Medieval Spanish Epic Meeting

The Société Rencesvals will sponsor a Special Session at the Modern Language Association Convention, December 29, 1978, from 2:45 to 4:00 p.m., in the Royal B Ballroom of the Americana Hotel, New York City: Tradition and Creation in the Castilian Epic, Trends in Contemporary Research. The discussion leader for this meeting will be John S. Miletich, University of Utah. Three papers will be discussed, the abstracts of which are presented here. A detailed report on the discussion at this meeting will appear in a future issue of *Olifant.*

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The Problem of Lost Epics: Evidence and Criteria

It has long been a platitude—questioned only by a very few hardened skeptics—that the extant epic texts in Spanish are merely the survivors of a much more numerous group. Scholars have at various times postulated the existence and subsequent loss of over thirty epics in Castilian and closely related dialects (I shall not be concerned in this paper with the question of lost Catalan or Hispano-Arabic epic, and I shall not have much to say about Hispano-Latin). The evidence that these epics once existed varies from the overwhelmingly strong case *(Siete infantes de Lara)* to the hopelessly weak.

I shall provide a list of lost or hypothetical epics and shall enumerate and try to evaluate the ten criteria that may be applied when we aim to decide whether a lost work of some kind has left traces in extant texts, whether that work was an epic, and how many versions existed. I shall then use these criteria to suggest a solution in a number of representative cases. If time permits, I shall also discuss the possibility of judging the artistic quality of a text which no longer exists.

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The *Poema de Mio Cid* in the *Crónica de Veinte Reyes*

The *Crónica de Veinte Reyes (=XXR),* compiled in the Alfonsine scriptorium at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, recounts the legend of the Cid according to a prosified epic poem which closely resembles the poem copied by Per Abbat. In the material from the *Cantar del destierro* to the fall of Valencia (about v. 1097 of the poem), *XXR,* as well as other Spanish General Chronicles, follows an early prosification which had been complemented with details from translations of Latin and Arabic histories of the Cid. That common chronistic nucleus was completed under the personal supervision of King Alfonso, El Sabio, before 1274. The historian who formed *XXR* attempted to perfect the common compilation by selectively reintroducing into it details taken from its prime source, the epic poem of the Cid.

Whereas other chronicles complete the account of the legendary hero from historically invalid, novelized accounts, *XXR* alone contains a prosification of the *Cantares de Corpes and de bodas.* Like King Alfonso, the compiler of *XXR* was a historian who valued the epic narrative as oral history and who placed credence in the traditionally accepted veracity of the epic. Writing under royal patronage, he would have been attracted by the epic portrait of the Cid as a loyal vassal endeavoring to regain the king's *graçia.* An additional expedient, the succinct style of the epic matched the chronicler's own concise manner of expression.

An examination of traces of assonance in the *XXR* text, particularly in the *Cantares de Corpes and de bodas sections,* provides an enlightening contrast between the formal aspects of two contemporary poems and projects in relief the content which the *XXR* historian esteemed most. The chronicle passages which adhere most closely to the poem focus directly on the Cid's pious acts, on the depravity of his enemies, and only occasionally on his martial feats. The material showing lighter treatment of the epic, that is, the material which is summarized and which shows fewer exact verbal correspondences with the poetic text, deals with secondary figures not directly involved in the Cid's vindication.

Although the poetic base of *XXR* is very similar to the poem copied by Per Abbat, it shows distinct stylistic features patently characteristic of the epic genre and oral transmission: poetic license in character delineation, passages which supplement lacunae and faulty readings in the unique

poetic manuscript, distinct choices of formulae, shifts in assonance, and possible evidence of clerical intervention in the poetic base. The *Crónica de Veinte Reyes* offers clear evidence that the poem copied by Per Abbat is but a single manifestation in the trajectory of the Spanish epic poem of the Cid.

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French Epic Legends in Spanish Hagiography

The paper will study the methods by which French epic themes take hold in Spain and can be used to expand, invigorate, or even authenticate local legends. In a more general manner, the study will illustrate how epic narratives and the lives of saints borrow motifs and details from one another.

The examples of the survival of French epic legends in Spain will be taken from a fairly lengthy, unedited fifteenth-century manuscript life of a minor Spanish saint. Apparently, the vague allusion to the saint's French origin was enough to link him to the royal line of France. In this case, the royal kinsmen assigned to him are also the Carolingian epic heroes. In the expansion of the legend, all types of bizarre appropriations of epic materials take place. The legend is embellished with modified references to the principal personages or the *Roland* and subsequent or derivative epic traditions. The fraternal pairing of Oliver and Roland is emphasized; the motif of the Olifant is applied, with new implications based upon the hagiographer's private interpretation of the epic sequence; an incident reflecting the theme of Don Beltrán and his battle with the Muslims is also included; there is even a sequence which would appear to be based upon the character of Galien, the avenging son of Oliver.

The details cited above are not merely asides or ancillary references in the text we study. They are the basis for new adventures connected with the life of the saint, each of which is formulated upon known episodes in the French epic tradition. The genealogies (even those of the epic heroes) and the chronology are blatantly confounded in the saint's legend, but these matters are minor with our hagiographer. The essential point was that these recognizable legends could be invoked to nourish and expand the imposing dossier of the saint.

How these remnants of French epic details reached our author is uncertain. They may have been known through early Castilian versions of French epics, through known prose references in Latin documents or Spanish chronicles, or through Carolingian ballads which kept the legends flourishing in Spain long after most of them had been forgotten in France. The allusions to the character-type based upon Beltrán—including epithetical formulas—would most likely be from ballads.

In the expanded life of the nearly-neglected saint we study, the characteristic recourses of hagiography are all applied (opposition of parents to the son's religious vocation, the choice of the heavenly kingdom over the earthly empire, the miraculous cures at the saint's death), and motifs from early romances are also present. But the most impressive aspect of the saint's legend was the presence of French epic heroes, for whom the hagiographer stages a whole new set of adventures.