

# The *Cantar de mio Cid*: Orality and Ring-Composition

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Ever since the work of Parry and Lord revolutionized the study of primary epic, a significant body of scholarship has emphasized the oral, rather than the textual aspects of the genre. Given the crucial function of the formula to these oral interpretations of the epic, far more attention has been devoted to formulaic composition than to overall structural analysis. This study will focus, therefore, on aspects of global structure, specifically ring-composition, as manifestations of orality in the *Cantar de mio Cid* (*CMC*). I will also explore how aspects of oral composition, such as lack of explicit temporal or logical subordination, repetition, and redundancy play an integral role in the poem's ring-composition. These aspects of the poem's orality should shed further light on the circumstances surrounding the poem's composition and recording of the Per Abbat manuscript. Ring-composition and its closely related poetic convention of chiasmus perform an essential function in oral epic through their parallelistic structures. This parallelism in many respects is the antithesis of the overwhelmingly linear organization that characterizes literate composition.

Analysis of ring-composition has played a significant role in the structural analysis of Homeric epic, in spite of a lesser impact on the study of later primary epic. Although the work of Sheppard (1922) predated the impact of Parry and Lord (Parry 1971); (Lord 1960), his study, the *Pattern of the Iliad*, identified

many of the structural features of Homeric epic that would later assume greater significance with the increasing acceptance of oral theory. Sheppard's tripartite division of the Iliad into three "movements," together with an emphasis on that epic's inherent symmetry were antecedents to the concept of ring-composition. A similar interpretation of structure in Homeric epic formed the basis of Myers' study of the last book of the Iliad. Myres' work expanded Sheppard's study by positing a parallelistic "rhythm" of alternating movement and static passages (1932).

Following these early observations on structural parallelism, van Otterlo's study of Homeric epic was the first to *fully* articulate the concept of ring-composition. Van Otterlo conceived of ring-composition as a complex annular system of an outer ring containing one or more inner rings. The components of this system often were marked by repetitive formulas that either indicated the resumption of the main theme or provided the frame for a more or less self-contained passage (van Otterlo 1948). This structural model culminated in the post-Parry/Lord studies of Whitman and Nagler, who also applied ring-composition to Homeric epic. Although not specifically studies of primary epic, the work of James Monroe (Arabic poetry and the maqaôma (1971, 1972, 1976, and 1983 : 224). Samuel Armistead (1986, v. 2: 84, 252), and David Buchan (1972 89, 101, 117, 139, 143) have made significant contributions to the understanding of the ring-composition process. I have used for this analysis of the *CMC* the general conception of ring-composition shared by all these studies, that is, ring-composition as a parallelistic, mirror-imaging of thematic units. These units may be independent parallel constructions or encompass a central thematic core.

In spite of the wide-spread acceptance of the *CMC* as an oral epic, the work remains the object of polemics surrounding its origins and transmission.<sup>1</sup> Although the purpose of this paper is not to refute the stance of proponents for the *CMC*'s literate composi-

tion, it is worth noting that arguments for literate composition have persisted long into the post-Parry/Lord period. The groundwork for the "traditionalist" interpretation was articulated, of course, by Ramón Menéndez Pidal's extensive work on the *CMC* (1947, 1963). In the "individualist" camp, Colin Smith (1983) is one of the more recent advocates for a literate composition of the *CMC*. Numerous later studies, including those by Aguirre (1968) and Michael (1978), have focused instead on the work's oral composition and transmission.

*CMC's* structure as a function of orality can best be seen from the perspective of repetition and parallelism, two fundamental aspects of oral composition. According to theorists such as Walter Ong (1982), oral memory is a gestalt: the material recalled is the end-product of a configuration of auditory, oral, and even motor skills. In the absence of the rote memorization of verses and passages possible with literacy, ring-composition can be a valuable tool in the oral poet's repertoire of compositional devices in such a gestalt. Ring-composition, as a technique on a global level, mirrors many of the same devices at work on the level of the verse, phrase, or *tirada* — parallelism, repetition, antithesis, and standardization of themes. Oral compositions propensity for ring-composition is related to both the mnemonic and structural capabilities of the device. On one hand, the techniques parallelism reduces by half the mnemonic "load" of structural units. At the same time, ring-composition's symmetrical enframing allows the oral poet to focus on a central thematic core. Ring-composition thus lends a certain degree of shape to an otherwise episodic, fragmentary structure. Ring-composition is also highly consistent with a key feature of orality, specifically oral composition's additive, rather than subordinative character. This tendency of oral composition toward additive, unsubordinated discourse can be seen on the level of global structure in the unsubordinated concatenation of narrative units to which ring-composition lends a degree of structure. This can be seen in

the structure of the second cantar (ll.1087-2277), with its seemingly fragmentary, episodic admixture of the capture of Valencia, the wedding of the daughters, and intermittent dispatches of gifts to Alfonso. Such a ring-composition structure stands in contrast to the linear, often subordinated organization so typical of literate composition. Ring-composition not only contributes to an ordering or shaping of groups of thematic units on a global level, but also at the level of the individual verse or tirada. At the level of the individual line or tirada, the seemingly unstructured, fragmented nature of the composition manifests itself in the extreme atactic and paratactic style so common in oral "texts." An example of this style is the catalog typical of oral epic, in this case a list of followers of the Cid from tirada 37 ll. 733-43:

¡Quál lidia bien sobre exorado arzón  
 mio Çid Ruy Diaz el buen lidiador;  
 Minaya Albar Fáñez, que Çorita mandó  
 Martín Antolínez, el Burgalés de pro,  
 Muño Gustioz, que so criado fo,  
 Martin Muñoz, el que mandó a Mont Mayor,  
 Albar Albaroz e Álvar Salvadórez,  
 Galín Garciaz, el bueno de Aragón,  
 Félez Muñoz so sobrino del Campeador!  
 Desí adelante, quantos que y son,  
 acorren la seña e a mio Cid el Campeador.<sup>2</sup>

Not only is this passage a stereotypical example of the oral catalog, the tirada is structurally central to the descriptions of the Battles of Castejoñin and Alcocer, a function dealt with in detail below.

One aspect of ring-composition closely related to the additive nature of oral memory is redundancy or copiousness. For some theorists of oral composition, Ong, in particular, this redundancy or copiousness can become a structuring mechanism in its own right. I would suggest expanding this idea, at least inasmuch as it applies to the *CMC*, by proposing that redundancy plays a key role in the poem's organiza-

tion through ring-composition within the individual cantar. Five *tiradas* within the *Cid* are either recapitulations or near verbatim repetitions of the *tiradas* they immediately follow. These are what Meneñdez Pidal has called *repeticiones* for the recapitulations and *gemelos* for the near verbatim repetitions:

Tirada: ll.:

44/45	837-850	Recapitulation of sale of Alcocer
50/51	926-934	Repetition of jubilation at arrival of news from Castile
72/73	1170-1194	Repetition of announcement of attack on Valencia
119/120	2429-2481	Recapitulation of <i>Cid</i> 's satisfaction with <i>infantes</i> ' combat
128/129	2675-2753	Repetition of abandonment of <i>Cid</i> 's daughters

Each of these redundant passages augments, in a two-fold manner, the symmetry of the overall ring-composition structure described below. First, *tiradas* 44/45 and 128/9 emphasize the thematic cores of the exile and *Corpes cantares* respectively. The first pair of *tiradas* focuses on the Battle of Castejón/Alcocer. The second pair of repeated *tiradas* emphasizes the abuse of the *Cid*'s daughters, an event that both leads to the *Cid*'s litigation with the *infantes* and contributes to their vilification. The redundant *tiradas* also mark overall structural division through a symmetrical enframing of the second cantar, by *tiradas* 50/1 near the end of the first cantar and 119/120 near the beginning of the third. At the same time these passages draw attention to the themes of the increase in the *Cid*'s wealth in *tiradas* 48-63 and the honor/dishonor dichotomy in the relations between the *Cid* and *infantes* in *tiradas* 112-123. The central redundant passage in *tiradas* 72/73 not only marks the beginning of the second cantar, it also highlights the pinnacle of the *Cid*'s military career, the conquest of Valencia. The repetitiousness of the *repeticiones* and *gemelos* thus reinforces a puta-

tive centrality of this event in the narration. This emphasis can be seen as a vestige of an alternative composition in which the conquest of Valencia indeed may have been the focus of the narration. A contradiction thus arises between the historical reality of the Cid's career, with its high point as the capture of Valencia, and the emphasis afforded minor, or even fictional aspects of the hero's life in the Per Abbat manuscript. I will return to this apparent contradiction in the discussion of the poems overall structure.

The following are a chart and analysis of ring-composition in the broadest structural divisions of the *CMC*, the cantares:

Tirada: II:

#### I. Exile

- A 1 1-21 Adversities and anguish from Cid's exile;  
convocation of vassals  
B 2-22 22-436 Departure from Castile; ill omens,  
masses promised  
C 23-39 437-777 Battles of Castejón and Alcocer  
B<sup>1</sup> 40-47 778-889 Return of Minaya Álvar Fáñez to Castile;  
favorable omens; masses paid  
A<sup>1</sup> 48-63 890-1086 Benefits and jubilation from conquests;  
increase in number of Cid's vassals

#### II. Marriage

- A 64-76 1087-1262 Capture of Valencia  
B 77-82 1263-1384 Gifts to Alfonso  
C 83-95 1385-1798 Pledge to moneylenders; arrival of  
daughters and Jimena in Valencia  
D 96-103 1799-1984 Gifts to Alfonso; infantes' plan  
to marry Cid's daughters  
C<sup>1</sup> 104-105 1985-2140 Pledge of daughters' marriage;  
departure of Cid for Valencia

*Olifant*

B <sup>1</sup> 106-107 2141-2181	Gifts to Alfonso
A <sup>1</sup> 108-111 2182-2277	Wedding of daughters

## III. Corpes

A 112-123 2278-2542	Disgrace of infantes with lion and in battle
B 124-128 2543-2748	Conspiracy of infantes
C 129-132 2748-2900	Abuse of daughters; litigation of Cid
BI 133-149 2901-3507	Trial of infantes
AI 150-152 3508-3731	Honor and glory of Cid and descendants affirmed by duels

As can be seen in the outline, the poem's overall structure focuses on the Cid's initial conquests and actions together with those events contributing to the vilification of the Infantes of Carriõn. The beginning and concluding cantares enframe the second cantar that contains the thematic high point of this composition, the infantes' plan to marry the Cid's daughters and the actual wedding, actions that will precipitate the downfall and vilification of the infantes. The symmetry of the second cantar's internal structure, in turn, reiterates this emphasis on the infantes' marriage to the Cid's daughters. This central passage is enframed by parallel structural units based on the themes of pledging and movement. In "C" or tiradas 83-95, the pledge to repay the moneylenders is followed by the arrival of the Cid's family in Valencia. The counterpart section "C<sup>1</sup>," tiradas 104-105, presents the parallel themes of the promise of the daughters' marriage to the infantes and the departure of the Cid for Valencia. These structural units, in turn, are bracketed by the recurrence of the often-repeated gift-giving theme in "B," tiradas 80-82 and "B<sup>1</sup>," tiradas 106-107. Finally, the beginning section "A," tiradas 64-79, and concluding section, A<sup>1</sup>," tiradas 108-111, not only enframe the entire cantar, but also focus attention on their own content by means of their strategic beginning and end positions within the *cantar*.

The first *cantar* shows a similar internal parallelism in its structure. Both the structural and dra-

matic focus of the first cantar are the Battles of Castejoñ and Alcocer. As Duggan's analysis has demonstrated, the inordinate volume of narration devoted to these historically inconsequential, or even fictitious battles, far exceeds the attention devoted to what should be the high-point of the Cid's career, the conquest of Valencia. Over 300 lines are expended on the Battle of Alcocer, while the capture of Valencia in the second cantar receives a mere 11 (Duggan 1989 : 21-5, 83-4, 100, 141). Even after allowing for the extended lacuna at the beginning of the Per Abbat manuscript, the thematic core of this first cantar still emphasizes the insignificant Battles of Alcocer and Castejoñ. This is accomplished by enframing the central episode with "B" (tiradas 2-22) and "B<sup>I</sup>" (tiradas 40-47) both of which deal with travel and the closely related themes of augury and propitiation. The appearance of ill omens in the form of a crow on the left in "B" and auspicious omens described as "buenas aves" in "B<sup>I</sup>" underscore the transformation in the Cid's fortunes. Religious analogues to these superstitions are the propitiation of the Virgin Mary by the Cid's promise of masses in "B," tirada 12, and their payment, once his successes begin in "B<sup>I</sup>," tirada 41. Not only do these tiradas parallel each other, they also highlight the dramatic appearance of the angel Gabriel in the Cid's dream (*tirada* 19.) Despair over the Cid's misfortunes and his convocation of vassals in "A" stand in contrast to the jubilation over triumphs and increase in the number of vassals in "A<sup>I</sup>."

Although the structural importance of an initial block of narration such as the "Exile" cantar should be somewhat less than would be the case in a rectilinear organization, this first cantar bears an equal, if not greater significance than the other two cantares. This emphasis is best seen in the internal structure of the first cantar itself. As mentioned above, the disproportional emphasis on the Battles of Castejoñ and Alcocer detracts from the significance of the capture of Valencia with its minimized description in the second cantar. The catalog of the Cid's followers quoted above, a de-



tail lacking in the description of the battle of Valencia, embellishes the taking of Castejoñ and Alcocer. The emphasis afforded the Castejón/Alcocer thematic core of this first cantar is further underscored by two repetitions (one repetición and one gemelo), *tiradas* 44/45 and 50/51 in B<sup>1</sup> and A<sup>1</sup> respectively. The sheer volume of narration in the form of the extensive level of detail afforded aspects of the Castejoñ/Alcocer campaign similarly emphasizes the significance of these *tiradas*. Events in both the Christian and Moorish camps are often dramatized with copious use of dialog (*tiradas* 23, 24, and 32). Many of the *tiradas* function as fora for the recitation of toponyms, a feature not surprising in light of the poem's emphasis on local color (*tiradas* 23, 26, and 32). In contrast to the more heroic character of the conquest of Valencia, the Castejoñ/Alcocer campaign, even in the Per Abbat manuscript, is an inglorious trench defense. This is followed by the Cid's attack by necessity when water and food are cut off. The inordinate emphasis given Castejoñ/Alcocer is thus all the more paradoxical.

In contrast to the Castejón/Alcocer episode, the poet's description of the Cid's conquest of Valencia offers an insight into the paradigm of oral composition's flexibility in accommodating varying degrees of emphasis. Although one might expect a relatively fixed mode of presentation if there were a reliance on a rigidly memorized recitation, the adaptability of the poet to shift emphasis from one event to another at will is evident in the contrast between the Castejón/Alcocer and Valencia episodes. The phrase "Aquis conpieça la gesta de mio Cid el de Bivar" (167) marks the new structural unit with a formula that would be inappropriate for the intermediate cantar of a three-part narration. Plausible explanations for this incongruity include the fixity of the formula itself in the poets repertoire for beginning a new narration. The use of the phrase also indicates the poet's adroitness by making this either a subdivision of a three-cantar composition, as it appears in the Per Abbat manuscript, or by allowing the cantar the independence of a stand-alone nar-

ration. In view of the dynamics of oral formulaic composition, an entire poem, therefore, conceivably could be devoted to the conquest of Valencia, a commemoration not at variance with the significance of historical fact. Still another indication of how the Valencia episode putatively could function as an independent narration is this cantar's stereotypically oral epic beginning in medias res, after the campaign for Valencia as begun and without explicit linkage to the end of the previous cantar. In contrast to this structure, the Castejón/Alcocer narration is told for the most part chronologically, beginning to end. The prolixity and detail of the Castejón/Alcocer episodes also give way to the brevity and even terseness of the description of the conquest of Valencia, as exemplified by the extreme condensing of events in the second half of tirada 68 (ll. 1143-1152, 169-70):

Moros son muchos, ya quieren reconbrar.  
 Del otra part entróles Albar Fáñez;  
 maguer les pesa oviéronse a dar e a arrancar:  
 de pides de cavallo los ques pudieron escapar  
 Dos reyes de moros mataron en es alcaz,  
 fata Valençia duró el segudar.  
 Grandes son las ganancias que mio Cid  
 fechas ha;  
 robavan el campo e piénssanse de tornar.

This brevity is even more apparent in the chronology of *tirada* 71, with its collapsing of the events of three years surrounding the conquest of Valencia into a mere three lines (172).

The final cantar not only contains the poem's denouement from a rectilinear structural perspective, the section also shows a well-defined ring structure in its own right. The litigation of the Cid before Alfonso reinforces one of the poem's main dichotomies, that is the vilification of the infantes and the glorification of the Cid. The central episode is thus framed by the parallelism of the plotting of the infantes' in "B" and the trial related to this conspiracy in "BI" The begin-

ning and concluding units, "A" and "AI," respectively, delineate the independence of this cantar within the global structure or the entire composition and recapitulate the Cid versus infantes dichotomy.

In view of both these overall and detailed structures of the *CMC*, Buchan's study (1972) is instructive as to how the epics organization reflects an inherent orality. Buchan conceives of ring-composition as a framing process in which balanced, parallel structures flank a single unit of narration (in the case of the ballad, a stanza) (95). Even though Buchan postulates this definition for the oral ballad, the concept holds equally well for the oral epic. The *CMC* manifests this triadic organization on its broadest structural level, the tripartite structure of the three cantares. The internal organization of each cantar also reflects this enframing process in which parallel structural units encapsulate a central thematic core. On the most detailed level, this structure manifests itself as the chiasmus of an inverse ordering of lines enframing one or more central lines (abccb1a1) (100). One of innumerable examples of this structure found in the *CMC* is the internal organization of tirada 35 (ll. 715-25, 145):

Enbraçan los escudos delant los coraçones,  
 abaxan las lanças abueltas de los pendones,  
 enclinaron las caras de suso de los arzones,  
 ívanlos ferir de fuertes coraçones.

A grandes voces llama el que en buena ora  
 nació:  
 "¡feridos, cavalleros, por amor del Criador!  
 "Yo so Roy Díaz, el Cid de Bivar Campeador!"

Todos fieren en el az do está Per Vermudoz.<sup>3</sup>  
 Trezientas lanças son, todas tienen pendones;  
 seños moros mataron, todos de seños colpes;  
 a la tornada que fazen otros tantos muertos  
 son.

The tirada's chiasmic structure is readily apparent in this limited amount of narration. The parallel beginning and ending quatrains (ll. 715-19 and 722-25, respectively) enframe the centrality of the Cid's exhortation in direct discourse. The rhyme scheme underscores the tirada's chiasmic structure with the rhyme of the first quatrain partially repeated in the last. Moreover, the final quatrain becomes an alternation of rhymes from both the first quatrain and central tercet. Oral compositions predisposition for tripartite organization is apparent not only in ring-composition, but also in the grouping of characters. As the Buchan's analyses have shown, triadic grouping of characters underscores the inherently tripartite nature of ring-composition (111). On the *CMC's* broadest level of structure, the cantares, the Cid together with two characters who are variable according to each cantar, are the principle "players" in the narration. The first cantar's triad is the Cid, his followers, and Alfonso. In the second, the emphasis shifts to the daughters and Infantes, both as collective characters, together with the Cid. The third cantar again focuses on the Cid, Alfonso, and the Infantes, whereas it might be argued that the Moorish enemy is also a collective character in all three cantares, its omnipresence and lack of definition make the group more of an adverse force than a character.

Other than an exercise in structural analysis, what conclusions can we draw from the *CMC's* ring-composition? First, the form of the ring-composition itself, with its lop-sided emphasis on the fictitious or historically insignificant Castejón and Alcocer, underscores Duggan's view that the work was composed for a specific audience, the court of Alfonso VIII of Castile. The local color of the Castejón/Alcocer episode would have had a special appeal for this audience (Duggan 1989 : 143-8). As for the question of the poems oral origins, ring-composition can be and, indeed, is used in literate works. An outstanding example is Garcíáa Lorca's "Romance sonañmbulo." Nevertheless, the inherent parallelism and circularity of the technique make

ring-composition ideally suited to the constraints of oral composition. Literate works, with a far greater array of structural devices and freedom from mnemonic constraints at their disposal, would be less likely to use ring-composition to the degree found in the *CMC*. Oral and written composition differ in their use of ring-composition in that the technique is a mnemonic necessity in the former and an effect or embellishment in the latter. When ring-composition is used in literate works, the technique in many instances seems to be deployed in a more regular, self-conscious manner, a phenomenon exemplified again by a composition such as the "Romance sonañmbulo." In contrast, ring-composition in the *CMC* shows a high degree of irregularity and asymmetry — irregular number of fines per tirada, reiteration of lines at irregular intervals, etc. A topic for further research would be a comparison of oral and literate uses of ring-composition, with special emphasis on the contrast between primary and secondary epic.

## NOTES

1 For a discussion of these polemics see either Faulhaber (1976) or Webber (1990).

2 All references to the text are from the Menéndez Pidal edition, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1966.

3 Menéndez Pidal reconstructs this patronymic as "Vermudoz," whereas other editors such as Ian Michael prefer "Vermúez" (Michael 1975 : 58).

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