible through a "literary" manifestation: in the *CMC*, through what could be considered as the written record of an oral performance, and in the *CFG*, through an entirely different verse form. That these two works also existed in other oral versions as auralture has been corroborated through study of the chronicles.

Spanish epic narrative thus exists both as auralture and as literature. This is true whether the literary form is different from the aural, as in the *Fernán González*, or whether it is very similar, as in the *Mio Cid*. The polished nature of the *PFG* makes it easy to distinguish from an aural *cantar*, but Hispanists have usually considered the *PMC* and the *CMC* to be the same work.[8] This has led to a great amount of argument regarding the authorship, date, and origin of the work, without sufficient attention given to whether the object of discussion is the *Cantar* or the *Poema*. Prior to the concept of auralture introduced in this paper, no distinction was made between the aural and the manuscript versions of these works. Even though it was generally accepted that the Spanish epic was an oral genre, the works were associated only with "literature." In the case of the *Cid*, the titles *Poema de Mio Cid* and *Cantar de Mio Cid* were in fact used interchangeably. The known manuscript was considered *the* work, if not necessarily the "original." Furthermore, the essence of an oral genre was not clearly defined and therefore the relationship between the oral epic and the written poems was not uniformly understood. While some critics perceived the written manuscript as the work itself, others saw it only as a manifestation of the work. Those who believed the written work originated in oral tradition identified themselves as "neo-traditionalists" and tended to use *Cantar* in the title, while the "individualists," who emphasized individual authorship, leaned towards the use of *Poema* in the title.[9]

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[8] The *Fernán González* is "polished" by virtue of its rigid versification, equal number of syllables, four verse stanzas, and consonant rhyme, whereas the versification of the *Mio Cid* has a variable syllable count, no stanzas, and assonant rhyme.

[9] The originator of the "neo-traditionalist" theory is, of course, Don Ramón Menéndez Pidal. Diego Catalán and Samuel G. Armistead consider themselves neo-traditionalists. Colin Smith and Alan Deyermond, are considered, by others more than by themselves, to be "individualists."

Literary Texts, Pseudo-historical Chronicles, and the *Romancero*

The Spanish epic, in addition to being an oral genre, is also and primarily an aural genre. When designated as "oral" the emphasis is on the act of presentation, disregarding the creation and retention of the work. When coupled with the term "literature" the concept is inevitably connected with the written word. The implication follows that oral literature, while transmitted orally, survives through written storage. By changing the emphasis from oral (from the verb *orare*, "to speak") to aural (associated with the nouns *auris*, "ear," and *aura*, "air"), we emphasize the total life-cycle of the genre rather than its presentation. Auralture, then, is verbal art that exists in and is transmitted through air, and relies on hearing rather than reading for its reception. Because it is inherently unwritten we must rely on other documentation to prove its existence. There are three categories of written texts that serve as a record for auralture: (a) purely literary texts, such as the poems just discussed; (b) pseudo-historical chronicles; and (c) the Spanish ballad tradition, or *romancero*, in written and aural existence.

Literary Texts

Besides the *PMC* and the *PFG*, there exists one other complete work, the *Mocedades de Rodrigo,* as well as a brief fragment of a fourth poem, the *Roncesvalles*. Some scholars estimate that there might have been as many as forty to sixty epic poems of this type.[10] The uncertainty is due in part to the lack of precision in the implied definition of *cantar*. What are the boundaries of a *cantar*? Where exactly does it begin or end? How many episodes does it include? It is precisely this vagueness that led to the interchangeable use of *poema* and *cantar* and caused the latter term, removed from its fluid oral-aural context, to assume the characteristics of a written poem. Based on scattered verses and literary references, some scholars have assumed that a written poem, rather than an aural work, had existed, and have even proposed boundaries and numbers of versions for these lost poems. But since the Spanish epic was an oral-aural genre and its

[10] In his 1995 work *La literatura perdida de la Edad Media castellana*, Deyermond lists twenty-nine traditional epics as lost works. However, he later states (1996:30): "This list of some forty lost epic poems put forward by scholars, with varying degrees of firmness and plausibility, at one time or another during the past hundred years rises to over sixty if we include the additional versions listed by Armistead ('Neo-Individualist Theory', 321-27)."

circulation the trade of professional singers, the assumption of lost poems appears to me unnecessary. It has never been established exactly to what extent these singers relied on writing and/or memory to learn, retain, and present their narratives, but it is probable that they worked from a repertoire of episodes and did not require a written poem for their purposes. Yet the estimate of lost epics based on the premises of literature attempts merely to quantify "lost" poems, instead of to identify a cycle of episodes as works of auralture that were seldom, if ever, written out in full.[11]

Since aural works do not have fixed boundaries, it appears unreasonable to estimate a given number of them, since this would imply that the collection of related episodes, the Immanent Whole, has been uniquely parceled.[12] In the case of the *Cid* this can be justified because the *Mocedades* and the *PMC* are both written works. These poems, dated two centuries apart, cover different periods of the hero's life and each consists of a series of episodes corresponding to that period. The *PMC* in particular has the sequential causality of a well structured and cohesive series of events.

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[11] As has been postulated above, the principal attribute of auralture is its existence in a latent state. The concept of boundaries, as understood in a literary environment, is alien and unnecessary here. Therefore it is unreasonable to insist that the boundaries of literature must also apply in auralture and that its works must always correspond to written poems. Time and again we have seen hundreds of versions that correspond to a single aural *romance*. Because these versions have been transcribed from oral performance, their diversity has been understood and the lack of correspondence between the written version and aural "original" has been accepted. The transcription of *cantares* in the distant past must have been much more imperfect, both because of the lack of recording devices, and because of their greater length. Why must we believe that these aural works were once perfectly transcribed and subsequently disappeared? The fact that the *PMC* could well be an almost perfect transcription of an aural work may just as well be considered the exception rather than the rule.

On the subject of quality and completeness of text in a literary work, the thirteenth-century poem *Elena y María*, found in a deplorable manuscript of the fourteenth century, is probably more representative than the *PMC*. See Menéndez Pidal 1914. On the subject of variable boundaries of heroic narratives as perceived in different texts, see Armistead and Silverman 1971:42, n. 8; and when dealing with the problem of ballad boundaries resulting from the fragmentation of epic poems, see Armistead 1992.

[12] The concept of the Immanent Whole, applied throughout this study, is adapted here from Clover (1986), who states: "African scholars such as Okpewho and Biebuyck have developed what we might call an idea of 'immanent' epic—the idea, that is, that there can exist a 'whole' epic in the minds of performers and audiences alike even though it never be performed as such" (23-24). See also the concepts of "immanent art" and "traditional referentiality" in Foley 1991.

This is not the case with the *Mocedades*, where the episodes are loosely connected and do not always reflect a chronological sequence. In either case, however, the works of auralture reflected by the *Mocedades* and the *PMC* are known primarily through these poems. Why are we justified in applying the boundaries of these particular versions to the aural and fluid works?[13] Conventional literary theory does not pose this question because it assumes that a *cantar* has the same boundaries as the poem, that they are one and the same since the characteristics of the written word are retrofitted to the aural environment. But because the epic narrative existed prior to the written Spanish language, it is obvious that such reasoning is illogical. Indeed, the *PMC* is the first important literary manifestation of that nascent language.

To sum up, the existing epic poems are only a partial reflection of the aural works. Identifying the aural work as a specific poem is a carry-over from literature, one that is neither necessary nor justified. The two poems discussed, the *Mocedades* and the *PMC*, are part of a cycle of narratives concerning Rodrigo Díaz de Bivar. These literary texts have traditionally been considered "the Spanish epic," as well as the main source of our knowledge on the subject.

Pseudo-historical Chronicles

From the early twelfth to the fifteenth century a number of chronicles were written in Latin and in Romance dialects recording the history of Castile. Because most Spanish epic songs had a factual origin, many of the aural works were considered historical in spite of the poetic license taken and, as such, were incorporated into the chronicles. This textual evidence does not relate directly to a singer's performance, because it has been transcribed into prose and often includes only partial versions. Their form differs from the oral-aural versions as much as the *PFG* differs from the *PMC*. Because of the number, variety, and multiplicity of extant manuscripts, however, the importance of the chronicles as testimony for the existence of auralture exceeds that of the literary texts. By making possible the recognition and identification of numerous narratives, the chronicles help

[13] The problem implied by these questions is the nature of the boundaries that establish the textual content of a work in auralture and in literature. The problem has been specifically addressed through the *romance* entitled *La jura de Santa Gadea*, which may link the *Cantar del cerco de Zamora*, a work of auralture, with the *CMC* and the *PMC*. See Menéndez Pidal 1973:89-106 and Armistead 1984.

us to assess, very approximately, the corpus of this genre. What they do not permit is to establish boundaries so that the narratives can be correlated with a specific number of lost poems.

While Spanish historiography had Latin ancestry, in the changing circumstances of the twelfth century it was also the offspring of epic. The chronicles assumed part of the informational and historiographic role that the epic songs were no longer serving as the latter evolved into romances of chivalry. Although unrelated, these changes were concurrent and complementary. At the same time, because of the prestige and permanence of the written word, the chronicles served to forge a national Spanish identity. While the oral-aural epic had fulfilled this role in earlier times—the *CFG* being a characteristic example—the cultural renaissance of the twelfth century made it more natural for the written word to assume that function. The trend towards the official use of Spanish rather than Latin and the shift from an aural to a written environment were simultaneous with the increased standardization of the Romance languages.[14] It is no coincidence that this process began in the twelfth century and reached maturity towards the end of the fourteenth. Early in this period Spanish chronicles were written in Latin; the *Historia Silense* and the *Crónica Najerense* in the first half of the twelfth century, as well as the *Chronicon Mundi* and *De Rebus Hispaniae* in the first half of the thirteenth, are important examples. From the end of the thirteenth century, however, Alfonso X began to write history in Castilian Spanish. The first Alphonsine chronicle is followed in the fourteenth century by a profusion of texts that borrow and conflate material from each other. The *Crónica de Castilla*, *Crónica de Veinte Reyes*, and *Crónica de 1344*, all from the first half of the fourteenth century, represent the most prolific period and the apogee of the epic's presence in the genre.

The use of aural epic as historical material, however, is evident even in the Latin chronicles. The *Najerense*, from 1160, retells part of the *Fernán González* narrative and also includes a portion of the *Cid*'s epic cycle dealing with the siege of Zamora. Menéndez Pidal (1980:xlii) recognizes traces of six legends in this chronicle that, due to their circulation and relevance, the compiler considered indispensable and used without specifying their source. In the *Primera Crónica General*, the first Spanish

[14] The creation of a standardized written language is of course an important part of forging a national identity and, in this respect, the contribution of Alfonso el Sabio was monumental. The *Estoria de España*, usually referred to as the *Primera Crónica General*, served these social and national objectives, both through its historical content and through its groundbreaking use of the Castilian language.

chronicle, there is extensive use of epic material, and it is possible to recognize sequences of assonant rhyme carried over from the songs into the prose. It was precisely through the identification of such passages that Menéndez Pidal (1971) was able to reconstruct a large portion of *Los siete infantes de Lara*, using material from several chronicles. The quantity and quality of the prose narratives suggest that the compilers may have been in possession of written versions of certain narratives. How extensive they were and to what extent the compilers modified them remains, of course, impossible to determine. But there is no reason to assume that they had before them complete manuscript poems.

The Romancero

The third group of texts that serves the study of auralture is the printed corpus of traditional Spanish ballads known collectively as the *romancero*. These texts are particularly important because the versions of a given ballad sporadically written over the years represent a living oral tradition and enable us to witness the evolution of auralture. Even though the *romancero* was in its original latent state a purely oral-aural genre, with the advent of print it took on a hybrid oral-written existence that has continued to this day. When versions of *romances* were published in the sixteenth century, the oral-aural *romancero* acquired a parallel existence in print. Since then it has been possible to perceive the dual nature of the phenomenon, that is, a literary *romancero* of frozen versions and the latent *romancero* manifesting itself through oral performance. A literary *romance* may be known in hundreds of versions and yet be only a single aural romance.[15] Every *romance* ever sung is an ephemeral manifestation that may result in a written version. Once written and fixed in permanent form, as was the case in the sixteenth century, the ballads became specific versions frozen in time. But some of those aural "originals," the latent ballads from which they came, may still be heard today in protean versions through the living voices that carry on the tradition.

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[15] In the case of *Muerte del príncipe don Juan* , discussed above, Paul Bénichou (1968) states that more than a hundred versions have been collected, although his work was based on only forty-six of them. Subsequent to Bénichou's pathbreaking study many hundreds of additional versions have been collected and classified. For an idea of the vast number of versions of this ballad collected and studied, see Catalán 1982-88:iii, 367-433, no. 70; Catalán 1997-98:ii, 35-107; and Catalán et al. 1998:i, 627-719.

Epic, Ballad, and Problems of Perception

Having reviewed the types of texts that serve as a link to auralture, I will now consider Spanish epic and ballad literature in light of the new concept to illustrate how the reference frame of the written word dominates the perception of the works, even when most scholars are cognizant of their aural nature.

The Spanish epic genre consists of three manuscripts and a number of postulated "lost" poems documented in chronicles and ballads. It is usually assumed that the lost works had once been complete poems and had existed in a form similar to that of the extant manuscripts. Even Menéndez Pidal, the first scholar to expound the traditional aural nature of the epic, appears in many of his writings to emphasize the physical or poetic form rather than the latent state of the missing works.[16]

While discussing epic narratives as part of the lost corpus of Spanish literature, Robert B. Tate is even more assertive in equating the existence of epic narratives with the existence of a literary text written in "narrative verse form" (1988:442-45, emphases added):

> The existence of lost epic narratives is more easily attested, if only because we have the direct evidence of 5,000 lines of extant texts, none complete. Supporters of the neotraditionalist theory argue for the existence of a chain of epics composed by secular *juglares* from Visigothic times to the appearance of surviving texts. Much of the support derives from the *supposed* presence in medieval chronicles of material deriving from nonhistorical sources, stretching from ninth-century Latin

[16] The discussion of this subject in Menéndez Pidal's *Reliquias de la poesía épica* (1980:xvi-xvii) is entitled "*Negación de los textos perdidos. Enorme destrucción de libros*." In it, Menéndez Pidal draws a comparison with the losses, at a later date, of dramatic works of Lope de Vega (69%), Alejandro Hardy in France (95%), and Thomas Heywood in England (90%). He cites examples of practices in monastic libraries where many volumes were destroyed in order to re-use the parchment or even the paper. He also cites reasons such as the change from Visigothic to Carolingian script for discarding volumes, and the accidental destruction by moisture, fire, or bookworms. In every case, his emphasis is on the destruction of books. The enormous proportion of book losses is projected against the small initial number of copies of *cantares* actually written in the Middle Ages due to the high cost of parchment. The emphasis in this discussion is not so much on the existence of a particular epic, but rather on the existence of a written version of it.

> histories to the thirteenth-century Castilian *Estoria de España*, in which acknowledgment is made to "*cantares*" and "fablas de gesta." Such references do not carry equal weight, and if one demands *explicit evidence of the presence of compositions in narrative verse form* and not legend or folktale or prose accounts in Latin or the vernacular, then the case for most of the supposed works listed by Menéndez Pidal in his *Reliquias de la poesía épica española* is decidedly weak.

Here again, Tate's argument implies that the *cantares* had to have been written in order to leave us "explicit evidence . . . in narrative verse form," and therefore qualify to be considered lost epics. Without tangible evidence, as opposed to paraphrased retellings in prose, he considers aural works to be "legend or folktale or prose accounts." Even if Tate is not specifically denying the existence of a Spanish epic, nor challenging the generally accepted fact that it is an oral genre, he still insists on written evidence in a specific verse form. This carry-over from literary tradition is so strong that it overrides the logic that should question why an aural genre would need a written form at all in order to exist.[17] Tate's posture derives from a school that considers a manuscript such as that of the *PMC* as *the* work, rather than recognizing an unwritten predecessor in the *CMC*. Alternately, the neo-traditionalists believe that the *CMC* is an aural work that, in this exceptional case, has a written parallel version in the *PMC*. The fact that the manuscript version exists has no bearing on the *Cantar*'s prior aural existence. Had the *PMC* been consumed in fire or by bookworms, the *Poema* would be lost, but the *Cantar* would still have existed. Various ballads and chronicle accounts bear ample testimony that the *CMC* once lived in the public domain. Although epic *cantares* are no longer sung on village squares, their earlier existence is a historical fact and the ballads are an undeniable link to them.

Alan Deyermond has proposed eleven independent criteria to assess the probable existence of a lost epic (1996:30-31). Although he consistently uses the term "epic poem" when speaking of lost epics, Deyermond does not restrict the term to a written narrative verse form, but leaves it open to include aural epic poems that may never have been written. This perception is evident from his commentary on the criteria. Deyermond considers "a surviving verse fragment" (assumed to have survived in written epic form) criterion A for the existence of an epic. But, at the same time, he accepts

[17] After the introduction of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory as a mechanism supplementing memory and the publication of A. B. Lord's *The Singer of Tales* in 1960, it seems incongruous to find, three decades later, such an absolute requirement of written evidence in narrative verse form as a criterion for recognizing the existence of an aural work.

that the simultaneous presence in the chronicles of several other criteria, such as reconstructable verse lines (criterion C), existence of an extensive plot with generally epic character (criterion E), and the presence of formulas and formulaic phrases (criterion J), are "almost irresistible" in establishing the existence of an epic poem. Adding the existence of independent traditional ballads that carry the same story (criterion G) makes the case, in Deyermond's words, "wholly irresistible."

In terms of our concept, Deyermond, in contrast to Tate, has asserted that in spite of the total absence of a "surviving verse fragment" (his criterion A) it is impossible to deny the existence of certain epic poems, now unknown to us, in narrative verse form—poems that, I may add, might never have been written at all. That is to say, he has described the phenomenon of auralture without labeling it, but, in recognizing the possible existence of works in latent state, he has granted them an autonomous status comparable and parallel to literature. An even stronger case for the unwritten is evident in the approaches taken by Diego Catalán and Samuel G. Armistead. The conceptualization of written and aural texts as separate but related entities, as proposed, seems to echo the thinking of Catalán in explaining the essence of the *romancero* (Catalán 1983:451, emphases added):

> La necesidad de *considerar el <texto> como una representación circunstancial del poema (y no como el poema mismo)* es de rigor siempre que un <lector> examina una transcripción de uno cualquiera de los múltiples actos de exteriorización (una versión) *de un poema archivado en la memoria de la colectividad* y cuya forma habitual de transmitirse es de *homo loquens* en *homo loquens* a través de actos orales; esa transcripción, por fiel que sea al acto emisor, no recoge sino una <actualización> entre las innumerables y variadas manifestaciones sucesivas y simultáneas del poema.

Working with both Spanish ballads and epic, Armistead has for many years argued that the traditional oral nature of these intimately related genres precludes having a unique and well-defined text representing a given work (1978:316):

> Unfortunately, forms of folk literature—ballad, folktale, and, yes, epic—which are or were sung or narrated over centuries and over vast geographic areas by innumerable individuals have a messy and uncomfortable way of just not conforming to the monolithic textual univalence which twentieth-century print-oriented critics tend to project upon them.

If the known manuscript of the *Mocedades* is not *the Mocedades* but a recasting of it, then, as in the case of the *Poema* and the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, we can postulate the existence of an earlier (aural or written) *Cantar de las mocedades de Rodrigo*. This does not prove that another manuscript, a *Poema de las mocedades de Rodrigo*, must have once existed, but it does establish that an earlier narrative had a place "in the collective memory of society," to use Diego Catalán's expression cited above. Whether or not other recastings were ever written before the extant one is independent of the latent existence of the aural work.[18]

These examples have illustrated the following points: as late as the 1950s, Menéndez Pidal, the foremost authority on the Spanish oral tradition, who had applied the concept of latent state to the *romancero*, still felt it necessary to argue that the lack of epic texts was not due to the aural existence of the genre but resulted from the extensive destruction of books. Robert Tate's position, three decades later, showed that the concept of latent state applied to the epic was not universally accepted, in spite of the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory of composition.[19] Deyermond, on the other hand, in elaborating his criteria for establishing the existence of epics, implicitly accepted that *cantares* could have existed even when no written fragments have survived. And Catalán and Armistead, dealing separately with the *romancero* and with the *Mocedades de Rodrigo*, emphasized the difference between the written texts of these aural works ("una representación circunstancial") and the written text of any ordinary literary work. Through these approaches we can see that four of these five scholars, to a greater or lesser degree, recognize an unwritten verbal art whose latent existence is not in question. The perception of the written evidence through which that "aural literature" is approached, however, varies from critic to critic. The

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[18] Speaking of the *Romancero*, Armistead has used the terms oral and written poetry in the following sense: "La crítica neopositivista, por lo visto, sigue pensando en la poesía oral como si fuera igualita que la poesía escrita; como si consistiera en textos fijos—o relativamente fijos—como cualquier soneto de Garcilaso. Pero los hechos no son así. Son muy otros. La poesía oral constituye un proceso en constante devenir; se asocia y desasocia incansablemente con otros y diversos temas narrativos; en fin, no conoce en absoluto la fijeza del texto escrito. Y no hay "texto" en el sentido que se entiende desde la perspectiva de una literatura escrita" (1992:12, n. 14).

[19] According to the Parry-Lord oral-formulaic theory of composition, the singer creates the narrative during the act of presentation by drawing from a stock of standardized episodes and formulas retained in memory. Menéndez Pidal's concept of latent state as applied to the epic implies the retention in memory of a stock of related episodes that can be drawn upon to re-create a narrative.

dissenting scholar, Tate, appears to be saying, strictly in accordance with the etymology of the term, that without a written text there can be no epic *literature*.

The term "epic" has been used since Aristotle to refer to a long narrative poem of heroic character and proportions that deals with an important theme or major action and often has tribal or national significance. The narrative, centered on a hero possessed of exceptional or semi-divine attributes, forms part of a nation's mythology of self-definition. Although it has always been accepted that the early epic is oral, such poems are always defined by their written form. Prototypical are the works of Homer, the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Poema de Mio Cid*, and the *Fernán González*, among others. Over the centuries the concept of epic has expanded to include long narrative poems of a certain grandeur in content and style, even when they lack semi-divine heroes or tribal mythology. It is unwritten epic songs of this type that constitute the bulk of Spanish auralture. But what is this latent corpus? What are these unwritten works? How can we recognize and individually identify them? Or were they, as many have assumed, once written and subsequently lost? It is this type of question that must be addressed to develop credibility in auralture.

In spite of the early epic being an oral phenomenon, the inability to address these questions until recently made them purely rhetorical. Oral literature is still generally perceived in some quarters as orally transmitted literature. Prior to the Parry-Lord theory it was believed that orality could only be the transmission vehicle for works that were otherwise inevitably connected to the written word. On the other hand, auralture, as defined herein, exists in a latent state and is transmitted by oral-aural means, from mouth to ears. Therefore evidence of its existence should not require proof that the work has been written, which contradicts its very nature, but rather that the work has been heard. Because there are numerous chronicle references to *cantares*, epic songs, that do not exist as textual poems, it is possible to assume that they were once written. But this is unnecessary, because what is important is that they were known: they had been heard and heard of. Otherwise, how could they have been mentioned? And that is enough evidence to prove that they existed in the collective mind of society. But having references to or fragments of a *cantar* is one thing; establishing its identity as an epic is another. What must be shown is not the existence of a legend or narrative, but rather whether these were of a sufficient stature and a cohesive nature to be considered *cantares*, rather than the "legend or folktale or prose accounts" that Tate (1988) suggests.

As Tate's statement implied, part of the carry-over from the concept of literature is that the epic must have a written verse form, but this

condition is not inherent to the genre. While the epic was sung in verse, there is no proof that the work required writing in order to exist. It must be remembered that the early Spanish epic dates from a time when the Castilian dialect did not have a written form. It was precisely because the rhyme and rhythm of verse served to facilitate retention that it was used in the absence of writing. The fact that some aural epics were subsequently put into writing is in no way a precondition for their existence.

Through the study of Spanish historiography during the ninetennth century, it became evident that the chronicles of the Middle Ages contained a good deal of traditional material. The exploits of the Cid, known through the *PMC*, were also found in chronicles, thus making it possible to compare the verse and prose versions. A similar comparison became possible between the historical Fernán González and the clerical *PFG*. Because of these surviving pairs, Menéndez Pidal assumed that other chronicle narratives were also derived from poems or songs. Even though he considered the *cantares* an oral tradition, he believed that the singers occasionally used written texts to help memorize them.[20] But recognizing the songs in the chronicles was not enough to consider them epics, even when the compilers often introduced these as *cantares* and credited them to singers. For Menéndez Pidal, as well as for many other Spanish medievalists, the narratives identified were assumed to have been lost literary texts. Even though the precursors were acknowledged to have been *cantares*, which, if written at all, "se escribían de cualquier manera para ayudar al aprendizaje de memoria," scholars continued to refer to them as lost epic poems, recalling the "enorme destrucción de libros" and associating lost songs with lost manuscripts. This link between *cantares* and lost poems

[20] Under "La poesía épica tradicional: Origen godo" in *Poesía juglaresca y juglares* Menéndez Pidal states: "Existía otra poesía juglaresca tradicional, productora de relatos épicos algo extensos, que no sólo se trasmitían oralmente, sino a veces ayudándose de la escritura" (1991:439). This dual oral-written nature is elaborated upon in Menéndez Pidal 1980:xix: "Por otra parte, esas producciones literarias, de que nadie quiere ocuparse, podían en aquellos tiempos carecer de forma escrita conveniente, lo cual las hacía desestimables para el erudito. Toda la literatura en lengua vulgar se propagaba más por el oído que por la vista, pero, sobre todo, la literatura juglaresca. [. . .] ¡Cuánto no ahorrarían la escritura los juglares mismos para cosas de su oficio, aguzando la memoria, sobre todo en los siglos más remotos en que el pergamino era extremadamente caro! En tiempos de general analfabetismo, la memoria substituye corrientemente a la escritura, y se desarrolla en términos que hoy no podemos imaginarnos, reteniendo enormes cantidades de verso o de prosa, a veces mediante sólo dos o tres audiciones. [. . .] Pero, además, cuando se escribía para los juglares, solía escribirse ocasionalmente, de cualquier manera, para ayudar al aprendizaje de memoria y desechar después lo escrito como cosa inútil."

perpetuated the misunderstanding of auralture by reinforcing its perception in terms of written texts.

The versions the chroniclers summarized or paraphrased could well have been unwritten songs rather than manuscript poems. One may speculate on the possibility that singers may have actually performed in the presence of chroniclers, who—like the *memorillos* of Golden Age theatre—would subsequently write down their rendition, although it may also have been the case that a transcription of the songs was prepared as an intermediate step to the chronistic prosification. Be that as it may, it is certain that the sources of the chronicle narratives were ultimately aural songs. In several chronicles, Menéndez Pidal identified the story of a tragic family quarrel that included insult, retaliation, treason, and revenge. The passions involved and their bloody consequences were indeed epic in their proportion. Through the regular appearance of assonant rhyme in the prose, verses could actually be recognized, and from these Menéndez Pidal reconstructed 560 lines of verse as a fragment of the *Cantar de los infantes de Lara* (1980:199-239). While we may question the logic of "re-creating" an epic poem that may never have been written, the main point is that the content of the chronicle narratives was so comprehensive as to make a reconstruction possible.

But what are the implications of this reconstruction? Does this prove that a corpus of some forty to sixty written epic poems comparable to the *PMC* and the *Mocedades* once existed? I do not believe so. Does this prove that at least a minstrel's manuscript resembling that of *Elena y María* must have existed?[21] Probably not. Or could it be, as I have speculated, that a written copy was specially prepared for the compiler? Menéndez Pidal believes that the compilers were using written texts as source material at least for the *Primera Crónica General* (1955a:xli): "Sin duda Alfonso X, al mismo tiempo que en 1270 se procuraba en los centros clericales el *Paulo Orosio,* el *Catálogo de los reyes Godos* y demás fuentes latinas, se procuraba en las escuelas juglarescas los más famosos y divulgados cantares épicos que entonces circulaban." Collecting the aural and latent *cantares*, however, was surely a more difficult proposition than borrowing Latin manuscripts from monasteries and, knowing his traditionalist perspective,

[21] "Conocemos un único librito de juglar ambulante, de hacia 1300, el curiosísimo ejemplar del poemita *Elena y María*, hecho con desperdicios de papel, pequeños e irregulares, formando 25 hojitas de unos 6 x 5 centímetros, donde se copian 400 versos a renglón seguido en forma de prosa. No puede darse apuntación más tosca y descuidada. ¿Cómo una obra, publicada así, podía guardarse en los estantes de una biblioteca ni podía ser citada por ningún erudito que estimase el decoro de su pluma?" (Menéndez Pidal 1980:xix). Concerning the literacy of minstrels, see Southworth 1989:96-97; 166, n. 8.

his use of *"escuelas juglarescas"* must be interpreted figuratively. But to what extent were the aural *cantares* transcribed into working copies for the chroniclers? This Menéndez Pidal does not answer, and in fact Alfonso's draft epic material has not survived. Perhaps his compilers were dealing with a form of lecture notes combining fragments of verse and prose passages of little value after serving their purpose. In a recent article, Joseph J. Duggan presents evidence of the use, prior to the advent of paper, of wax-covered wood tablets for learning to write and as a vehicle for temporary records (1997:4-6, n.10-16). It could well be that the transition between the aural *cantares* and the written chronicles was facilitated by the use of writing on such wax-covered tablets.

While it is undeniable that the epic narratives in the chronicles are derived from aural songs, there is no evidence that they were once complete manuscript poems. And if we accept the concept of auralture as implying unwritten existence there is no reason to look for such evidence. Since it has never been disputed that the epic was an oral phenomenon, it is easier to reconcile auralture with the facts than to postulate the creation and loss of manuscripts. Rather than considering the *PMC* and the *Mocedades* as the norm and the rest as lost literature, I would emphasize that in the nature of a latent genre the *PMC* and the *Mocedades* are the exceptions to that norm.

Fixity and Fluidity

Relevant to the idea of lost literature is the problem of the fixed textual content of a written text as compared to the fluid content of the aural work.[22] Regardless of whether songs are orally composed, carefully memorized, or the result of a combination of these skills, each presentation is a unique performance. It is therefore evident that aural works live in constant evolution. The changes in performances as a function of time reveal a pattern of evolution akin to that of an organism. Because we cannot witness a medieval presentation we have been forced to study written

[22] This does not mean that a written work cannot evolve through a series of modified texts. Multiple copies of medieval manuscripts attest to the fact that each copy is often a new version that coexists with, but does not replace, the preceding one. As Menéndez Pidal has shown (1955b), the chronicle manuscripts display a traditionality in their evolution similar in nature to that of aural works. However, the difference in magnitude between the aural and written phenomena, the speed of propagation of the changes, and the fact that the aural works do not normally leave a complete record of the preceding versions mean that, for the purposes of this discussion, written texts can be considered static in comparison to the fluidity of aural works.

remnants of songs, but these are neither the work itself nor necessarily complete versions. They are fragmentary and frozen snapshots, reflections perceived through the scattered fragments of a broken mirror. In the case of the *PMC* and the *Mocedades*, the broken mirror is still in place and only a few pieces are missing, so an almost complete aural work can be perceived. In other cases, through fragments of chronicles and ballads the mirrors reveal episodes, parts of one or another song, and sometimes a complete narrative or a climactic episode.[23] The aural form is by nature fluid, and when a narrative or fragments of the same have been identified through epic or a ballad they are seldom identical.[24] The case of the Mocedades will serve to illustrate this point. As before, I identify the poem as the *Mocedades* and the aural work as the *Cantar de las mocedades de Rodrigo* (*CMR*). The former is understood as only one version out of several that may have existed.

In *Romancero Hispánico*, Menéndez Pidal attributes the origin of three ballads to aural versions of the *CMR* different from the *Mocedades* (1953:i, 220, emphasis added):

> Ambos romances *derivan* igualmente *de una versión* del *Rodrigo distinta* de la conservada y *distinta* de la prosificada en la Crónica de 1344 y en la Particular del Cid (capítulos 2, 3 y 4). La versión conservada, aunque no es fuente de los romances, sino colateral de ellos, pues anda fuera de la línea directa de la tradición, contiene (ya lo hemos visto) muchos versos tradicionales y por ellos pareció a Milá ser fuente de los romances.[25]

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[23] Menéndez Pidal (1971:81-117) identifies more than thirty *romances* related to *La leyenda de los Infantes de Lara*. Some—relatively few—derive from aural versions of the *cantar* and some are composed by learned poets. Vaquero 1990 studies the presence of aural narratives in late medieval chronicles.

[24] Although written specifically with regard to *romances*, the following words are equally applicable to *cantares*: "Con esas pequeñas variantes, temblor expresivo que refleja la emoción del momento sobre la superficie del poema recitado, cada cantor varía en poco o en mucho las palabras aprendidas, de manera que la forma de un poema tradicional es algo cambiante, algo flúido que se adapta a la sensibilidad y gusto de cada recitante, al modo que un líquido toma la forma del vaso en que se echa" (Menéndez Pidal 1953:41).

[25] It is not possible to tell whether each of the three *romances* to which Menéndez Pidal refers derives from one, two, or three written versions of the *cantar*. But why should this matter? In my opinion, the emphasis should be not on postulating theoretical *cantares* but rather on accepting the *romances* as manifestations of the aural work in their own right.

He also recognizes, as we can see from the above, that the version in the two chronicles must have been different from the one (or the ones) that gave rise to the known ballads. For Menéndez Pidal there is evidence of at least three distinct versions of the *CMR* (1953:i, 219) that, he implies, reflect three written works. In the context of auralture, however, it would be more appropriate to refer to these as aural variants, since they are distinct from the version in the manuscript. Even though it is undeniable that the ballads and the chronicles give evidence of other variants, that certainty does not establish that these ever had written versions.

For Deyermond, the *Mocedades* tradition also consists of several versions that he refers to as "intermediate texts," suggesting the possibility that there might have been two or more. From the fact that orality is not discussed, it is implied that these intermediate texts must have been written. In *Epic Poetry and the Clergy*, he describes the situation as follows (1969:15): "Thus from the original *Gesta* derived an intermediate text, exaggerating some characteristics; from this intermediate text, by stages that are not entirely clear, there descended the ballads, the versions known to García de Salazar and the anonymous editor of Rodríguez de Almela, and—still more exaggerated—*MR*." In his catalogue of lost works (1995), Deyermond considers the *Mocedades* to have had at least two lost versions, and perhaps as many as four (identified as Aa15.1 to Aa15.4). Referring to these potential versions, surmised from chronicles and *romances*, he observes that "el problema, como siempre, es el de saber cuándo una variante procede de una refundición épica, y cuándo se debe a la iniciativa de un cronista o de un poeta de romances" (1995:102). The subject of written or aural existence is, unfortunately, not specifically taken up, since Deyermond uses the term "literature"—as it is normally used—to cover both written and oral works without distinction. His objective is merely to catalogue those lost works for whose existence there is substantial evidence. The reference to four potential versions does not imply that they were once written, nor even, as we can see from the disclaimer quoted, that the source, from which we heard of their existence, is completely reliable.

For Armistead the evidence, both written and aural, leads him to establish with certainty the existence of at least seven versions of the *Mocedades*, some of which, it is implied, may never have been written. Throughout his work, Armistead has consistently stressed the aural nature of traditional literature.[26] Therefore it is evident that some of the versions,

[26] The following statements are indicative of his approach to aurality: "Individualist criticism tends to imply that traditionalism is somehow fuzzyheaded and unscientific in arguing for the necessity of lost texts, that such things are chimeric, a

particularly those giving rise to ballads, listed in the appendix to "The *Mocedades de Rodrigo* and Neo-individualist Theory" (1978), could well have had only an aural-oral existence. The wording throughout that article gives ample evidence of the conscious duality between "the epic's natural mode of existence as a traditional, oral form" and its literary manifestations. The poem contained in MS Espagnol 138 in Paris is not *the Mocedades* but only one version of it. In the words of Albert Lord, it "has no need of stylus or pen in order to exist" (1960:124). The *CMR* is an aural work that we know through several and diverse written versions and some oral fragments. The evidence through which we know it includes an epic poem, several prose histories, six ballads printed in the sixteenth century, and one ballad from the Sephardic oral tradition.[27]

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product of outdated Romantic imaginings, and that the positivist, in insisting on a text that he can see, touch, read, is the only one who is 'realistic,' who stands on firm theoretical ground and is endowed with impeccable scientific rigor. But the real chimaera is what beckons the individualist in his fruitless search for a fixed text, a learned prototype, and leads him, too, to negate the necessity and the very existence of intermediate versions, of variants and *refundiciones*. Such things are part and parcel of any traditional genre. *Remaniement*, constant variation is the norm, not the exception, and it is absolutely indispensable to a viable study of such forms of literature. [. . .] The concept of a 'fixed text' originates with modern literacy. It is an individualist, literate critic's fantasy. It is just as phantasmagoric, as chimeric, as unreal as any Romantic's singing throng—if not more so. For today we know that, in a sense, the Romantics were right: *Das Volk dichtet*, not, of course, as a group, by spontaneously bursting into song and thus somehow (impossibly) generating poetry, but rather as an infinite series of individuals, each of whom modifies and recreates the poem as it develops through time in oral tradition" (1987:342-43, n. 9). Furthermore, he states: "Ante la necesidad de reunir un enjambre de libros y artículos, a veces antiguos, exóticos y de bastante difícil obtención, suficientes como para poder formarse una idea cabal o por lo menos satisfactoria de la vida oral múltiple y dinámica de cualquier romance, resulta mucho más fácil dejarlo todo y seguir pensando en el género como si fuera igual que cualquier tipo de poesía escrita—estable y unívoca en su existencia textual—. Pero quien no entiende—o no quiere entender—esta dinámica textualidad no solamente no va a entender lo que es el Romancero, sino tampoco va a entender, en una perspectiva más amplia, lo que es la literatura medieval, tanto oral como escrita. El "texto," en un contexto medieval (o en una sociedad oral), hay que entenderlo como algo esencialmente—radicalmente—diferente de lo que es un texto en cualquier sociedad moderna" (1992:14, n. 15).

[27] A full description of these versions and fragments can be found in the Appendix to Armistead 1978.

The opinions of Menéndez Pidal, Deyermond, and Armistead indicate that these scholars all have a clear understanding of the dual aural and written nature of folk literature. Whereas Deyermond has emphasized the study of the epic genre as literature without making a specific distinction between aural and written works, Menéndez Pidal and Armistead choose to emphasize that the essence of folk literature is in its latent rather than manuscript form, in the word heard rather than in the word seen. Therefore they perceive the literary versions as related to but distinct from the aural form, which is the essence of the work. For this reason they consider that the approach to the aural song must make use of all three channels: the chronicles and ballads in addition to the epic manuscripts.

The *Romancero*

The study of the *romancero*, with its multi-secular corpus of aural and written ballads, provides a living example of the interaction between these environments. Spanish ballads have for five centuries coexisted with the printed word and continue to exist in both forms to the present day. Therefore it has been possible to transcribe in some cases hundreds of versions of the same ballad from the entire geographic spread of the Hispanic and Sephardic tradition.[28] The ability to study the *romancero* in oral and printed forms has provided us with a unique laboratory for understanding the nature of an aural phenomenon.

An important consequence of the genre's aural and written duality is that ballads are as much song as they are poetry. Therefore, when moving from a fluid to a fixed medium, when read rather than heard, two distortions are introduced; *rigor mortis* sets in, and the tune is lost. Even if the printed words can stand alone as poetry, they are only a part of the ballad, as Diego Catalán has pointed out. Indeed, like the epic, the essential ballad exists in a latent, fluid, and unwritten state. As in the case of the *PMC*, the number of ballads that have found their way into print is a small fraction of the total,

[28] As an example, consider the *romance* entitled *La muerte del príncipe Don Juan*, mentioned above. While Bénichou (1968) worked with forty-six versions of this ballad, Menéndez Pidal (1953:ii, 406) recognizes more than one hundred transcriptions collected in Spain, Portugal, and the Sephardic communities in the Balkans and the Middle East. Note also the vast documentation upon which Menéndez Pidal, Catalán, and Galmés (1954) based their geographic studies of *Gerineldo* and *El conde Sol*.

and an atypical and exceptional fraction.[29] Unlike the epic, however, and because of their relatively short length, ballads can be retained in memory by many listeners. As such, the genre is truly a living form, belonging to the people, "popular" in an etymological sense and popular also across the spectrum of society. But as Menéndez Pidal has pointed out, the term "popular" can be misleading.[30] The essence of the *romancero* is not just that it is widely sung by many across the entire spectrum of society, but rather that, in being sung, *romances* are reworked by each singer and continuously change in form while maintaining a recognizable core. Being inherently aural, the *romancero* does not need to coexist with the written word. When transferred from its aural medium, deprived of voice and tune, and cast into visual script, the *romancero* is transubstantiated into literature. But the written form manifest in any one version is only lying in state, bearing a lifeless resemblance to its real self, as an inanimate snapshot can reflect an instant of life. The *romance*, being aural, cannot be restricted to one version in preference to another. A written version is "lifeless" because it is a snapshot of one link of the continuum, whereas the *romance*, in its aural environment, is the sum total of the collection of variants. It is, to use Menéndez Pidal's words, "poesía que vive en variantes" ("poetry that lives in variants"). And, associated with the written word, the term "poetry" (comparable to poem versus song in the epic) is particularly well chosen. When written down, ballads are indeed poetry. As literature, then, the

[29] "Y sin embargo, lo típico respecto a los pliegos sueltos y cancioneros del siglo XVI, es encontrarnos con una sola versión—al parecer estática y unívoca—que una vez recogida por la imprenta, se imprime y se vuelve a imprimir, esencialmente en la misma forma y sin variar, de un pliego suelto en otro, de un cancionero en otro. Por lo tanto, el estudio del romancero viejo nos produce una impresión falsa, ilusoria, de un repertorio textual fijo e invariable. Pero no hay tal. Resulta bien claro que, al lado de las pocas que recogen los impresores antiguos, habían de existir otras muchas, muchísimas lecturas alternativas no recogidas, no consignadas a la imprenta y, por lo tanto, no conservadas para nosotros" (Armistead 1994: xii).

[30] "Estos dos grados tan diversos," he says, speaking of *popular* and *tradicional*, "se confunden comúnmente bajo el único nombre de canción o romance 'popular', término sumamente equívoco, causa de continuas confusiones y yerros, que equiparando lo popular simplemente vulgarizado, o hasta lo callejero del momento, con lo tradicional, se presta a muy falsas deducciones. Por eso en unos estudios sobre *Poesía popular y Romancero,* 1914-1916, abogué por el nombre de *poesía tradicional*, entendiendo que la tradición no es simple transmisión como la etimología dice, no es mera 'aceptación' de un canto por el público (popularidad), sino que lleva implícita la 'asimilación' del mismo por el pueblo, esto es, la acción continuada e ininterrumpida de las variantes (tradicionalidad)" (Menéndez Pidal 1953:45).

written form exists frozen in print, in different versions. In their aural environment, however, their living medium, all individual singings are different variants. As auralture, they will take on hundreds of different shades in an ephemeral existence written on the wind.

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