Book Review

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Brian Powell. *Epic and Chronicle: the "Poema de mio Cid" and the "Crónica de veinte reyes."* Modern Humanities Research Association Texts and Dissertations, Volume 18. London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1983. Pp. xi, 204.

"MODERATION AND WISDOM," words with which Brian Powell characterizes Mio Cid's early heroic persona (p. 18), could well be applied to the author of *Epic and Chronicle,* for the manner in which he selects and presents his material and offers his conclusions concerning the prosification of the *Poema de mio Cid* by the chroniclers of the *Crónica de veinte reyes.* Given the nature of the topic of the study, some controversial matters and conflicting opinions in regard to the *PMC* must be considered, and choices made. Powell handles this situation deftly, weighing carefully and deciding open-mindedly on the basis of logic and factual — often statistical — information derived from his own research and from extensive reading of other scholars' works.

Five data-packed chapters, each divided into sections and subsections presenting important facets of the epic and chronicle matter and leading to a specific "conclusion," are followed by a sixth chapter of final conclusion. The work is primarily informational, to a small degree speculative. It is relatively brief but highly concentrated, largely a compilation of facts supporting the arguments and substantiating the conclusions offered.

A series of succinct and unbiased summary remarks on the *PMC,* its manuscript, its theme, its protagonist and his legend, and on related matters, introduces the reader to a survey of the place of the poem in literature and history, and to the scholarship the medieval masterpiece has inspired.

After considering various arguments over when the poem was composed, Powell, favoring a date "in or shortly before 1207,"[1] turns first to the inevitable question of oral vs. written composition, and, taking all available opinions into account, removes the *versus,* noting that "the poet had a wide range of influences working on him" (p. 6). He attributes these influences to the time and place in which the poet was working. He concludes that a sole, educated poet freely copied oral techniques but that the work was composed in writing.

Presently available literary and historical forerunners of the *PMC* — that is, written compositions dealing directly with the Cid's life and exploits, or at least making reference to the Cid — that could indicate something of the popularity and favorite aspects of the theme, in Powell's opinion, are the *Carmen Campi Doctoris,* the *Historia Roderici,* the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris,* the *Crónica Najerense,* and the *Linaje del Cid* section of the *Liber Regum.* Powell indicates similarities with the *PMC* to be found in these works and notes the fact that the latter do make available background material that helps clarify certain references in the poem, but he finds no evidence of direct dependency of the *PMC* poet on any of them. What he does find, after scrutinizing both similarities and differences, is that the *PMC* poet "used the traditional structure and then applied his artistic judgement in developing his own poem" (p. 27). To the poet, moreover, he is inclined to credit invention of some of the major episodes of which he finds no previous trace, particularly those involving the Infantes de Carrión.

Of extant post-PMC (i.e., after 1207) writings in which the Cid story appears, the first two, chronologically, Lucas de Tuy's *Chronicon Mundi* (1236) and Rodrigo Toledano's *De Rebus Hispaniae* (1243), show no direct relationship with the *PMC* but do stand as proof of the continued strength of the Cid tradition. In the series of Alphonsine chronicles, however, Powell discovers and presents clear evidence of the writers' direct acquaintance with the *PMC* itself, not merely with the Cid tradition. Outstanding in this respect is the *Crónica de veinte reyes* for what can be gleaned from it in regard to sources, even those now lost, and their utilization, especially as

[1]P. 4. To Powell's list of those favoring 1207 as the date of composition, and single authorship by a learned poet, may now be added Marina Conti, who presents new argumentation on these questions, in " 'Afrenta de Corpes' a la luz de algunos motivos literario-folklóricos clásicos y medievales." *Revista de Filología Española,* 63 (1983), pp. 73-90.

concerns studies of composition methods. Powell considers the *CVR* the best, perhaps the only, early example of the purification of a complete poem *(PMC),* and therefore a prime source of material for comparative study, and of information on both early prose and epic poetry. Given its proximity to its sources, he considers it a primary text. He believes, furthermore, that the *PMC* text used by the *CVR* chroniclers was *not* that of the presently known manuscript of the poem but an earlier copy from the same manuscript family. He provides extensive and virtually conclusive evidence not only of the existence of an earlier copy, but of the close relationship between the two texts, highlighting his argument with the statement that evidence of separate copy identities is to be found in the *CVR's* inclusion of matter from lines missing from the extant *PMC* manuscript.

It should be noted that the *PMC* prosified version does not appear all in one piece in the *CVR,* but that sections are located at appropriate intervals.

Observations on such subjects as the systems, methods, and aims of accommodating the poem to the chapter and annal that replaced *laisse;* the self-effacement of author; the blending of materials from other sources; the excision of matter perhaps considered fictional or otherwise inappropriate to history as it was then conceived (e.g., war and politics above personal tribulation or triumph, the practical over the emotional); and the amplification of scant passages or of accounts of unusual interest, precede a close study of more subtle stylistic and linguistic alterations used for the purpose of depoeticizing the source, or even, at times, of "improving" it — since the chronicler's medium was *prose,* and his business was to glean information and present it in orderly, direct fashion, albeit interestingly, for a new audience. The chroniclers' efficiency in the execution of their craft, concludes Powell, precludes the practicality of attempting reconstruction of parts of the poem, or even emendation of the poem on the basis of the chronicle.

It is clear, then, that prosification does not mean merely a simple mechanical transfer from one mode to another, piece by piece — though such may be the main procedure — but has to do with various operations in combination. The process resulted inevitably in some distortion and a dulling of stylistic effect. Certainly, one may add, in the depoetization, the poet's remarkable sense of the pictorial was lost on the chroniclers.

The foregoing provides barely an inkling of the substance and worth of *Epic and Chronicle,* and does not take into account such features as the chart showing immediately the points of the chroniclers' greatest dependency on the poem's content, or as the welcome edition of the appropriate passages of the *CVR* (MS. N), appended to the work and facilitating study and direct text comparison. Detailed notes, a list of "Contents" consisting in an outline of the study, and a 476-item bibliography preceded by a "Bibliographical Note" containing further information on certain points discussed in the book, are also major aids to those who wish to pursue any of the many new topics hinted at, but not developed, in the work.

One of the most engrossing chapters of *Epic and Chronicle* compares the style and language of the two texts. Here Powell reports on (and often leads us to consider the psychological bases for) some of the less obvious minor traces of the poem to be found in the chronicle, and, in certain instances, the prosifiers' apparent attempts to erase such traces — assonance words, for instance — or indirectly, using *dicen* as a disclaimer, to notify the reader that a statement about to be made may not be true. Prominent among the topics selected for comparative study is that of the use of direct speech in the two works. Observations on both quantity and handling lead the author to the conclusion that it is in the treatment of speech in the *CVR* that the existence of a poetic original becomes most obvious. He comments on such details as word order, pairs, absolute phrases, *admiratio, oppositum, sententiae,* personal epithets, physical phrases, and references to the Divine. Powell's comparisons of usage of the above and of similar items lead him to believe that the prosifiers intended to "conceal the poetic nature of their source, to omit or replace its assonance words whenever they could, to change its poetic phraseology to the prosaic, and to transfer the poem to prose as similar as possible to the prose of the rest of the chronicle."[2] That they did not succeed in fully attaining this goal Powell demonstrates by means of statistics showing a far higher percentage of lines of direct speech in the *CVR* Cid story than in any other section of the chronicle.[3]

[2]*P.* 87. He does not mention the possibility that the fiist *estoria* of the penultimate sentence of the *CVR* version ("E porque en la su estoria sse contiene de como murio, e lo que acaesçio a la su muerte, por eso no lo pusimos aqui poi non alongar esta estoria"), a reference he thinks is probably to the *Historia Roderici,* might well refer to the text of his postulated early *PMC* copy utilized by the chroniclers, and that, if so, the original-version probably contained some details on the Cid's death and burial.

As throughout the study, only objective criteria are here utilized as a basis for a conclusion. A casual reader may be tempted, nevertheless, in this instance to offer, in favor of the above-quoted statement, a bit of subjective evidence — to wit, that familiarity with the *PMC* interposes itself in the reading, making it difficult for one *not* to read the poem into the prose. On the other hand, one might ask whether an introduction to the hero via the chronicle alone would not leave a reader with the impression that the Cid was more practical plunderer than conquering hero. In any case, the chroniclers' concept of "hero" differed noticeably from that of the poet, as Powell asserts, though, in spite of our critic's warning, we are not prepared completely for witnessing the full consequences of the operation of cutting, culling, and sifting, and the consequent "cold facts" technique employed by the chroniclers in reporting events of the first two *cantares*. The prosification "treatment" leaves the account bare, and the Cid, stripped of much of his humanity, a near-pasteboard hero, a mechanical contrivance even in his display of fairness and generosity. When material extraneous to the Cid story has been removed from the chronicle, the chronologically reported succession of events is so rapid that tempo variation and rhythmic pulsation are virtually nil. Even the periodic indicating of the specific year of events narrated,[4] stretching over almost three decades the whole Cid story from banishment to Infantes' defeat, affords little notion of the rate of the passage of time and does little to distract attention from the steady enumeration of happenings seemingly collapsed timewise into months. Except for the halting effect of the intervalic presentation of story sections, relief comes almost exclusively in the form of direct speech, which humanizes as it reins in the onrush.

The chroniclers do redeem themselves to a great extent, however, in their handling of the Infantes de Carrión story. Here they do not allow the process of depoetization unduly to interfere with the portrayal of the dramatic, even though they are working under the same constraints as before. Their characterization is adequate, and they manage to retain a good por-

[3]The statement that terms such as *cantar and gesta* do not appear in the *CVR* in reference to the *PMC*, though they are used "to identify other poetic sources" (p. 62), causes one to wonder whether the rather glaring omission happened by design, motivated by the chroniclers' desire to hide, or at least to avoid giving a hint of, their *specific* source.

[4]Years mentioned in this span begin with the third of Alfonso's reign (after the Alcoçer episode), and end with the thirty-third (defeat of the Infantes de Carrion). The Cid's death occurs four years later, in Alfonso's thirty-seventh year (see *caps.* 17. 18, 20, 70, 75, and both numbered 83).

tion of the suspense, simultaneously reducing the tempo of the narrative. It is almost as if they considered the first part of the prosification a merely routine exercise, and the last a pleasurable undertaking. It is worth noting, in this respect, that the Infantes episode as recounted in the *CVR* could well be considered a first-rate short story, complete, medieval fashion, with typical tables-turned moral: the covetous and cowardly tricksters, betraying clear signs of submission to more than half of the deadly sins, including the most heinous of all, pride, are caught in the very trap they set for the undoing of others; and. whereas the daughters, whom they immediately look upon as social inferiors *(cap.* LXVIII), finally outdo them in social rank, they, *Infantes de* Carrión though they are, publicly debase themselves as a result of their own nefarious scheming. The chroniclers, of course, owe to the *PMC* poet much of the narrative technique they employ so well in the telling. In short, the *CVR* Cid story is a piece of writing worthy of being studied for itself alone.

In part, it will be remembered, Powell bases his study on certain assumptions (his term) — e.g., the authorship and the date of composition of the *PMC, t*he existence of an earlier copy utilized by the *CVR* chroniclers — that, for the present, at least, cannot be entirely substantiated. His evidence in every case, however, is persuasive, and his reasoning sound. His close scrutiny of the evidence he adduces, moreover surely places such assumptions much closer to fact than to mere conjecture, and Powell has accomplished far more with his seminal study than he is willing to admit. Even if it "does not tell us a great deal more about the *PMC* than we knew already" (p. 111), or prove to the satisfaction of every reader the procreative power of the poem, it does intensify our awareness of time and circumstance, and the mere contrast he has demonstrated between the two accounts of the same story affords new perspectives on the artistic qualities of the poem, deepens our appreciation of the poet's keen sense of both the poetic and the dramatic, and his sensitivity to the affective nature of his characters, and helps explain why the *PMC* is unique among epics. He treats the chroniclers sympathetically also, making clear that their work required specially refined skills and fine judgment, as well as respect for certain priorities — the flow of national events, particularly those of war and politics, above personal incident or vicissitude, even though these might directly affect the hero. It becomes evident with the reading of *Epic and Chronicle* that the paucity of source material available to the chroniclers for the compilation of a proper history was merely *one* of the difficulties to be

surmounted, and the writers' consequent effort to defictionalize material available to them becomes understandable.

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