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MEDIEVAL
SPANISH
EPIC

Mythic Roots
and
Ritual Language

The Pennsylvania State University Press
University Park, Pennsylvania

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PREFACE

This study was originally conceived as a synthesis and amplification of work I had done on the traditional content of the various Spanish epics, as well as philological and linguistic analyses of the texts, aimed at interpretation of the mentality each one seemed to represent. I find a coherence in these early works that would probably never be evident to anyone else unless I made the effort to demonstrate it in a unified published form. As it turned out, that effort led further than anticipated: while there are occasional pages summarizing aspects of earlier articles, new slants given to that material and large additions to it have yielded a product I regard as essentially new. Because the topics are wide-ranging, many have been treated rather briefly so as not to lose the overall thread. I hope in the future to deal more fully with some of them.

This book does not espouse or adhere to any of the "isms" that have loomed large in the scholarship of recent decades on Spanish epic. It does not directly address polemic issues. It does make some reference to oral theory, particularly as utilized by Homeric scholars, whose work on myth it also takes into account. For key linguistic concepts it depends on Roman Jakobson and Émile Benveniste as durable guides, and as tacit models in approaching the modes of memory and perception that have shaped the peculiar idiom of medieval Spanish epic.

I will define my use of the terms "myth" and "ritual" in due course. By way of initial clarification, it may be noted that the myth under consideration is that of the initiation of the warrior, known through folk and other literature to have been widespread among the Indo-European cultures.¹ The other great myths, those of creation and of cyclical renewal, have inter-

1. Several critics have written on mythological aspects of the *Poema del Cid*. Though by no means unanimous in their interpretation of the term "myth," they tend to identify it with the marvelous, particularly in connection with the lion (Castro 1956; Bandera Gómez 1969). Cesáreo Bandera Gómez sees the hero's mythical stature in moral terms: "El carácter mítico del Cid es inseparable de su ejemplaridad" (115). Peter N. Dunn also emphasizes the Cid's "moral profile" (1962, 349) but develops a more rigorous conception of what constitutes myth, basing himself partly on Eliade and Malinowsky and emphasizing the mythical character of narrative structures in the *Cid*: "The political, social-religious level is where the mythic structure . . . is most readily apparent" (1970, 116-17). The good king is released from evil

connections with the initiation tradition, but those relationships are largely obscured in the sources to be examined here; only the cyclical theme will come in for brief consideration. By "ritual," no religious implications are intended. The minstrel's role before his audience, the language he uses, and the behavior of his fictional characters are all stylized and formalized in ways that find parallels in the performance of religious rites and would have produced an analogous sense of admiration and respect in the audience, but the explicitly religious content of some parts of the poems does not receive special attention in these pages. Part I is devoted to the network of initiation narratives discoverable in Spanish and related foreign sources. Part II deals with various linguistic and poetic traits of the *Poema del Cid* and other texts as concrete manifestations of a deep belief and absorption in an age-old tradition that continued to underpin the sense of identity and propriety of members of Castilian society at the turn of the thirteenth century, as well as modes of perception and thought that supported the mythic vision.

In Part I of the book, translations into English have been provided for all quotations in Old Spanish. Part II concentrates on the mechanics of the epic language more than on content. Hence, translations are usually omitted in this part as potentially intrusive; a knowledge of modern Spanish on the part of the reader will make the analyses clear. For the *Chanson de Roland*, Bédier's (1960) modern rendition of the Old French is included.

Portions of this book were written during a sabbatical leave granted by Tulane University for the fall of 1994, which I gratefully acknowledge. I also thank Mary Montgomery for a helpful critical reading, James Montgomery for technical assistance and advice, and particularly Matthew Bailey for a thorough commentary that led to substantial and necessary improvements to the study. Andrew Lewis, editorial reader for Penn State Press, provided invaluable contributions and advice. Finally, I express deep appreciation for many critical and editorial suggestions offered by Samuel Armistead. Remaining defects are all attributable to me.

counselors, for instance, and the Infantes' return to Castile is the reverse of the Cid's triumphant journey to the east. The elaborate study done by Alberto Montaner (1987) shows parallels between the Cid and classical heroes, particularly Herakles, treating them as archetypes. This book, which concentrates on the initiation myth, largely supports the views of Dunn and Montaner, though its perspectives are quite different.