

# **FROM CREATION TO ANONYMY IN POPULAR TEXTS**

## **THE CASE OF FELIX CHANQUIN PIRIR: WRITER OF DANCES, CHALLENGES AND LOAS**

Luis Ortiz

The members of traditional dances call “stories” or “relations” to the longer or shorter pieces that they must recite during the dances. These stories are very important because they constitute the thread that weaves the plot throughout the work. In many cases the authentic originals have disappeared, leaving only loose and dispersed copies, rewritten from memory with errors and omissions, the absence of the original rhyme and meter being noted in many stanzas. Even so, each dancer jealously takes care of their paper (photocopied, typewritten or copied by hand), considering this material as a true treasure, the possession of which confers prestige and a tone of pride to its bearers.

One of the characteristics of the folk-dance event is its status as an anonymous work, since the individuality of its creator is unknown. Although the parliaments have suffered many alterations over the centuries, they often preserve some pieces that reveal their birth, from the Spanish pen, in times of the conquest and reduction of the country.

Although it is normal to place the anonymous composers of these pieces in times lost in time, it is not a literary genre that we can consider disappeared forever, since in the village of San José La Comunidad, Mixco, Department of Guatemala, they live in full production Félix Chanquín Pirir, an extraordinary writer who keeps the dance tradition alive in that region, providing local groups with a large number of scripts and scripts for dances, challenges and praises.

If one of the characteristics of folkloric dances is their condition as anonymous works, ignoring the identity of the author, the question arises as to whether or not we can include the works of Félix Chanquín Pirir in the category of folkloric dance events. The answer is given by Roberto Díaz Castillo when he states that, despite the criteria expressed, there are non-anonymous and therefore non-folkloric events that become folkloric and vice versa. Let's look at a case: in Nicaragua, a fragment of Jules Massenet's El Cid dance is danced to the beat of the traditional bow marimba, as if it were a popular dance typical of the country. For the people who perform this dance, who ignore its origin and have made it their own by transmitting it from one generation to another, it is a genuine folk dance.

In all the reports written by Félix Chanquín Pirir, his name always appears at the end, in his capacity as owner of the original, without claiming his authorship. That is

why his dances have been performed in many squares in the country, without the dancers and even less so the public having the slightest idea who the author is.

As such, relying on the words of Roberto Díaz Castillo, we can assure that the dances, challenges and *loas* of Félix Chanquin Pirir are genuine folklore pieces.



**Félix Chanquín Pirir and Luis Ortiz. Main Festival of Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Villa de Mixco, Guatemala. (Photography Rafael Herrera).**

Let's now get to know some aspects of the life of Félix Chanquín Pirir, following his own narration of the events:

One happy day in June 1945, when I was eight years old and without even imagining that over the years it would be my first pleasant surprise, I was invited to participate in a loa de jicaques, offering me to play the role of a cometist, having to guide - with my snare drum and my clarion - the march of the Christian soldiers under the command of King Celín and the Great Captain San Sebastián. That was my only role that year, but for me it was something wonderful because from then on I began to dream about traditions, and I told myself that I would never find anything better to dedicate my time to, thinking that it was the best way to approach people and to cultivate their friendship, instilling culture and proclaiming the goodness of God and that, in the light of His Divine Nature, to be able to manifest my faith in some way.

That's how in 1946 I played three different roles, which seemed few to me because I felt capable of much more. So much so that by 1947 I oversaw copying all the actors' roles by hand. The sleeplessness did not matter to me because I wanted to know more about the customs of our heroes, especially because as a Guatemalan I believe that we should know our origins and the secret of the wars of that time. Anyway, what I want to say is that I felt a great passion within my entire being. That would be why by 1948 I played six different roles.

In 1949 the group had grown a lot and together they decided to appoint me as their representative, a proposal that they considered very responsible. For the first time I was unable, but the proposal was unanimous, and I had no other choice but to accept. I started by making a general list of all the members of the group, as you can see below.

### **Name of the actors from 1946 to 1958**

#### ***Finca "Las Charcas" Zona 11, Guatemala***

##### **MEN**

Félix Chanquín Pirir (writer)	Pedro Cruz Culajay
José Gabino Guzmán Sotoj	Mario Adolfo Solórzano Ruiz
José Julio Guzmán Sotoj	Moisés Velázquez Ramírez
Pedro Guzmán Sotoj	Prudencio Ramírez Cotzajay
Bernardino Guzmán Sotoj	Serapio Cotzajay Siam
Pedro Pirir Casuy	Julio Tubac Boror
Mateo Cruz Culajay	Jorge Boror Castillo

Eusebio Allapam Ramírez

Félix García Marroquín

Miguel Allapam Ramírez

Pedro Coz Boche

Pedro Pirir Gómez

Lorenzo Canel Fuentes

Melecio Castillo y Castillo

Timoteo Canel Guzmán

Damián Chitay Boror

Alejandro Chinchilla Canel

Inés Castillo Chitay

Esteban Ramírez Hernández

Eduardo García Chitay

Alejandro Ramírez Hernández

Rosalío García Marroquín

Agustín Ramírez Hernández

Ciriaco García Marroquín

## **WOMEN**

Marta Lidia Sánchez

Alba Juárez Valenzuela

María Rosario Guzmán

Elvira Chinchilla Canel

Margarita Fuentes Guzmán

Nemecia Ramírez Cotzajay

María Luisa Ramírez Allapan

Victoria Ramírez Pirir

Cristina Solís Juárez

Eva Gutiérrez Solís

This was the list of actors, to whom I made my first proposal as a representative, which consisted of convincing them that we should work to make our own costumes, since it was not convenient for us to rent them every year. Then it came to light how difficult it seemed for them to get the money to purchase them, since most of us were between 13 and 17 years old and almost all of us were used to giving our parents all the money we could earn each week.

At that time there was very little to be earned, but it was still worth trying. On that occasion I informed them that in addition to having the joy of being part of the group, I was also a butler of the band of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and since then my mother gave me enough of my salary to fulfill my commitments, but nothing further. I proposed to the members that they do the same and eight days later they gave me the great news that their parents had agreed to contribute financially with the money for the clothes. This response motivated me enormously and that same year I wrote my first original, which was titled: *AGUA, FUEGO, AIRE Y TIERRA* (water, fire, air and earth), which was widely accepted by the public. For my part, I dedicated this work to the parents of the actors, in gratitude for their generous help in acquiring the clothes.

I continued writing more and more stories and eight years later I already had 62 originals of my own inspiration, including pieces of folklore, stories, comedies, challenges and praises.

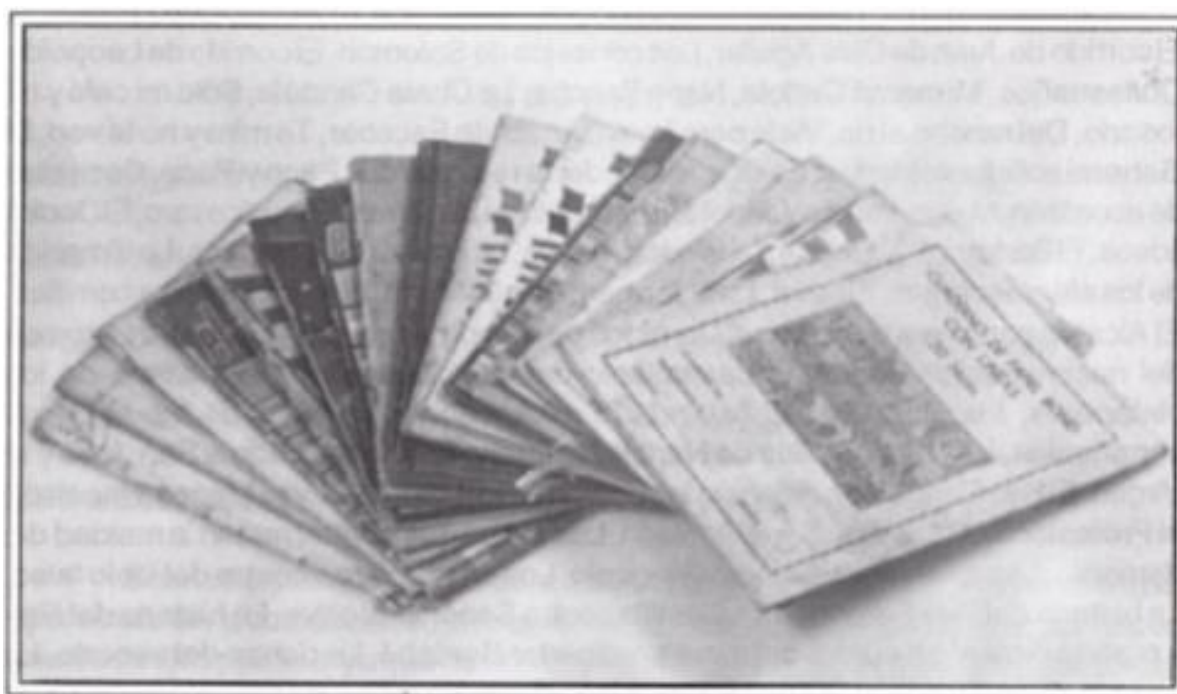
**Some titles of my production:**

*La conquista de Hernán Cortés, Los siete que brillan, Los cuatro elementos: Agua, Fuego, aire y tierra, Orgullo y perfidia, honor y verdad, Los tres elementos: Grandeza, belleza y pureza, Bendición a los cristianos y castigo a los judíos, La Reina Catalina en contra de su padre, La espada de Salomón, Los esclavos del Emperador Fausto, El corrido de Juan de Dios Aguilar, Los consejos de Salomón, El corrido de Leopoldo Quitasueños, Mi mamá Carlota, Nana Pancha, La Chata Candela, Sólo mi café y mi rosario, Del rancho al río, Vieja pero joven, Anacleto Escobar, Te miro y no te veo, El General solicita soldados, Es difícil defender la retaguardia, Paco y Paca, Cachetes de acordeón, Melón, sandía y zapote, El chinchín de las rorras, El músico raro, El Doctor fideos, El Barbero machetero, La ley del Cusuco, La proeza de un recluta, La filmación de los efervescentes, El ñahúr, La enfermera quinceañera, El redactor entre comillas, El Alcalde con leyes de su casa, Domingo de mayo y lunes de junio, Los tres tomos del nacimiento de Jesús, El casamiento del indio Marcelino, El misterio de los platanos, La Chabelita, El estandarte milagroso, Los Reyes de las espadas sangrientas, Las tres batallas de Napoleón, Divino fulgor dedicado a San José y la Virgen, El Rey Carlos V en defensa de su patrimonio, Los tres Reyes Magos, Napoleón el Protestante, Carlomagno y Napoleón, Los indios que contrarrestan la maldad del demonio, Las aventuras del indio Gorgonio, Los cristianos en contra del ídolo falso, La historia del Rey Fernando de Castilla contra Senón el fugitivo, La historia del Rey y profeta Ismael en contra del moro predicador Bemabé, La danza del venado, La historia de los tres jacintos, La gitana, Marcelino y Rosalía.*

I only must talk about the beautiful land where I was born and I am referring to a little piece of Guatemala, such as Finca Las Charcas, Zone 11 of the Capital city. It is so small, but for me until today it has been the greatest thing because I was born there, on April 21, 1937, thanks to God, thanks to my parents and thanks to that wonderful land in which they created me, fed me and helped me. They gave wisdom. In other words, I retired from Finca Las Charcas at the age of 19, after which I had been dancing for eleven years in offering to the Virgin of Guadalupe, moving then to San José La Comunidad, Mixco, as the second place of my predilection and from where, thank God, I was able to fulfill the fourteen years offered to the Virgin, which represented for me three more years traveling long distances on foot, from La Comunidad to Las Charcas, needing three hours on bad roads, but all out of devotion. and out of gratitude to God. I consider myself more than satisfied for their blessings and for all the collaboration of the people I met along my way for the same cause. So much so that I had enough will to motivate the youth in San José La Comunidad, managing to present



**A Loa and two original manuscripts of Moorish and Christian dances authored by Don Félix Chanquín Pirir. (Photography Elmar Orlantes).**



**Sample of notebooks in which Don Félix has copied his texts. The notebooks number twenty and together they contain 62 originals. (Elmar Orlantes Photography)**

the first dance on March 19, 1958. And from that date until the year 1965 in which I was able to observe that faith and traditions they were losing, because young people were no longer showing more interest. Some joined the group only to look for a girlfriend, then get married and retire. This happened to us several times: young people participated for a year or two, got married and retired. The proof of what I say is that in the seven years that we maintained the group we never maintained a stable cast. Especially for girls, when they got married, they were no longer given permission to continue participating, even if they wanted to. That's why I could no longer gather more than ten people per year. Next, let's see the general list of the 7 years of work in San José La Comunidad:

### **Names of actors from 1958 to 1965**

#### ***San José La Comunidad, Zona 10, Mixco***

#### **MEN**

Felix Chanquín Pirir (writer)	Esteban Raxión Castillo
Gabriel López España	Eugenio Raxión Castillo
Apolonio Gómez Pixtún	Juventino Castillo Díaz
Oscar Galeano	José Luis Barrientos
Juan Lucas España Canel	José Luis Vásquez Gómez
Cristóbal España Canel	Alejandro Gómez
Eduardo Chigüichón Acú	Vicente Pirir Gómez
Miguel Chigüichón Acú	Amulfo Yantuche España
Carlos Chigüichón Acú	Abel Pixtún Natareno
Celso Chigüichón España	

#### **WOMEN**

Irma Acú Natareno	Victoria Abad Saso
Norma Pixtún Natareno	Telma Castillo Díaz
Irma Pixtún Natareno	María Rosario Castillo Díaz
María Elena Sánchez Saso	María de Jesús Chigüichón Acú

Yolanda Acú Natareno

Ana Silvia Acú Hernández

Graciela Chigüichón Acú

Fidelia Pirir Gómez

Crisanta Ramírez Cotzajay

Marcela Chigüichón Acú

In this way you can compare what is from one place to another, as well as from one time to another. But what I am sure of is that my greatest satisfaction throughout these 21 years consisted of the multiple invitations that were made to us, thanks to which they allowed us to give presentations of our dances in various towns, such as Taxisco, Sololá , Tecpán, San José Pinula, Santa Catarina Pinula, Villa Nueva, Mixco, Chinautla, Bárcenas, Vila lobos, Villa Canales, Chichimecas, Pueblo Nuevo Viñas, Las Conchas, Chiquimula, many villages and neighborhoods of the Capital of Guatemala.

I am very pleased that my son, Fredy Hemán Chanquín, and my son-in-law, Rafael Herrera, have followed the tradition, since both are members of the Group of Moors and Christians of Barrio San Antonio, San José La Comunidad, Mixco. Rafael has also danced in the Grupo de Moros de Las Charcas, and I hope that my grandchildren will also be dancers, like us, in the future.

In this way I end this story by thanking Luis Ortiz for his interest in publishing and disseminating something of what I have modestly done, so that it is not forgotten.

*Félix Chanquin Pirir*