

Introduction

The ballad or *romance*, as it is commonly called, has played a vitally important role over the centuries in Hispanic culture as an orally transmitted narrative song. It is the product of people who have had to look to themselves for entertainment. By moments, in particular from the end of the fifteenth to the early seventeenth century, the *romancero* (balladry) enjoyed a great vogue among learned poets and their audiences. Later on, poets like the Duque de Rivas in the nineteenth century or Garcia Lorca among others in the twentieth drew inspiration from the *romancero*. But whether visible or not at the level of “artistic” poetry, the *romancero* has continued to live among the Hispanic peoples as part of their cultural heritage and has gone with them wherever they have chanced to go, whether throughout the Spanish empire to other parts of Europe, to the Atlantic islands and on to the New World, or, with the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, around the Mediterranean and to many places in eastern Europe. Now, unfortunately, the tradition is vanishing.

Our intent here is to survey and to assess the state of the *romancero* today, not only in Spain and Portugal, but also in the peripheral areas where it has migrated and taken root. In the following essays one will find accounts of the efforts that are being made to capture on tape the *romances* that are still being sung before they are lost forever, together with an evaluation of the material that is being collected and examples of various ways in which it is being studied.

The prime mover in all endeavors related to *romances* is Diego Catalán, director of the Seminario Menéndez Pidal in Madrid, which is the center for *romancero* studies today. In the initial essay Diego Catalán not only describes the unique character of *romances* and the problems involved in their study, but he also surveys the results of recent ballad-collecting projects and, finally, analyzes in some detail the poetic language and narrative structure of several *romances*. Ana Valenciano reviews the history of

ballad-collecting and the success of recent expeditions sponsored by the Seminario. She also discusses the problems experienced by the ballad collector who goes out into the field. The age-old routes followed by migratory shepherds with their livestock as the seasons change have been studied by Antonio Sánchez Romeralo, and he shows how ballad versions tend to cluster along these routes. Suzanne Petersen examines the subject of ballad geography and, by making innovative use of the computer, has been able to plot variation and modification in certain ballad narratives throughout Spain and detect regional tendencies.

Going outside of the Iberian Peninsula, Maximiano Trapero describes the extraordinary ballad finds he has been making in the Canary Islands. Manuel da Costa Fontes, who has had great success in collecting *romances* in Portugal and its islands as well as from Portuguese immigrants in Canada, New England, and California, writes about his collecting methods and experiences. In Brazil Judith Seeger immersed herself in a local rural environment, which enabled her to record ballads sung in their natural setting. She analyzes both the words and the music of her texts. Although it generally has been believed that in Mexico the *romance* has been supplanted by the *corrido*, Mercedes Díaz Roig presents a convincing case to the contrary. She reviews not only the role of the *romance* in Mexican culture but also the specific ballads that have kept reappearing and the particular characteristics of some of these versions. Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman, who have long been the recognized authorities on the Judeo-Spanish ballad tradition, survey in their essay the Sephardic ballad repertory, regional characteristics, ballad collecting, and principal collections of this important branch of the *romancero*. By way of conclusion, Beatriz Mariscal de Rhett discusses and illustrates how the functions and narrative structures of the *romances* that have survived over the centuries have been modified in response to the ever-changing social environment.

The *romance* line is usually eight syllables long with a stress on the seventh, although six-syllable forms are not uncommon. All have assonance (vowel rhyme) in alternating verses. *Romances* can also be written in long lines divided into two hemistichs, in which case every line is assonating. The same assonance is generally maintained throughout. Inasmuch as the *romance* is a narrative song, words and music are inseparable. The importance of the melody must not be underestimated despite our focus here

on poetic and narrative aspects. In its present-day state, however, recitation sometimes alternates with singing, or the *romance* may simply be recited.

Since the *romance* is an oral form, it bears no title; nor is there any standardized system for naming *romances*. Therefore, the same ballad may be referred to in more than one way. For this reason there is included an index of the titles of all of the ballads cited here, whether in Spanish, Portuguese, or English. All *romance* texts are accompanied by English translations, which have been kept as literal as possible. The bibliography at the end lists the works referred to in the ten essays.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dean Stuart M. Tave for the contribution of The Division of the Humanities of The University of Chicago to *Oral Tradition* for the publication of this number.

R. H. W.