

“LA MUERTE ME ESTÁ BUSCANDO; JUNTO A TI VIDA SERÍA”: THE CLOCKWORK OF TEMPORALITY IN THE BALLAD *EL ENAMORADO Y LA MUERTE*

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Abstract

This research examines how the temporal configuration in Menéndez Pidal's version of *El enamorado y la muerte* redefines its meaning. Time generates narrative and symbolic meaning through heterochrony, specifically the coexistence and conflict of temporalities (*Chronos*, *Aion*, and variants of *Kairos*) that compose a treatise on the phenomenology of time. Through a semiotic-comparative analysis of this version and its virtual program, the analysis suggests a framework based on liminality, ambiguity, and temporal reterritorialization, which determines the architecture of time. Ultimately, heterochrony may emerge as a generative principle, rooted in premodern versions and later crystallized in the modern imaginary.

Keywords: *heterochrony, Chronos, Aion, Kairos, Balladry, temporal liminality.*

Introduction

Recent discussions on heterochrony and plural temporality question the idea of time as a single, linear dimension and emphasize the coexistence of multiple temporalities. Most of these studies focus on modern narratives, while oral and premodern forms remain comparatively neglected. The current article addresses this gap by examining the tradition of the Spanish ballad *El enamorado y la muerte* (The Lover and Death) as a site of heterochronic tension, based on the version of Menéndez Pidal. A semiotic-comparative reading of the ballad suggests that

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the ballad constructs a structured conflict between temporalities in a symbolic dimension. From this approach, Spanish Balladry thus becomes relevant to current debates on temporal plurality.

1. Theoretical frame and methodology

Our corpus is mainly based on *Flor nueva de romances viejos* (New flower of old ballads) by Menéndez Pidal [Menéndez Pidal 1928], *Pan-Hispanic Ballad Project* by Suzanne Petersen and *Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews* by Samuel Armistead [Armistead n. d.].

As for our methodology, among the approaches commonly employed in the study of Spanish Balladry¹, we have opted for a close reading, semiotic and comparative analysis. Within this frame, we will focus on Mercedes Díaz Roig's theory of the marvellous, which lies in the expulsion from "novelized reality in order to immerse ourselves in a marvellous atmosphere where the narrated events break the laws of the real world" [Díaz Roig 1977: 47]. With regard to the semiotic analysis of the text, we take as our point of departure Diego Catalán's studies on symbolism. To this end, we draw on the general reflections developed in *Arte poética del Romancero Oral* (The poetics of the oral balladry) by Catalán [1997, 1998] and refer specifically to the chapters "Semiotic analysis of open structures: The 'Ballad' model" [Catalán 1997: 143–157] and "Symbolic meanings" [Catalán 1998: 174–184].

We will also focus on the actantial and functional structure of the ballad. The former structure, according to Catalán, is made up of "more general and abstract structures [...] [in which the characters are] identified merely with the major roles of the 'grammar of narrative'" [Catalán et al. 1984: 25]. The latter structure, on the other hand, determines the "functional structure", "in which the roles of the *dramatis personae* and the actions of the characters are integrated to offer the receiver a unified message" [Catalán 1997: 153].

Our terminological framework primarily follows Catalán's proposals [Catalán et al. 1984; Catalán 1997]. We define a "version" as "each of the recitations of a ballad collected from the oral tradition" [Catalán 1997: 1]. Each "tradition" of a ballad consists of a set of versions characteristic of a specific geographical region. The *dramatis personae*, "while initially lacking individuality, typify categories of human beings, semantically definable through a bundle of distinctive traits" [Catalán 1997: 150]. The "virtual program" of a ballad refers to the set – latent in each version – of variations present in all versions of a ballad; that is, all

¹ Those approaches are: formalist analysis (which has led to electronic approaches), quantitative, synchronic, diachronic, semiotic, comparative, dynamic models, historicist, categorical unconscious, and the sociological-anthropological approach.

its expressive possibilities. This proposes a “decoding” of the text, relying on the reader’s capacity to unveil the indexical dimension of ballad elements inserted into the collective memory, making them intelligible to the receiver. Therefore, the ultimate and deep meaning of the text is considered the “deep grammar” of the ballad.

With regard to the analysis of time, heterochrony can be defined as the coexistence of distinct temporalities within a single historical moment or text. Besides, we employ notions drawn from *Filosofías del tiempo: un recorrido por la historia de la filosofía* (Philosophies of time: A journey through the history of philosophy) by A. Alonso Enguita [Alonso Enguita 2021]. Specifically, we work with a temporal architecture primarily based on the temporal concepts of *Chronos*, *Aion*, Christian *Kairos*, Greek *Kairo*, Christian Eternity, Providence, and *Moirá*. The philosophical categories function as hermeneutic and analytical frameworks. Consequently, the present reading should be understood not as an attempt to reconstruct a fixed or original meaning, but as an interpretive model aimed at rendering legible the heterochronic structures activated by the ballad. Accordingly, other interpretive configurations remain possible within the openness of the ballad tradition.

With regard to language and translation, for the sake of editorial consistency and to ensure accessibility, the manuscript has been mostly standardized in English. Consequently, all citations from non-English sources are presented here in English, except the original text in Spanish of the ballad.

2. Contextualization of the ballad

The popular ballad *El enamorado y la muerte* is an old and rare ballad from the Spanish ballad tradition. As demonstrated by Catalán [Catalán 1970], the origins of the ballad are located in the erudite Juan de la Enzina’s poem *Yo me estaba reposando* [I was resting] found in *Cancionero de las obras de Juan del Enzina* [Songbook of the works of Juan del Enzina] (1496). The collective voice inserted and adapted the ballad – making relative adjustments and changes – into the popular tradition of northeastern Spain (Asturias, León, Zamora, and mainly Catalonia). Besides this, the ballad was also sung among the Sephardic communities of Greece.

Menéndez Pidal’s composite version recovers the ballad, combining two popular versions as a model: the 1910 *Sanabresa* version and the Catalan version recorded by Milá y Fontanals [Catalán 1970: 53]. Menéndez Pidal’s version was published in his work *Flor nueva de romances viejos* [Menéndez Pidal 1928]. This composite reinterpretation re-entered the oral tradition and became widespread as the reference version in Spanish America.

Menéndez Pidal's ballad reads as follows [Menéndez Pidal 1928]:

*Un sueño soñaba anoche, soñito del alma mía,
soñaba con mis amores, que en mis brazos los tenía.
Vi entrar señora tan blanca, muy más que la nieve fría.
—¿Por dónde has entrado, amor? ¿Cómo has entrado, mi vida?
Las puertas están cerradas, ventanas y celosías.
—No soy el amor, amante: la Muerte que Dios te envía.
—¡Ay, Muerte tan rigurosa, déjame vivir un día!
—Un día no puede ser, una hora tienes de vida.
Muy deprisa se calzaba, más deprisa se vestía;
ya se va para la calle, en donde su amor vivía.
—¡Ábreme la puerta, blanca, ábreme la puerta, niña!
—¿Cómo te podré yo abrir si la ocasión no es venida?
Mi padre no fue al palacio, mi madre no está dormida.
—Si no me abres esta noche, ya no me abrirás, querida;
la Muerte me está buscando, junto a ti vida sería.
—Vete bajo la ventana donde labraba y cosía,
te echaré cordón de seda para que subas arriba,
y si el cordón no alcanzare mis trenzas añadiría.
La fina seda se rompe; la Muerte que allí venía:
—Vamos, el enamorado, que la hora ya está cumplida.*

According to Catalán [1970: 53, 54], the differences not endorsed by tradition but introduced by the scholar are as follows. On one hand, the verse "next to you, it would be life" replaces "perhaps she wouldn't find me". He is also inspired by the presence of hair in the oral tradition for the introduction of "braids". Likewise, "the fine silk breaks; / Death who was coming there" replaces the Catalan verses "if the silk were thin, / the cord would break." Furthermore, he concludes the ballad at the moment of the Lover's death, without including the episode of the hermit, which is typical of most Peninsular versions. These additions and modifications will be essential for the analysis of the ballad.

3. "Un sueño soñaba anoche, soñito del alma mía": The temporal frame – liminality, ambiguity, and temporal reactualization

In the analysis of the poem's different traditions, interests vary. In general terms, the old branches emphasize the following: the Sephardic tradition highlights gender differences [Catalán 1970: 49]; Juan de la Enzina's ballad focuses on troubadour

codes and the inner feelings of the lover; and popular Peninsular tradition links the troubadour tradition with religious reflection².

By contrast, the modern branches focus on the following: Pidal's version emphasizes the race against Death; the Mexican versions assume this latter approach but evolve in a particular line, associated with cultural features.

Amidst the variety of paths taken by the different traditions of the ballad, the expression of time is especially highlighted in the composite version. The ballad emphasizes movement and temporality, drawing attention to the actions of the Lover through the continuous presence and relevance of time. Specifically:

- In the temporal space of the dream and the night: "I dreamt a dream last night"
- Regarding the temporal deadline, his request: "Oh, Death so rigorous, let me live one day," the concession: "one hour of life you have," and its fulfilment: "for the hour is fulfilled"
- The haste: "Very quickly he put on his shoes, even faster he dressed"
- The temporal inadequacy: "if the occasion has not come," or the temporal adequacy: "Let's go, lover, for the hour is fulfilled"
- The legibility of the Lover's remaining time though the omen of the lover's destiny
- The symbolic representation of times in the *dramatis personae*
- And, in short, the temporal composition through verb tenses

However, these elements occupy different spaces and functions in the poem as they are organized on different levels, as we will analyse throughout our work.

3.1. Liminality

In both popular and composite versions, while it is understood that the poetic self is a common man belonging to the natural world, the ballad establishes its foundations in the realm of the marvellous. For instance, the temporal location of the night and the dream, "I dreamt a *dream* last *night*," introduces the listener to spaces associated with the marvellous, inscribing it within a vast tradition of magical

² Although time is also depicted in the popular tradition of northeastern Spain – inspired by Juan de la Enzina's ballad – the primary focus remains on the troubadour motif. This is evident, firstly, in the troubadour question: *He who dies for love – is his soul lost?* Secondly, the poem draws inspiration from the ballad *La pregunta a un ermitaño*. Moreover, the version from Sanabresa conclude with the ballads *El alma peregrina y el caballero piadoso* and *La penitencia de Don Rodrigo*, highlighting the ethical resolution of the troubadour question. Few versions in the popular tradition place significant emphasis on urgency or temporality; instead, they develop an alternative ending involving a hermit.

discourse. Thus, the setting itself places the listener in a liminality, in a human and real world where the irruption of the marvellous becomes perceptible.

Likewise, all the objects in the text exist in a state of threshold tension, always between their limitation and their transgression. The Lover's bedroom is closed: "the doors are locked, / windows and lattices" but Death breaks into it. The guarded room of the Beloved is also closed: "How can I open for you / If the occasion has not come?", yet the Lover still attempts to enter it.

Similarly, the starting point of the ballad – the Lover's recollection of the night – consolidates itself as another threshold. This may create a paradox, as the ballad is narrated by the Lover *after* the night: "I dreamt a dream *last night*", and yet, it concludes with the Lover's death on that very same night. In this way, the listener would not know if the narrator is alive or dead by the end of the ballad. This leads the listener to conceive time as fluid and indefinite; the experience of the ballad leads them to confusion. It is unclear if the dream continues throughout the poem or stops when Death first enters the Lover's bedroom. Thus, the Lover finds himself temporally immersed in the night and the dream, without knowing with certainty if these begin or end, in a spatio-temporal limbo.

Consequently, the position of the Lover in memory imposes greater distance and amplifies the liminality in the event, since "Remembrance, on the contrary, like fantasy, offers us a mere evocation that re-presents" [Husserl 2002: [41], 63]³. The way Deleuze interprets the past as a new territorialization is of interest here, as "the past, this is the key, is not fixed, it is under constant revision. Deleuze would speak of a new territorialization [...] it is a virtual past, it is a past that is written virtually, that changes its syntax after the event, after each of them" [Alonso Enguita 2021: 136]. This position of the ballad on the threshold grants it a spectral character, where time occurs and does not occur, and all time is nothing more than a ghost of its own possibilities.

3.2. Ambiguity

This is not the only resource through which the listener and the reciter are prevented from situating themselves in a secure position where they can foresee the ballad's development. On the contrary, the ballad uses another paradox to destabilize them and put them in the narrator's shoes: the paradoxical ending of Pidal's creation: "The fine *silk breaks*, / *Death* who was coming *there*."

At the same moment that the silk cord breaks (an element whose symbolism can belong to both the human and the marvellous world, the symbolic meaning of which we will see later), Death arrives (marvellous personification), fulfilling *a fortiori* the prophecy of Death. Although a large part of the references in the ballad point to

³ For further detail, see the chapter *Fantasy* [Alonso Enguita 2021: 164–169].

the idea of the inexorability of Death, it remains unclear to the listener which reason the Lover's death obeys: a terrestrial accident or the supernaturally ordained death.

The limits of a primary dialectic posed by the ballad between the human world and the marvellous are blurred, creating a truly brilliant diffuse interplay between possible readings within the symbol, which will unfold carefully in the ballad. In this ambiguity lies the key position of the listener regarding the ballad, unstable between the marvellous-divine reading and the human one. The former explains the Lover's death through divine decree, the latter through his own fall. Both readings are functional in the ballad, but they situate the listener in two different dimensions, reconciled in the text.

3.3. Temporal reactualization: The reciter, the listener, and the autodiegetic narrator

Both previous points place us before a crucial question we have already been hinting at: how do liminality and ambiguity affect the listener and the reciter? That is, what temporal projection exists in the process of production and reception of the ballad? Thus, it is interesting to recover the concept of territorialization, applying it to the temporalities generated through performance. The potential possibilities for reactualization are multiple, limited by the referential reality of the poem.

Initially, the autodiegetic "I" invites both the reciter and the listener to inhabit the Lover's temporality. From this position, they may opt for one of the temporal reading possibilities the text proposes, assume them, or resolve them. Thus, the possibilities of human time, marvellous time, or the maintenance of coincident temporal ambiguity unfold. Here, the external subject decides the temporality of the text and interprets it. The reciter does this, for example, through tone, musicality, voice modulation, intentional communication...; the listener does so through their gesture while listening, the audience's cognitive processing of the ballad, the formation of a framework of expectations while the text unfolds, etc.

Thus, they themselves are carriers and generators of temporal meaning, since the "I is traversed, divided by time, prior to it as its support and mediated by it as a phenomenon" [Alonso Enguita 2021: 269]. The same logic applies to the autodiegetic narrator, as he is definitely divided between various times. We are facing a functioning of the text's temporal logic that transcends its own textual limits, which intensifies the blurring of the Lover and entails a greater identification of the listener and the reciter with the autodiegetic narrator.

From a broad panorama, such individual recitations construct communal ones or the macro-context, that is, the historical traditions of the ballad, which are divergent in their interpretation of temporality from other traditions.

To summarize, on a double plane of enunciation, both inner and the external characters engage in temporal reactualization and propose temporal reterritorializations. The Lover, cognitively structures time from memory and dream, meaning from fantasy. In contrast, the external subject – in this case, the listener and the reciter – appropriates the voice of the internal subject and reactualizes his temporality.

In conclusion, in the composite version, the temporal marks start composing a temporality framework in which time is initially conceived as liminal and ambiguous. The Lover remains trapped in the liminality between life and death. He is neither dead nor alive, and yet he is simultaneously dead and alive. Furthermore, liminality is accentuated by the ambiguity covering the ballad, as the external subject stands halfway between paradoxes and different readings. Now, how is temporality defined within the framework?

4. "Un día no puede ser, una hora tienes de vida". The nature of temporality in the ballad: *Chronos* and *Aion*

For the analysis, let us follow the textual narration. First, the Lover is suspended in the daydream of his love, in a state of temporal suspension: "dreaming of my loves / that I held them in my arms". Let us remember here that the bedroom often symbolizes the soul and the inner state. We are, therefore, in full amorous evocation, withdrawal from time, and inner recollection. Likewise, the specific evocation and daydream of the beloved, the fantasy, introduces us to a time that is the "qualitative and immeasurable time of duration" [Alonso Enguita 2021: 88], into a temporal dynamic characterized as *Aion*.

During this time, the transfiguration of the figure of his sweetheart into Death, "I saw a woman enter, so pale / much paler than cold snow" who breaks into the Lover's inner state, sinks the temporary gravity of the poem, and forces the Lover to consciousness. Firstly, the Lover's destiny becomes intelligible and his *Chronos* advances inexorably, which we understand as "objective, measurable, and homogeneous time" [Alonso Enguita 2021: 88], and "it is present, but finite, relative present" [ibid.: 89]. Secondly, by waking him from the daydream, Death also reveals to the Lover that the *Aion* he was dreaming of was a virtual and unreal temporality, merely a phantasmagoria. It is an *Aion* projected in fantasy and not belonging to the Lover's reality, "a mere evocation that re-presents" [Husserl 2002: [41], 63].

At this point, the first thing the Lover does is turn to time. The ballad continues with the request for a deadline of one day of life:

"Oh, Death so rigorous, *let me live one day.*"

Among others, in our version Death refuses:

"One day it cannot be: *one hour of life you have.*"

This destined time must be understood within the logic of the inexorability of Death, which leads the poem towards a divine, juridical, and sacred temporality. Thus, when the Lover asks for more human time than he is allowed, she denies it: “One day *it cannot be*”, since it is impossible to alter the divine decree.

So, how is the concession of the deadline by Death explained? To understand it in depth, we must turn to the virtual program of the ballad. We follow Catalán here, who reminds us that variants offer valuable information in the interpretation of motifs [Catalán 1998: 174–184]. Let us look at the poetic structure of the popular versions. In them, the appearance of Death is linked to the scene immediately preceding, in which the Lover evokes his loves (“I dreamt of my loves, / that I held them in my arms”). In the troubadour context, this implied a troubadour question about the Lover’s state of sin: “He who dies for love – is his soul lost?”.

Thus, Death grants him only one hour, whose purpose is to offer a moral time for “Extreme Unction”, that is, repentance for his sin before the imminence of his death (Galende version 1910)⁴:

*By God I ask you, Death, / leave me another day,
for I want to confess, / to repent if I could.*

Death offers him a deadline of one hour, which he must use to achieve Christian eternity. Thus, we interpret that, ultimately, it is a Christian *Kairos*. He is offered the opportune moment for his salvation, which is “God himself acting [...] it is the moment that must be seized and used, and this will be our responsibility” [Alonso Enguita 2021: 125]. In this way, *Kairos* becomes “an exercise of divine will” [ibid.: 126].

However, in the Pidal ballad, the Lover rejects this Christian *Kairos* and, instead, goes to his beloved. Thus, the symbolic autonomy of the poem dispenses with limiting itself to the troubadour and moral question and opens up into a broader dialogue with deeper symbolic meanings.

The poetic structure of the Sephardic versions gives us another interpretive key that will enrich the analysis. In these versions, the temporal deadline is substituted by a bet with Death [Catalán 1970: 49]:

*So may you live, Death, / that you grant me life,
when for a moment I go / to see a friend I had.
If the friend speaks to me, / you will grant me life,
if the friend does not speak to me, / do with me what you wanted*

⁴ Galende Version (Mun. Galende, formerly Puebla de Sanabria, Jud. Dist. Puebla de Sanabria, *Comarca* of Sanabria, Zamora, Spain). Recited by a woman. Collected by Tomás Navarro Tomás, 00/00/1910 (Archive: ARMPG; Coll.: Navarro Tomás, T.). Published in Catalán 1970b, pp. 41–42. 80 hemistichs. Music recorded.

This branch of the tradition may indicate that the temporal deadline can be replaced; merely a functional element articulated around relation to the deep grammar of the ballad. Therefore the Lover may not be willing to assume the logic and the divine decree. It may be an act of rebellion by the human being against the divine being. This conflict between the marvellous and the human dimensions contributes again to the blurring of time and the threshold space.

Further on, the consciousness of *Chronos* temporality becomes inverted and regressive: a "countdown". Therefore, haste presses: "*Very quickly* he put on his shoes, / *even faster* he dressed" and time seems to concentrate on the character's action and not on divine time, which persists as a present threat. In this way, the Lover, driven by the pressure of his *Chronos*, goes to the house of his sweetheart:

"Open the door for me, white one, / open the door for me, girl"

And she refuses to receive him:

"How can I open for you / if the occasion has not come?"

This refusal is posed as a social impossibility: "My father did not go to the palace, / my mother is not asleep", but it resolves as a temporal impossibility: "If you don't open for me *tonight*, / you will *never* open for me, dear". That precise night is established as the only possible scenario for the amorous encounter.

Despite the fact that the majority of Peninsular versions in the virtual program choose the solution of religious burden, one version makes both episodes coincide, placing both motifs on the same level. In this one, the Lover promises Death the Extreme Unction and asks to enjoy the company of his beloved for the last time [Catalán 1970: 27]⁵:

"Oh Death so rigorous / give me one [more] day of life
to confess and take communion / and to see my dear one".

Critics have explained this solution by qualifying the Lover as a hypocrite [Catalán 1970: 27]. However, this interpretation may be enriched with a deeper motivation on the part of the Lover: instead of entering the logic of *Chronos* and saving his soul, perhaps the Lover also intends, just as in the Sephardic versions, to bet his life on other terms. In this case, perhaps he attempts to alter the temporal logic in which he finds himself, by suspending chronological time and constructing an amorous *Aion*. Let us see how.

⁵ 0081:1 El enamorado y la Muerte (i-a) (Entry no.: 7961) Sant Gervasi Version (*Comarca* of Garraf, Barcelona, Auton. Comm. of Catalonia, Spain). Documented in or before 1882. (Coll.: Milà i Fontanals, M.). Published in Milà 1882, no. 240, pp. 211–213. 58 hemistichs. Music not recorded.

The Lover only convinces his sweetheart when he makes the death omen explicit: “Death *is looking for me*, / next to you *life would be*.” He makes his destiny and his *Chronos* perceptible to her. At the same time, the Lover opposes the vital time shared with his beloved (“life would be”) against death (“Death is looking for me”). This follows the logic of the troubadour tradition, for if romantic disillusionment is a metaphorical death, the amorous encounter may be a giver of life. In this opposition, it makes sense to locate *Aion*, since we understand said time as a qualitative time that symbolizes the “god of life [...] it closes in on itself, is infinite present, is constant return and repetition” [Alonso Enguita 2021: 89]. Within this framework, *Aion* thus would appear as a vital temporality, just as the poem acknowledges. Likewise, it is also the victor over *Chronos* and Death, since *Aion* is “son of Zeus, that is, he is the son of the one who dethrones *Kronos*, god of time” [ibid.: 115].

Therefore, to reach *Aion*, the Lover tries to create an event⁶, an impossible *Kairos*. The Greek *Kairos*, in opposition to the Christian one, is the opportunity that demands precise measure and exactly in its recognition man decides his destiny [Alonso Enguita 2021: 117, 118]. As discussed below, the symbolic network of the ballad – particularly the thread of life, destiny, and the figures associated with the Moirai – makes a Greek reading of *Kairos* hermeneutically plausible. The beloved warns him that “the *occasion* has not come”. In this way, the *Kairos* is defined in the ballad as an impossible time for the Lover, which he tries to open by force, but which is not truly inscribed in the divine destiny. In opposition, the Christian *Kairos* is an “opportunity for salvation that the Greek *Kairos* did not offer. This is perhaps the great distance between both worlds” [ibid.: 128]. As discussed below, the symbolic network of the ballad – particularly the thread of life, destiny, and the figures associated with the Moirai – makes a Greek reading of *Kairos* hermeneutically plausible.

Moreover, following Alonso Enguita in “Comprendiendo el amor: Filosofía del acontecimiento” (Understanding love: Philosophy of the event) [Alonso Enguita 2019], love is drawn as an evental time that stops chronological time and is built as a space of refuge and temporal freedom. This same vision of refuge is already sketched in the last popular version mentioned⁷:

“Death is looking for me, / *perhaps she wouldn’t find me*”.

⁶ In this context, it is pertinent to incorporate the notion of the Event – extensively examined by Deleuze and Žižek – as it assumes the characteristics of *Kairos* actualized within contemporaneity.

⁷ 0081:1 El enamorado y la Muerte (i-a) (ficha no.: 7961) Version of Sant Gervasi (comc. Garraf, *Barcelona*, auton. Catalunya, España). Documented in or before 1882. (Colec.: Milà i Fontanals, M.). Published in Milà 1882, No. 240, pp. 211–213. 058 hemist. Music not registered.

Finally, in the pidalian ballad, the Lover's attempt to suspend his destiny in *Kairos* is frustrated: "The fine silk breaks, / Death who was coming there: / 'Let's go, lover, / for the hour is fulfilled". At this point in the discourse, the paradox considering the divine or human cause of the Lover's death is irrelevant because a convergent image is used: the Lover's fall. Mortal fall by mundane causality, divine by the fulfilled hour. Both causes may converge and are expressed through a single representation: eternity, both Christian and Greek, since "Christian eternity is simultaneity. And thus, we see, it refers to Aionic time where the goddess, the muse, viewed the movement from inside the circle [...]. Here lies, if you will, the connecting point between Greek eternity and Christian eternity" [Alonso Enguita 2021: 313]. The Lover dies, in this way, in a superimposition of temporalities, so that *Moira* and providence are fulfilled.

Therefore, the temporal structure of the poem is closed and centres on the Lover's endeavour to construct an *Aion* together with the beloved. He thus fights against an implacable divine time, which permeates the background of the ballad without leaving cracks. These temporal tensions, however, are inscribed in a broader discourse, with deeper structural significations.

5. "No soy el amor, amante, la Muerte que Dios te envía". The *Eros* and *Thanatos* dialectic

As proposed earlier, this first scenario possesses broader readings in connection with the tradition of motifs. We recover for the analysis of this section "Symbolic meanings" [Catalán 1998: 174–184]. Furthermore, it must be remembered that the dimension of the marvellous is not affected by space-time, so the deep grammar of the ballad may be rooted into an archetypal imaginary of an anachronistic nature. This is manifest in the presence of the cord and the braid, in the human tendency to rebel against destiny, in the force of destiny, or in the *Eros-Thanatos* dialectic, of long and ancient trajectory.

Note that the main temporal dynamics that formed part of the narrative scheme, *Chronos* and the amorous *Aion*, are animated through the marvellous dimension and are personified in the figures of Death and the Beloved, respectively. In this way, they may not only act as temporal variables but also as the archetypal images of *Thanatos* and *Eros*. In their symbolism, the role they fulfil within functional and actantial levels changes the parameters of analysis of the ballad.

Death is introduced literally as "[I am] *Death* whom God sends to you." Therefore, Death may be *Thanatos*, a force or impulse that drives the subject toward Death. Secondly, Love may be *Eros*, literally expressed in "where his *love* lived". The figure of the sweetheart is accompanied by three main symbolic elements, the *cord*, the *window*, and the *braids*:

“Go under the *window* Where I was *embroidering and sewing*,
I will throw you a silk *cord* For you to climb up,
And if the thread is not enough I would add my *braids*.”

On the one hand, the cord symbolizes life and *Aion*, for it brings connection to the biblical life cord and the tradition of thread as life in the Greco-Roman world, as the Fates [Gericke 1998: 281]. On the other hand, the hair as a stairway is a deeply embedded motif in the international context of the popular tale [ibid.: 282] and the braid links with the symbol of the virgin bride. The image of the window, in which the woman embroiders and sews, aligns her with female functions, and therefore in her quality as beloved, being a frequent amorous *topos* in both the Balladry and popular Spanish lyric.

The appellatives with which the beloved is qualified, so typical of the *Romancero*: “Open the door for me, *white one*, / open the door for me, *girl*” could situate the beloved as both a maiden and a lover. In her semantic construction coexists a contradiction, which is nothing more than another expression of liminality. Despite this, masculine desire remains clear and the Beloved is located in the ballad in the position of *Eros*.

In this line of the ambiguity of *Eros*, the confusion of the Lover between Love and Death does not occur by chance. The Lover confuses them because of another element available in the semantics of the lover of the *Balladry*: the whiteness of the woman. This signals her virginity, since dark skin “is only produced after the approach of the lover, who has undermined her previous state of whiteness and purity” [Terradas 2007: 212]: “I saw a very *white* lady enter, / much whiter than the cold snow”.

Nevertheless, not only Death acquires erotic traits, *Eros* also possesses mortuary traits, such as the possession of the cord, linked with the Greek tradition and representing *Atropos*, the Moira who cuts the thread of life. There is no confusion of signs between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, but a coexistence in a common symbol. Within a wider traditional symbolic repertoire, encompassing the Hispanic tradition, occasionally *Eros* and *Thanatos* converge; both give and remove life.

In a dissertation on the relationship between *Eros* and *Thanatos* in Western discourse, Pujante (2011) examines the role of the Sumerian goddess Inanna-Ishtar, a precedent of the Mediterranean goddesses, and includes the following reference:

Incarnates the cyclical aspect of time, both in the quality of goddess of life and death and in her facet as goddess of fertility. She is alternatively creator virgin and suffering mother or wife, alternatively the one who brings life and the one who brings death. [...] In the early times of Sumer, just as in old Europe, there was no distinct and individualized image of a ‘terrible’ goddess of death and destruction. Life and death were interwoven like the strands of a rope, two aspects of a whole.

[Baring and Cashford 2004: 227–228, 237]

Pujante also comments that "for the Greeks, the act of death could fuse with the act of love, it could function as an act of love" [Pujante 2011: 215]. As in the ballad, *Eros* and *Thanatos* are traditionally represented as two sides of the same coin.

Finally, we find unified the two main visions of the Lover as Death that structure Spanish lyric, following Fernández Alonso (1971). The ballad depicts, on one hand, the archetype of the beloved as Seductive Death: "the idealized vision of death, figured as a beautiful woman, attractive in her mystery and treated as a beloved, symbolizes or signifies the desire for death as liberation" [Fernández Alonso 1971: 435]. On the other hand, her macabre vision: "the macabre vision corresponds in general to an attitude of rebellion against death" [ibid.]. It is not surprising, in short, that *Eros* and *Thanatos* are psychic projections of the Lover – and of the human being – that have survived, with their divergences and convergences, as foundational psychological conflicts in an intertwined discourse.

Conclusion

This research set out to analyse the temporal configuration of Menéndez Pidal's ballad *El enamorado y la Muerte*, with the aim of determining how heterochrony articulates its narrative and symbolic meaning. Temporal mechanisms (the coexistence in tension between *Chronos*, *Aion*, and *Kairos*, liminality, temporal ambiguity, and temporal reterritorialization) simultaneously suggest (1) the semantic ambiguity of the text, (2) the deep grammar of the ballad and (3) the interweaving of systems of thought.

The study's contributions are situated within the fields of Temporal Studies, Romance Studies and ballad scholarship, as well as Folklore Studies.

From the perspective of Temporal Studies, the article contributes to current discussions on heterochrony by incorporating premodern materials into contemporary debates on plural and overlapping temporalities. Its main contribution to this field lies in indicating that heterochrony does not appear solely as a narrative technique, but also as a principle of symbolic production that articulates different cultural conceptions of time. In this sense, the article argues that heterochrony constitutes in our analysis one of the structural cores of the ballad's narrative and symbolic meaning, while simultaneously functioning as a phenomenology of time – that is, as a mode of temporal experience.

Regarding its contributions to Romance Studies and ballad studies, the article offers an analysis of the ballad tradition from premodern to modern forms, taking temporality as the central axis that reorganizes poetic meaning. It proposes a transferable methodological framework that may be relevant for the broader study of ballad scholarship.

From the perspective of Folklore Studies, the heterochronic structure enables the ballad to negotiate different dialectics – particularly those of humanity/divinity and Eros/Thanatos – while opening new symbolic interpretations of the encounter between the Lover and Death. This negotiation allows the ballad to engage with broader symbolic, historiographical, and cultural discourses already embedded within the folkloric tradition.

In conclusion, the analysis of *El enamorado y la Muerte* proposes that time acts as an actant whose intervention determines the progression of the ballad. The heterochronic configuration of the text creates a liminal space in which the boundaries between desire and death, destiny and individual will, and the human and the divine are continuously negotiated. In this regard, in our reading of the ballad, the poem may be understood as a laboratory of temporalities.

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