

## **Hunting for Rare *Romances* in the Canary Islands<sup>1</sup>**

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What is a Rare *Romance*?

Diego Catalán published in 1959 an article with this same title (1959a:445-77), dedicated to the Portuguese ballad tradition, in which he brought out the importance of that tradition for the knowledge of certain *romances* which because of their rarity were overlooked or lived in fragmented form in the oral life of other Hispanic traditions. Four *romances* were studied there,<sup>2</sup> four very powerful examples of how an oral text, a single version, can be the key to the correct interpretation of several *romances* which tradition has not preserved very well. Here we should like to call attention to the Canarian tradition as one of the most extraordinary in its preservation of *romances* that are extremely rare in modern oral tradition.

Ballad collecting can be compared to going hunting. One must always go out well prepared. It is true that the prey—the *romance*—appears when it is least expected and, frequently, when that type of example was not foreseen in that particular zone. But the search constitutes a very pleasant adventure. Ballad collecting today, given the extreme state of decadence in which the subject lives, is now an adventure on its own account, but if in addition those that are being sought are rare, the ones that are scarce everywhere, then the search turns into a true big-game hunt. Going out into the field and collecting whatever is there is the obligation of every collector, but if something valuable comes out of it, the obligation turns into joy. And what causes one *romance* to be more valuable than another? Evaluative judgments about traditional songs are very diverse and the criteria upon which they are based, very subjective. As Diego Catalán says:

In the “permanence” of the medieval historical *romancero* we do not know what to admire most, the collective memory, capable of retaining century after century details of a song that refers to a past event, whether real or imaginary, or the re-creative capacity of oral transmission which, at the same time that it recalls a poetic text, gives it new life, omitting, adding, or modifying certain motifs that make up the story (1969b:8).

If the phenomenon *romancero* were a closed genre, that is, a fixed repertory, and that repertory were considered to be the same at a given historical moment, it would seem obvious that selective criteria would favor aesthetic values only, but if, as it happens, it is a living phenomenon which perpetually renews itself, making and remaking itself during transmission, a changing repertory in which there are *romances* that are forgotten and die in oral life and others that are born and become popular, a phenomenon that goes beyond time and adapts itself to historical moments as disparate as the Middle Ages and the present, evaluative criteria necessarily become very heterogeneous. And in any case, the criteria of the scholar are not, nor are they ever apt to be, the same as those of the public singer.<sup>3</sup> The traditional singer always has a limited repertory and he clings to it as if it were the best and the only one. The investigator, for his part, is trying to put together a “puzzler” of a thousand and one entries in which many are always missing, and furthermore, a “puzzler” with an unknown number of entries. No one will ever be able to say what is the total ballad repertory of an epoch, that is, the oral *romancero*, or of a district, or even of a single informant. Novelty and surprise are always possible in a genre that lives by surprises, buried in the collective memory of a marginal people, without census or nomenclature.

The traditional *romancero*, despite the more or less systematic extensive searches that have been carried out during the twentieth century—and before—through all the territories where it is still alive, continues to be a source of frequent surprises such as the appearance of a still unpublished *romance* or others only known in fragmentary or contaminated versions which are insufficient for a true knowledge of the *romance* in question. The accumulation of many versions of the same ballad theme in a genre which is by definition changing and multiform is an absolute necessity for its

study. From this point of view collecting many versions of *Gerineldo* or *La condesita* can be important for the knowledge of those *romances* in a determined district not previously investigated, but rarely can they offer new aspects to the general knowledge of those themes given the thousands of versions already collected. It is of much greater interest to collect a single version, even though it is fragmentary, of *Lanzarote y el ciervo del pie Blanco*, for example, since it is a very rare *romance*, and still more interesting to be able to determine that a ballad like *Río Verde* has survived until today in oral tradition after more than four centuries of anonymity; and it turns out to be a real challenge to come upon a traditional *romance* about which there do not exist any literary references, like the case of *El esclavo que llora por su mujer*.

#### Collecting *Romances* in the Canary Islands

It can be said that the Canaries were populated with *romances* when they were populated with Spaniards, that is, at the same time that they entered into history, which was the very moment in which the *romancero* was living its most splendid life in Spain. Incorporated into the crown of Castile in the fifteenth century, the Spaniards who went to the islands came from many different regions of the Peninsula, especially from Andalusia, Extremadura, Castile, and the Galicia-Asturias-León region. They arrived, just as when they went to America a short while later, with a multitude of epic-lyric songs in their memory and some little book or other in their pockets. Unfortunately, at that moment there was not any Martín Nucio in the Canaries to collect the texts that were then popular, for which reason we know nothing directly about the ballad repertory that populated and inhabited the Canaries in the first centuries following their conquest. Only an occasional indirect reference of some chronicler of the islands assures us of the existence of the genre in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> The survival by oral means in the islands of a *romancero* with ancient roots guarantees, through textual criticism, the implantation of the *romancero* in the Canaries from a very early date, thereafter developing autonomously and coming to form one of the best defined branches of the Pan-Hispanic *romancero*. Alongside these minimal references of primitive chroniclers, the existence of an inquisitorial trial against a series of religious ballads at the end of the eighteenth century,<sup>5</sup> and very brief pieces of information left us by travelers to the islands in the

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Catalán 1969a:1:3-5), no *romance* text from the Canaries was known until the threshold of the twentieth century.

The history of ballad collecting in the Canaries is told by Diego Catalán in the introduction of what is to be the first part of the *Romancero general de las Islas Canarias: La flor de la marañuela* (1969a:1:3-46), a “collection of collections,” which brings together all the texts, both published and unpublished, that were gathered by different people from 1920 to 1966. This collection, which is splendid (682 versions of 155 ballad themes of great interest), represents very disproportionately the tradition of the various islands of the archipelago. Collecting efforts had concentrated on two islands, Tenerife and La Palma, and the other five had remained practically untouched. Out of the total of 682 versions, some 400 are from Tenerife (the whole first volume), about a hundred from La Palma, 66 from Lanzarote, 54 from Gran Canaria, 23 from La Gomera, 11 from El Hierro, and only 3 from Fuerteventura.

The different islands of the Canaries have in many respects very defined and individual profiles as far as popular culture is concerned. And this is true not only because certain ideological or pressure groups or even individuals fight to have each island display distinctive characteristics, which exist within the conglomerate, but also because geography and history have taken a different form in each one. Thus it is that, although they comprise an archipelago in which all participate in the same common regional cultural coordinates, each island has its own cultural personality. Such being the case, one must not give up the search for the traditional *romancero* in the Canaries, as Diego Catalán very intelligently advised:

This *Flor de la marañuela* simply hopes to be the first part of the *Romancero general de las Islas Canarias*. If what has been brought together up to this point suffices to demonstrate the richness and the rarity of the insular *romancero*, in no way does it exhaust the subterranean store of the Canaries’ ballad tradition, which we should all help to bring forth. (1969a:1:vii).

The Canaries, Marginal Zone of the *Romancero*

In the last third of the nineteenth century, when there began

to be a glimmering of the survival of the old Spanish *romancero* by means of oral transmission, a general belief was established among the students of the *romancero* that the tradition had been displaced to the more marginal zones of the Peninsula, that is, Portugal, Catalonia, Asturias, and, to a great degree, Andalusia. It was Menendez Pelayo who most stoutly affirmed:

Although the greatest and the best part of the Castilian *romances* have only come to us by written tradition (whether in Gothic broadsides or *romanceros* of the sixteenth century), it is not a small or insignificant fact that they still live on the lips of the people, especially in certain districts and population groups which, because of their relative isolation, have been able to retain this poetic store until today, which, apparently, has disappeared almost completely in the central regions of the Peninsula, in the provinces which by antonomasia we call Castilian, which was the cradle of the *romance* or, at least, where it attained its greatest degree of vitality and epic force (1945:9:151).

He appeared to have arrived at such a conclusion after the first explorations in the nineteenth century that were begun by the pioneers of the modern oral *romancero*: Almeida Garrett, Teófilo Braga, Milá y Fontanals, Mariano Aguiló, el Marqués de Pidal, and Menéndez Pelayo himself. If tradition as such was reluctant to come out into the light of day in peripheral geography, which was studied, why should it not be in the center, in Castile, where there had scarcely been any serious, persevering attempts. In the supplement that Menéndez Pelayo added to the *Primavera y flor de romances* of Wolf and Hofmann, he compiled *romances* collected from oral tradition in Asturias, Andalusia, Extremadura, Galicia, Catalonia, and Portugal together with ballads which had come from Judeo-Spanish communities in the East. This copious collection of more than two hundred texts was a harbinger of the extraordinary harvest which was to be confirmed years later. All in all, none or almost none of those *romances* came from the center of the Peninsula, old Castile. It was believed, therefore, that the *romancero*, engendered during the Middle Ages in Castile, with the passing of the centuries had abandoned its focal area to take refuge in the collective memory of the peripheral areas.

Menéndez Pidal would have to expend much effort to undo these beliefs and to forcibly demonstrate that Castile not only had

not forgotten its old epic minstrel songs, but also that it could compete in abundance and elegance with those of the periphery. The persistent silence of the *romancero* in Castile was only apparent, for on inciting it skillfully, it could offer texts as extraordinary and as archaic as those of any other region, even including some that were unknown up to then outside of Castilian territory.<sup>6</sup>

Field expeditions and studies about the *romancero* in Castile multiplied from the twenties on to such an extent that in 1953 its principal scholar, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, said: "It seems incredible to us now how the ballad tradition of the center of Spain, which is seen at present in such great abundance, could remain so unknown, its existence so persistently denied for a whole century" (1953:2:305). Exploration has continued and there has been an intensification of the systematic character of the field-work. But in the same way exploration has also intensified in other peripheral zones: the Canaries, Portugal and her Atlantic islands, Asturias, the northern part of León, the mountain region of Santander and Palencia, Galicia, Aragón\*, Catalonia, and, exhaustively, the Sephardic communities of Spanish origin in northern Africa and on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The results in the form of *romanceros* and the experience of those who have been collectors in the center as well as in the periphery have always been the same: of course the *romancero* is alive in Castile, but does it have the same vitality as in the periphery? The most recent field expeditions through the plains of Segovia, Valladolid, Soria, Burgos, Palencia, León, and Zamora offer much poorer results than those obtained in the northwest, for example. It is true that the mountainous region of León and, by extension, the isolated zones of the northwest part of the Peninsula is a privileged enclave in the preservation of the traditional *romancero*, a crossroads where all the traditions converge, but the investigator discovers, as he goes down to the plains, that the repertory becomes poorer and shorter and that the tradition is known to a smaller percentage of people. Recently published collections of *romances* from the peripheral zones, Portugal, Madeira, the Azores, northern León, and even the Canaries are superior in every respect to those of the center in richness of repertory, in abundance of versions, in the plenitude of texts, in rarer *romances*, and in more archaic versions.

Therefore, simply because of the marginality of the Canaries

with respect to Castile, even before recognizing the special treasure contained in the Canaries, the archaic and conservative character of its *romancero* was already being predicted. Menéndez Pelayo announced it at the end of the nineteenth century:

I have already indicated my suspicion that in the Canaries there may exist old *romances* brought there in the fifteenth century by Castilian and Andalusian conquerers. If they should come to light, it would be a great find, because in analogous cases it has been observed that insular versions are more archaic and purer than those of the Continent, as has happened in Mallorca with relation to Catalonia, in Madeira and the Azores with relation to Portugal (1945:9:332).

And Menéndez Pidal repeated it again fifty years later when the results of the first fieldwork in the Archipelago were already beginning to be known:

With respect to the Canaries, it is necessary to repeat what has been said for America. If its tradition appears very weak, it is because it has not had enough investigators. It is not clear, if the Portuguese insular tradition is strong and conservative, why it should not be the same in the Canaries as it is in Madeira (1953:2:356).

And then he evaluated the first fruits of this investigation:

These archaisms assure us that the tradition of the Canaries is as dense as any. I hope that it will be explored deeply, because it will be an essential way to explain the oldest tradition that emigrated to America, since the importance of the Canary Islands in the colonization of America is very great (1953:2:357).

The prediction of one and the sound suspicions of the other have come to be fully confirmed. In the Canaries a very archaic and conservative branch of the ballad tradition took refuge. It is even possible to hear today *romances* that have disappeared everywhere else, the rarest *romances* in modern oral tradition, only preserved outside of the Canaries by a few Sephardic communities of North Africa or of Eastern Europe who have always proven themselves to be the most zealous guardians of the old Spanish epic-lyric patrimony. But not only the rarest *romances*; any version of the Canarian *romancero* “presents an unmistakable seal

of antiquity; they are versions that have evolved little, close to those that are recorded in the oldest song books and *romanceros*" (Menéndez Pidal 1955:5).

Thus it is that the store of *romances* should never be considered exhausted, especially since, as in the Canaries, there remain so many *lacunae* that have not been explored in the studies carried out up to the sixties.

#### New Collecting Efforts

From 1966 (the year of the last field expeditions published in *La flor de la marañuela*) until 1980 there was a respite in ballad collecting in the Canaries, despite the fact that there was available a good fieldwork manual developed by M. Jesús López de Vergara and Mercedes Morales (1955), two of the best collectors in the Canaries whose findings, mostly in Tenerife, are included in *La flor de la marañuela*. It is with the decade of the eighties that field-work was begun again in several points on the islands by various people. It did not correspond to any systematic attempt at collecting, only to the desire to show examples of popular culture of a given zone wider in scope than just the *romancero* by gathering *romances* alongside of *canciones*, proverbs, riddles, stories, dances, and other folkloric genres, or just collecting what the informants would say to the generic question: "Do you know any old ballads?"

As far as we are concerned, it was in 1979 that we undertook the task in the Canaries. It coincided with a new phase of the Seminario Menéndez Pidal, the heir to the very rich ballad materials of the Menéndez Pidal family together with its aims and methods. Stimulated by the inexhaustible energy of its director, Diego Catalán, two objectives were proposed: one, the systematic exploration of certain peninsular zones which had produced nothing in former searches; and two, the formation of a group of young investigators who could initiate these explorations in their usual places of residence. The enterprise seemed to be, and in fact is, the last attempt to collect what oral tradition has amassed. The substantial changes that have affected Spanish rural life in recent years inevitably portend that the inherited traditional knowledge will die when its present possessors, the elders of the villages and towns, die, without having passed on this knowledge to the coming generations. There is no more oral transmission, and the younger generations know nothing at all about what remains of the

tradition in the older people. Furthermore, the tradition exists as a residual product in the oldest people, but not as a living phenomenon. In spite of everything, the new attempt to collect ballads turned out to be providential because it did take place in time. With a great deal of effort and many difficulties it has been possible to recover what one would have been able to recover at the beginning of the century. This means that up to the present there has remained the bulk of what had been traditional for centuries. And thus it can be said that the Seminario Menéndez Pidal in only five years has more than duplicated the ballad store that had been formed in more than a century of collecting. And the same is true with respect to the second objective. In the Canaries, counting only our collections, the number of *romances* brought together and published in *La flor de la marañuela* has been tripled.

Our first investigation centered on a very limited zone in the southeast of the island of Gran Canaria. And the results were astonishing (see Trapero 1982): in only four localities we managed to collect 504 versions of 141 different *romances*. It is true that the figures do not distinguish between the religious ballads, those from chapbooks, the *vulgares*, and the truly traditional ballads, but it is an impressive lesson as to what extent anywhere in the Canaries popular memory is capable of preserving such a fantastic amount of collective knowledge. What was collected in Gran Canaria is, on the other hand, to a certain degree a living tradition among the women workers packing tomatoes. But it was not limited to the southeast. The investigation continued through the whole island, with different characteristics in the various zones of the south or the north, of the coast, the mountains, or what is in between, and we amassed a collection of more than one thousand versions, aside from those already published from the southeast, all of which gives an idea of what is possible from a detailed and persistent search.

After Gran Canaria came the island of Hierro, the smallest of the archipelago and the least populated, which with only 6500 inhabitants gave us a harvest of 175 versions of 68 *romances*. There the *romancero* is dead, pure archeology which is only revived when someone asks for it. An obvious example: in the interval between carrying out the fieldwork (1982) and the publishing of the book containing what was collected (Trapero 1985) in the summer of 1985, five of our best informants had

died. Three years' delay in carrying out the fieldwork would have meant the loss of a third of what we gathered, with some of the best of the *romances*, including among them *Virgilio* and *La princesa peregrina*, both unknown in the Canaries up to that time and extremely rare in peninsular Spain.

La Gomera followed the island of Hierro and there we found paradise. We had written about Hierro in the prologue:

The *romancero* that is still alive in the oral tradition of Hierro is extraordinary, so much so that it would be difficult to find another place with a similar geographical extension that is comparable in the wealth of its repertory. Historic, geographic, and social conditions are unique and, along with them, their folkloric and literary traditions (Trapero 1985:37).

But after coming to know La Gomera, we had to rectify what we had said. La Gomera is not a lost paradise like so many places in Spain, Portugal, or the Hispanic world, but a paradise in which *romances* live today as they must have lived in the most favored places during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is an island where singing and dancing *romances* is a daily exercise of its whole population. The island has at present about 25,000 inhabitants, and there we succeeded in collecting more than 400 versions of more than 140 ballad themes. Among them appear some titles of ballads that are the rarest in modern oral tradition, including one that is unique: *Río Verde*, *El Cid pide parias al rey moro*, *Lanzarote*, *París y Elena*, *Fratricidio por amor*.

Our investigations are continuing, and now we are going on to Fuerteventura, an island about which we know absolutely nothing, and afterwards to other places until we obtain the complete map of the oral *romancero* of the Canaries.

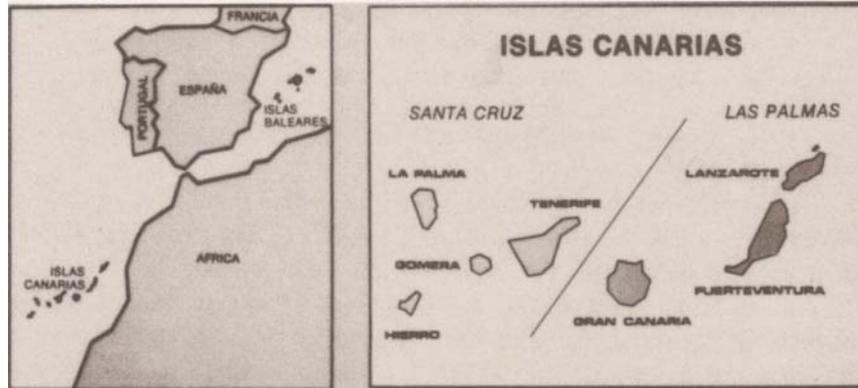
An important aspect of our searches and studies has been music, a matter which had been completely ignored and which shows us the other face of the *romancero*. Diego Catalán had called attention to it already in the Primer Coloquio Internacional sobre el *Romancero*: "Another gap that we have to fill is that of music. No one of the collectors was a musicologist, and in the field expeditions they did not have the help of tape recorders" (1972:146). Today we have easily manipulable machines with high fidelity which make the collecting of materials in the field much easier. Afterwards, in the tranquility of the study, we have

counted on the collaboration of a very capable musicologist, Lothar Siemens Hernández, who has been fully aware of how neglected the important reality of the music of the *romances* is, neglected not only in the *romancero* of the Canaries but also in the *romancero* in general.

But we are not alone. Other collectors on their own initiative have obtained new and always valuable versions in other places on the islands: Talio Noda on the island of La Palma and in the center of Gran Canaria, Francisco Eusebio Bolaños in the northwest of Gran Canaria, Benigno León Felipe in the south of Tenerife, Manuel J. Lorenzo Perera on the island of Hierro and in the north of Tenerife, and others. The interest in popular culture awakened to a great degree by the political process of regional autonomy widespread in Spain during the last few years also affects the Canaries. Today we are at a crossroads in which a radical change of customs threatens to extinguish a whole traditional culture. In collecting what remains of those old popular manifestations, welcome will be given to all who apply themselves to the task of saving it for future generations—if not the tradition itself, at least historical testimony to its existence.

#### The Canaries, a Heterogeneous Ballad Tradition

For those who know the Canaries from hearing or reading about them, it may seem strange that each island has its cultural peculiarities, its own signs of identity. There are, of course, characteristics common to all of them, recognized as such when the Canaries are compared to other regions. It could not be otherwise, since it is a question of islands that belong geographically to Africa and to the Atlantic but which are historically and culturally European and Spanish. But looking from within the Canaries themselves, one cannot help observing the outstanding traits of each island. Geography began differentiating them, and history continued the process. The origin of the aborigines is not known, nor even if the islands were all inhabited by the same people. Archaeology has not even been able to come upon minimal remains that guarantee communication among the islands, but, nevertheless, it has demonstrated sufficiently the cultural and ethnic differences among their inhabitants. Incorporated into the crown of Castile in the fifteenth century after a period of conquest that lasted almost a century (from 1402 in Lanzarote and Fuerteventura to 1496 in



Tenerife), they were brought in on different terms. Some (Fuerteventura, Lanzarote, Hierro, and Gomera) became islands of *señorío*, that is, with an overlord, prolonging their dependency for several centuries; others (Gran Canaria, Tenerife, and La Palma) became islands of *realengo*, subject to the state, a situation which has prolonged to the present day certain socio-economic structures that had a determining effect upon the life of each one of them. To cap it all, nature also acted capriciously. To some it gave abundant water, like La Palma and Tenerife, and to others extremely dry conditions, like Lanzarote and Fuerteventura; some are high and mountainous, others low and sandy; some have abundant resources, others have scarcely any; some have easy access to the sea, for others it is almost inaccessible. Some have been in constant contact with other peoples and other cultures, with windows and doors open to every type of influence from abroad (Gran Canaria and Tenerife); others have been completely turned inward without any contact with the exterior world except that of their own inhabitants who left their island as emigrants, not to return (Hierro and Gomera). An English seaman, who came to know the islands well from his trips there in the middle of the eighteenth century, said of the latter:

La Gomera and El Hierro are so poor that no ship arrives there from Europe or America; nor are the inhabitants permitted any commerce with the Spanish West Indies, for they are not so completely under the jurisdiction of the Spanish crown as are [Gran] Canaria,

Tenerife, or La Palma since they have an overlord or proprietor, that is, the Count of La Gomera. But it would be very advantageous for them to be completely subject to the crown, for never was the saying so true that says "The rubbish of the king is more valuable than other people's grain," as in this case (Glas 1982:133).

It is not surprising, then, that the ballad tradition, which is one of the popular traditions established in its communities, should have notable differences. A few examples will serve.

In 1948 J. Pérez Vidal, one of the most knowledgeable people concerning popular culture of the Canaries and chief investigator of the *romancero* on the island of La Palma, published an article entitled "*Romances con estribillo y bailes romancescos*" (1948:197-241) in which he revealed the curious fact, unknown up to that time, that on La Palma *romances* were sung with a refrain called *responder* (answer), which was inevitably intercalated at the end of every four octosyllabic verses. Later critics generalized the phenomenon for all of the Canaries without investigating further, and caused the references to the Canaries in ballad studies to invariably report that on the islands *romances* are always sung with their corresponding *responderes*. (see Débax 1982:100-101). It was necessary to discover on Gran Canaria that each *romance* had its own melody and that the phenomenon of the *responderes* was unknown. Thus an important difference opened up: on Gran Canaria the *romancero* behaves, the same as any place on the Peninsula, like an individual song, while on La Palma, according to the information of Pérez Vidal, it is a genre that demands the help of a soloist to sing the ballad and a chorus for the *responderes*. Ballads are sung on Lanzarote and Fuerteventura just as they are on Gran Canaria, to judge by the few examples from the former that we have, that is, without a refrain and each one with its own melody. Conclusion—the phenomenon of the *responder* is not general in the *romancero* of the Canaries. Our investigations on the islands of Hierro and La Gomera clarified the situation: the phenomenon of the *responderes* of La Palma extends also to La Gomera and Hierro. It remains to be determined what happens on Tenerife where, paradoxically, despite its being the first and the best investigated in *La flor de las marañuela*, nobody has studied this matter. Thus, aside from the island of Tenerife, the Canaries are divided into two well-defined blocks, as far as the phenomenon

of ballad refrains is concerned, which coincide with the present administrative division into two provinces: on the western islands or the province of Tenerife, all of the *romances* are sung with *responder*; on the eastern islands or the province of Las Palmas, the refrain is unknown.

A phenomenon parallel to refrains is that of music. Where the *romances* are sung with a refrain, the music is always the same and it has a specific name according to the island: *la meda* on Hierro and La Palma, *el tambor* on La Gomera, which is to say, with slight variation, the music is the same on all three islands. On the contrary, where the refrain does not exist, each *romance* has its own particular melody just as it does on the Peninsula and everywhere else.

The lack of knowledge about the *romancero* of Hierro and especially of La Gomera has deprived critics of a very unusual fact: the survival of a ballad dance, the *baile del tambor* on La Gomera, surely the last ballad dance of Spain and the last evidence we have of the *romancero* as a collective festive genre (Trapero 1986).

A ballad like *Gerineldo*, perhaps the most popular in modern tradition everywhere, to judge by the lists in *La flor de la marañuela*, was exceedingly rare in the Canaries. New field expeditions, however, have shown that its role in insular tradition is very irregular, abundant in some (Gran Canaria), scarce in others (Tenerife), and unknown in still others (La Gomera). And the same happens with other very popular ballads like *Tamar*, very well known in Gran Canaria but undocumented up to now in the remainder of the islands. On the other hand, *El caballero burlado* (preceded by *La infantina* and with the conclusion of *La hermana cautiva*), which is quite rare in modern Spanish tradition, is the most frequent ballad on all of the Canary Islands. The *romances* of *Sildana* and *Delgadina* are abundant in the Canaries as independent ballads, but on Gran Canaria a new type predominates, the fusion of both themes in a unique *romance*, following the Portuguese model in this case.

Finally, new explorations have uncovered many new themes unknown before in the Canaries, some even completely unpublished in the modern Hispanic *romancero*, like *Río Verde*, *El Cid pide parias al rey moro*, *Pensativo estaba el Cid*, or *El esclavo que llora por su mujer*.

The Canaries were always the meeting point, a bridge between two continents, a shelter for all voyagers. The tradition

that lives on the islands is the heir of many influences, and with it, of course, the *romancero*. They received everything from Spain, the largest measure from the Andalusian *romancero*, but also from the northwestern part of the Peninsula. They also received a great deal from Portugal, especially from Trás-os-Montes, and almost always by way of the archipelago of Madeira. Jewish influence is in evidence in the *romancero* of the Canaries, although we do not know very well yet, because of the lack of studies about the matter, how and when they reached there. And from America there returned what had previously come from here, but americanized. The Canaries are, with respect to America, a round trip, a necessary bridge between the two shores of the Atlantic which served to carry the culture of this shore there and to bring it back again. Therefore the *romancero* of the Canaries is heterogeneous and unique.

#### The Rarest *Romances* of the Canaries

It is difficult to know where to begin. Diego Catalán, who based his study of several individual ballads on the tradition of the Canaries, in his introduction to the *Romancerillo canario* stated that *Lanzarote y el ciervo del pie blanco* is the most extraordinary one (1955:n.p.). Before that Menéndez Pidal, when the tradition of the Canaries was still not well known, had selected as being the most outstanding the *Rapto de Elena* (or *Paris y Elena*) and *El conde preso* (1953:2:357). These three *romances* stood out for being, if not unique versions, almost unique in the general panorama of the modern *romancero*. *Lanzarote*, which had only been known in an Andalusian version collected in Almería in 1914, presupposed the survival of a medieval European theme from the Arthurian cycle by means of a process of oral transmission. The *Rapto de Elena* attested to the great archaism of the ballad tradition in the Canaries and, at the same time, to the tie between its *romancero* and the Sephardic, the only areas in which it has been preserved. As for *El conde preso*, Menéndez Pidal's attention was attracted by the primitive form of its versions, comparable to those from Morocco, and so archaic that he said that they had “*visos de chanson de geste*” (1953:2:357).

Diego Catalán studied these three ballads extensively, comparing the versions from the Canaries with the old tradition and with other known modern traditions, and to them he added three others, *El idólatra*, *El conde don Pero Vélez*, and *El poder*

*del canto*, as the most extraordinary and exotic ballads of the *romancero* of the Canaries (1970:82-117, 167-85, 270-80). Today, from the perspective of more extensive knowledge about the reality of the case and after many new discoveries, the list would have to be lengthened, its order changed and the previous data re-evaluated. The following order of ballads does not indicate order of importance. From those studied by Diego Catalán:

a. *El idólatra* is a *romance* with documentation that is abundant and widespread.

b. *Poder del canto* is one more version, although a very unusual one, of *El conde Niño*, a ballad which is very popular on the islands and everywhere (*Romancerillo* #10, *Flor* #439).

c. *El conde don Pero Vélez*, a very rare ballad of the sixteenth century, known in modern tradition in a single version from Tenerife (*Flor* #10), has not reappeared in the Canaries or elsewhere.

d. A new peninsular version of *Lanzarote* was collected in Beas del Segura (Jaén) a few years ago (Catalán 1979:229-32), but we now can offer many more from the Canaries. It seems as if the islands were the refuge sought by this *romance* in its modern life. To the three known versions from Tenerife, one must now be added from Gran Canaria and 119 from La Gomera—another good example of the arbitrary and capricious distribution of the *romancero* throughout Hispanic territory. What could cause *Lanzarote* to be forgotten everywhere while the inhabitants of La Gomera go on singing it as one of their favorites?

e. There were three Canaries' versions of *Paris y Elena* (aside from the Sephardic ones), one of them from La Gomera. And there we collected in 1983 a new version, which, however, was contaminated and somewhat defective.

f. *El conde preso* is today a ballad that is quite well known and documented in the Peninsula. In the Canaries new versions have appeared in Tenerife which maintain the epic style that Menéndez Pidal observed (Rodríguez Abad 1984:93-102).

Another series of rare *romances* that are rare in the general tradition and unpublished up to now in the Canaries are the following:

g. *Virgilio*s, a novelesque *romance* of the sixteenth century which attributes to the Latin poet a courtly love affair in *romance* style. The protagonist is Virgil as he was popularized in the

Middle Ages. The ballad was very widespread in olden times judging by the ballad lists we have, but today it is practically extinct in peninsular tradition although among the Sephardic Jews it is very popular. We found it six times on the island of Hierro, and those versions clarified a very confused interpretation that had been given to the *romance* (Trapero in press).

h. *La princesa peregrina*, which is found only in the Sephardic tradition (in both the Northern Africa branch and that of Eastern Europe) and in the Portuguese tradition (on the continent and on its Atlantic islands), has also been collected on Hierro, where it is very well known. It is a ballad that was not documented in the old tradition but which, nevertheless, given its present distribution and its configuration, appears to be old.

i. *¿Por qué no cantáis la bella?* is a *romance* which has been divinized, becoming one of the most frequent of the religious ballads but one which is very rare in its primitive form, being known by only a single peninsular version (from Huesca) and, of course, many Jewish ones. In the Canaries it had been documented contaminating several versions of *Blancaflor y Filomena*. Now we have succeeded in collecting it in its “divine” form, as well as quite a few times contaminating *Blancaflor y Filomena* (on Gran Canaria and La Gomera) and *Presagios del labrador* (on Gran Canaria), and twice as an autonomous ballad in its most primitive version.

j. Pérez Vidal tells us that among the unedited material he possesses from the island of La Palma collected in the forties, there is a version of *Isabel de Liar*, a historical ballad which is very rare in present-day oral tradition and was dispersed in such a way as to make its presence in the Canaries improbable.

Our investigations on the islands of Hierro and La Gomera have furnished us with a series of ballads about captives, among which there are four from the Canaries without any known documentation or reference. We have entitled them: k. *Cautiva liberada por su marido*, l. *Cautiva y liberada*, m. *Rescate del enamorado*, and n. *Joven liberado por su enamorada* (Trapero 1985:#100, #102, #103, #110). Judging by their narrative structure and their poetic language they appear to be late *romances*, possibly from the eighteenth century, popularized by means of broadsides and strongly traditionalized.

o. The last one in this group, the *Fratricidio por amor*, is a very rare *romance* collected by us on La Gomera and only known

by seven Sephardic versions (five from Tangier and two from Tetuán) and one Catalán version of the nineteenth century. It is a blind man's ballad from the end of the sixteenth century that relates an event that took place in Málaga: the execution of a woman convicted for having confessed to the murder of her sister whom she had killed out of love for her brother-in-law, hoping to supplant her sister in the conjugal bed. The old *romance* is to be found in the *Flor de varios romances nuevos* of Pedro de Moncayo (Barcelona, 1591) as a very clear example of the type of ballad about current events that circulated by means of broadsides. But it became traditionalized and attained an artistic excellence it did not have before, although to a different degree in each one of the three branches (Sephardic, Catalán, and Canaries) that preserve it.

We have left for the end the rarest of all, those that were unknown in the Canaries or in the *romancero* as a whole, those that have been documented for the first time in oral tradition, the last ones to appear, truly the four major trophies of the hunt. One is a frontier ballad, another a ballad about captives, and two are about the Cid: *Río Verde*, *El esclavo que llora por su mujer*, *El Cid pide parias al rey moro*, and *Pensativo estaba el Cid*.

p. *Río Verde* (or *Romance de Sayavedra*) is a frontier ballad from the end of the fifteenth century. It is based on a historical episode in which the Christian troops of Juan de Saavedra, mayor of Castelar de la Frontera, suffer a complete disaster in their attack on the Moors of Sierra Bermeja, along the Verde river in the present province of Málaga. The event occurred in 1448 and soon was turned into a *romance*. Its popularity must have been very great, since in the middle of the sixteenth century it was circulating in chapbooks with variants as notable as those offered by another version of the end of the century collected by Pérez de Hita in his *Guerras civiles de Granada* (Trapero in press). It had remained forgotten from that time on, dead as far as oral tradition was concerned, until we collected it in La Gomera in 1983. The story of its discovery and of its reconstruction as the result of several interviews is told elsewhere as an example of the decadence in which the modern *romancero* lives and the efforts demanded of the collectors in order to bring it to light (Trapero in press). The version from La Gomera begins as follows:

Sobre ti, Peña Bermeja,  
murió gran caballería,  
murieron curas y condes

Upon you, Red Mountain,  
many horsemen died,  
priests and counts died

y mucha gente moría,  
murieron curas y condes  
en la ciudad de Valía,  
murió aquel que va juyendo  
por un ramonal p'arriba.

and many people died,  
priests and counts died  
in the city of Valía,  
the one died who is fleeing  
up the sheep run.

q. *El Cid pide parias al reymoro* appeared in La Gomera, collected for the first time by Martha E. Davis when she was investigating its popular festivals in 1984, one year after our own investigations and from an informant who had been one of ours (surely the only informant from La Gomera who knows it, and he did not mention it to us). The *romance* is extraordinary for every possible reason: in the first place because it assures the survival in the modern *romancero* of one of the most famous of the old *romances* which were believed to be completely forgotten; in second place because it is a splendid, very complete version which seems to re-create the old text, even improving it as truly traditional literature always does. It is the same *romance* that with the title of *Por el val de las Estacas* is recorded in Durán (1849-51:#750) as coming from a sixteenth-century manuscript. In his note he says: "It belongs to the class of old ballads, and is one of the few that have been preserved without much alteration. We have not seen it in print, nor preserved by tradition anywhere else" (Durán 1945:1:492). It is also included in Wolf and Hofmann (1856:#31), citing Durán as the source. The version from La Gomera begins as follows:

Por las vegas de Granada  
baja el Cid al mediodía  
con su caballo Babieco  
que a par del viento corría  
y doscientos caballeros  
que lleva en su compañía.

Across the plains of Granada  
the Cid goes at noonday  
with his horse Babieco  
who ran like the wind  
and two hundred knights  
whom he has in his company.

r. We collected *Pensativo estaba el Cid* on Gran Canaria from the same informant who later gave us another very rare ballad, *El esclavo que llora por su mujer*. The Cid ballad is a new *romance* that has only literary, not traditional, antecedents. It appeared for the first time in *Flor de varios y nuevos romances* (Valencia, 1591, with a license of 1588); it is reproduced without any variation whatsoever in the *Cancionero general* of 1600 and in the *Romancero del Cid* of Escobar (Lisbon, 1605); it provided Guillén de Castro with the plot for his *Mocedades del Cid*, and it was included as an old ballad by Wolf and Hofmann (#28). Never have traditional versions of this ballad been collected, although

there are a few of another ballad of the same cycle, *Rodriguillo venga a su padre* or *El Cid y el conde Lozano*, which has the same literary origin. Although the Canaries' version is fragmentary, it offers unequivocal proof of its traditionalization. It begins:

Pensativo está Rodrigo, pensativo y enroñado por no poderse vengar de su padre don Sagrario. Se va para el monte Olivo donde están los hortelanos, se ha hallado una espada vieja del gran Román castellano.	Rodrigo is thoughtful, thoughtful and annoyed because he can't avenge his father Don Sagrario. He goes to Mount Olive where the gardeners are, he has found an old sword of the great Castilian Román.
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s. And finally a ballad of captives, *El esclavo que llora por su mujer*, which deserves special attention and poses many specific questions applicable to the entire *romancero*: 1. Is it still possible to collect from oral tradition *romances* without either old or modern antecedents that are unknown to critics? 2. Do the narrative structure and the language of the *romance* suffice to stamp it as old even without antecedents? 3. We know that when a *romance* has been recorded by the Jews who were descendants of those who participated in the Spanish Diaspora it has the likelihood, if not the certainty, of being an old *romance*, but if this *romance* exists in some other place is it possible that it did not have a Spanish origin? 4. How can one establish boundaries for the identification of a ballad theme when the textual discourse of their respective versions is so varied? 5. Are two versions of the same theme but with maximum variation of discourse the product of individual recreations from the same origin or, the other way around, despite having different origins and forms of discourse, has their thematic content become similar because of the presence of the same widely dispersed folkloric motif?

*El esclavo que llora por su mujer: A Romance Unknown in the Canaries*

As the fruit of one of these hunting expeditions for rare *romances*, we want to tell about one that is truly exceptional. It is so completely unknown that it scarcely has a name; it is so rare that its character and origin are unknown; it is so challenging that it demands a more thorough study than we can dedicate to it here; and it is so beautiful that it is a joy to be able to present it. It goes as follows:

	Peinándose está el cautivo al pie de un verde naranjo, peinándose está el cautivo y lágrimas derramando.	The captive is combing his hair beneath a green orange tree, the captive is combing his hair and shedding tears.
5	En estas razones y otras la morilla que ha llegado: —¿Que tienes, cristiano mío, de qué te aflijes, mi esclavo? —¿Para qué le digo nada si no ha de ser remediado? —Puede ser que se remedie si se lo digo a tu amo. —Tengo una mujer bonita, niños chiquitos al lado.	While this is going on the Moorish girl arrives: “What’s wrong, my Christian? What upsets you, my slave?” “Why should I tell you if it can’t be remedied?” “Perhaps it can be remedied if I tell your master.” “I have a pretty wife, small children at her side.”
15	—¿Habrà mujer en el mundo que a mí se haya igualado? —Tan bonita como vos, sólo su rostro es más albo. En estas razones y otras	“Is there any woman in the world who is my equal?” “As pretty as you, only her face is whiter.” While this is going on the Moor appears:
20	el moro se ha presentado: —En está noche el gran perro mi viña me irá cavando, yo le daré con que crí(v)e cien callos en cada mano, la azada pesa cien libras, el cabo pesa otro tanto. En estas razones y otras la noche que se ha acercado, el moro se ha recogido,	“Tonight the great dog will dig in my vineyard, I’ll give him what makes a hundred calluses on each hand, the hoe weighs a hundred pounds, the handle weighs as much.” While this is going on night has come, the Moor has gone to bed, the girl has lain down.
30	la mora se ha recostado. Allá a la medianoche cuando la mora ha ’espertado: —Cristiano mío, levanta aunque estás muy bien echado,	There at midnight when the girl awakened: “My Christian, get up even if you’re resting well, he who has a pretty wife, small children at her side, he who has a pretty wife doesn’t sleep so carefree; take, my dear, this gift (?) with these hanging balls and to your pretty wife say I’m sending them to her, and in the purse you have wherewith to live carefree:
35	quien tiene mujer bonita, niños chiquitos al lado, quien tiene mujer bonita no duerme tan descuidado; toma, mi bien, estas parias con estas bolas colgando y a tu mujer la bonita dile que yo se las mando, y en el bolsillo llevas pa que vivas descuidado:	when you pass among Moors you will say as you pass, that you’ve left the Moors,  when you pass through Turkey you’ll say you’re Turkish, when you pass through India you’ll say you’re Indian
40	cuando pases entre moros dirás paso entre paso, que de moros has salido, ... cuando pases por Turquía dirás que eres turquesano, cuando pases por las Indias dirás que vienes de indiano ...	

(y el cristiano marchó para su casa para estar con su mujer la bonita.)  
(and the Christian went home to be with his pretty wife.)

This version comes from La Gavia, a very primitive district in the outskirts of Telde on the island of Gran Canaria, and it was told to us by María Monzón, 87 years old, who, in her turn, had learned it when she was a child, along with many others (among them the previously mentioned *Rodriguillo*), from a little old woman from the nearby town of Santa Brígida who had died before the civil war. Since María Monzón's memory was weak and she had much to offer us, we repeated the interview on three separate occasions. The first time she did not even mention the *romance*; it was the second time when as she was repeating *Rodriguillo*, doubtless because of the similarity of the opening ("Pensativo está Rodrigo, / pensativo y enroñado"), she began to say: "Pensativo está el cautivo", no, that's another one, but it didn't begin that way, it began: 'Peinándose está el cautivo / al pie de un verde naranjo.'" And then she recited what she remembered of it, a few verses that kept increasing as the interview went on, and repeating them helped to put them in their place. Those verses had not been actualized in María Monzón's memory for many years, and it was necessary to give her time. It was at the third interview that she was able to complete the foregoing *romance*, which, even lacking a conclusion, loses none of its value.

The absence of literary antecedents obliges us to ask questions about its origin. Is it a traditional ballad or simply a learned re-creation that imitates the traditional genre? Does it belong to the oldest branch of the *romancero* or is it a more modern product from the new *romancero*? Does it exist elsewhere in modern oral tradition? To the lack of older documentation is added its apparent absence among other modern versions that could serve as a counterpart. It is not to be found in modern regional *romanceros* from any branch of the available tradition. It is also lacking in the bibliographical information we have about the old *romancero*. And there is no reference to it in the critical bibliography on the modern *romancero*. In the mind of María Monzón it is one more *romance* alongside the aforementioned *Rodriguillo*, or *Gerineldo*, or the *Difunto penitente*, or various religious ballads, or those about modern crimes. According to her, they all came from the same source, the little old woman from Santa Brígida, and all of them have lived together as part of the



Maximiano Trapero with María Montón



Domingo Medina being interviewed by Maximiano Trapero

traditional knowledge of María Monzón, who confesses herself to be completely illiterate. But from the investigator's point of view, is it truly a traditional *romance*? That is, is it a matter of an old text, created and reproduced according to traditional models, handed down in the family, which reached La Gavia and María Monzón by oral transmission? To affirm this opinion involves deducing an example of a very special type and genre, which are the genre and the language of the traditional *romancero*. And the *romance* of La Gavia is all of that without the slightest doubt. Furthermore, more than just any kind of an example, it is a true model, a precious paradigm of the language in which traditional epic-lyric knowledge is constructed. And if such a splendid example exists, how could it have passed unnoticed by the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anthologists, supposing that it existed at that time? Why is it that it has not deserved the slightest reference in the very abundant literature about captives? How is it, in short, that it has not survived in other geographical areas of the *romancero*?

*El esclavo que llora por su mujer* in the Sephardic Tradition

Among the very rich materials of the Menéndez Pidal archives of traditional Judeo-Spanish poetry (more than two thousand poems aside, of course, from a great many more from other areas of Hispanism), there are two short poems that have an obvious connection to our *romance* (cf. Armistead and Silverman 1982:160). The two correspond to the eastern tradition. The first, from Salonika, was sent to Menéndez Pidal from Barcelona by Rosendo Serra in 1912. It is contaminated from verse 7 on with *¿Por qué no cantais la bella?* and is published here for the first time:

	El día que yo nassí nassieron cien con ml. —¿De qué lloras, povre esclavo, de qué llorache i vos quechache?	The day I was born a hundred were born with me. “Why are you weeping, poor slave, why are you weeping and complaining?
5	¿Non comes? ¿non durmiche? ¿o vos aossan en la vida? —Mucho bien como, mucho bien bevo, ni me aossan quando durmo, lloro yo por una amiga	Can't you eat? can't you sleep? or are you being tormented?” “I eat very well, I drink very well, nor am I tormented when I sleep, I weep for a friend
10	que se llamava Marqueza, madre era de los mis hijos y también mi mujer primera.—	who was called Marqueza, she was my children's mother and also my first wife.”

	Marqueza está en altas torres lavrando sirma i perla,	Marqueza is in high towers embroidering with thread and pearls,
15	lavrando i una camisa para el hijo de la reina, quando de la sirma le mancara de sus cabellos metía,	embroidering a shirt for the queen's son, when she lacked thread she put in her own hair,
20	quando de la perla le mancara de sus lágrimas ajuntava. Reina, reina, reinadines, por la ciudad de Marqueza. Se subió en altas torres	when she lacked a pearl she added one of her tears. Queen, queen, <i>reinadines</i> , in the city of Marqueza. She climbed the tall towers
25	las que dan para la Marqueza, por allí passó un caballero que de las guerras vinía. —Hablar vos quero un secreto que de mi tripa tenía.	that they give to Marqueza, a knight passed by there who came from the wars. “I want to tell you a secret that comes from within.”
	.....	
30	—Háblame como una hermana mía. Hablando y platicando a conocer se darían, se toman manos con manos, onde los hijos la llevaría.	“Speak to me like a sister.”  Talking and chatting they recognized one another, they take each other's hands, he led her to her children.

The second *romance*, from Smyrna, was collected from the lips of Leonor Israel by M. Manrique de Lara in 1911:

	—¿De que lloras, probe esclavo? ¿De qué lloras? ¿Qué te quejas? ¿U no comes u no bebes, u t'azotan cuando duermes	“Why do you weep, poor slave?” Why do you weep? Why do you lament? Can't you eat or drink, or do they whip you when you sleep?”
5	—Yo ya bien bebo, ya bien como, ni m'azotan cuando duermo. Lloro yo por una amiga, una amiga bien querida; madre es de los mis hijos,	“I drink well, I eat well, nor do they whip me when I sleep. I weep for a friend, a very beloved friend; she is the mother of my children, my first wife.”
10	mujer mía la primera. —Tú no llores, probe esclavo, ni llores cuando te quejas. Si es por la tuya amiga muy querida,	“Don't weep, poor slave, don't weep when you lament. If it is for your beloved friend,
15	ya te la trajera a tus manos. Toma tú la[s] mis palabras y vate a tus buenos estados.	I will bring her to your hands. Take my word and go to your good land.”

Both versions are catalogued by Armistead (1978:1:305-6) among the *romances* of captives and prisoners with the numbers H20.1 and H20.2 respectively. He published the second of them, furthermore, in its entirety as one of the few that deserve the designation of very rare *romances* (1978:3:28). But its rarity is not only because of its lack of documentation—two unique versions in

a single branch of the Sephardic tradition—but for other things as well: for its brevity, only eight verses if we discount the Salonika version with verses from *¿Por qué no cantáis la bella?*; for the inconsistent rhyme changes; for being a completely dialogued text, discounting again the contamination in the Salonika version. But even in the latter, which opens with a narrative verse, it functions like an exordium put into the slave’s mouth. All of these features appear separately in other Sephardic texts, but not, of course, in combination.

In oral tradition everywhere, and naturally in the repertory of any “artisan” singer, various genres co-exist: *romances*, *canciones*, children’s songs, prayers, magic spells and other poetic texts of related genres. In its Sephardic versions *El esclavo que llora por su mujer* would be difficult to classify. For that reason, on the manuscript of the version from Salonika that Rosendo Serra sent to Menéndez Pidal, the latter wrote a series of notes that reflect his uncertainty upon confronting an unknown text. Thus it is necessary to consider the origin and derivation of these texts.

#### Derivation

Armistead and Silverman have been the only ones who, although very briefly, have spoken about this *romance*, naturally before knowing about the Canaries’ version, attributing to it an eastern origin. They believe that it comes from a neo-Hellenic ballad, a statement that Armistead makes again in his *Catálogo-Índice* (1978:3:28). They compare the text of our *romance* (in a new transcription with notable orthographic differences) with the neo-Hellenic ballad *Ho niopantros sklábos* (*El galeoto recién casado*) on which they believe it to be based. The Spanish translation of the Greek ballad goes as follows:

- Cuarenta galeras éramos y sesenta y dos fragatas.  
 Ibamos navegando con el viento del noroeste.  
 Huimos del poniente y vamos al levante.  
 También teníamos muchos esclavos, esclavos valientes.  
 5 Por el camino donde íbamos, por la vía donde pasábamos,  
 el esclavo echó un suspiro y detuvo la fragata.  
 Y nuestro Bey nos pregunta, nuestro Bey nos dice:  
 —¿Quién echó un suspiro y detuvo la fragata?  
 —Soy yo quien eché el suspiro e hice parar la fragata.  
 10 —¿Esclavo, pasas hambre; esclavo, pasas sed; esclavo, te falta ropa?  
 —Ni paso hambre, ni sed, ni quiero ropa.  
 Tres días estuve casado, por doce años esclavo.  
 Pero hoy llegó una carta de mis padres:

- 15 Hoy venden mis casas; hoy podan mis viñas;  
 hoy casan a mi mujer con otro,  
 y mis niños huérfanos conocerán otro señor.  
 —Vete, mi esclavo, con lo bueno en buena hora  
 y que tu camino esté lleno de capullos y rosas. . . .  
 (Armistead and Silverman 1982:161-62)

(We were forty galleons and sixty-two frigates. / We were sailing with the wind from the northwest. / We are fleeing from the west and going to the east. / We also had many slaves, valiant slaves. /5 Along the path we were going, along the way where we were passing, / a slave let out a sigh and stopped the frigate. / And our bey asks us, our bey says to us: / “Who let out a sigh and stopped the frigate?” / “I am the one who let out the sigh and made the frigate stop.” /10 “Slave, are you suffering from hunger, or thirst, or do you lack clothing?” / “I am not suffering from hunger or thirst, nor do I want any clothing. / I was married for three days, I have been a slave for twelve years. / But today a letter arrived from my parents: / Today they are selling my houses; today they are pruning my vineyards; /15 today they are marrying my wife to someone else, / and my orphan children will know another master.” / “Go, my slave, with good luck and good wishes, / and may your way be filled with buds and roses.”/

There is no doubt about the similarities between the Greek ballad and the Sephardic songs, but how can one be sure that the latter derive from the former? The slave as the leading character, his sigh for his lost liberty, his beloved and his children who remain behind are all folklore motifs which appear in an infinity of popular, universal stories, whether *romances* or not. The greatest parallelism is between the questions and answers concerning the slave’s sigh. In the Greek ballad the king is the captor, but who is in the Jewish texts? Furthermore, the question: “Why are you sighing, are you suffering from hunger or thirst, do you lack clothing?” is no more than a variant of the Jewish *romance*: “Why are you crying, what are you complaining about, can’t you eat, can’t you drink, can’t you sleep?” Just as other *romances* or popular poetic forms contain similar questions that are topical formulas of discourse,<sup>7</sup> they do not indicate genetic derivation of one *fabula* from another. Armistead and Silverman themselves recognize that the Greek ballad incorporates, in its different versions, several traditional motifs that do not transcend the Judeo-Spanish *romance*: the supernatural effects produced by the sigh (v. 6); the slave or captive who gains his freedom by means of a magic song; and the motif of the interrupted wedding (v. 15) (1982:161).

To accept the fact that the *romance* of *El esclavo que llora*

*por su mujer* is an adaptation of the ballad *El galeote recién casado* would mean that the Sephardic *romance* evolved until it reached the point of telling a story that is quite different from that of the Greek ballad and, of course, telling it in a very different manner. It would imply a long process of re-creation, not impossible, of course, that would demand a long period of time. Do these conditions correspond to the reality of the case? When the authorities we have cited say that the ballad is *neo-Hellenic*, what does that mean? To what time frame does the *neo* belong? If the Sephardic ballad did not show similarities with others of Hispanic tradition, the question would remain, but after considering the version from the Canaries, it seems to us that the question makes the foregoing explanation invalid.

#### Two Extreme Traditional Results

But the Canaries' version opens new questions when the two conservative traditions of this *romance* are compared. If the Sephardic texts are not considered *romances* in the strict sense, the text from the Canaries is one without the slightest doubt. Nobody would hesitate to affirm that the versions of Smyrna and Salonika tell the same *fabula* as that of La Gavia, but are they the same *romance*? Or rather, do they come from the same model? What poetic product are the Sephardic songs closest to—the *romance* of La Gavia or the Greek ballad? Modern oral poetic tradition of the Judeo-Spanish communities, especially those of the eastern branch, is nourished with materials of a very different origin. It is not to be doubted that the original bearers took with them from Spain a store of old *romances* in the first Diaspora of 1492, but it is also true that that old store was added to later and mixed with other texts: new *romances* and broadsides coming from Spain, *romances* born of Jewish inspiration in situ, stories and ballads turned into *romances* or similar forms which they took from the places where they settled, poetry and popular traditions of the Balkans (Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, etc.). It seems astonishing to be able to produce evidence, as in this case, that a poetic re-creation that extended over centuries in places so distant and so different as the Canary Islands and eastern Europe could offer such extreme results starting from the same model. If we agree, however varying and diverse the forms may be, that it is a matter of the same *romance*, we also will have to accept that their origin was the same. The existence of a poetic theme, a *romance* in this case, in

two places in which Hispanic tradition was established, ignoring distance, nationality, the culture of each place, even the language, is an unequivocal sign of the same Spanish origin. And if, as in this case, one of those places is the home of very old Judeo-Spanish communities, Salonika and Smyrna, we are almost entitled to say that the origin of that *romance* is very old, that it is, in fact, a *romance viejo* (cf. Menéndez Pelayo 1945:9:390 and Menéndez Pidal 1953:2:334, 338).

It seems obvious to us that the texts of Salonika and Smyrna are closer to and have more similarities with the text from La Gavia than the three have with the Greek ballad. In the former it is the same *fabula*: the weeping of a slave who is lamenting the absence of this wife and children and finds a remedy for his misfortune in the kindheartedness of his mistress who frees him. There is also similarity in the initial question:

- ¿De qué horas, probe esclavo? ¿De qué lloras? ¿Qué te quejas?  
(Smyrna)  
—¿Qué tienes, cristiano mío? ¿De qué te afliges, mi esclavo?  
(La Gavia)

and in the answer of the slave:

- Madre es de los mis hijos, mujer mía la primera.  
(Smyrna)  
—Tengo una mujer bonita, niños chiquitos al lado.  
(La Gavia)

There is also the same narrative model, direct discourse, making it a *romance* of pure dialogue. In the Jewish versions (contamination aside) there is not a single verse of indirect narration, and in the twenty-six verses of the La Gavia version there are only seven, which serve to present the interlocutors, three of them using the same narrative formula (vv. 5, 19, 27). And finally there is the same structural development of the *fabula*, following the model of the *romance* as a scene, which is so characteristic of the old *romancero*, or rather, which was so pleasing to the ballad collectors of the sixteenth century (Menéndez Pidal 1953:1:63-64).

But the differences are also numerous and notable. In the first place, their length: the text from the Canaries, supposing that there are a few more verses in the conclusion which our informant forgot, has a length that is average for old traditional *romances*, between twenty and forty sixteen-syllable verses, but the Sephardic versions are abnormal in their brevity. The synthesis manifest in the *fabula* of the Smyrna version is astonishing, how an entire story is condensed into eight verses. Without narration and

specific details in the dialogue, conditions and situations important for understanding the story have been lost, such as, for example, the identity of the interlocutors: one is the slave, but who is the other? Instead, everything is condensed into a brief poetic sigh, the sigh of the slave who is weeping for his wife. Nothing more is necessary to capture its quintessence. There is no shorter and at the same time no more intense scene in all of the Spanish *romancero*, whether ancient or modern.

In second place, the rhyme. The monorhyme of the Canaries' tradition is in direct opposition to the Judeo-Spanish texts, which have no consistent rhyming pattern.

In third place, the *dramatis personae*. There are two in the eastern texts, the slave and an unidentified master. If tradition does not specify the latter, it is because the function of the second character is not affected by his condition. Nevertheless, the condition of the second character is fundamental in the tradition of the Canaries since it offers a new and original reading of the *romance*. The appearance of a third person in the Canaries clarifies, on one hand, the relation between slave and mistress and, on the other, complicates the structural relationship of the *dramatis personae*. The kindness of the woman (v. 4) contrasts strongly with the cruelty of the man towards the slave (vv. 11-13). But why that attitude of the woman? Why does the woman free the slave against her husband's will without his knowing it? To say that she is moved by the slave's answer (v. 7) is not to say much, even though it is literally what the text says. What it is necessary to understand, because the text is full of indications of this sort, is that the Moorish woman loves the slave and it is that "good love" that motivates his liberation, despite the fact that an absent wife and children are preferred to her.

And in fourth place, a very unusual fact. The eastern texts only speak to us about a slave, and therefore make of it a story without place or time, a universal story that could be from anywhere. On the other hand, the version from the Canaries hispanizes and christianizes the *fabula*, turning it into a story of Moors and Christians and the simple slave into a captive. But was the original model the version of the Canaries or the eastern Jewish version? That is, did the *romance* in its evolution pass from a period indifferent to religion, the eastern model (also represented by the Greek ballad), to a story of Christians and non-Christians, the Canaries model? Or, on the contrary, did the

Spanish model, a story of captives, become universalized and lose the connotations that framed it in historical time and gave it a specified place? The Canaries model does not represent the result of an evolution of that type, but rather the type of *romances* of captives, one of the most characteristic and, of course, most preferred subgenres of the *romancero* of all time (Marco 1977:2:389-94). This is so because the identity of the characters—the Moor, his wife, and the Christian—and of the story—a story of captives—is not only made known by their being literally qualified that way, but also because the *romance* is full of topical allusions that characterize *romances* of captives: the cruelty of the Moor (vv. 11-13); the happy outcome thanks to the mediation of one of the characters who falls in love with the captive; the comparison between the beauty of the woman and the captive's beloved (vv. 8-9), including the mention of skin color; the precise utilization of the very archaic term *parias* (v. 20) to refer to a kind of coinage the Moors used to pay tributes to the Christians; or the mention of Turkey (v. 25) as an allusion to the destination of most of the Spanish Christian captives.

Whatever comparison one may make between the two conservative branches of the Hispanic tradition of *El esclavo que llora por su mujer*, the eastern Jewish and that of the Canaries, always inclines one toward a judgment in favor of the precedence of the latter. Not only has the Canaries model been able to preserve the primordial character of *romances* about captives, which was lost in the East where it was confused with stories about slaves and accommodated itself to a more universal ballad genre, but also the discourse-model *romance* is preserved intact and in unsurpassed shape in the Canaries but not among the eastern Sephardic peoples. The *romance* lives among the Jews in an unballad-like form, that is, it bears little resemblance to the splendid forms of the oral *romancero* of the Sephardic Jews; or else it is in a very decadent state, or it never came to be a true *romance*, that is, it was born as a *canción*, an allied genre, in order to narrate a Greek ballad in Spanish, according to Armistead and Silverman, and it remained as a brief narrative song. We would have been able to defend the second hypothesis before knowing of the existence of the *romance* in the Canaries, but now no longer. Thus there remains no other alternative than to speak of the decadence of this *romance* in eastern tradition, decadence that by now may be death (remember that the two versions were

collected at the beginning of the century and have not reappeared in any of the numerous field expeditions that have been carried out in Sephardic communities during the course of this century). The version found in the Canaries, on the other hand, is splendid; it possesses all the characteristics that make of it an insuperable model of the genre of the single-scene *romance*, and within that category, of the dialogued *romance*, inherited from the medieval epics (Menéndez Pidal 1953:1:63-65). Even the failure of the memory of our informant, María Monzón, is allied in a special sense to the great poetic value of the *ex abrupto* conclusion, which, if it does not leave the listener in suspense (because the ending is announced in earlier verses), does leave the discourse without a conclusion, a situation which was so pleasing to the singers and collectors of the old *romances*.

Las Palmas  
Canary Islands

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Translated from the Spanish by the editor.

<sup>2</sup>*La guarda cuidadosa*, *La fuerza de la sangre*, *Bodas de sangre*, and *La canción del huérfano*, all four unknown up to that time as autonomous *romances*.

<sup>3</sup>The *romancero vulgar* and that of blind men, transmitted by *pliegos sueltos* (chapbooks), have inundated and become mixed with oral tradition everywhere. The investigator who is a purist tries to avoid such texts, but they are precisely the ones the average informant most wants to communicate since they are the ones he appreciates the most.

<sup>4</sup>For example, Gómez Escudero in his *Historia de la conquista de Canarias* refers to the dances of La Gomera, and Diego Durón uses a refrain or a popular verse from *romances* in his works for the Capilla Musical of the cathedral of Las Palmas.

<sup>5</sup>Although the trial opens against eighteen religious *romances* taken from broadsides in the belief that they contain opinions contrary to church doctrine, it gives sufficient evidence of the popularity attained by the phenomenon of the *romancero*. At the present time we are working on a study of this matter.

<sup>6</sup>A paradigmatic example of this was the discovery in Burgo de Osma of the *romance of La muerte del príncipe Don Juan* in 1900 by Menéndez Pidal and his wife, a *romance* that until then had been completely hidden from old as well as from modern critics (Menéndez Pidal 1953:2:291-92).

<sup>7</sup>One example among many that could be cited here is from the ballad

