

Hispanic Studies TRAC  
(Textual Research and Criticism)

# Al que en buen hora naçio

Essays on the Spanish Epic and Ballad  
in Honour of Colin Smith

*edited by*  
BRIAN POWELL and GEOFFREY WEST

*General Editor*  
DOROTHY SEVERIN

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# Preface

The essays in this volume are dedicated to Colin Smith by colleagues, pupils and friends from Britain, Spain and the United States of America. The contributions focus on the Spanish epic and ballad, two fields in which Colin has had an important influence as an editor and critic. We could not hope to do justice to the full range of Colin's scholarly interests in a single volume like this. Hence, it was decided to concentrate on these two areas.

Colin Smith, Doctor of Letters, Corresponding Member of the Real Academia de la Lengua Española, Comendador de la Orden de Isabel La Católica, is an exemplary scholar and a gentleman. Brought up on the south coast of England, he took his first degree in 1950 at the University of Cambridge at St Catharine's College, that ancient but discreet college between more illustrious neighbours. After his first degree, Colin remained at St Catharine's for his doctoral studies. His thesis, 'The Origins of Gongorism', earned him a doctorate in 1954. By this time, he had become a lecturer at the University of Leeds where he was to stay for over a decade, rising through the ranks to a Senior Lectureship in a period of expansion in universities.

It was at Leeds that Colin began to establish his reputation as an outstanding teacher and productive researcher. Generous to students with his time and his hospitality, he would offer them the chance to visit him and his wife, Ruth, at their home. As his experience grew, he was the ideal choice as Sub-Dean, a post he held for several years and which brought him closer than ever to students. He was also a keen participant in the life of the Department, where certain new ballads in Spanish were to appear, featuring Colin amongst the protagonists, while he prepared his own edition of traditional Spanish ballads, which appeared in 1964. Prior to this, he had published a number of articles on Golden Age topics, and, then, in the 1960s, publications on the Spanish epic began to appear. It was also at Leeds that Colin's interest in lexicography was able to grow and to bear early fruit in a publication for Harrap and in the edition of Langenscheidt's bilingual dictionary in which he participated.

From Leeds, Colin and Ruth, and a young family, moved to Cambridge, where he took up a lectureship and a fellowship back at St Catharine's. A few years later, on the retirement of Edward M. Wilson and subsequent death of Roy Jones, Colin was appointed to

the Chair of Spanish of the University. And it was during this time at Cambridge that his record of scholarly publications became truly outstanding with a number of highly significant works on the medieval epic. His edition of the *Poema de mio Cid*, in 1972, was the first to question fundamentally the critical text that Menéndez Pidal had created. It set new standards and opened wide the doors to other scholars. Later, his *Estudios cidianos* and *The Making of the 'Poema de mio Cid'* broke new ground once more, and moved debate on the medieval epic into fresh areas of research and, it has to be said, of controversy. Encouraged by the debate that he himself stimulated, he has continued to explore these areas in typically erudite and challenging articles ever since. It is not only in the field of medieval studies that Colin has earned distinction by his published work. His dictionary for Collins, which first appeared in 1971, redefined excellence in English-Spanish lexicography. With its regularly updated editions, it continues to set the standards for others to emulate. His tome on *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, with A. L. F. Rivet, is also a major contribution to scholarship along with many other works ranging in topic from Machado to the Moors. It is easy to comprehend the disbelief of the person who once asked, in all seriousness, 'Y Colin Smith es un equipo, ¿no?'. Since his retirement in 1990 as Professor of Spanish at Cambridge, he has pursued his scholarly interests with no less vigour and enthusiasm. He has added to his range of activities by translating two major novels, one of which, Alvaro Cunqueiro's *Merlín e familia*, reflects his fascination with Galicia.

Colin has achieved this outstanding record of scholarship while making a full contribution to academic life in other ways. He has been a distinguished servant of the University of Cambridge, where, amongst other tasks, he chaired the Board of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages with firmness and wit. He also strove to promote the identity of Spanish within the collegiate system. He has advanced the well-being of St Catharine's College in various ways as a fellow, and in the extramural sphere as an Officer of the St Catharine's College Society. In the wider world, he is a regular supporter of the conferences of Hispanists and medievalists of various hues. Most notable of his contributions, however, is his work for the *Modern Language Review*, first as Hispanic Editor and later as General Editor from 1976 to 1981. It is fitting that the Modern Humanities Research Association has been able to contribute practical support to this homage to him.

A distinguished researcher, academic and scholar, Colin has, nevertheless, always been a sociable and approachable man. He has unfailingly offered visitors to his study at St Catharine's that most precious of gifts, his time—along with a glass of St Catharine's sherry

at the appropriate hours of the day. In Cambridge, as at Leeds, he continued to encourage the welfare of undergraduates with whom he had contact. Research students too found him interested in their well-being and in their progress, while, as a supervisor, he was always positive, gently steering research towards suitable goals. His infectious chuckle is a constant presence on such occasions, revealing a sense of humour which has had outlets in his fictitious memoirs of a Cambridge bedder and other occasional pages circulated to friends. And, as if this were not enough, Colin pursues other interests in his leisure time. Amongst these, an interest in entomology stands out, for Colin has a notable collection and an even more remarkable knowledge of moths and butterflies, and is an *amateur* in the best sense.

Colin's outstanding contribution to Hispanism has been recognised by his corresponding membership of the Real Academia Española and his nomination to the Orden de Isabel La Católica. Amongst Hispanists throughout the world, these honours will be seen as fitting recognition of an outstanding career. Those who know him academically, like the contributors to this volume, recognise, too, that he is an admirable scholar who gives freely of his expertise and offers his encouragement to others. Those of us who know him as a friend can add that he is a charming man, whose hospitality, at college or at home in the company of his wife, is second to none. This volume is our tribute to him.