

Piñero Ramírez, Pedro M., and José Manuel Pedrosa. Prólogo de Giuseppe Di Stefano. *El romance del caballero al que la muerte aguardaba en Sevilla: historia, memoria y mito*. México: Frente de Afirmación Hispanista, 2017. 579 pp.

**Reviewed by:** Manuel da Costa Fontes  
Kent State University



In this beautifully printed, splendidly illustrated volume, Pedro Piñero Ramírez and José Manuel Pedrosa, two foremost experts on the oral tradition, go well beyond traditional ballad studies, presenting what amounts to a new method. They focus on *Yo me estaba allá en Coimbra*, also known as *La muerte del maestre de Santiago*, which tells how Pedro I of Castile had his illegitimate half brother, Don Fadrique, Grand Master of the Order of Santiago, assassinated on May 29, 1358. Although they were apparently on good terms – the Grand Master had just conquered Jumilla and the castle of Coimbra (Murcia) for the king – Don Fadrique had rebelled and fought against his brother on two occasions. The ballad, which was composed either by a popular poet or a minstrel as a *romance noticiero* soon after the assassination, turns the protagonist into a poor, innocent victim. Thus, besides bearing the news, the ballad also served as a propaganda tool, for it took the side of the House of Trastámara, which came to the throne eleven years later (1369) when Fadrique’s twin brother, Enrique, became king after killing Pedro with his own hands.

The book opens with what may be described as a traditional examination of the early and modern versions of this ballad. After being transmitted orally for almost two hundred years, the first known version appeared in Martín Nucio’s *Cancionero de romances sin año* (c. 1548), and was reprinted with few changes throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the common people never stopped singing it for, although relatively rare, the modern ballad, which was first collected by José Amador de los Ríos in Asturias between 1860 and 1865, has been recorded in the oral tradition of Northern and Western Spain and the Moroccan Sephardim until the twenty-first century.

In the early version (p43-44), the dead Don Fadrique himself, as if speaking from the grave,

explains how his brother, the king, invited him right after the conquest of Coimbra to tournaments in Seville. He travels quickly with a small group of his men, all of them festively dressed. Upon arriving in the city, he ignores warnings and goes immediately to his brother's quarters in the *alcázar*. When Pedro says that he has promised his head as a present ('aguinaldo'), Fadrique protests that he has never caused him any harm, but the king orders him immediately beheaded and has the head taken on a plate to his mistress, María de Padilla. María grabs it by the hair and throws it to Fadrique's mastiff ('alano'), which starts howling and places it on a dais. The king's aunt makes him realize that a bad woman has caused him to commit a terrible crime, and he has his mistress jailed.

The earliest and most detailed account, Pedro López de Ayala's *Crónica de don Pedro Primero* (c. 1400; 60-65), shows that the king's invitation to Seville, albeit without tournaments, and the fratricide, are the only historical elements; everything else is folkloric. There was no decapitation, no faithful dog, and María de Padilla had nothing to do with the murder (30-31). According to López de Ayala, she was a good woman and opposed it (62). The ballad's popularity is due to the pathos elicited by the details of the cruel fratricide, compounded by the fact that it begins with the innocent Fadrique himself telling the story of his own murder: "el romance se apartó de la historia para acercarse a los moldes de la literatura folclórica, renunciando a la historicidad, incluso a la verosimilitud, en favor del patetismo" (37). María de Padilla's reported utilization of the word "aguinaldo" to ask for the head has probably played an even more crucial role in the survival of the ballad until modern times. Despite its morbid character, young people sang it on Three Kings' Day (January 6) as an *aguinaldo*, when they went from door to door asking for a snack (105) which recalled the presents that the Magi brought to Baby Jesus.

The early renditions were quite popular, for they served as direct inspiration for five additional ballads, influencing several others as well (35). Some modern versions add that Fadrique is instructed to take a small escort on the way to Seville. The authors surmise that, since this motif appears in other ballads, it could well supplement our knowledge of the early tradition (246-255). I would like to add that, in all probability, the loyal dog's burial of his master's head in holy ground, by digging a hole with his feet, which appears frequently in the modern versions, also goes far back in time. On the other hand, Fadrique's appearance as a headless horseman in the version collected by Amador de los Ríos in the 1860s, "no puede ser más que indicio de alguna tradición legendaria latente" (450). In other words, the chances are that it represents an unrelated addition. That may not be the case with the damnation and practical transformation of María de Padilla into a witch, which is found only in this version: "Doña María de Pavilo / por los aires va volando, / por sus buenos procederres / no la quiere Dios ni el diablo" (49). The expression "doña María con toda su cuadrilla" (i.e., gang of demons) became proverbial (462) and, since Trastámara propaganda transformed her into an evil seductress, who had bewitched the king, she also became associated with love spells. These spells are well documented in inquisitorial trials from the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, reaching Brazil as early as 1715, when Antonia Maria, who had been deported from Portugal, confessed a similar incantation to the Inquisition (p467-477). Thanks to her adoption by Afro-Brazilian religions, Maria de Padilla was eventually transformed into a "diosa poderosísima" (478), remaining popular in that country to this very day: "hasta hoy se invoca en cuestiones de amores y en ocasiones de lo más diverso" (*ibid.*).

What we have seen so far fits well with the traditional approach to ballad studies; what follows amounts to a new method. Since the historical element plays such a small role in the ballad, the authors decided to focus on the importance of its folkloric aspect through a comparative study of the type and motifs that it incorporates. After all, the poem is almost completely composed of

“material folklórico-literario reciclado, cortado y ensamblado de manera ruda pero eficaz” (34). The central type, which provides the frame, is that of the murderous trap (“celada mortal”), according to which “un tirano llama a su corte, simulando afecto, a un joven incauto, a veces pariente o muy allegado, contra el que alimenta algún odio oculto, y para el que ha preparado una celada mortal, que ejecutarán por lo general sus esbirros” (80).

Pedro Piñero and José Manuel Pedrosa examine thirty-six examples of this type drawn from a variety of sources, ranging from the Bible and classical antiquity to modern times. These examples fit the pattern in varying degrees, however. Most come from ballads, but some were found in chronicles, epic poetry, plays, one short story, the folktale, and even modern media. The first example, of course, is the trap that Pedro used to murder his brother, as told in the ballad (Celada I, 73-83). The second example, Pedro’s assassination (1369) at the hands of another half brother, Enrique, thanks to a trap prepared by Bertrand Du Guesclin, is taken from López de Ayala’s chronicle (II, 84-92). In *Don Ramiro de Aragón*, Ramiro II, known as the Monk, summons the nobles who mocked him to court and beheads no less than fifteen (VIII, 174-177). Thus, there is more than one victim. In *Yo me fui para Vizcaya*, which is based on *Yo me estaba allá en Coimbra*, speaking from the grave, the dead Don Juan de Aragón, Pedro’s cousin, tells how the king had him trapped and killed (VI, 164-169). Although it also involves more than one victim, the ballad about the *Siete infantes de Lara* is similar, in the sense that the murders of the young men include a treacherous trap (XVI, 222-224, 295-297). Despite the existence of a learned ballad on the subject, the example involving Lamoral, Count of Egmont, and Philip de Montmorency, Count of Horn, is based on historical works. Both had served the Spanish crown with distinction, but opposed the introduction of the Inquisition to the Netherlands. In 1568, rather than following the example of William of Orange, who fled to Germany when the Duke of Alba was appointed regent, they accepted his friendly invitation to discuss matters of state, only to be imprisoned and decapitated publicly in Brussels (XXIII, p307-317). The account of Julius Caesar’s assassination derives from Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, where Brutus convinces him to ignore several evil omens to go to the Senate (XXVII, 368-371). In 1983, Benigno Aquino dismissed warnings not to return to his country after three years of exile, and was assassinated at the Manila International Airport as soon as he landed (XXXIV, 520).

The two examples that follow do not enclose a successful trap, but their presence is justified by the fact that they provide background on Fadrique’s murder. *Entre la gente se dice* reflects the rumor that he had an affair with Pedro’s wife, Blanca de Borbón, adding that she sent the child they had together to be raised secretly elsewhere. Informed of this, Pedro returns immediately to Seville and invites his brother to tournaments, thus presumably preparing the trap (III, 141-151). López de Ayala’s account of Fadrique’s assassination fails to mention the Seville tournaments but, in another part of his chronicle, he writes that, fearing for his life, Fadrique decided not to participate in tournaments Pedro had held in Tordesillas two years before (V, 157-163).

In some examples, though already trapped, the intended victims still manage to escape. When Bernardo del Carpio accepts the invitation extended by his uncle, Alfonso II of Asturias, to go to court, he takes enough men along and is thus able to foil the trap (XVIII, 231-235). In *El rey invidioso de su sobrino*, the nephew also escapes his murderous uncle (XX, 242-245). When the Prior of San Juan realizes that Alfonso XI invited him to dinner in order to have him killed, he finds an excuse to go to the kitchen, exchanges clothes with the cook, and escapes on a magic horse (XIX, 237-241).

In other instances, albeit successful, the traps do not lead to death. In *En Arjona estaba el duque*, John II sends for an unsuspecting noble, Fadrique de Castro, and has him jailed (IV, 152-

156). In another ballad, Alfonso II, angry with Bernardo del Carpio's father because he had married his sister secretly, draws him to court and has him thrown in prison (VII, 170-173). *El sumario del despensero*, a fifteenth-century chronicle, tells how Enrique III summons the archbishop of Toledo and the most important nobles, who were robbing him, threatens to have all killed, but confiscates their property instead (IX, 178-183). In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c. 1136-1139), Elidurus the Dutiful, legendary king of the Britons, wants to return the throne to his brother Archgallo, who had been deposed. He feigns to be sick, invites the nobles to the palace, and orders that they come in to see him one by one, alleging that noise bothers him. Each noble is threatened with decapitation if he refuses to pledge allegiance to Archgallo, and they acquiesce (Celada X, 184-188).

And then there are examples without traps. In *Quéjome de vos, el rey*, the widow of the Count of Guimarães complains to John II of Portugal for having her innocent husband killed because of false witnesses (XIII, 198-203). According to two ballads, the king of Portugal returns from Ceuta when he hears about the death of Inês de Castro, whose name is changed to Isabel de Liar, in order to avenge her assassination (XIV, 204-213). In the Sephardic *El duque de Bernax*, a ballad about the death of Álvaro de Luna in 1453, the duke knows perfectly well that John II's summons means that he is going to be executed (XVII, 225-230). In a Ceylonese folktale, a young man discovers that the woman he is about to marry is his mother only when she tells him about her life (XXVIII, 371-373). In *El conde Alarcos*, the king orders the count to kill his wife so that he can marry his daughter (XXIX, 399-404). Once again, there is no trap.

It is probably best to survey the examples taken from Lope de Vega, Shakespeare and Jorge Luis Borges separately. In Lope's *El caballero de Olmedo*, Don Alonso, a nobleman from Olmedo, falls in love with Inés, who had been promised to Don Rodrigo de Medina, and is killed in an ambush prepared by his jealous rival (XXII, 298-306). After noting several coincidences with the ballad, the authors conclude that, even though it is impossible to show that Lope could have had it or a similar story in mind, "De lo que no se puede dudar, desde lo que nos han revelado tantos tópicos y genes compartidos, es de que algún tipo de parentesco hubo entre ellos" (306).

In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Lord William Hastings, believing in the friendship of his distant cousin Richard, who is still a duke, obeys his summons to come to court in London, and is beheaded; thus, his fate is similar to Don Fadrique's. Later, already crowned king, Richard is abandoned by some of his noble allies during the battle of Bosworth, and is killed by his rival, the future Henry VII. The authors point out that Pedro I also suffers an important defeat at Montiel, is killed soon after by his brother, thanks to the trap set by Du Guesclin, and that there are additional similarities, such as omens and the treatment of the corpses (XXIV, 338-346). The conclusion is that the stories of Pedro I and Richard III could well have been influenced by motifs "del río proceloso del folclore" (346), and that "Esa es la única manera de explicar, creemos, tantas y tan notables coincidencias" (*ibid.*).

In another of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth*, the eponymous protagonist, a general, invites his Scottish king, Duncan, to a banquet, stabs him while he sleeps, and usurps the crown (XXV, 347-349). Thinking that another general, Banquo, is a dangerous rival, Macbeth invites him to a feast, and ambushes and kills him while he is on the way (XXVI, 349-351). Thus, these two murderous traps correspond to what happened to Don Fadrique.

Jorge Luis Borges's *Emma Zunz* is used as an example because Emma makes an appointment under false pretenses with Loewenthal, whom she blames for her father's suicide, and then shoots him dead (XXXVI, 528-529). Although there is no king, what we have here is another trap that is not the case with another, unnumbered example, taken from Gabriel García Márquez's

*Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (521). Since the two brothers who planned to kill Santiago Nasar for deflowering their sister announce their intentions to the whole town, there is no tra

The international folktale of *The Donkey without a Heart* (ATU 50 + 52), in the version versified by Juan Ruiz in the *Libro de buen amor* (1330 and 1343) as a warning to ladies against men (cc. 893-903), is printed twice, first as one of the primary sources (68-69), and then at the beginning of a separate chapter: angry with an innocent, unsuspecting donkey, the lion sends the fox to invite him to a party, has him imprisoned as soon as he arrives, and then kills him (XXX, 487-494). Besides coinciding with the ballad, which encloses an implicit condemnation of the king, Juan Ruiz's versified trap may also be directed against the perceived tyranny of Alfonso XI of Castile, Pedro I's father, because of his bloody repression of the nobles (493-494). Since the tale is already documented in the *Pantchatantra*, the type goes back to time immemorial, and we find it repeated in *Little Red Riding Hood* (ATU 333), the story of the little girl who is trapped and devoured by the wolf disguised as her grandmother (XXXV, 527-528).

As we have seen, the thirty-six examples fit the postulated type or frame in varying degrees. In some, the traps do not exist and, when they do, they do not always lead to death; in others, the intended victims manage to escape. The number of victims can increase from one to several. Some, such as Julius Caesar, Pedro I, and Benigno Aquino are far from being careless, innocent young men. Little Red Riding Hood is a little girl. In the examples with historical characters, the similarities to the type could well be a matter of coincidence. Finally, although the donkey in Juan Ruiz's story may stand for the victims of the tyrannical Alfonso XI, he is still a donkey.

Notwithstanding the differences we have observed, however, the examples presented are connected by a great number of motifs. These include letters of invitation ("cartas traidoras"), festivities, tournaments, dinners and banquets, feigned illnesses, small escorts, hurried travel, omens such as river crossings, death of a page, fallen animal, loss of a weapon, and other ignored warnings, followed by evil queens, assassins, beheadings, faithful dogs, ghosts, witches, and headless horsemen. The book offers an erudite, detailed discussion of these motifs, with abundant documentation from numerous, profusely quoted sources. Since the motifs appear in disparate narratives from different times and places, there is no question that their appearance in *La muerte del maestro de Santiago* is a matter of cross pollination.

According to Pedro Piñero and José Manuel Pedrosa, this applies to the basic frame or type as well; there is no question that it is repeated over and over, albeit in varying degrees. Many more examples could have been examined but, had the authors chosen to do so, "el libro que tiene el lector delante no hubiera llegado nunca a su fin" (519). The comparison between the *Donkey without a Heart* and the ballad receives such emphasis because, in their opinion, "ambos pudieron beber [...] del manantial del folclore común" (31). Although they know that "Siempre habrá críticos [...] que defiendan que las analogías pueden ser más producto de la casualidad o del azar que del imán de la tradición" (523), and also ask themselves at times whether the similarities between some examples are a matter of "¿casualidad o dependencia genética?" (188), they are convinced that the type goes back to times immemorial, being told "mucho antes . . . de que la escritura hiciese su aparición sobre la faz de la tierra" (487). Whether readers agree with them, or not, there is no question that they have accomplished what they set out to do: "Del romance de *La muerte del maestro de Santiago* podremos afirmar, cuando cerremos el examen de su mecanismo, que casi todo en él es material folclórico-literario reciclado, cortado y ensamblado de manera ruda pero eficaz" (34). Last but not least, this is a rich, thought provoking book, and will serve as an inspiration for many future studies.