

Oral Tradition as a Worldwide Phenomenon

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Oral tradition

It is my view that oral tradition is the source of all of the world's literary traditions. Two principal concerns have driven my work (1995, 2000, 2002): the collection of examples of living oral literature (ballads, songs, proverbs, legends, stories, oral history, and epics) in different countries and traditions (Spain, Hispanoamerica, central Africa), and the comparative study of world literary traditions from Homer to García Márquez.

I have come to the conclusion that oral literature created and influences written literatures, including contemporary works of fiction, in much more profound and decisive ways than is generally recognized. Additionally, oral tradition affords scholars clear and transparent examples of different strategies for creating symbols, metaphors, and motifs. The analysis of oral literature also sheds light on the aesthetic strategies of literary authors whose stylistic sophistication tends to obscure those modes of symbolic, metaphoric, and motific production in their work, strategies that rarely differ from those manifest in oral literature.

New directions

My early research was focused on songs and ballads. Recently, I have become director of the "Atlas of Myth and Legends in the Hispanic World," and of ancillary projects such as the "Atlas of Myth and Legends of the Basque." I am also directing theses on the oral traditions of various countries (Ecuador, Brazil, Niger, Benin, Madagascar, and so on). These experiences have led me to conclude that the field of folk legend, less well-studied than that of the folktale, possesses enormous aesthetic and literary interest, and perhaps even greater sociological and anthropological value. Legends are imbued with more local references, more communal and

ideological values than are stories. The extraordinary and original work of Linda Dégh strikes me, for that reason, as enormously attractive for future research (1995, 2001). The stunning advances made in the study of genetic populations bodes well for projects in comparative cartography: the elaboration of maps and atlases depicting the migration of oral literatures superimposed upon maps tracing demographic and genetic migrations. I believe such studies could flourish in the twenty-first century. It seems to me that the work of specialists such as Luigi Cavalli-Sforza (2000) on the parallel evolution and development of genes, peoples, and languages could usefully be amplified by taking into consideration another element: oral tradition.

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- Pedrosa 2002 _____. *Bestiario: antropología y simbolismo animal*. Madrid: Medusa.

For further information on Hispanic, central African, and other oral traditions, see the following journals.

Estudos de Literatura Oral, published by Universidade do Algarve, Portugal.

Revista de Investigaciones Folklóricas, published in Buenos Aires under the direction of Martha Blache.