Oral Composition in the Medieval Spanish Epic

MATTHEW BAILEY

THERE IS ABUNDANT EVIDENCE OF AN ORAL EPIC NARRATIVE tradition in Spain during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The protagonists of these heroic tales are not the kings of the official biographies written in Latin but warriors of the lesser nobility who challenged their lord or king. The most celebrated of these popular heroes was Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, El Cid. He is the protagonist of the only two epic poems to survive from the considerable corpus of oral narrative in Old Spanish. The *Cantar de Mio Cid* (*Cid*), first put to parchment in 1207, tells the story of his exile and return to royal favor as the conqueror of the Moorish kingdom of Valencia in 1094. The *Mocedades de Rodrigo* (*Mocedades*) is a later work of uncertain date, although it was known before 1300. It narrates the youthful exploits (*mocedades*) of Rodrigo Díaz before he earned the honorific *Mio Cid* 'My Lord.'

The popularity of these and other vernacular epic narratives is evidenced by their appropriation by the potentates of the time. The learned authors of the church created a rival vernacular narrative poetry and used it to preach a gospel of consecration for warrior deeds. The late-thirteenth-century historians in the employ of Alfonso X incorporated the epic narratives into their official history of Spain. In doing so, they abandoned the Latin of earlier histories and initiated the vernacular prose tradition in Castilian, the language of the epic. The evocative power of the epic was surely a factor in its imitation and use by learned authors. But modern efforts to identify the compositional process responsible for the epic's unique expression have proved inconclusive. The extant poems share fundamental characteristics with other oral narrative traditions but also seem to have been shaped by learned influences.

It is generally assumed that oral composition and writing were mutually exclusive endeavors, representative of two distinct worlds, the un-

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lettered and the learned. This assumption has led scholars to conclude that the oral essence of extant epic texts was altered during their transition to parchment. But the issue is still open to question, since historians have indicated that during the medieval period oral composition was an integral part of writing. To explore further the relation between oral and literate compositional techniques, this essay introduces a new tool of analysis, intonation units, which make possible readings of the Spanish epic that are more precisely grounded in the social and political circumstances under which they were written, read, and listened to. Ultimately, the expressive characteristics of these poems reflect their compositional process, and to understand that process is to hear the poems in a more genuine and culturally attuned way.

We can better grasp the concept of oral composition and its relation to the Spanish epic by approaching the poems' composition from the perspective of their cultural environment. It is clear enough from a reading of the *Cid* that knights were the power brokers of society. They lived in an essentially oral world; even those who were considered experts on legal matters, *los sabidores* 'knowledgeable men' in the *Cid*, practiced their craft orally. To rule over their compatriots, knights had to be adept at expressing themselves in speech. There can be no doubt that status is reflected in speech and that good speech coupled with high status sustains power and authority. There are specific indicators of the importance given to good speech in the poem, such as when the Cid congratulates Minaya on speaking well in counsel over the next course of action to take in the defense of Alcocer: "A mi guisa fablastes, / ondrásteisvos, Minaya, ca avérvoslo iedes de far" 'You spoke to my liking, / you honored yourself, Minaya, just as you were bound to do' (lines 677b–78).[1] The first time the Cid speaks in the poem, he does so "bien e tan mesurado" 'well and so measured' (7). Likewise, when Asur González, the older brother of the malicious Infantes de Carrión, enters the court in Toledo, not only his drunken appearance exemplifies the decadence of his family but his speech as well:

> Asur Gonçález entrava por el palaçio,
> manto armiño e un brial rastrando,
> vermejo viene, ca era almorçado,
> en lo que fabló avié poco recabdo. . . .
> (3373–76)

> Asur González entered the palace,
> dragging his ermine fur and his tunic,
> he's all red, for he had just eaten,
> in what he said there is little prudence. . . .

Additional indicators of the esteem attached to good speaking in the *Cid* are the subtle hierarchies of speech used in the hortatory modes (Montgomery, *Medieval Spanish Epic* 97–112). This speech-centered world did not limit itself to the unlettered, of course. But as long as writing by hand on parchment was the means for written communication, oral habits of expression would prevail.

In medieval Europe *illitteratus* denoted someone who knew no Latin, while *litteratus* meant a person who knew Latin, or was learned. A parallel antithesis is that of *clericus* and *laicus*, although none of these terms may be used in a strictly modern sense. A monk or cleric might well be *illitteratus*, while a knight might be referred to as *clericus* in the sense of being learned (Clanchy 177–82). Reading and writing did not go hand in hand as they do today. Literary works were intended for reading aloud, whether in Latin or in the vernacular, a practice referred to as *oratio*. Traditional monastic reading, *lectio*, was a process more of savoring the divine wisdom in a book than of finding new ideas or novel information. The ability to put pen to parchment was a specialized skill because it was difficult. This activity was the practice of scribes, who may not have been *litterati*. Writing in the modern sense of composition was usually referred to as *dictitare* (literally, "to dictate"); "to write" (*scriptitare*) was to make a fair copy on parchment (Clanchy 216–18). The *Cid* manuscript provides the classic example of Per Abbat, the scribe who "escrivió este libro" 'wrote down this book.'[2]

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Modern scholars have long questioned absolute distinctions between oral and literate modes of expression. Ruth Finnegan, an anthropologist, provides evidence of a wide array of oral poetry, some of it composed orally but much of it memorized with or without the aid of written texts. Consider the example of Saint Thomas Aquinas as presented by Mary Carruthers. Thomas transcribed his early works in a *littera inintelligibilis* 'unintelligible script,' writing designed not to be read by anyone but the author. He would then call his scribes to take down the text in a legible hand while he read his autograph aloud. When one scribe tired, another would take his place (4). That Thomas's later works seem to have been dictated completely from memory does not mean that Thomas did not consult texts; he did, sometimes asking his scribes to make copies for his use. But composition seems to have occurred only after the texts were committed to memory. As one of his scribes attests, his dictation would flow, and it "ran so clearly that it was as if the master were reading aloud from a book under his eyes" (6).

Other testimonies of medieval composition describe it as an oral process, although revisions followed oral delivery. The twelfth-century preacher Saint Bernard de Clairvaux assumed that his sermons would be easily recalled from one day to the next, but he had them recorded for good measure. His words "were written down (*scripta*) as they were spoken (*dicta*), that is, recorded by pen (*excepta stylo*)." Bernard's literary production also could occur in "three phases, composition (*dictare*), transcription (*transcribi*), and publication (*edidi*)" or might include "oral presentation in small groups (*conferre*), writing out (*scribere*), revisions for correction (*recogitare, corrigere*), and the putting out of an anthology (*legendum praebere*)" (Stock 409). Eadmer of Canterbury, who had to conceal from Saint Anselm that he was writing his biography, was well along in the process of composing on wax tablets and transcribing onto parchment when Anselm asked what he was composing and copying (*quid dictitarem, quid scriptitarem*; Clanchy 218). In the redaction of the miracles of Saint Foy, Bernard of Angers took accounts from eyewitnesses he interviewed. He hastily scribbled notes that he took with him to Angers "not to add superfluous information, but to prune repetitions and to rework the whole into a concise, organized literary product" (Stock 65). Canonical procedure required that there be two texts, the transcript of the testimonies and the later version (*lectio*) composed in Angers. In Spain, well into the fourteenth century, Juan Manuel repeatedly informs us in *Conde Lucanor* that he liked a story so well he "mandolo escrivir en este libro" 'ordered it written down in this book' (Pellen 190). The works of these learned men bear little resemblance to the diction in the Spanish epic, yet initially their works and the epics were composed orally. Composing a text in medieval Europe involved speaking, and it follows that seeing composition as anything but a continuum from speech to writing is inappropriate for the period.

The extent to which oral expression shapes the Spanish epic has been a lively issue among hispanomedievalists, although the polemical question of the epic's oral composition has been effectively shelved in favor of an approach that allows for varying degrees of literate and oral influences.[3] Medieval references document a vigorous epic tradition that was oral in performance.[4] The popularity of the epics inspired the learned vernacular narrative poems that competed with them for an audience among the elite and the rulers of the land. The anonymous author of the *Libro de Alexandre* calls attention to the virtuosity of his poetry, known as *mester de clerecía* 'clerical, or learned, verse,' as exemplified in its metrical regularity, and contrasts it to *juglaría* (the traditional poetry of the *juglares* 'bards,' including the epic), which is not metrically regular.[5] Alfonsine chroniclers question the veracity of epic tales that clash with the story lines of the Latin chronicles at hand, but

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they are compelled to include the tales in their vernacular histories.[6] For Ramón Menéndez Pidal and the earlier pioneers of Spanish epic studies, the epic was narrative poetry written in a style appropriate for oral performance before a wide variety of audiences.[7] The publication of Milman Parry and Albert Lord's findings on the oral composition of the South Slavic epic prompted hispanomedievalists to examine the formulaic language of the Spanish epic to determine if it too was orally composed. The data from those studies vary somewhat, but formulas are found to account for about a third of the half-lines of the *Cid* and a little less than half that amount in the *Mocedades* (Duggan; Geary; Webber). Although the *Cid* percentage is nearly equal to that of the French *Chanson de Roland*, it is low in comparison to the traditions studied by Parry and Lord (Lord, *Singer of Tales* 47). This difference has led scholars to reject or at least avoid the question of oral composition for the Spanish epic, preferring to proceed under the assumption that the two extant epic texts are transitional. It is assumed that these poems were no doubt spawned in an oral tradition but were transformed by a learned author or learned culture in their transition from traditional oral narrative to verses written on parchment.[8]

To examine the validity of this assumption, we must return to Lord's *The Singer of Tales*. Lord's theories on oral composition, drawn from his fieldwork alongside his mentor Parry, have as their starting point Parry's work on epic epithets in the Homeric poems. Parry had come to the conclusion that these poems were traditional narratives that must also be oral compositions. For purposes of comparison, he decided to observe a living oral narrative tradition, that of the guslars of the Yugoslav epic. From this fieldwork two key concepts related to oral narrative emerged; the formula and the theme. The presence of formulas, "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Lord 30), soon became the litmus test for determining oral composition in European epic narrative, including the Spanish epic. Lord understands formula as a compositional tool, an aid used by the poet to narrate a compelling story in metrically sophisticated verse during the intense process of oral composition before an expectant audience (54). Formulas—elevated expression, to be sure—are nonetheless metrically apt expressions that the bard has learned to employ through years of apprenticeship and practice (36, 65–67).

But the poetry studied by Lord is syllabic or syllabotonic, using trochaic (falling) pentameter, with the break or caesura always after the fourth syllable (37–38). Homeric verse is even more complex, expressed in dactylic hexameter, a quantitative meter. Both are measures far more structured than Spanish epic verse, which has essentially no metrical constrictions, relying on simple assonance for its poetic effect. Even the assonance varies as the story evolves. The shortest assonantal series (*tiradas*) contain no more than two lines; the longest extend well over one hundred lines. Sometimes these breaks in assonance mark a change in subject, but other times they do not. So even assonance is a flexible pattern in oral performance.

What can Lord's "the same metrical conditions" mean in a context in which there are essentially no metrical conditions? Not much, to be sure. At least in terms of oral composition, if the formula is a phrase that assists the bard in forming metrically apt verse, then the near absence of metrical conditions in the Spanish epic would mean little need for formulas. Formulas certainly exist in Spanish epic poetry. Some are found in end-line position, producing assonance; just as many are simply functional phrases in first hemistiches, such as *dixo Mio Cid* 'said Mio Cid.' There is, not surprisingly, a lower formulaic density in Spanish epic verse than in the South Slavic and Homeric poetry studied by Lord, but that result does not lead logically to the preclusion of oral composition. The essential premise of formula studies, that the same or even a similar definition of *formula*

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can be applied to diverse metrical conditions, is flawed. It seems more reasonable to conclude that Lord's concept of epic formula is not an appropriate tool for determining the compositional process of Spanish epic narrative.[9]

The second concept to emerge from Lord's work is theme, which he initially defines in a strict sense as a compositional aid, following Parry: "the groups of ideas regularly used in telling a tale in the formulaic style of traditional song" (68). However, in his later work *The Singer Resumes His Tale*, Lord defines *theme* more loosely as "a repeated passage with a fair amount of verbal repetition" (137). He then elaborates on its use:

> I have now come to realize, as I have analyzed themes in terms of textuality, that the traditional epic singer, composing characteristically in comparatively short passages—that is, themes—actually does work with a mixture of more or less stable core and optional lines. . . . The core lines are those found in all (or nearly all) the occurrences of a theme; the optional lines may or may not be used in any single instance of it. The latter are of at least two kinds. One functions as expansion and ornamentation, the other in adapting a theme to the specific context of a given song. (212–13)

Note that no mention is made of formulas in this later definition. Lord has demonstrated the appropriateness of this less rigid concept of theme for the analysis of Anglo-Saxon poetry (137–66), and it could shed light as well on the compositional process of the Spanish epic.

In the *Mocedades*, Rodrigo de Vivar (the young Cid) does battle in France with the count of Savoy:

929 Caudillan las azes e lidian tan de grado,
930 —¡Saboya!— llamó el conde e —¡Castilla!— el castellano.
Veredes lidiar a profía e tan firme se dar,
atantos pendones obrados alçar e abaxar,
atantas lanças quebradas por el primero quebrar,
atantos cavallos caer e non se levantar,
935 atanto cavallo sin dueño por el campo andar.
En medio de la mayor priessa Rodrigo fue entrar,
encontrósse con el conde, un golpe le fue dar,
derribólo del cavallo, non le quiso matar.
939 —Preso sodes, don conde, el onrado saboyano—.[10]

929 They set up the battle lines and they fight so gladly,
930 "Savoy!" cried the count and "Castile!" the Castilian.
You will see fierce fighting and powerful blows being struck,
so many sewn pennons rising and falling,
so many lances broken at the first breaking,
so many horses falling and not getting up,
935 so many horses without riders wandering in the field.
In the middle of the greatest furor Rodrigo went in,
he came upon the count, he struck him a blow,
he knocked him off his horse, he decided not to kill him.
939 "You are captured, Sir Count, the honorable Savoyard."

The narration of the battle involves two assonances. The battle proper has assonance in *a* (931–38), while its contextual frame is narrated in *a-o* (929–30, 939). Something similar occurs in the ensuing example from the *Cid*:

722 Todos fieren en el az do está Pero Vermúez,
trezientas lanças son, todas tienen pendones,
seños moros mataron, todos de seños colpes,
725 a la tornada que fazen otros tantos son.
Veriedes tantas lanças premer e alçar,
tanta adágara foradar e passar,
tanta loriga falsar e desmanchar,
tantos pendones blancos salir vermejos en sangre,
730 tantos buenos cavallos sin sos dueños andar.
Los moros llaman —¡Mafómat!— e los cristianos —¡Santi Yagüe!—
Cayén en un poco de logar moros muertos mill e trezientos ya.
¡Quál lidia bien sobre exorado arzón,
734 Mio Çid Ruy Díaz el buen lidiador!

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They all strike at the formation where Pedro Bermúdez is,
they are three hundred lances, all have their pennons,
they killed a like number of Moors, each one with a single blow,
on the second charge they make, as many again are killed.
You would see so many lances lowered and raised,
so many Moorish shields pierced and penetrated,
so many mail coats traversed and torn,
so many white pennons come out red with blood,
so many good horses wandering without their riders.
The Moors cry "Mahomet!" and the Christians "Saint James!"
In a small space one thousand three hundred Moors now fell dead.
How well he fights over his gilded saddlebow,
Mio Cid Ruy Díaz the good fighter!

Here again the description of the battle includes a highly stylized narration in one assonance, *a* (726–30), while the remainder of the battle is delivered in another, *úe*, *o* (722–25, 733–34).

In both passages the assonance of the more stylized portion of the narration is the same. Also noteworthy is their stylistic similarity, with the use of the formulaic *veredes* or *veriedes*, followed by the repetition of *tanto* or *atanto* at the beginning of each of the enumerative lines and the use of infinitives to complete the assonance in *a*. These striking similarities may be considered the core or stable lines of the battle description, the theme. Also noteworthy is the use of the battle cry, similar though contextualized in each poem (930; 731) and the identification of the individual hero's participation in the battle immediately following the more generic combat (936–39; 733–34). These verses of battle cry and identification seem equivalent to Lord's "optional lines," employed in the ornamentation and contextualization of the theme. Although the battle descriptions are similar, there is no word-for-word, or formulaic, correspondence. Searching only for formulaic repetitions, previous studies have overlooked this type of thematic resonance.

Another example of the use of theme is part of the description of two distinct battles in the same poem. The first of these re-creates the defense of Alcocer by the Cid against the two Muslim generals, Fáriz and Galve, sent by the emir Tamín of Valencia. The second description narrates the chase of the Moroccan king Búcar by the Cid after the Cid's successful defense of Valencia. Only the verses with clear parallels in expression are cited.

765 Martín Antolínez un colpe dio a Galve
2421 arriba alçó Colada, un grant colpe dádol' ha

766 las carbonclas del yelmo echógelas aparte
2422 las carbonclas del yelmo tollidas ge las ha

767 cortól' el yelmo, que llegó a la carne
2423 cortól' el yelmo e, librado todo lo ál

772 Los de Mio Cid firiendo en alcaz
776 El Campeador íval' en alcaz
2408 Mio Cid al rey Bucar cayól' en alcaz

777 fata Calatayut duró el segudar
2407 Siete migeros conplidos duró el segudar

765 Martín Antolínez dealt a blow to Galve
2421 he raised up Colada, a great blow he has dealt him

766 the carbuncles of his helmet he broke them apart
2422 the carbuncles of his helmet he has broken them off

767 he split open his helmet, and reached his scalp
2423 he split open his helmet and, leaving the rest exposed

772 Mio Cid's men are attacking in pursuit
776 the Campeador went in pursuit of him
2408 Mio Cid fell into pursuit of King Búcar

777 up to Calatayud lasted the chase
2407 seven full miles lasted the chase

These references are from the first and third *cantares*, respectively, and contain three formulas: 766a and 2422a (*las carbonclas del yelmo*),

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767a and 2423a (*cortól' el yelmo*), 777b and 2407b (*duró el segudar*). But in these passages assonance is not the structuring principle, since two of the three formulas occur in the first hemistich. Additionally, the paired second hemistiches have essentially the same meaning yet express it differently, with the exception of the formula *duró el segudar*. Evidently the poet is constructing his theme not with formulas but instead by adjoining the patterned actions, placing one before the other in fairly strict order until all the actions are included.

The same structuring process can be found in the individual combats undertaken by the Cid's vassals to defend his honor against his former sons-in-law. Again, verses with like meanings have been paired.

3625 firiénse en los escudos sin todo pavor
3673 Firiénse en los escudos unos tan grandes colpes

3626 Ferrán Gonçález a Pero Vermúez el escúdol' passó
3676 tras el escudo falsóge la guarnizón

3627 prísol' en vazío, en carne nol' tomó
3677 en vazío fue la lança, ca en carne nol' tomó

3630 un colpe reçibiera, mas otro firió
3678 Este colpe fecho, otro dio Muño Gustioz

3631 quebrantó la bloca del escudo, apart ge la echó
3680 por medio de la bloca del escúdol' quebrantó

3632 passógelo todo, que nada nol' valió
3681 nol' pudo guarir, falsóge la guarnizón

3633 metiól' la lança por los pechos, que nada nol' valió
3683 metiól' por la carne adentro la lança con el pendón

3637 de dentro en la carne una mano ge la metió
3684 de la otra part una braça ge la echó

3638 por la boca afuera la sángrel' salió
3687 vermejo salió el astil e la lança e el pendón

3640 por la copla del cavallo en tierra lo echó
3686 al tirar de la lança en tierra lo echó

3641 Assí lo tenién las yentes que mal ferido es de muert.
3688 Todos se cuedan que ferido es de muert.

3625 they strike each other's shields fearlessly
3673 They strike each other's shields with such great blows

3626 Fernán González pierced the shield of Pedro Bermúdez
3676 through the shield he broke his armor

3627 he hit only air, he did not strike flesh
3677 the lance hit only air, for it did not strike flesh

3630 he received one blow, but he dealt another
3678 This blow struck, Muño Gustioz struck another one

3631 he broke the boss of the shield, he split it in two
3680 through the boss he broke the shield

3632 he went through it entirely, it didn't protect him at all
3681 it could not protect him, he broke through his armor

3633 he stuck his lance into his chest, it didn't protect him at all
3683 he thrust right through his flesh the lance and the pennon

3637 into his flesh a hand's breadth he drove it
3684 pushing it through the other side an arm's length

3638 out from his mouth the blood came
3687 the shaft came out red as did the lance tip and the pennon

3640 over the croup of the horse he was thrown to the ground
3686 when he pulled back on the lance he threw him to the ground

3641 In this way the people thought he is mortally wounded
3688 Everyone thinks that he is mortally wounded

The two combats are structured in nearly identical order from beginning to end. There are minor differences, as shown in the inversion made here of lines 3686–87 to conform to lines 3638–

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40. However, of the eleven pairs of verses only four have formulas in one of their two hemistiches (3625a, 3673a; 3627b, 3677b; 3640b, 3686b; 3641b, 3688b). The formulas are noteworthy, but the overall development of these individual combats is based on not "any fixed set of words, but a grouping of ideas" (Lord, *Singer of Tales* 69).

Additional examples of this theme as well as others can be found in the *Cid*, but the ones given here should suffice for the point being made, that the poem's compositional process is driven more by themes than by formulaic language. These themes might be referred to as stylized narrations, but there is also room in them for individual variation or ornamentation. The nearly identical ordering of the actions in these final combats makes them seem ritualistic, a familiar sequence re-created in essentially the same way and whose resolution is not in doubt. All the familiar acts are recounted, allowing the bard and the audience to anticipate and celebrate them together, as a shared experience. Lord documented a similar compositional process in the South Slavic epic, Homeric verse, and Anglo-Saxon poetry. Oral composition seems the one common denominator for these otherwise divergent narrative traditions.

In a field loosely defined as discourse analysis, linguists have made good use of cognitive psychology and linguistic research to identify some of the characteristics of narrative production. Wallace Chafe has brought to the fore cognitive traits of casual speech that seem especially pertinent to medieval epic discourse. In his *Properties of Written and Spoken Language*, Chafe follows up on his earlier work on conversational speech, which he sees as produced in relatively brief spurts. He terms these spurts idea units, or intonation units. In cognitive terms, these units "express what is in the speaker's short-term memory or 'focus of consciousness,' at the time [they are] produced." The prototypical intonation unit has the following properties: it is spoken with a single, coherent intonation contour; it is followed by a pause; and it is likely to be a single clause. Chafe studies some properties of intonation units and finds that "a speaker does not, or cannot, focus on more information than can be expressed in about six words," while the syntax of these units "must be kept simple" (10). He concludes that intonation units are the natural units of speech, whereas sentences are the major units of writing. This distinction comes about "presumably because writers have the leisure to perfect complex and coherent sentence structures which speakers are moving too fast to produce" (18).

Egbert Bakker has associated the cognitive concept of the intonation unit with the highly stylized and rhythmically sophisticated form of Homeric verse. He finds that, just as in ordinary speech, the basic metrical unit of Homeric verse is not the sentence but the intonation unit. The intonational and prosodic properties of this unit are stylized into metrical properties, their cognitively determined length making them ideal for formulas as the basic ingredients of epic discourse. The metrical requirements of Homeric verse would not exclude it from being considered a form of speech; in Bakker's terminology it is "special speech" ("How Oral" 37–39).

In the Spanish epic, where there are essentially no metrical requirements, the cognitive relation between narrative discourse and Chafe's concept of the intonation unit should be even more evident than in Homeric poetry. The hemistiches and paratactic verse of the epic can be readily understood in terms of an intonation unit, a single focus of consciousness, adjoined to subsequent cognitively based intonation units. Another passage from the *Cid* should serve to illustrate this relation as well as an additional aspect of narrative formation brought to light by Chafe.

The passage that follows is from the well-known "niña de nuef años" 'nine-year-old girl' episode:

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15 Mio Çid Ruy Díaz por Burgos entrava,
en su conpaña sessaenta pendones,
16*b* exiénlo ver mugieres e varones,
burgeses e burgesas por las finiestras son,
plorando de los ojos, tanto avién el dolor,
18–20 de las sus bocas todos dizían una razón,
—¡Dios, qué buen vassallo, si oviesse buen señor!— *center of interest*

Conbidarle ien de grado, mas ninguno non osava,
el rey don Alfonso tanto avié la grand saña,
antes de la noche, en Burgos d'él entró su carta
con grand recabdo e fuertemientre sellada,
25 que a Mio Çid Ruy Díaz que nadi nol' diessen posada,
e aquel que ge la diesse sopiesse vera palabra,
que perderié los averes e más los ojos de la cara,
e aun demás los cuerpos e las almas. *side interest*

Grande duelo avién las yentes cristianas,
29–30 ascóndense de Mio Çid, ca no l'osan dezir nada.
El Campeador adeliñó a su posada,
assí commo llegó a la puerta, fallóla bien çerrada, *center of interest*

por miedo del rey Alfonso, que assí lo avién parado,
34 que si non la quebrantás por fuerça, que non ge la abriesse nadi. *side interest*

15 Mio Cid Ruy Díaz entered Burgos,
in his company sixty pennons,
16*b* women and men came out to see him,
burghers, men and women, are at their windows,
weeping from their eyes, they had such sorrow,
from their mouths all said one thing,
20 "God, what a good vassal, if he had a good lord!"
They would welcome him gladly, but none dared,
King Don Alfonso had such terrible anger,
before nightfall, his letter reached Burgos,
with much precaution and heavily sealed,
25 that no one give lodging to Mio Cid Ruy Díaz,
and that whosoever might give it to him know verily,
that they would lose their possessions and also the eyes from their face,
and even their bodies and their souls.
The Christian people had great sorrow,
30 they hide from Mio Cid, for they dare not say anything to him.
The Campeador headed for his lodgings,
as he arrived at the door, he found it securely locked,
for fear of King Alfonso, for so they had agreed,
34 that if he did not break it by force, that no one open it for him.

Traditionally, editors of the Spanish epic have divided each verse into two hemistiches. This division is not based on metrical characteristics since the length of the hemistiches is not determined by a syllable count, as in alexandrine verse, or by feet, as in Homeric verse. It simply reflects a natural pause, generally between two distinct and readily discernible phrases. This traditional division corresponds perfectly to Chafe's concept of intonation units, with four to six words each. Each hemistich is a clause with the same cognitive basis as the intonation unit of casual speech. The metrical irregularity of the verses and hemistiches now has an explanation. These essential units of expression are not related to prosody; they are cognitively based in speech. They are not so much metrically irregular as unencumbered by metrical constraints. Also, the string-along style, or parataxis, of the hemistiches and of the verses is not a style at all. It is the cognitively based process of narration observed by Chafe in his analysis of casual speech.

The adjoining of multiple foci of consciousness is carried out sequentially, which is a reflection in speech of the cognitive processing of information. It seems that we are not capable of processing more information in a larger focus. These sequences "convey a single mental image about which several things are simultaneously true," and when the speaker determines that adequate communication of an image has been achieved, sentence-final intonation is employed (Chafe, "Deployment" 27). The sequences or

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images are termed centers of interest, and speakers do not express a series of centers of interest without some trouble, what Chafe calls perturbations. He divides these perturbations into five categories: abandonment; postponement; pursuit of a side interest, with subsequent return to the main track; insertion of a center of interest on a different level of interest; and supplementation of a center of interest after preliminary closure has been reached (33). As speakers switch from one center of interest to another, the perturbations are generally accompanied by corrections, pauses, repetitions, false starts, backtracking, and other manifestations of uncertainty. Although the "niña de nuef años" episode seems sequential, it actually alternates between what might be called background and foreground narration. By identifying these two spheres of narration, we should be able to determine if its relative complexity has resulted in anything similar to Chafe's perturbations. A positive finding would provide supporting evidence of the oral composition of the passage, with its cognitive basis in speech.

The episode begins with an initial center of interest, or foreground action, the entrance of the Cid into Burgos and his reception by the residents, who are grieving over the Cid's situation (15–20). The narrator then switches to a side interest, or background action (21–28). Here the narrator explains the despair of the citizens of Burgos, already described as grieving, as a consequence of their inability to aid the Cid. The narration of the main action of the passage resumes (29–32), but the narrator again interrupts to pursue a side interest (33–34), this time to explain why the door to the Cid's customary lodging was not opened.

The paratactic structure of the poem gives little sense of the multiple foci employed by the narrator, since the action and what lies behind it are communicated to the audience without the use of subordination. The narrator presents first the foreground action, then some background information as explanation, then returns to the main action, and so forth. This narrative produces something akin to the third of Chafe's five categories of perturbations: pursuit of a side interest with subsequent return to the main track. Chafe found in his samples of casual speech that when the narrator returns to the main image, it is reverbalized before the narration proceeds ("Deployment" 34–35). In the passage from the *Cid*, lines 18–20 are reverbalized in 29–30, as the narrator's focus returns to the initial center of interest.

Beginning at line 35, the narrator returns to the original center of interest and presents the remainder of the Cid's encounter with the people of Burgos.

35 Los de Mio Çid a altas vozes llaman,
los de dentro non les querién tornar palabra.
Aguijó Mio Çid, a la puerta se llegava,
sacó el pie del estribera, una ferídal' dava,
non se abre la puerta, ca bien era çerrada.
40 Una niña de nuef años a ojo se parava,
—Ya Campeador, en buen ora çinxiestes espada,
el rey lo ha vedado, anoch d'él entró su carta
con grant recabdo e fuertemientre sellada.
Non vos osariemos abrir nin coger por nada,
45 si non, perderiemos los averes e las casas
e demás los ojos de las caras.
Çid, en el nuestro mal vós non ganades nada,
mas el Criador vos vala con todas sus vertudes santas.—
Esto la niña dixo e tornós' pora su casa.
50 Ya lo vee el Çid, que del rey non avié graçia,
51 partiós' de la puerta, por Burgos aguijava. . . .

center of interest

35 The Cid's men call out loudly,
those within would not respond.
Mio Cid rode up, he came to the door,
he drew his foot from the stirrup, he gave it a kick,
the door doesn't open, for it was heavily secured.

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40 A girl of nine years came into view,
"Oh Campeador, in a fortunate hour you girded sword,
the king has forbidden it, last night his letter arrived
with much precaution and heavily sealed.
We dare not open up or take you in for anything,
45 or else we would lose our possessions and our houses
and even the eyes from our faces.
Cid, in our suffering you gain nothing,
but may God help you with all his holy powers."
This the girl said and returned to her house.
50 Now the Cid sees it, that he had not the king's favor,
51 he moved away from the door, he spurred through Burgos. . . .

The girl is a poetic device that allows the people of Burgos to finally speak to the Cid. In rapid succession she conveys their admiration for him (41), the king's prohibition (42–43), their current dilemma (44–46), a subtle plea for mercy (47), and an expression of their hope for his future success (48). Once she has greeted him (41), the statements are narrated in a sequence of past, present, and future. Paratactic verse seems particularly well suited to the narration of events chronologically. The focus is intense, and the story moves forward effectively. Although the girl recapitulates verses 23–28 (with 42–46), here the recapitulation does not indicate uncertainty in speech. Her speech has a pleasing aesthetic effect and exemplifies the skilled speaking that characterizes the verbal exchanges in the poem (see Montgomery, *Medieval Spanish Epic* 98–100). In this passage the bard seems to concentrate his cognitive energies on producing a speech that is memorable and powerfully persuasive.

The principle of performance-enhanced speech may recall a similar concept in classical rhetorical prose, especially in the subservience of such speech to natural constraints. In oral delivery, the natural constraint is the need for the speaker to take a breath. Breath pauses during performance result in short units of expression, identified and labeled by Cicero and Quintilian as essentially smaller parts of a whole: they are the limbs of a body, connected by joints, which we recognize as the clauses of a sentence or period joined by conjunctions. The clause can be rhythmically complete but semantically meaningless (*membrum*) or both semantically and rhythmically incomplete (*incisum* or *articula*; Bakker, *Poetry* 138–46).

Classical rhetorical prose and epic verse are understood as fundamentally constrained by nature. In recognition of these constraints, the classical rhetors adapt their public speeches so as to create a pleasant and memorable experience for orator and audience alike. This experience is enhanced by the manipulation of breath units in a way that blends their syntax and rhythm of delivery, for the audience responds best to speech governed by nature. But the units of Latin rhetorical discourse (*membra*) are ultimately subservient to syntactic periodicity, in that "they either create syntactic expectations or give 'what is due' in fulfilling them" (Bakker, *Poetry* 145). Epic discourse looks ahead as well, but not to the completion of a sentence or grammatical construct. Instead, it projects toward the completion of the verse, to the simple assonance that marks the end of one verse and the beginning of another.[11]

As the passage from the *Cid* confirms, a speaker does not process information quickly enough to be able to place centers of interest in a hierarchy. Consequently, these are adjoined sequentially, as in parataxis, or sometimes coordinated with conjunctions—mostly *and*; less often *then*, *but*, or *so.* Speakers seldom use subordination, a device that leads to confusion (Chafe, "Deployment" 30). As writers, we are familiar with the struggle to create coherent prose by subordinating some ideas and images to others. This process of integration was not manifest in the speech of Chafe's subjects in the late seventies, and neither is it found in the epic narratives of thirteenth-century Spain. The distinction between speech and writing becomes markedly apparent when we compare the *Cid*

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passage to its prose equivalent in Alfonso X's *Estoria de España*, also from the thirteenth century (c. 1289). Subordinating conjunctions have been italicized.

> Et *pues que* entró en Burgos fuesse pora la posada *do* solié posar; *mas* non le quisieron y acoger; *ca* el rey lo enuiara defender quel non acogiessen en ninguna posada en toda la uilla, nin le diessen uianda ninguna. *Quando* aquello uio el Çid, saliosse de la uilla et fue posar en la glera. (Menéndez Pidal, *Primera crónica general* 523; ch. 851, col. 2, lines 27–34)

> And *once* he entered Burgos he went to the inn *where* he normally stayed, *but* they did not want to take him in there; *for* the king had ordered it prohibited that anyone should offer him lodging at any inn in all the town, nor should they give him any provisions whatsoever. *When* the Cid saw that, he left the town and went to camp on the riverbank.

Most striking is the absence from this passage of the moving encounter with the nine-year-old girl. Her breaking of the enforced silence implies solidarity between the Cid and the people of Burgos, which the Alfonsine chroniclers could not abide.[12] Her absence eliminates the tension from the passage altogether. The use of subordinating conjunctions integrates the various centers of interest into a briefer yet syntactically more complex single focus. Transforming oral verse into prose produced the equivalent of a modern-day paragraph. The punctuation, determined by its editor, now seems essential to it and underscores its literate essence (see Fleischmann 186–88).

Other Spanish epic narratives, such as *Siete infantes de Lara, Sancho II, Condesa traidora, Infante García,* are preserved only in Alfonsine prose, so their original mode of composition is not open to examination. The *Poema de Fernán González* re-creates the legendary deeds of the first count of Castile, but it does so in *clerecía* verse, a form traditionally associated with learned writers (see Bailey, Poema). The *Mocedades* is the only other Spanish epic poem whose composition can be analyzed, and it displays the same characteristics of speech as the *Cid*. Verses in the *Mocedades* have no metrical properties; they consist of two clauses or half-lines divided by a natural pause and ending in assonance. Themes and formulas are part of the poem's expression, even if to a lesser degree than in the *Cid*. Overall, the expression of the *Mocedades* pales in comparison with the *Cid*, but certain passages are exceptionally moving, and the combination of prosaic and poetic language provides insights into its mode of composition.

The first folio (188r) of the work contains a thumbnail sketch of Castile's legendary history in prose that morphs into verse during the narration of key episodes in the life of Fernán González (188v). This historical material ends abruptly as the narration takes up the story of Rodrigo's *mocedades* (line 296). Included in the introductory material is the foundation legend of the diocese of Palencia. The status of the diocese is clumsily connected to Rodrigo's epic deeds as a legal issue that the epic hero helps resolve (736–49). The presence of this ecclesiastical matter in the aggressive warrior world of the hero is understood as an indicator of learned intervention in the production of the extant text (Deyermond, "Autoría"). The many lengthy lines in the poem are another sign of learned intervention. Some eighty of these betray a chronicler's concern for titles and complete names; others contain nouns designating family relationships or deliberate stylistic archaisms that complete the same *a-o* assonance employed in over eighty percent of the poem (Montgomery, "Lengthened Lines" 12). Additionally, adjective use seems conventional and automatic when compared with the resonance and restraint of the *Cid* (Montgomery, "Adjective Patterning" 175). There are also moving passages in the poem, some of which later appear in ballad collections of the fifteenth century (Bailey, "Asonancias"). The historical material in prose that precedes the poetic text is not reminiscent of the

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learned style of the Alfonsine chroniclers. It is halting and structured on the repetition of the conjunction *et* 'and,' a characteristic of oral discourse (Bakker, *Poetry* 62–71). The poem as a whole is too disjointed and poorly focused to have been a record of performance. However, putting it to parchment established a documentary link between an epic legend not in dispute and the foundation and legal standing of a diocese that was disputed. This clerical purpose does not obscure the fact that the work bears no resemblance to the learned compositions of its time. A combination of oral composition with some later learned reworking remains the most likely explanation for the poem's narrative characteristics.

Certain characteristics in the *Cid* also suggest ecclesiastical influence. Tomb cults developed around all the principal Spanish epic protagonists (Russell 57–58). The Cid, no exception, became the object of veneration at the monastery of San Pedro de Cardeña, where his body was transported for burial after the fall of Valencia in 1102. The extensive history of this tomb cult culminated in a 1554 petition by Phillip II to have the Cid canonized. The Cardeña monks composed a prose biography of their patron sometime between 1238 and 1260, known as the *Estoria de Cardeña.* Their influence has been suggested as an explanation for the importance of the monastery of Cardeña in the events narrated in the poem (Russell 70–78; Fletcher 195–200). Clerical intervention is clearly evident in the passage known as Jimena's Prayer (330–65), a credo with language reminiscent of the ecclesiastical expression of the *Poema de Fernán González* (Bailey, Poema 43–53). The poem's truncated ending can also be considered a sign of the monastery's influence (Russell 74). It places the death of the Cid at Pentecost, in accordance with the Cardeña legend, as opposed to the account of the historically reliable Latin biography of the Cid, *Historia Roderici*.[13] Jimena, the wife of the Cid, emerges from near oblivion in the *Historia Roderici* to assume a role of some importance in the poem. But she has no heroic qualities, being a "pale and passive character," especially when compared with the mythic forces represented by Urraca and Lambra in *Sancho II* and *Siete infantes* (Montgomery, "Oral Art" 109–10). Her presence in the poem seems perfunctory, not unlike the tomb for her that the monks of Cardeña exhibited next to the one for her husband even though she had long been buried in the monastery of San Juan de la Peña.

The most significant learned influence on the poem might well be the masterly weaving of two distinct tales into one composition. The marriage of the Cid's daughters to the Infantes de Carrión is not based on history, as are his exile and conquest of Valencia. It is a mythic tale in which irrational evil forces wreak havoc on the hero and the splendid world he has secured for his family. The Cid's daughters are subjected to the brutal violence of cowardly husbands whose anger threatens the reasoned success of the Cid. The tale unleashes primeval forces on a confident Cid, forces that he does not manage well, that he is not equipped to handle, and that he does not seem to understand. The Infantes are ultimately vanquished, and the Cid's daughters are free to marry again, this time with little ceremony to their husbands of history. But this resolution requires the intervention of the king, a higher power meant to ensure that justice prevails. It is literature in the sense of a fictional archetypal tale with a universal meaning.

The weaving of this tale into the story of the historical deeds of the Cid is done with mastery and surely denotes the intervention of someone with enough skill in literary conventions to integrate the two tales into a nearly seamless whole (Montgomery, "Oral Art" 110). An analysis of the recitative formulas in the poem reveals another important difference between the two halves of the poem. While in the first half the bard exhorts the audience *ver* 'to see' and *oír* 'to hear' the deeds of the protagonist, in the second half the formulas encourage the audience *sentir* 'to feel' and *saber* 'to know' the actions of the Infantes and their consequences. As the exiled

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Cid acts to restore his honor by recovering a political space for himself, the sensorial formulas seem sufficient for highlighting that process. But the duplicity of the Infantes invites an examination of their virtues and vices, a more complex task that requires a correspondingly sophisticated set of formulas to guide the audience (Gómez Redondo, "Recitación"). This urge for introspection marks a new direction in oral epic narrative, away from heroic deeds and toward interior conflict and its resolution, the battleground of the clergy. Since these learned features are expressed in the same cognitively determined manner as the poem as a whole, it seems safe to conclude that literate individuals participated in the oral composition of the poem. They could have included the monks of San Pedro de Cardeña, who would have copied down the *Cid* for performance, including reading the manuscript text to supporters and admirers of the Cid tomb cult.

The compositional technique employed in the *Cid* and the *Mocedades* is clearly oral. The epic half-line and the intonation unit are two manifestations of the same cognitive process that governs speech. These elements are adjoined by simple coordinating syntax both in casual speech and in epic discourse because a speaker's short-term memory does not manage well the subordination of one center of interest to another. Similarly, a change in focus between background and foreground action produces reverbalization in the *Cid* passage, a perturbation proper to oral composition and not attributable to the imitation of the oral style in writing. As in other oral narrative traditions, recurrent episodes are narrated nearly identically, enabling the bard and the audience to anticipate and celebrate them together. Assonance creates anticipation as one half-line initiates a rhythmic period completed by a second. Formulas resonate with the dignity and stature of the protagonists they honor. The same cognitive constraints that govern narrative production as performance-enhanced speech guide its reception by the audience. Although literate individuals participated in the creation of the extant versions of these poems, they composed orally, in the manner of bards. In this process audience response continued to influence the composition of the narrative. Once the poems were removed from the dynamics of performance, learned authors were able to manipulate the narrative material more freely. This development is apparent in the Alfonsine chronicles, where the Cid and the other rebellious warrior heroes of Castilian history have lost their vitality and act in accordance with the sponsoring king's ideal of knightly obeisance and deference.

Notes

[1] All translations in this essay are mine. The quotations from the *Cid* were taken from my Web site (*Cantar de Mio Cid*) and were subsequently fine-tuned.

[2] "Quien escrivió este libro dél' Dios paraíso, amen. / Per Abbat le escrivió en el mes de mayo . . ." 'Who wrote down this book, may God give him Paradise, amen. / Per Abbat wrote it down in the month of May . . .' (3731–32). For a more detailed analysis of the terms *escribir* and *libro*, see René Pellen 185–86, 187–88.

[3] Thomas Montgomery brings to our attention an archaic formal language preserved in the *Cid* that points to a "habit of oral composition latent in the poem's background" (*Medieval Spanish Epic* 111). However, "tradition-based epic texts such as the *Poema del Cid* stand at the juncture of orality—language heard—and literacy—language seen and accordingly preserved," and Montgomery sees the possible influence of writing in the bold measures the poet has taken "to bend his story to convey messages that are of his time rather than inherited with the tradition" but does not attempt to answer "whether the *Cid* has undergone such [writing-influenced] revisions with the aid of the tool of writing" (150). Alan Deyermond assumes a long period of oral composition for the Spanish epic and the probable memorization of much of the *Cid* in its extant form (*Literatura* 52). John S. Miletich distinguishes "hemistiches in which a similar idea recurs from those in which there is no such recurrence" ("Repetition" 189) as a tool for determining the degree of oral or literate composition of a text. Making this distinction leads him to conclude that "the *Poema de mio Cid* is a text composed in writing in which oral tradition has to some extent played a part, and that it was destined for oral diffusion" (194). Irene Zaderenko postulates that the entire poem was composed in writing, although some sources may have been oral (88, 126, 153, 170, 188, 191–92).

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[4] Alfonso X's *Estoria de España* (c. 1289) prosifies in their entirety or makes reference to some thirteen epic tales. In addition, a brief passage of a hundred lines, known as the *Roncevalles* fragment, may be an epic passage or a ballad (see the edition of it in Gómez Redondo, *Poesía* 139–45). Deyermond accounts for twenty-nine traditional Spanish epic narratives that are now lost to us (*Literatura* 54–137). Colin Smith provides an interesting itinerary of the vicissitudes suffered by the epic and other lost literature of medieval Spain.

[5] The second stanza of the *Libro de Alexandre*: "Mester traigo fermoso, non es de joglaría, / mester es sin pecado, ca es de clerezía, / fablar curso rimado por la quaderna vía, / a sílabas contadas, ca es grant maestría" 'I bring a beautiful craft, it is not of bards, / it is without sin, for it is of clerics, / to speak in rhymed verse in quatrains, / all syllables counted, which is great craftsmanship.' The Spanish alexandrine verse (*mester de clerecía*) is divided into two hemistiches of seven syllables, each grouped in monorhymed quatrains. Ramón Menéndez Pidal affirmed early on the metrical irregularity of Spanish epic verse (Cantar 83–86). For recent confirmation, see Gómez Redondo, *Poesía* 18–20. Alberto Montaner provides a general description of the *Cid*'s prosodic configuration, which also recognizes the epic's "anisosyllabism," as opposed to the alexandrine "isosyllabism" (34–44).

[6] On the inclusion of oral epic in Alfonsine chronicles, see Menéndez Pidal (*De primitiva lírica* 45–69 ["Alfonso X y las leyendas heroicas"]). See also the interesting textual examples of a thirteenth-century chronicler's ruminations on the veracity of epic tales in Fradejas Lebrero, esp. 36–38.

[7] See his *De primitiva lírica*, where the proof that the story of the Moorish Princess Zaida is a written epic narrative lies in the many details proffered, which are "pormenores profusos que las tradiciones orales son incapaces de conservar" 'profuse details that oral traditions are incapable of preserving'; such detail "tenía que conservarse en un relato escrito" 'must have been preserved in a written account' (55–56). In his *Poesía juglaresca*, Menéndez Pidal states that we cannot speak of *juglares*, because we do not know any of their names. We must speak of *obras de carácter juglaresco* 'works characteristic of bards': "A los autores de éstas llamaremos juglares, sin tener seguridad de que lo fuesen, es decir, sin saber si hacían de la recitación de los poemas un oficio o modo de vivir, o si eran hombres de otra posición social, que escribían para abastecer la recitación pública de los que a esta profesión se dedicaban" 'We will call the authors of these poems bards without knowing for sure if that is what they were, which is to say, without knowing if they made a living from the recitation of their poems or if they were men of another social position who wrote to supply the public recitation of those who dedicated themselves to this profession' (190). Menéndez Pidal does affirm that the short narrative poems that originated from the epic, *romances*, were developed orally (250). In his later work (*En torno*), he continues to assume a written text: "Cuando el poeta de Gormaz escribe . . ." 'When the poet from Gormaz writes . . .' (145). At the same time he recognizes the use of the oral-formulaic style (201), which would have originated in oral narrations of contemporary events (189).

[8] See, e.g., Deyermond, "Autoría"; Armistead 9–16, esp. 9–12; Montgomery, *Medieval Spanish Epic* 9, 150; and Gómez Redondo, *Poesía* 15–27.

[9] Miletich sees the problem in comparing wholly dissimilar verse forms and advocates the need for first "establishing the principle which most consistently determines the metrical structure" ("Quest" 122). See also Duggan 263.

[10] From Fátima Alfonso-Pinto, with slight modifications in editing. On the dating of the *Mocedades*, see Martin 453–54 and Deyermond, "Autoría" 2–7.

[11] In addition to its role in determining the rhythmic profile of epic verse, some consider assonance part of the epic's aesthetic appeal. David C. Rubin, a cognitive psychologist, maintains that the aesthetic role of rhyme is more appropriate to written poetry because rhyme's mnemonic function is no longer needed (84).

[12] Similar observations regarding the editing of the poem by the Alfonsine chroniclers date from the work of Dyer and of Powell (87, 91, 97–98).

[13] Chapter 75 of the *Historia Roderici*: "Rodrigo died at Valencia in the month of July in the Era 1137 [=AD 1099]" (Fletcher and Barton 146). The *Cid* reads, "Passado es d'este sieglo Mio Cid el Campeador / el día de cincuaesma, ¡de Christus aya perdón!" 'Mio Cid the Campeador left this world / on Pentecost, may Christ forgive him!' (3726–27).

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