

SAINTLY RELICS, SOLIDARITY, AND SIDETRACKING IN THE FIRST PUBLISHED ASTURIAN BALLAD

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Antón de Marirreguera's "Pleitu entre Uviéu y Mérida pola posesión de las cenises de santa Olaya" is a ballad that has been largely—and mistakenly—ignored by most literary critics. Besides being the first literary work published in Asturian, it appeared in Carlos González de Posada's *Memorias históricas del Principado de Asturias* in 1794, the poem offers significant insight into early modern Asturian culture. "Pleitu" was not only the Asturian response to what was seen as an outrageous claim by the Extremadurans regarding the relics of St. Eulalia, the patron saint of the diocese of Oviedo and the city of Merida, but also a means to report the news. This *romance noticiero's* account reinforced religious beliefs and it was written for both ecclesiastical and secular publics. In addition, Marirreguera's use of Asturian directed the message of his work to those that spoke the regional language, consolidating the community. Finally, I suggest that the poem served as a distracter from the rampant criticism of the corrupt behavior of the ruling classes in Asturias in its recognition of a common and non-Asturian antagonist: the Extremaduran city of Merida.

Marirreguera was born in 1605 in Logrezana, Asturias. He came from a titled family and was said to be a rebellious youth (Suárez 22). He studied theology at the University of Oviedo and took his religious vows in 1631. After serving as parish priest in Prendes (1634-1644) and Santiago d'Albandi (1645-1656), he became the archpriest of Carreño in 1656. It is assumed that he died in 1661 or 1662 because his name does not appear in the *hidalgo* census completed shortly thereafter (Viejo, *Fábulas* 14). Marirreguera was a prolific artist and his vocation allowed him to write without having to worry about earning a living from his art, which led to a certain degree of experimentation and innovation when composing his work. His influence over the region's culture was great, which compels Xulio Viejo to call him the father of Asturian literature ("Contestu" 13). Unfortunately, only a small

sampling of his literary corpus survives today because, as legend has it, while on his deathbed, Marirreguera asked his nephew to burn most of his works because he thought that his literary pastime would be seen as not befitting a priest (Suárez 25).

Marirreguera had a rich literary talent and a sharp-witted style that made him a prominent literary figure in the seventeenth century. His works combined medieval literary tradition with more modern trends, serving as a model for the region's literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His work captured the hopes, ideals, and frustrations of the Asturian people; it also had the popular classes at its foundation (Medina 13). Marirreguera's artistic production maintained an originality in which he succeeded in coherently adapting unique Asturian formulas into more conventional literary contexts (Medina 18). In "La cultura asturiana na obra d'Antón Marirreguera," Carlos Rubiera asserts that the merit of the artist's literature lies in its unique character and more specifically in its relation with Asturian civilization and culture (161).

He has not received the critical attention that he deserves and of his extant works, which include fables, ballads, and interludes,¹ most scholars have concentrated on his lyric poetry, but this research is also limited in scope. Although his work was very popular until the early nineteenth century, it lost its luster soon thereafter as it was deemed superficial, rustic, picturesque, and comical by contemporary critics (Medina 16). These claims have been challenged more recently and Ángel Medina notes how the sociocultural importance of Marirreguera's literature should not be judged in comparison to other works or subjected to strict formulas (16).

In early and early modern times, Asturias was a remote and rural region whose stratified society was made up of noble and ecclesiastical classes that dominated a mostly illiterate majority. Asturians were often characterized by their rustic demeanor and the region had a certain exotic flair, but not in the positive sense of the concept. Oliva Blanco Corujo mentions how the Castilians named Asturias "les otros Indies d'España" (73), a clearly disparaging title. The population struggled to survive as it was constantly confronted with poverty, plagues, bad harvests, high mortality of their livestock, and corruption of the ruling classes. Such unfortunate factors have caused Roberto J. López to suggest that the Asturian people as a whole cultivated a taciturn attitude and concentrated primarily on coping with quotidian life (39).

This precarious situation affected not only the Asturian people's self-perception, but also that of others in the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. Asturias did not enjoy the prestige of other regions, but these differences and hardships seem to have influenced and inspired its literature and culture. I would suggest that the Asturian people found a certain sense of solidarity in their marginalization.

During the Middle Ages, Asturian literature had much in common with other traditions in the peninsula, but the use of Asturian language gave it a unique character. In general terms, Miguel Ramos Corrada divides written discourse in Asturian into two categories: the legal, which included charters, codes of law, and notarial documents; and the non-legal, that is creative, which included epic poetry, ballads, lyric poetry, and the lives of saints. This was in addition to the translations of Castilian texts into Asturian (23-26). A Castilianization of the region took place after 1230 that was especially significant in terms of spoken language. A diglossia established Castilian for use in official capacities, and Asturian became the language of the masses. Literature composed in the regional language was passed on through oral tradition and there is no example of preserved written Asturian literature until much later. The three prevalent literary forms of literature produced in Asturias starting in the thirteenth century were the short story, ballad, and *copla*, all of which flourished until the start of the Baroque period.

The Asturian Baroque sets itself apart from its Castilian counterpart in a number of ways. Ramos Corrada suggests three factors that define and distinguish the cultural movement. The first is the predominance of Oviedo in the region. As the only urban center in the Principality, the capital became the center of intellectual activity in Asturias. Furthermore, the University of Oviedo was an oasis of culture and art in a desert of illiteracy, which led to a certain prejudice within the confines of the university directed at the rest of the area. In fact, Rubiera even suggests that the University of Oviedo was anti-Asturian (156). The second factor was the enormous influence of the ecclesiastical class on the arts. Not only were its members among the literate minority, but also they were the most interested in producing literature since the rich court culture common to Castile did not exist in Asturias. Finally, the outside influences of the Castilian culture had a grand effect on the Asturian Baroque. It served, however, more as a counterpoint as artists began to celebrate Asturias and steer away from the monolithic dominance of Castile.

At this time, a shift in public taste was seen both in and out of Asturias and an interest in the local culture began to germinate. This transformation affected the production of Asturian literature. One example was the common stereotype of the brutish Asturian, reminiscent of the Sayagués shepherd, so common in the theater of the epoch. Although not the most appealing depiction of its people, the frequency of the caricature's appearance generated a genuine interest in the region (Ramos Corrada 67). Another factor was seen in how the public's frame of mind changed literary production, especially in the case of popular and legendary figures. Juan Menéndez Pidal states that "El pueblo crea los personajes de sus leyendas y los pinta y define más que por su aspeto exterior por los rasgos psicológicos y el modo de ser su alma: les da vida real, habla por boca de ellos y de sus palabras se produce quienes son" (58), which clearly helps explain the proliferation of the legend of St. Eulalia in Asturias.

The passion and martyrdom of St. Eulalia is a popular one in Spain.² In fact, there are two of them: one from Merida and another from Barcelona.³ Prudentius recounts the story of St. Eulalia of Merida in his *Liber Peristephanon* in the late fourth century AD. The legend is also found in the *Canticle of St. Eulalia* (c. 880), which is the first piece of French hagiography and one of the earliest extant examples of vernacular writing. The two renderings of the saint's life, passion, and martyrdom coincide in many aspects, but they do differ slightly. Eulalia was a twelve-year-old Christian girl born in Spain who was incensed by emperor Diocletian's edict that everyone must worship his pagan gods. In 304 AD, she goes to Merida and challenges the decree, accusing the authorities of heresy by denying the only true God. As she is but a young girl, the judge Dacian attempts to convince her that her beliefs are mistaken by first appealing to her high birth and the disappointment that her upper class parents must have due to her religion. His pleas fail and the judge resorts to bribery and then threats of torture, all ineffective. He keeps his word and the girl is tortured. The Romans impale Eulalia with iron hooks and whip her. She is then burnt at the stake. She praises God throughout the passion. As her body and long hair burn, she dies from her injuries and asphyxiation. A dove then flies from her mouth, representing the Holy Spirit and her soul rising to the heavens. Finally, a great snow covers her body. In the later French version, the fire cannot consume her, so she is decapitated and the dove flies from her neck.

The devotion for St. Eulalia had resonated throughout Asturias for hundreds of years. In the late eighth century, Asturian king Silo was said to have rescued the remains of her body from a Moor-occupied Merida and transported them to San Juan el Evangelista church in Santians de Pravia, where they stayed until the San Salvador Cathedral was constructed in Oviedo.⁴ The relics have remained there ever since. During medieval times, adoration for the saint spread rapidly, evidenced by the forty-eight parishes in the region that carried her name (Martínez 87-88). St. Eulalia was a nucleus of cultural activity in Asturias at the time and her life and death inspired literature, music, liturgy, and prayer.⁵ In 1639, a papal bull issued by Urbano VIII named St. Eulalia as the patron of the diocese of Oviedo. Although her ashes had always been a point of contention between the two cities, this turn of events aggravated the situation more and gave the Asturian community an even stronger sense of ownership.

Marirreguera's ballad "Pleitu" gained instant notoriety. The popular poem pays tribute to the religious beliefs and local customs in a simple manner, reflecting the sensibilities of the rural society from where it originated. In 1639, the year it was written, the poem won a poetry contest, the *Xuegos Florales*, during a celebration in Oviedo for St. Eulalia. Posada y Caveda, however, claims that it is a minor work that did not deserve such accolades, but rather that Marirreguera was victorious because of his literary reputation in the region and his frequent participation in the celebration of St. Eulalia (qtd. in Viejo, *Fábules* 139). Also, Viejo points out that it was the only submission in Asturian in a field of lyrical works written in Castilian, Greek and Latin (*Fábules* 13). Though unknown, the constituency of the judging panel could give a better idea as to the actual effect of writing in Asturian and its the reception on the contest results. It seems unlikely that the literati would embrace a poem composed in the regional language because of its previous prejudice toward the language, so perhaps it was the crowd who decided the winner. While the topic was certainly appealing to the public, it was the same as the other submissions, so one could posit that the use of Asturian played a role in the victory that day.

The ballad continued an ongoing rivalry that existed between Oviedo and Merida over the saint's remains. Indeed, rumors concerning St. Eulalia's relics were common and the poem strove to confirm the authenticity of her ashes,⁶ but there is an interesting backstory that

also might have affected the outcome of the contest: a scandalous letter surfaced on May 27, 1639, during the preparations for the citywide festival. The epistle recounted how in 1633 the *Regidor* of Merida at the time, Bernabe Moreno de Vargas, attempted to prove that the ashes were not in fact in the Oviedo Cathedral (Viejo, *Fábules* 139), a libelous claim in the eyes of the Asturians. The judicial nature of the claim is parodied by the poem's pretext as a lawsuit between Merida and Oviedo in which the former has demanded the return of St. Eulalia's ashes. While we don't precisely know the extent of the conflict, there was some legal wrangling for the relics.⁷ We see Marirregueras's mastery of combining the popular character of the ballad and the juridical writing style, adding to the gravity of the situation while simultaneously undermining it by demonstrating the absurdity of the allegations. Certainly, as a priest, poet and Asturian, he was an ideal spokesperson to represent the wishes and express the response of the public toward the claims.⁸

"Pleitu" is 66 verses long.⁹ In it Marirreguera appeals to numerous cultural referents and points of Asturian pride while offering a heartfelt, ironic, and resolute response to Merida's move to defame the ashes of the saint. The poem begins with the symbol of the honeybee and how it tirelessly pollinates flowers until it is disturbed, at which time it stops its labor and looks for a new and better hive (vv. 1-6). Immediately, this reference is reminiscent of St. Teresa of Avila's recurrent use of bees in her work, namely in the *Moradas primeras*. In a Christian context, the bee symbolizes industriousness. The legend that it does not sleep suggests vigilance and zeal for the acquittal of Christian virtue (Ferguson 13). The beehive represents community. The poem manifests this symbolism as Marirreguera states that Eulalia was the bee that fled Merida because of the heretic religious practices of the time (vv. 7-10). The virgin's legendary devotion, virtue, and tenaciousness exemplify the Christian symbolism of the bees.

In addition to the Asturian public's religious affinity for the saint, there lies another possible motivation for the use of such a symbol. Apiculture had always been prominent in the north of Spain and it is certain that its mention offered a familiar reference to the public. The mostly uneducated and rural public could relate to the abstract notions because they were explained in a comprehensible context. This allegory would have captured their attention and clarified the message of this part of the poem.

Besides using recognizable images and symbols to appeal to the popular audience, Marirreguera recounts the history of how the ashes ended up in the San Salvador Cathedral. An epic literary tradition familiar to the ballads reverberates in the poem. "Pleitu" evokes regional and religious pride by referring to King Silo's illustrious victory—facilitated by the saint—over the Moors and his grandiose entrance into Merida (vv. 11-18). It is there that he finds the relics in a state of neglect and relocates them to Asturias with great ceremony (vv. 19-30). Remembering the bee analogy, this represents the move from one hive to another. By referring to the holy war with the Moors, Marirreguera engages the intrinsic pride of the Asturian region, the birthplace of the Reconquest. The poem places this particular conflict in a religious milieu.

At this point, Marirreguera introduces the common antagonist to the Asturian people: Merida, and the poem sardonically responds to the city's request for the return of the saint's remains (vv. 31-34). The poetic voice recognizes the Extremadurans longing for the relics and suggests that their complaint is misdirected; they should address St. Eulalia. If that does not prove effective, the complainants can also make their case to God, who is ultimately responsible for the relocation of the relics. The poem admonishes the Extremadurans with a reminder that they should have taken better care of the relics when they possessed them; their present faith and devotion do not make up for past disregard (vv. 35-38). Next, the poem personifies the Sudarium of Oviedo,¹⁰ suggesting that it, too, be consulted about the return of the saintly remains, though this request would also be futile since such a change of events would leave the Sudarium as the lone relic in San Salvador (vv. 39-42). Clearly, these spirited verses imply that any rumors about or pleas for the ashes have fallen on deaf ears. The poem then takes a serious turn and warns that if the ashes were to be removed, the faithful would take up arms—or in this case, sickles, being a rural society—to protect them (vv. 43-46). Marirreguera then cleverly turns the table on the claims of the Extremadurans by noting that although the saint may have died in their city, she is still much very much alive and well in his (47-50).

The poem maintains a defensive stance, which underlines its self-referential character. Here, Marirreguera states that if the ashes were to be removed, he would insist upon their immediate return and he would announce the conflictive situation between the two cities (vv. 51-54).

In fact, the composition and recitation of the poem does exactly this in a self-referential manner. Marirreguera repeats that the relocation of the ashes was Extremadura's loss and Asturias' gain, and that she is doing just fine in Oviedo. All naysayers should go back from where they came (vv. 59-60). He concludes with the assurance that the relics of St. Eulalia are in good hands and those that protect her well being will do so ardently and are even willing to take this case to God for a decision, if necessary (vv. 61-66).

Much more than a ballad that won a poetry contest and celebrated the patron saint of the region, the poem reveals much about the society at the time. It reported on a particular circumstance in the polemic between the two cities and reacted to it. Marirreguera was most certainly aware of his audience and cognizant of the importance of their reception of the ballad's message, which he made more attractive by writing in Asturian. It also served to bring the community together and its recital at the festival set the tone for these motives since the public was already celebrating St. Eulalia. He piqued their interest by reporting the situation with Extremadura and the threat—no matter how minor it was—of losing the relics or of them being proven inauthentic. The ballad unified the people by its subject matter and use of the regional language. It was almost as if he was pandering to the crowd, especially in terms of using Asturian.

Marirreguera's choice of Asturian is important and proved to be a step forward in liberating the language from the linguistic confines imposed by the Castilian culture, which perceived the language as unrefined. For example, in the fifteenth century, Gonzalo García de Santa María described the language as "áspera y grosera" in *Las vidas de los santos religiosos* (c. 1491). Even in the sixteenth century, the opinion continued that it was a brutish language that afforded little possibility for the adequate expression of ideas. More specifically, in 1560, Eugenio de Salazar stated that the language was more appropriate for communicating with animals than with humans. Damasio de Frías y Balboa agreed, writing in his *Diálogo de las lenguas y de la descreción* (1579) that Asturian sounded more like grunts and snorts than anything else (qtd. in Pensado Tomé, 28-40). In *Diálogo de la lengua*, Juan de Valdés—of Asturian descent—talks about the predominance and prestige of Castilian and notes how its use differentiates the noble class from the popular classes. He sees Asturian as a crude variation of Castilian (142).

Opinions regarding the use of Asturian were mixed in the seventeenth century.¹¹ In *Cisne de Apolo* (1602), Asturian author Luis Alfonso de Carvallo claimed that Castilian was best used when writing literature because it was the *lengua franca* of the peninsula (256), but later he recognized the historical and cultural importance of Asturian in *Antigüedades y cosas memorables del Principado de Asturias* (1695): “no sólo en la nobleza de España se conservó en Asturias, sino también el habla y lengua antigua, sin corromperse como por todas las demás partes de España con la sujeción de los moros” (107). Conversely, Miguel de Cervantes wrote in *Don Quixote* that a poet should write in his native language since translated poetry was like looking at the back of a tapestry: “Que aunque se veen las figuras son llenas de hilos que las escurecen, y no se veen con la lisura y tez de la haz” (2: 62, 519). In the seventeenth century, Marirreguera led a pronounced uptick of literature written in the language. Innovative poets and authors took advantage of the occasion and began to compose in Asturian, using this opportune moment to separate themselves from established convention, that is, Castilian, and to integrate their culture into the literature and other forms of expression.

Studies dealing with the use of the language have yielded varying conclusions in more recent times. Juan Menéndez Pidal discusses the use of Asturian in the ballads of the region. He suggests that many were translated, and therefore reworked, in Castilian because the language was more developed and it was popular to do so (61). Like most of his predecessors, Menéndez Pidal does not treat Asturian as a separate language from Castilian, rather as an isolated dialect. He felt that the regional language should be limited to the agricultural context and it could not be used to adequately express certain ideas, emotions, and passions (61-62). Of course, Marirreguera’s ballad contradicts these generalizations. In “Pleitu” he succeeds in expressing the emotions, religious fervor, and passion of a people that strove to protect a valuable religious relic intimately tied to their culture.

José Luis Pensado Tomé examines the factors that limited the use of Asturian in early modern Spain by contrasting it to other peripheral languages of the time. He notes that Galician and Basque were the most prestigious non-Castilian languages, leaving the others to be relegated to a very low status (29). He agrees that Asturian was considered a crude language because the influence of Castilian did not reach the general population due to the remoteness of the area. Pensado also mentions

that the bourgeoisie readily adopted the use of Castilian. At the time, Asturian was spoken by the lower classes and this newly forming middle class was intent on distancing themselves from their humble roots. This linguistic subversion disparaged the region that considered itself the heart of Christianity and the Reconquest in the Iberian Peninsula. Finally, Pensado Tomé also suggests that many saw Asturian more as a language of entertainment than one of communication since it was most commonly heard on the stage spoken by buffoonish characters (38).

Returning to the seventeenth-century context, we see how, in addition to the use of familiar cultural phenomena, conventions, and beliefs, the use of Asturian facilitated the reception and interpretation of the message. In “La moral secul nel barrocu asturianu al traviés de les fábulas mitolóxicas d’Antón de Marirreguera,” Mariano Suárez Rodríguez discusses Marirreguera’s use of the regional language in his fables by suggesting three factors that may have influenced the use of Asturian and its effects on reception, which are also applicable to this ballad. The first aspect is political. The use of Asturian could help to reverse the well-established preconception that the language was solely for the popular classes. The second is social and refers to the intention to reinstitute or reinvent references to popular Asturian culture. The final reason is linguistic since writing in Asturian eases the transmission of the message and it democratizes the text (28).¹² Language is the thread that holds together the cloth of a culture, and in this case its use strengthened the bond held by the Asturian society.

So far, we see how Marirreguera executed a number of strategies and took advantage of an inflammatory social situation to bring together the Asturian people. Indeed, he invoked religious and cultural references as well as used Asturian to relate to and help to further develop the singular identity of the region’s populace, all in opposition to their common enemy, Merida. While certainly most of the influences and results of “Pleitu” seem to have positive connotations, I suggest an ulterior motive might have also been at the foundation of its composition: to distract the populace from local scandal and corruption, especially in the ecclesiastical ranks. In *Transnational Cervantes*, William Childers picks up the conversation of internal colonization in early modern Spain. He notes that internal and external colonizers took advantage of many of the same social forces (4). Childers mentions Michael Hechter’s description of nation formation as a process of internal

colonialism in which a core region with a centralized government (i.e., Castile) had a distinct set of cultural practices from those of outlying, peripheral regions (4-5). He states that the culture of these internal colonies was seen as valueless, except as a sign of inferior status or of defiant resistance. Though perhaps not to the extent as the Moriscos and Jewish *Conversos* that Childers mentions, the Asturian populace did fall into this category. In fact, Childers mentions how the *Cristiano Viejo* peasantry was an internal colony in Spain that was manipulated by the ruling classes in the attempt to dignify the Castilian commoner and his agricultural labor. The hegemonic class strove to boost their confidence and attitude by highlighting their *limpieza de sangre*, which was an invitation to participate in noble values (10).¹³ There is little doubt about the dignity of the people, whose roots lay in the Visigoth culture who mounted the Reconquest against the invading Muslim hordes. So, in reality it may be seen as way to placate the masses by appealing to cultural and historical pride.

“Pleitu”, therefore, may have served as an early example of the “wag the dog” idiom that explains how attention is diverted from a graver situation to one that is lesser in importance. In this case, the distraction would be from the looming social and economic problems in Asturias during the seventeenth century. In the middle of the century, Asturias suffered from a brutal economic crisis and there was a contentious relationship between the upper and lower classes characterized by an anti-noble and anti-clerical sentiment among the general population. Acrimony against the ruling classes was perpetuated by their lavish lifestyles and expenditures that contrasted with the misery that many others faced. Marirreguera’s ballad came at a time when these problems were widespread, and I suggest that the poem may be seen as a distracter that redirected the popular rancor onto a common adversary, the Extremadurans, who questioned the sanctity of St. Eulalia’s, a common link shared by the Asturians.

Marirreguera played an integral role in promoting change to the socio-cultural, economic, and religious situations that occurred at the time. He spearheaded the beginning phases of a revival of the society by using his literature as a means to celebrate Asturias and to question the dominance of Castilian conventions in the region. Most certainly, the ballad galvanizes the community into a cohesive force that confronts a larger enemy. In it, Marirreguera recognizes and

criticizes certain aspects of the Church, for example, its oppressive practices and dominant ideas, but the difference is that this is not the Asturian church or clergy but the Extremaduran. He cleverly offers reasons for criticism but then redirects it to another entity that is not his own. As such, the Asturian people are united with its Church in opposition to the Extremaduran neighbors and its ecclesiastical classes. Of course, it is the same institution in general but, at the same time, there is a distance—literal and figurative—between the two regions. Furthermore, since Asturias has always been considered separate both by the Castilians and the Asturians themselves, this would seem a plausible case to make as he could appeal to their marginalized state and condition in early modern Spain.

Marirreguera's "Pleitu" is underappreciated in many respects. For modern-day Hispanists, the poem offers a rich look into seventeenth-century Asturian society. "Pleitu" underlines the importance of St. Eulalia to the region and recounts a situation in the ongoing quarrel over the ashes of the patron saint of Oviedo and Merida. In addition, the ballad succeeds in forming a sense of community not only thorough its subject matter, but also through its use of Asturian. Marirreguera's choice to compose in Asturian brought the language to the forefront as the society was trying to redefine and distinguish itself from predominant Castilian cultural conventions. The poem elevated local pride in its lyrical defense of Merida's libelous accusations as to the veracity of the relics. Marirreguera's combination of rustic themes with juridical writing simultaneously reflected the Asturian character and the gravity of the accusations. In addition to these aspects of "Pleitu" also lies the possibility of a more subversive motivation for its composition, to deflect the critical eye of the unhappy peasantry from the thriving and corrupt ruling classes toward a common enemy, Merida. This poem demonstrates why it, as well as much of the other extant work of Marirreguera, deserves to be reevaluated and reexamined within the context of early modern Spanish studies.

APPENDIX

“Pleitu ente Uviéu y Mérida pola posesión de les cenices de Santa Olaya”

Cuando examen les abeyes
 y posen de flor en flor,
 si les escurren, s’espanten,
 vanse y no facen llabor,
 dexando el caxello vieyo 5
 pa buscar otro meyor.
 Santa Olaya fo l’abeya
 que de Mérida ensamó,
 enfadada qe’adorasen
 les fegures de llatón. 10
 Estoncies el re don Sil
 andaba en guerra feroz
 con los moros, que querín
 encabezase en Lleón.
 Permitiólo aquesta santa 15
 que les vitories-y dio,
 fiendo nellos matanzúa
 fasta qu’en Mérida entró.
 Llegó al pueblo désta ñeña
 que temblaba de pavor, 20
 y esconfiaba de socutre
 solliviada de temor.
 Cutieron los santos güesos
 viendo que s’arrodiyó:
 s’estovieren mas carnudos 25
 saldrín fe-y acatación.
 Trúxolos al endefeto,
 de llaceria los sacó
 y metiólos per Uviedo
 con gaites y procesión. 30
 Mérida diz que-y tornen
 esta prenda que’y faltó:
 diga ella que quier ise
 y aun con eso quiera Dios.

Si quieren que la llarguemos 35
 páguenos la devoción
 así de los que finaron
 como los qu'agora son.
 Díguenlo al Santo Sudario
 ver ora se da razón, 40
 pos non tien utro cuidado
 el Señor San Salvador.
 ¿Quián ora-y lo mandará?
 Bien echa de ver que nós:
 se nos lleven esta santa 45
 no hai mas d'arrimar la foz.
 Dirán ellos: «morrió acá»;
 diremos nós: «no morrió,
 que está viva par Asturias
 si que está muerta para vós». 50
 Y aunque la lleven, m'obligo
 que se torna per ú fo,
 porque dexa conocidos
 y gran comunicación.
 Se por amor désta Santa 55
 Estremadura llibró,
 el Prencipado heredero
 puede ir tomar posesión.
 Ella está mui bien acá,
 L'otro vaya per ú fo, 60
 porque están de nueso cabo
 l'obispo y gobernador.
 Nosotros los de capote
 cual con un ral, cual con dos,
 seguiremos isti pleito 65
 fasta llevallo ente Dios.

NOTES

¹ See Miguel Ramos Corrada, Xulio Viejo Fernández, Mariano Suárez Rodríguez, Roberto J. López, Carlos Rubiera, and Anthony J. Grubbs, for the most recent work on Marirreguera's literature.

² St. Eulalia is the patron of runaways and widows and her feast day is December 10.

³ Opinions about the existence of two St. Eulalias is polemical. The versions of their passions and martyrdoms are virtually identical. The question seems to stem from two sets of relics, both purportedly of Saint Eulalia, one housed in Oviedo and the other in Barcelona. Within the Catholic Church, it is generally believed that they are two distinct figures with two different feast days; the Catalan version of the saint celebrates her feast day on February 12. If nothing else, the acceptance that there are two St. Eulalias avoids the conflict between the two cities that was seen between Oviedo and Merida.

⁴ Carlos Rico-Avello offers another version of the story. He claims that Christians rescued the ashes earlier than popular legend suggests, between 756-758, and before the reign of Silo. His theory is based on the reports that the Arab *caudillo* Abderrahman obsessively persecuted Christians and their cults and is linked with Merida. According to him, the ashes were transferred to San Juan el Evangelista in Asturias because it was the safest haven in Reconquest Spain. They remained hidden until 775, when they were given to Silo for safekeeping. He also suggests that Silos's entrance into Merida was not as glorious as reported, rather it was a peaceful incursion (15-16). No matter the case, this corroborates the notion that Marirreguera's poem contained a certain propagandistic element.

⁵ See the studies by Ángel Medina, Javier González Santos, and Xuan Busto Cortina for further information.

⁶ This situation is not unique to St. Eulalia, the veracity of saints' relics is under constant scrutiny as is their ownership.

⁷ Record does exist in the archives of San Salvador Cathedral.

⁸ See Viejo 139-40 and note 123. Viejo hypothesizes that this letter was at one time the property of one of Marirreguera's relatives. He suggests that the release of the letter and resulting scandal may have been a timely factor in the production of the poem and its winning the contest.

⁹ All citations are from Xulio Viejo Fernández's edition of the ballad, which is included in an appendix at the end of the article.

¹⁰ Another relic housed in the San Salvador Cathedral, the Sudarium of Oviedo is the cloth believed to have been used to clean and cover Jesus Christ's face after his crucifixion.

¹¹ See José L Pensado's evaluation of the use of Asturian at the time.

¹² One factor omitted by Suárez Rodríguez but mentioned by Viejo was that Asturian was used at times to evade censorship (Viejo, “Contestu” 20). Of course, this was not the case with “Pleitu”, in which its use was highlighted and not meant to confuse or hide anything; the ballad served to consolidate a group through the diffusion of news.

¹³ This was a common theme in many *comedias*; especially notable is Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *El alcalde de Zalamea*.

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