



12-2-2013

The Role of el Cid in Medieval Spanish Culture and Epic Literature

Emily Chaney

Western Michigan University, chaneyfam1@sbcglobal.net

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Chaney, Emily, "The Role of el Cid in Medieval Spanish Culture and Epic Literature" (2013). *Honors Theses*. Paper 2383.

This Honors Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



The Role of *El Cid*:

The historical and literary virtue of the Spanish epic hero

Emily Chaney

ABSTRACT

This research looks at the medieval Spanish epic poem, the *Poema de Mio Cid*, and how it reflects the world of Spanish culture and literature, its place in the landscape of epic poetry on the European continent, and the noble virtues of the hero, *el Cid*. The *Poema* is an anonymous *cantar de gesta*, or “song of heroic deeds,” likely composed around the early thirteenth century by a person (or persons) very familiar with Castilian noble society and law in effect during the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, as well as the area of northern Spain around the city of Burgos. Like most epics, the *Poema* was originally sung by *juglares* or minstrels who often only performed sections of the poem at a time, adding or editing parts of it depending on the audience. This research draws mostly upon articles in both English and Spanish literary journals and also close readings of the text of the *Poema* itself. Most previous research on the topic of the *Poema* focuses on various individual aspects of its influence on or its reflection of Spanish society and culture. The purpose of this research is to offer a consolidated view of how the *Poema* reflects Spanish culture from the Middle Ages to the present day, as well as the *Poema*'s place in the world of Spanish literature and the development of epic on a much larger scale.

El Cid Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar was a historical figure and literary character that has had a profound influence on the landscape of medieval literature in Spain and across the European continent. The epic hero was a legend in his own lifetime: “[a] contemporary French chronicle tells us that 'his death caused grave sorrow in Christendom and huge rejoicing among the Moorish enemies.' To the two halves of the known world his passing was an event of great importance” (Merwin 10). The many statues and artifacts of his deeds and of the poem's accounts that can be found in cities such as Burgos, where many scenes from the first cantar take place, show that his presence is felt just as much today as it was centuries ago. Unlike many heroes of epic poetry, the Cid was a real person, “que al morir deja una descendencia que llega hasta nosotros, del que quedan espadas, carta de arras, casa y sepultura,”¹ evidence that he truly lived and died in Spain during the 11th century (Gárate Córdoba 19). The *Poema de Mio Cid*, or *Cantar de Mio Cid*, is the oldest example of epic poetry in the Spanish Castilian vernacular and it offers a glimpse of the culture of medieval Spain that few other texts can provide.

The accuracy of the poem's account to the historic Cid's life is impressive. He truly did grow up in the Spanish court and go on to become a military leader who led campaigns for Sancho II of Castile against the kingdoms of León and Galicia as well as against the Muslim kingdoms in Andalucía. He lost his status and was held in suspicion after Alfonso VI of León rose to the throne since the Cid had fought against him for his brother Sancho. He was exiled in 1081 and found work fighting for the Muslim rulers of Zaragoza. He won the city of Valencia in battle and ruled there more or less independently from Alfonso, establishing a culturally pluralistic state with the popular support of both Christians and Muslims. Eventually, Alfonso overcame his antagonism with the Cid and asked that he fight

¹ [who, upon dying, left a legacy which reaches us; from which swords, a letter of a dowry, a house and a grave remain]

for him again and defend his kingdom from the invading Moorish armies. He ruled over Valencia all his days and his daughters—historically named Cristina and María (called Elvira and Sol in the poem)—really did marry into royal families. In most epic poetry, characters and their deeds are often described superlatively, and this is because the subject matter of epic is often mythological and legendary and the characters are often only loosely based on real-life historical counterparts. In the case of the *Poema*, little embellishment is needed on the actual deeds and victories of el Cid Campeador: his ability as a warrior was incredible, and, as a political and military leader, he was second to none. As Andrew Beresford puts it, “The *Cantar* is a subtle blend of fact and fiction that characterizes the Cid as the embodiment of a series of noble, Castilian virtues[:] *fortitudo* (“strength”) and *sapientia* (“knowledge”) as well as *mesura*, a quality that embraces prudence, forbearing, and moderation” (Beresford 76-77). These virtues, as shown in the Cid's behavior, make him the ultimate Castilian hero. The proximity of the Cid of reality to his epic counterpart provided an ideal which the people of medieval Spain could strive to emulate. He achieves the ultimate success possible for a man of his social status. His journey from exile to glory “represented, to twelfth-century feudal Spain, very nearly as complete a triumph as a human being not born to royalty could conceivably achieve this side of the grave” (Merwin 34). The Cid shows that it is possible to overcome all obstacles and succeed. Despite being wrongly accused and exiled, “the story of the hero of the *Cantar de Mio Cid* is that of the perfect hero functioning triumphantly in an imperfect world” (Ratcliffe 11). The *Poema* is the ultimate rags-to-riches story, showing that it is possible to triumph in the face of utter degradation. The poem reflects the values of medieval Spain and the social aspirations of its people through the life and deeds of its hero, el Cid.

The *Poema* emphasizes the importance of allegiance and loyalty, especially that of a

vassal to his lord. As David Hook observes, in the poem, the Cid does not try to become independently established after his banishment from Castile. On the contrary, “el héroe, en vez de establecer su independencia, busca la reintegración en la sociedad que le ha rechazado, y la restauración de la aprobación de su rey”² (Hook 324). The Cid even proves himself capable not only of establishing his independence, but also of creating a miniature society of his own. After the Cid has won many battles and become independently wealthy, he personally marries the handmaidens of his wife Jimena to his vassals. Hook describes the situation, “En casar a las dueñas de Jimena con sus vasallos allá en Valencia, el Cid crea un microestado cristiano y, a la vez que paga a sus vasallos y subraya su condición de caudillo ideal, se garantiza para su territorio reconquistado una guarnición estable”³ (Hook 320-321). The Cid establishes a stable, independent territory of his own, which puts on display his ability as a political as well as military leader.

However, the Cid’s one true desire is to regain the favor of his natural lord, King Alfonso VI and return to Castile. This devotion to his lord is what makes the Cid of the poem an exemplary vassal. He is aware of his status as a member of the minor nobility of Spain, and, as is proper for a man of his status, is fiercely loyal to his king. Such is his devotion that as he takes his leave of his home in Castile upon his banishment with which the poem opens, the Cid is seen weeping openly. Some of the first verses of the poem itself describe his eyes “grievously weeping,” as he looks back upon his empty and abandoned home (*El Cid Campeador* 43). To leave Castile and to be out of favor with his lord is heartbreaking for him and so causes the Cid to weep. This loyalty might be described as “patriotism,” though at this time, the nation known today as Spain today was still being formed. However the Cid's

² [the hero, instead of establishing his independence, seeks reintegration into the society that had rejected him, and the restoration of the approval of his king]

³ [In marrying the ladies of Jimena with his vassals there in Valencia, the Cid creates a Christian microstate, and, at the same time as paying his vassals and underlining his condition as an ideal leader, guarantees a stable garrison for his reconquered territory]

loyalty became a foundation for a nationalistic spirit in Spain that has persisted throughout the ages. The Cid's example lent itself well to the agenda of Francisco Franco in his rise to power at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Margrét Jónsdóttir says in her doctoral dissertation, “[c]omo gobernante no era difícil establecer asociaciones entre la figura del Cid y la del general Franco, creando así aspiraciones imperiales para el General de expandir infinitamente su territorio...Como ciudadano ejemplar, era importante enaltecer al Cid porque era una manera de domar el pueblo”⁴ (Jónsdóttir 234). It is unfortunate that fascist leaders chose the Cid as the figure to which they compared themselves, because the Cid has many exemplary traits which made him a great man as well as a model citizen. For instance, the Cid also weeps deeply when he leaves his wife and daughters at San Pedro de Cardeña, and their parting makes a very touching scene. The Cid's weeping portrays him as a passionate and loving man towards his family. When a situation calls for him to be strong and brave, he can be ruthless. He can be a fierce warrior as well as a tender husband and father. In any case, such pride and devotion to his lord and to his family are part of what make the Cid an exemplary vassal and a model Castilian for the medieval as well as the modern audience.

When he is banished, the Cid's only desire is to return to his king's good graces which he attempts to achieve by sending Alfonso gifts after each of his successes in battle. After his first victory against the Moorish king Fáriz, the Cid sends King Alfonso “a gift of thirty horses” (*El Cid Campeador* 103). When Álvaro Fáñez Minaya delivers this gift to the king, Alfonso pardons him but not the Cid. As the Cid continues his journey and his army grows, he continues to be victorious in battle and the spoils he earns increase in value and amount. When the Cid takes Valencia, he sends the king one hundred horses, a significant increase from his first gift (*El Cid Campeador* 139). After this gift is delivered, Alfonso allows the

⁴ [as a leader it was not difficult to establish associations between the figure of the Cid and that of general Franco, in this way creating imperial aspirations for the General to expand his territory infinitely...As a model citizen, it was important to elevate the Cid because it was a way to control the people]

Cid's wife and daughters to be returned to him. In this way, value of the gifts to Alfonso keeps increasing until the Cid has succeeded in defeating the King of Morocco and his army when they try to retake Valencia and the Cid sends Alfonso two hundred horses (*El Cid Campeador* 175). Now that the Cid has proven himself in battle and also proved that he remained a loyal vassal of King Alfonso during his exile, the Cid is returned to the king's favor. His goal has been achieved: he has won back the favor of his lord with gifts and devotion. However, once the Cid has received his reward for all his deeds, the king asks him for his daughters to be married to the Heirs of Carrión. At first, the Cid responds that he does not have daughters ready for marriage. He has already expressed his concern for these matches and he attempts to evade having to marry his daughters to men who are bloated with pride and sit on their titles without having earned the honor of which they boast. But the king is persistent and so the Cid makes one more gift to his king, saying, "Doña Elvira and Doña Sol I give into your charge; / give them to whom you think best and I shall be content" (*El Cid Campeador* 195). In his struggle to be an exemplary vassal as well as a good father, the Cid is helpless and must comply with his lord's wishes. But being the strategist he is, the Cid emphasizes that it is Alfonso and not he who marries the girls, so that if the arrangements end badly—which they do—the only one to blame is the king.

Another virtue displayed by the Cid is the noble Castilian virtue of "*mesura*," which Beresford mentions. In all his actions—especially those concerning his behavior in the court—he displays prudence, forbearing and moderation. The famous episode with the lion is just one example of his *mesura*. At the beginning of the third cantar, the Cid is in Valencia with his two new sons-in-law, the Heirs of Carrión. Somehow, the Cid's lion gets loose and roams throughout the court, terrifying the men and sending the cowardly Heirs of Carrión running to find hiding places. In the epic tradition, it is not uncommon for the hero to find himself pitted

against a beast (or in some cases a monster) and, as a display of his heroic prowess, to slay the creature. This epic motif of conquering a beast is often used to show the hero's dominion over the natural (and sometimes supernatural) world. However in the *Poema*,

[e]l enfrentamiento tradicional se modifica notablemente en . . . porque la bestia es un león que vive en una jaula, que no ataca a nadie, el cual sobrevive su encuentro con el héroe; sin hablar, eso es, de la reacción tan *mesurada* del héroe. Sería justo decir que la finalidad del episodio es tanto mostrar la degradación moral de los Infantes de Carrión como exaltar la excelencia del Cid.⁵ (Hook 318)

The Cid does not need to kill the lion to prove his heroism. This is because it belongs to him and has not done any physical harm to any of his men, and also because he is elevated more by his conquering the lion through mere intimidation than he would have been if he had killed the beast—an example of his moderation and prudence in action. Most heroes of epic would not hesitate at the chance to display their strength and bravery, but the Cid's measured response to the situation reflects the more Castilian virtue. As Hook indicates, the episode as much elevates the Cid for his *mesura* as it puts on display the cowardice of the Heirs of Carrión in comparison. Their extreme measures to flee the lion are comical: one hides under the bench on which the Cid is sleeping and the other dives behind the winepress and comes out covered in the filth from the floor. This, juxtaposed with the intimidating presence of the Cid, emphasizes their weakness and the Cid's ability and heroic virtues.

It is important to note that the Heirs of Carrión are portrayed as inferior to the Cid

⁵ [the traditional confrontation is modified notably . . . because the beast is a lion that lives in a cage, that doesn't attack anyone, which survives its encounter with the hero; and this is without even mentioning the *restrained* reaction of the hero. It would be fair to say that the purpose of the episode is as much to show the moral dishonor of the Heirs of Carrión as to exalt the excellence of the Cid.]

even though the Cid comes from a slightly lower level of nobility than they. Despite this, the Cid is seen as the ideal vassal to King Alfonso VI and is praised for his devotion to his lord and for his awareness of his status. He is often portrayed through his actions as being far superior to the Heirs in might and ability in battle, but in the second and third sections of the poem, the Heirs often think of themselves as far superior to the Cid and his daughters because of the difference in social levels of the two families, frequently reminding themselves that they are “descended from the Counts of Carrión” (*El Cid Campeador* 231). Just after the Heirs beat and abandon the Cid's daughters, Elvira and Sol, they speak to each other, congratulating themselves for what they've just done. They convince themselves that they are so high above the girls in status that they “would not have them for concubines even if they begged [them]” (*El Cid Campeador* 245). This attitude of the Heirs toward the Cid's family is interesting because they are the ones who ask King Alfonso to arrange marriages to Elvira and Sol. In the second part of the poem, when the Heirs first hear of the Cid's successes and the cities and peoples which now pay tribute to him, they speak to each other saying, “Great grows the fame of My Cid the Campeador; / it would serve our advantage to marry his daughters” (*El Cid Campeador* 145). In order to gain access to the wealth the Cid has accumulated from his many victories, they actually beg the king to ask for the hands of the daughters of the Cid in marriage (*El Cid Campeador* 181). Their rapid change of attitude toward the girls and their status comes after their embarrassment from the episode with the lion. When they believe they are being made fun of, they try to reclaim their honor using their titles and the difference in social class as justification for beating and abandoning the daughters of the Cid.

Despite the hierarchical structure of medieval Spanish nobility, the *Poema's* ethos seems to be meritocratic—characters gain position and sympathy of the audience through

their deeds, not their status. Although the Heirs are at a higher level of nobility, through the events of the story, “la simpatía del pueblo...está con el Cid quien gana terreno y honra según sus méritos”⁶ (Jónsdóttir 60). The difference in status between the Heirs and the Cid does not affect the audience's opinion as much as the difference in their merits. Because of his bravery and *fortitudo*, the audience is more inclined to sympathize with the Cid and hold him in higher regard. Through his deeds on the battlefield and his strategic cunning in the marriages of his daughters, the Cid is able to earn the respect of the audience as well as win back his honor and place in society.

This meritocratic ethos is also shown in the poem's treatment of the Moors. They are portrayed as fierce and worthy combatants on the field of battle and their use of drums as they march toward the Cid's army is impressive. When the Cid and his men must defend Valencia, the Moorish army's drums are sounding and many of the Christian soldiers “marveled much at the sound,” since they had never heard their battle drums before (*El Cid Campeador* 217). The Moorish army displays similar *fortitudo* to that of the Cid himself, though he never loses in battle with them. Battle between Christian and Muslim armies is not unique to the *Poema*, but, as Hook observes, the portrayal of Muslims in the *Poema de Mio Cid* in its realism is more like that of Byzantine epic tradition than the epic poems of medieval France (315). Though France and Spain are geographically close in proximity, the portrayal of the Moors in medieval French epic is that of an inhuman and monstrous enemy. Their portrayal in the *Poema* is much more realistic. This is possibly due to the reality of Spain's firsthand experience in battling the Moorish kingdoms for control of the Iberian peninsula, though another Spanish poem, the *Poema de Fernán Gonzalez*, describes the

⁶ [the sympathy of the people...is with the Cid who wins terrain and honor according to his merits]

Moors as “más feos que Satan,”⁷ “suzio,”⁸ and “carvoniento”⁹ (*Poema de Fernán González* 118). This is not quite the monstrous exaggeration that is offered in French epic poetry, but is still rather hyperbolic—at least more so than their portrayal in the *Mio Cid*. It is hard to say what the cause of this difference could be, since the subjects of the *Poema de Fernán González* and the *Poema de Mio Cid* were both based on historic figures, however, the *Mio Cid* much more closely resembles historical events.

In any case, the more humane treatment of Muslims in the *Mio Cid* extends beyond their portrayal in battle. The Cid is a practical man, preferring to allow the people he conquers to pay him tribute rather than slaughter entire populations of Muslims—an example of his wisdom (*sapientia*) and *mesura*. In the poem, the Cid has intimate personal friends who are Moorish lords, the most prominent example being Abengalbón. When the Heirs of Carrión intend to journey back to their homeland from Valencia with their new wives, the Cid asks his nephew Félix Muñoz to accompany the party so as to protect them from the dangers on the road. He also asks Félix to meet his friend Abengalbón and ask him to escort them as well for a leg of the journey. Abengalbón is asked the same favor as if he were a blood relative of the Cid: the extremely important task of protecting his precious daughters. This not only shows the *Poema's* portrayal of Moors as drastically more humane than that of French epic, but it also shows the Cid's respect for and friendship with the Moorish people, which was considerably open-minded for medieval Spain, considering the history between Spanish Christians and the Moors. Historically, the Cid did in fact lend his services to Moorish kings in the time that he was in exile. Despite differences in religion and culture, the Cid's openness to the Moors is far ahead of his time, an example of his prudence or *mesura*. He serves, is served by, and has intimate friendships with many Moorish people historically

⁷ [uglier than Satan]

⁸ [dirty]

⁹ [as black as coal]

as well as in the body of the *Poema*.

The poem has had a significant place in Spanish society and literature, but it is difficult to place it in the world of epic literature. The *Poema* is one of very few texts conserved from this time period in Spain and as Hook notes, “Dada la escasez de textos épicos peninsulares, siempre se nos plantea el problema de obtener un contexto literario comparativo adecuado para el *Mio Cid*”¹⁰ (Hook 313-314). However, in the larger scope of epic tradition, much of the ethos of the *Poema* fits in quite neatly as many of its aspects are fairly recognizable to any reader of epic poetry anywhere. In another part of his article, Hook observes that an insult the Cid receives from Ansur González would be perfectly in tune with the society of the Icelandic sagas. The depth of such an insult would be as well-understood in one culture as it would be in the other. Hook writes,

El insulto echado contra el Cid por Ansur González, sugiriendo que se marche para Río de Ovierna para emprender con sus propias manos una tarea humilde de molinero, sería perfectamente inteligible en la sociedad de Islanda [sic] en la que una sugerencia a alguien que haga algo por sí mismo parece ser equivalente a decir que es tan pobre que no tiene siervos ni labradores que lo hagan.¹¹ (319)

The insult is able to be understood because the society of the *Poema* and that of the Icelandic sagas share a similar structure, at least in the relationship between servants or vassals and their masters. By implying that the Cid does not have vassals to do such humble work as

¹⁰ [Given the scarcity of peninsular epic texts, we are always presented with the problem of obtaining a comparative literary context appropriate for the *Mio Cid*]

¹¹ [The insult hurled at the Cid by Ansur González, suggesting that he go out to the Río de Ovierna to undertake a more humble job of a miller, would be perfectly intelligible in the society of Iceland where a suggestion that one do something for oneself seems equivalent to saying that he is so poor that he doesn't have servants or workers to do it.]

operating a water mill, Ansur González insults his honor, and makes the same mistake as the Heirs of Carrión in assuming that the Cid's social status is drastically lower than his own. In reality, the Cid was not much further down the social ladder than the Heirs, but he demonstrates his consciousness of his place in society by showing devotion to his lord. The precise relationship between a lord and a vassal plays a key role in the Germanic epic tradition and that of the Icelandic sagas, notably in the *Nibelungenlied*, which shows how the *Poema* does fit into the epic tradition of Europe.

However, as much as the society of the *Poema* is similar to that of epic tradition on the rest of the continent, there are also significant differences. In the Icelandic saga *Njál's Saga*, a similar situation arises where the hero is insulted, but immediately takes action to avenge his honor by killing the one who gave the insult. The modern reader of epic might question the Cid's reaction to the insult he receives at court and also to the news of the terrible mistreatment of his daughters. A typical epic hero might immediately seek brutal revenge for the wrong with a display of physical violence, but the Cid instead displays the noble Castilian virtue of *mesura*, thinking long and hard, strategizing how best to go about righting the wrong done to him and his family. The other virtues, *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, are often portrayed in epic literature: many characters—especially the hero—show great strength and wisdom in many situations. However, notably in the *Poema*, the hero also displays *mesura*, a trait not often emphasized in epic literature. His actions are always measured, and he takes great care to not act unless it will bring about the best possible outcome.

Just after the insult implying the Cid's low rank, Ansur González goes on and makes the serious mistake of wondering aloud who would possibly marry persons of such low status as the daughters of the Cid to the Heirs of Carrión. Of course, the answer is King Alfonso himself, as the Cid made very certain that Alfonso contracted the marriages and not he. There

was no way the Cid could have planned for his daughters to be dishonored by the Heirs, but in his wisdom, he set up a safety net for the girls when the marriages were arranged. By having the king give his daughters in marriage, the blame is placed on Alfonso for the terrible matches between the Cid's daughters and the Heirs. The somewhat anti-climactic finale of the court trials and the Cid's manipulation of his demands show that noble Castilian society was governed very strictly and that the Cid was well-versed in the legal routes of the royal court. After the trial by combat which the Cid's men win handily, not only has the Cid won his honor back, but the king makes amends for his mistake and the girls are married to princes and become queens of Spain. Unlike some other epic poems in which the hero displays his strength in courtly trials, the Cid once again displays his *mesura* by refraining from combat and having his friends and vassals fight in his place. Obviously a battle-tested veteran, the Cid would easily have beaten his accusers in combat. By allowing his men to fight for him, the Cid not only shows *mesura*, but he also shows that he *does* in fact have men to do work for him. He has defended his honor in the face of the insult gracefully as well as proving that the insult was completely unfounded. He is at a nearly equal level of nobility as his accusers and his men are faithful to him for his status, and more importantly, for his deeds and merits.

As opposed to the Cid, who is very strongly characterized, Jimena, his wife, and his daughters, doña Elvira and doña Sol, are not terribly well-developed characters in the *Poema*. Their purpose in the poem is to show what kind of man the Cid was, and to help facilitate his glorious return to honor after his exile from Castile by King Alfonso. The treatment of women is very illustrative of the culture of medieval Spain at the time of the poem's composition. The women in the poem seem only to be good for marrying, praying, and weeping, and Rachel Linville suggests that the reasons for this portrayal may be the poet's own motivation to undermine the role of women in society, using literature as a social

weapon to decrease their importance. She writes that “el poeta se vale de las bodas de las hijas del Cid para manipular el papel de la mujer en la Edad Media. De ser así, esta épica serviría a 'personas poderosas' como un arma social”¹² (Linville 52). A woman's consent in regards to whom she would marry is historically very important for the success and legitimacy of the marriage; in fact it was often legally necessary and in the church it was the most important requirement (Linville 54). The bride's consent to a marriage is just as important in the world of epic literature as it is in reality. In epic tradition, if the woman does not want to marry the man in question, or is not asked for her consent, the marriage is doomed. In every way, the poet makes it clear that the marriages of the daughters of the Cid to the Heirs of Carrión are legitimate, “Mediante el empleo de vocabulario, descripciones de ceremonias y el intercambio de dote y arras, se intenta convencer al público de que las nupcias son ortodoxas. No obstante, falta un elemento fundamental para que el matrimonio sea válido: el consentimiento de la mujer”¹³ (Linville 52). Elvira and Sol are presented as legitimate wives of the Heirs, not concubines or mistresses, however, explicit consent is never sought from the girls.

In the initial stages of the arrangement of the two marriages, the Cid says to his trusted friend and vassal Álvar Fáñez Minaya, “They have a great name, these Heirs of Carrión; / they are swollen with pride and have a place in the court, / and this marriage would not be to my liking. But since he wishes it who is worth more than we, / let us talk of the matter but do it in secret, / and may God in heaven turn it to the best” (*El Cid Campeador* 185). The Cid has doubts about the arrangement, but as a good vassal to his lord, he chooses to ignore his instinct and do as Alfonso wishes—but he chooses to do it without the

¹² [the poet uses the weddings of the daughters of the Cid to manipulate the role of the woman in the Middle Ages. Assuming this is the case, this epic would serve 'powerful persons' as a social weapon]

¹³ [Through the use of vocabulary, descriptions of ceremonies and the exchange of dowries, the poet intends to convince the public that the nuptials are orthodox. However, one fundamental element is lacking to make the marriage valid: the consent of the woman]

knowledge or consent of his daughters. Linville cites legal documents and other evidence which proves that at the time of the historical Cid's life as well as the time of the composition of the poem—at least ecclesiastically—the consent of the bride was necessary for the marriage to be considered legitimate. However, the practice of “aristocratic marriage,” which belittled the importance of the bride's consent in favor of marriages arranged by families to establish ties between families and navigate up the social ladder, was a growing trend.

Linville writes, “Todos [los] textos...reconocían la utilidad del matrimonio para establecer alianzas, aumentar riquezas e influencia, o cualquier otro beneficio que podría hacer que un enlace resultara favorable a otra entidad que no era la novia o su familia”¹⁴ (Linville 55). The contrast of the traditional necessity of the brides' consent to its omission in the *Poema* “sugiere que el autor del *Poema de Mio Cid* intenta manipular el papel de la mujer para hacer prevalecer el matrimonio aristocrático por encima del eclesiástico”¹⁵ (Linville 55). This legal and religious emphasis on the consent of the bride is interesting because in the *Poema* not only is the consent of the Cid's daughters never given, it is never explicitly sought.

Obviously, the Heirs agree to the marriage, since they are the ones who ask for the unions. However, “Doña Elvira y doña Sol, en cambio, nunca tienen la oportunidad de dar o negar su beneplácito, pues están ausentes cuando se contrae el contrato. No podía ser más evidente que el padre no busca su consentimiento”¹⁶ (Linville 56).

It is possible to take the girls' reactions when their father tells them of the arranged marriages as an act of consent, which would run contrary to Linville's argument. When the Cid tells them of the arrangements, Jimena, Elvira, and Sol all kiss his hand and the girls say,

¹⁴ [All [the] texts...recognized the usefulness of marriage for establishing alliances, increasing riches and influence, or whatever other benefit that could make a connection turn out to be favorable to another entity that was not the bride or her family]

¹⁵ [suggests that the author of the *Poema de Mio Cid* intends to manipulate the role of the woman to make aristocratic marriage prevail over ecclesiastic marriage]

¹⁶ [Doña Elvira and doña Sol, on the other hand, never have the opportunity to give or withhold their consent, since they are absent when the agreement is contracted. It couldn't be more evident that the father doesn't seek their consent]

“When you give us in marriage, father, we shall be rich” (*El Cid Campeador* 203). However, this is after the Cid and Alfonso have worked out the details and the girls have already been given over to the king to be married to the Heirs. Whether or not this scene indicates that the girls give their consent, the fact is that it takes place after the marriages have been arranged. The girls’ consent may also be given or implied at some other point in the story, but given Linville’s argument that their consent was of such great importance, it is curious that it is not seen in the poem. The girls are not present when King Alfonso makes the request for the Cid’s daughters’ hands in marriage for the Heirs of Carrión, but the Cid agrees to it, being the exemplary vassal he is. But in a brilliantly strategic move, the Cid insists that the king himself marry the two couples. This strategy plays out perfectly later in the poem to make King Alfonso culpable for the horrors wrought on the daughters of the Cid, unfortunately making the girls essentially tools in the Cid’s return to honor. They are used strategically to facilitate the Cid’s return to the king’s good graces, but the Cid truly believed that he was doing well for his daughters.

At the outset of his exile, the Cid promises his wife that he will see their daughters married well. As Marjorie Ratcliffe suggests in her article, “The responsibility he bears for the well-being and future of his wife and children triggers his efforts” (Ratcliffe 11). The safety and future of the Cid’s wife and daughters are his motivation for all his actions, but in the poem, they are still used to facilitate the Cid’s triumph over the Heirs of Carrión and his enemies in the court. It is possible that the author or authors of the poem intended to undermine women’s role in medieval Castilian society by eliminating them from their own marriage arrangements, but women still played a key role in the Cid’s life and in noble Castilian culture. Though their role in the arrangement of their own marriages is all but eliminated and they are used and abused by the men of the poem, Elvira and Sol are crucial to

the story of the *Poema*, “they are the catalysts of the dramatic action of the [plot]” (Ratcliffe 13). In the scene where they are beaten and abandoned, (one of the few instances where the girls speak) the girls even display some of the same heroic Castilian traits as their father. Doña Sol begs the Heirs to cut off their heads and make them martyrs rather than whip and abandon them in the forest. She goes on to warn them of the consequences of such terrible actions, “if you whip us the shame will be yours; / you will be called to account at assemblies or courts” (*El Cid Campeador* 243). The girls are alone with the Heirs and there is no reason to believe they will be found after they are abandoned, at least not by friends or allies. It is an extremely dangerous situation for the girls, but in the face of it, they show great bravery and even give counsel to the Heirs. For most of the poem, the women are marginalized and their role in society is undermined, but in the few scenes where they get to speak and act, the Cid’s daughters show their own *fortitudo*, and in the end are rewarded for their suffering when they are married well into the royal family.

The *Poema de Mio Cid* is a huge milestone in the development of Spanish literature. It not only embodies the values of Spain at that time in the character of the Cid, but it also provides a glimpse of the reality of medieval Spanish culture in terms of honor, social status, diplomacy, and gender roles. The Cid receives honor by staying true to his lord Alfonso and wins the sympathies of his men and the audience through his great deeds and wisdom. In all his actions, the Cid embodies the qualities of *fortitudo*, *sapiencia*, and especially *mesura*, which come together to make him the ultimate Castilian hero. The *Poema de Mio Cid* is an invaluable asset to the study of medieval Spain as well as an important chapter in the development of Spanish literature as a whole and provides interesting comparison for epic literature throughout all of Europe.

Works Cited

- Beresford, Andrew M. "The Poetry of Medieval Spain." *The Cambridge History of Spanish Literature*. 1st ed. Ed. David T. Gies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 75-94. *Cambridge Histories Online*. Web. 15 November 2013.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521806183.006>
- El Cid Campeador*. Trans. W.S. Merwin. New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1960. Print.
- Gárate Córdoba, José María. *Las Huellas del Cid*. Burgos: Imprenta de Aldecoa, 1972. Print.
- Hook, David. "El *Cantar de Mio Cid* y el contexto europeo." *Olivar* 8.10 (2007): 313-325. Print.
- Jonsdottir, Margret. "¡De Nuestro Mal, Oh Cid, Nos Sacaras! El Desarrollo Del Concepto Cidiano Desde 1779 Hasta El Franquismo." Order No. 3033023 Princeton University, 2002. Ann Arbor: ProQuest. Web. 20 Nov. 2013.
- Linville, Rachel. "La literatura como arma social: un examen del matrimonio en el *Poema de Mio Cid*." *Medievalia: Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas* 37 (2005): 52-60. Print.
- Merwin, W.S. Preface. *El Cid Campeador*. New York: Las Americas Publishing Co., 1960. 9-37. Print.
- Poema de Fernán González*. Ed. Juan Victorio. Madrid: Cátedra, 1998. Print.
- Ratcliffe, Marjorie. "Women and Marriage in the Medieval Spanish Epic." *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 8 (1987): 1-14. Print.