

Oral Tradition and Hispanic Literature: Essays in Honor of Samuel G. Armistead. Edited by Mishael M. Caspi. (New York: Garland, 1995. Pp. 647, ISBN 0-8153-2062-0.)

Messod Salama

Volume 19, Number 2, 1997

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1087706ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1087706ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (print)

1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Salama, M. (1997). Review of [*Oral Tradition and Hispanic Literature: Essays in Honor of Samuel G. Armistead.* Edited by Mishael M. Caspi. (New York: Garland, 1995. Pp. 647, ISBN 0-8153-2062-0.)]. *Ethnologies*, 19(2), 188–190.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1087706ar>

Oral Tradition and Hispanic Literature: Essays in Honor of Samuel G. Armistead. Edited by Mishael M. Caspi. (New York: Garland, 1995. Pp. 647, ISBN 0-8153-2062-0.)

Although Professor Armistead has been the subject of a previous *Festschrift* (Gerli and Sharer 1992), this new, well-deserved homage accommodates the desire of overseas scholars and disciples to honour him. This present collection of essays bears testimony to Professor Armistead's extensive research, dealing with the Spanish epic, traditional pan-Hispanic poetry and Sephardic folklore.

In the first essay, Haya Bar Itzhak emphasizes the need to integrate into the analysis of hagiographic Jewish tales the nonverbal aspects that accompany the narration of these stories. Bar Itzhak found that the components of the performance, i.e. facial expressions, hand movements, and mimics which reoccur in these narratives, may contribute to a definition of the genre (p. 15-32). "*Suvenirs de la Vida: Life History Among Sephardic Jews*" (p. 33-66) can be considered an act of contrition and a belated recovery of family histories [*her stories*]. R. Benmayor regrets not having incorporated life anecdotes into her previous field research of Judeo-Spanish balladry in Seattle and Los Angeles. These narratives would have elucidated the link between ballad texts and the construction of social identity. They are related to the contextuality and social function of the *Romancero* and reveal the sensitivities of the tradition bearers, the centrality of women's role in Sephardic life, and the difficulties experienced by and frequent failure of the Levantine Sephardim to transmit their multilingual heritage in an American society valuing its homogeneity and ethnocentricity. J. A. Mauleón-Berlowitz advocates the study of musical documentation as a necessary aspect of the ballad-collecting process. In her essay (p. 67-80), she shows that a musicological analysis may provide a better understanding of the text. A case in point is provided by the contamination of the Sephardic ballad of Hero y Leandro by *la malcasada del pastor*.

The perpetuation of the legend of the ritual murder, and its adaptation in Chaucer's *The Prioress' Tale* and in the ballad of the *Jew's Daughter*, is the subject of Mishael Caspi and Debra Snyder's article (p. 81-160). The popularity of this myth reveals the persistence of the legend. The interdependence of oral and written sources can have harmful consequences on the history of ethnic and religious groups.

In the ongoing debate on the historicity of the *Poema de Mio Cid*, D. Catalán pursues the presentation of the Cid and his various enemies ("*El Mio Cid y su intencionalidad histórica*," p. 111-162) in a dense analysis. The anonymous poet shows a clear preference for the hero and his fellow border warriors rather than for the landlord aristocrats. The original intention of the poet is to celebrate the historical peace between the grandson of the Cid and Alfonso VII. The question of the specificity of regional branches of the pan-

Hispanic *Romancero* is raised by J. Antonio Cid. Most ballad singers switch their linguistic code to Castilian during their performance (p. 163-189).

An analysis of sexual connotations in Medieval Spanish literature has contributed to a better understanding of a number of works. Through a study of these euphemisms (p. 189-216), da Costa Fontes revisits the sincerity of the Arcipreste de Talavera Martínez de Toledo's much-questioned palinode in his misogynist and anti-courtly *Corbacho*.

The functional value of the *Romancero* and its various social uses have been credited in part for its survival. Some of these ballads are used as work songs especially during agricultural labour in the region of Belmonte. It is possible that the parallel structure of some of these *romances* may mirror the patterns of the rural tasks (M. Aliete Galhoz, p. 231-256). The *Poema de Mio Cid* as a unique work is tackled by E. M. Gerli (p. 257-270). This less-than-epic poem seems to emphasize the complexities and conflicting values of the characters rather than portraying a universal social order. This special interest in civil behaviour may have been adopted from the Medieval romance. Nationalism has often obscured the discussion of the Mexican *Corrido*. Its dependency on the Hispanic *Romancero* has been the subject of much debate. In his comparative study of the formulas applied to both the *Romancero* and forty-two *corridos*, W. H. González finds no similarities between these traditional genres. The *corrido* is also sung in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Bonamore Graves and H. Cohen found that the Mexican *corrido* has extended beyond its borders and that the Costa Rican tradition has generated new models (p. 291-322).

Sephardic folklore has been an area of predilection for Professor Armistead's research. Articles on Judeo-Spanish culture are therefore well represented. R. Haboucha analyzes The Midas Legend in one Sephardic folktale (p. 322-340). In this tale both the Greek legend and the revered figure of the Prophet Elijah are combined to install the value of *Tsedaka*, a concept erroneously translated as charity but encompassing major virtues such as righteousness and justice. By Judaizing the pagan myth, the Sephardic narrator follows a process of syncretism which ties the traditional concepts of Judaism to societal values. In "The Jezebel Paradigm" (p. 353-383), Krow-Lucal analyzes the demonization of the female epic characters, Doña Lambra and Doña Urraca.

According to Anahory Librowicz, the gravity of the sexual transgressions of some heroines seems to have influenced the structure of the ballads. If these transgressions are tolerated, the circular pattern of these songs ([an initial order], rupture through transgression, restoration of harmony through punishment) is retained. The protean image of Cid throughout the ages is analyzed by Beatriz Mariscal (p. 401-414). She studies the fictional encounter of the insolent young Cid with the Pope to prove this point. Rather than retaining a set of unalterable heroic features, the figure of the Cid is modified according to changing sensitivities.

In "As Recolhas Inéditas do Romancero Transmontano" (p. 415-444), Dias Marques presents a valuable catalogue of unpublished collections of ballads from this region of Portugal. Louise Mirrer applies so-called female and male language to the *Romance de Landarico* found in the sixteenth-century broadsheet (p. 523-547). When female characters use powerful language features, they are seen as subversive and subsequently serve to justify misogynist practices. *El Conde Claros Confesor*, strongly represented by 242 Pan-Hispanic and Portuguese versions, gave birth to a number of contaminated texts. In order to study the mechanisms that contribute to the retention of certain elements, B. do Nascimento analyzes the variants in the sequence of the confession of the princess.

Other subjects included in this volume deal with folktales in Costa Rica (p. 217-230), incest in Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza* (p. 583-602), the work of F. M. Luzes, collector of Breton folktales (p. 341-352), the art of Anglo-Scots balladry (p. 583-602), the short story in Costa Rica (p. 217-229) and *Conde Lucanor* (p. 469-496). The possible dependency of Jimena's prayer in the *Mio Cid* on the French epic model (p. 619-647) and the divergence and subsequent agreement of M. Machado and J. R. Jiménez concerning the concept of popular poetry (p. 603-617) are also analyzed.

This volume represents a fitting homage to Professor Armistead. The editor could have grouped these essays thematically. Some of the articles are unnecessarily long; nonetheless, the variety, breadth and number of contributions constitute a clear testimony to Professor Armistead's scholarly and didactic impact.

Reference Cited

Gerli, Michael, and Harvey L. Sharer (eds.). 1992. *Hispanic Medieval Studies in Honor of Samuel G. Armistead*. Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies.

MESSOD SALAMA
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, Newfoundland

Handbook of Medieval Sexuality. Edited by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage. (New York: Garland, 1996. Pp. ix + 426, Index, ISBN 0- 8153-1287-3 cloth.)

According to Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage, the editors of the *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, it has only been during the last two decades that medieval scholars have begun to turn their attention away from traditional