

BOOK REVIEWS

Judeo-Spanish Ballads from New York. Collected by Mair Jose Benardette. Edited by Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman. Pp. 149. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. \$17.95.

Reviewed by Annette B. Fromm

Mair Jose Benardette came to America in 1910 from the dissolving Ottoman Empire. As the first Turkish-born Sephardic Jew to become accredited as a public school teacher in the United States,¹ he went on to lead a distinguished teaching career at Brooklyn College. Much of his academic energy was dedicated to mining the resources of Sephardic culture which were transplanted to this country in the first decades of the twentieth century. Articles about Sephardic culture and folklore by Benardette appeared in the Judeo-Spanish newspapers of New York. His historic work **Hispanic Culture and Character of the Sephardic Jews** was a ground-breaking book which delved into the ethos and history of a people who in the twentieth century were again searching for a home only to choose one in which the most vital aspect of their identity was questioned by their own co-religionists. Angel was correct in writing that Benardette "has served as a spokesman of Sephardic culture, the culture of which he himself was part."²

In 1923 Benardette wrote "Los romances Judeo-españoles de Nueva York" as his M.A. thesis at Columbia University. The collection upon which the thesis was based came from immigrants from the entire Mediterranean basin, from Turkey to Morocco, from the islands close to the Anatolian shores as well as the communities of what is now Greece and Yugoslavia. The wide geographic distribution of variants is an important aspect of the collection. The ballads were, for the most part, collected fresh, just before the effects of modernization worked toward reducing the repertoires of the best singers. Thirty-nine ballads from this thesis are now available in this volume edited with care by Armistead and Silverman.

Samuel G. Armistead and Joseph H. Silverman have devoted many years to a partnership dedicated to the exploration of the Sephardic ballad. Their untiring work has led them to singers of Sephardic ballads, to archives massed by other collectors, and to other archival materials in Europe and America for documentation which helped to establish the historical-cultural setting of the corpus of ballads with which they have worked. They are eminently qualified to edit this small volume. Their scholarship is reflected in the careful, in-depth notes which accompany the introduction to the ballads collected by Benardette. This introduction immerses the reader in the complexity of Sephardic ballad scholarship undertaken by scholars on three continents. In particular, a detailed skeleton of the history of this field of study in the United States, placing Benardette's work at the forefront of the deluge which followed in a steady stream from the 30s to the present, has been brought together in the introduction.

Along with the texts of thirty-nine ballads, the editors provide English abstracts for each respective text giving information on regional variants. They have exhausted not only the literature on the Sephardic ballad but also on the Hispanic ballad in general in providing extensive comparative notes for each text. An extensive bibliography of both published and unpublished works is furnished. The thematic classification places the ballads of the collection into categories based upon themes common to other European ballads. The significance of this lies in the relation of the Sephardic ballad to the wider sphere of Pan-European ballad scholarship. Indices of titles and first verses are included, aiding the reader in finding a particular text. As the Judeo-Spanish in which these ballads were performed has adopted words from Turkish, Hebrew and Arabic, a glossary of this specialized vocabulary is provided to help alleviate difficulties in understanding texts in which they are found.

This thin book makes available a collection of ballads made almost sixty years ago by an impeccable collector working in his own community. It is an important addition to the library of works on the Judeo-Spanish ballad, as well as of interest to the scholar of Sephardic folklore, the European ballad and ethnic folklore.

NOTES

1. Mair Jose Benardette, **Hispanic Culture and Character of Sephardic Jews** (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, second edition, 1982).
2. Ibid.

The English Mummers' Play. By Alex Helm. Foreword by N. Peacock and E. C. Cawte. Pp. 116. The Folklore Society Mistletoe Series, vol. 14, 1980. \$45.00. Cloth.

Calus: Symbolic Transformation in Romanian Ritual. By Gail Kligman. Foreword by Mircea Eliade. Pp. 209. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. No Price.

Reviewed by Paul L. Tylor.

Why review these two books together? Because they provide a similarity in subject matter and a contrast in substance. Alex Helm and Gail Kligman are offering us in-depth studies of seasonal rituals acted out in European country villages by troupes of disguised or costumed men. These ritual actors present a scripted performance: that is, a performance with a traditional form and content known by both the actors and their audience. There are further similarities between the English Mummers' Play and the Romanian Calus. In both, a fool and a female impersonator are important characters. In many variants, the death and resurrection of one of the characters is a central feature of the dramatic action. In both England and Romania the stage of the performance is the community itself as the troupe of actors make their rounds of the village and give their performance in homes, yards, or other fixed spots.

There are on the other hand some key differences between the two ritual traditions. The English Mummers present a play text of rhymes mixed with much stylized action.