

THE POEM OF THE CID (EI CANTAR/POEMA DE MIO CID)

I. Background/Terms

1. *El mester de juglaría*: The poetry of the people which was related/recited originally by wandering minstrels (*juglares*) in the Medieval Spain, often dealing with the exploits of national heroes as well as intimate personal emotions (of lyric poetry). This kind of poetry is presented as an oral literature characterized by its popularity and anonymity.
2. *El mester de clerecía*: The “learned” school of the poetry which was cultivated by clergies during the 13th century in Europe, often written in a set verse form, based on religious themes and frequently in imitation of Latin and French models.
3. *Los cantares de gesta*: The epic poetry chronicles the life and heroic feats of national figures along with the historical value.
4. *El Cid*: Rodrigo or Ruy Díaz de Vivar (b. c. 1043, Vivar near Burgos, Castilla [Spain]—d. July 10, 1099, Valencia) is a Castilian military leader under King Alfonso VI in the 11th century and national hero. He fought for Alfonso against the Moors, then, the exile from Castile led him to fight for the Moors against Alfonso, and conquered the Kingdom of Valencia for himself. He ruled there until his death. His popular name, “El Cid”, is a Moorish title of respect, from Arabic *al sayyid* “Lord”, also called “El Campeador” (the Champion) in Spanish. According to numerous modern critics, his title reflects the conflicting loyalties.

II. The author and metrics

The Poem of The Cid is the great epic of Spanish medieval about the national hero Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, relating events from his exile from Castile in 1081 until shortly before his death in 1099. It was composed about 1140, according to Menéndez

Pidal, some 40 years after the death of the Cid. Nevertheless, the identity of the author has been ignored just like most of the old European epics did. Menéndez Pidal presumed that a minstrel called San Esteban de Gormaz as well as the other one Medinaceli intervened successively in its composition. Later, the poem was preserved in a copy by one Per Abbat, to whom nowadays critics consider as only a copist.

The poem consists of 3,730 verses, written in irregular metrics, that is, with a versification that fluctuates between verses of different syllables, but with the dominance of those of 14.

III. Content and structure

The poem relates some of the adventures of the Cid in his maturity, and it is divided into three sections or cantos.

1) *El Cantar del desierto*: It deals with the exile of the Cid from Castile after falling into the King's disfavour. With deep sorrow and desperation, in Burgos the Cid farewelled to his wife Jimena and his two daughters, to whom he entrusted the monks of Cardeña to take care of. Since then, he was accompanied by his faithful subordinates in the journey of the exile. They conquered numerous Moorish lands, offering gifts to the King to show the Cid's high fidelity to the Monarch. Shortly afterwards, defeated and captured the Count of Barcelona, who had the great influence in the area of Valencia and to whom the Cid set free.

(2) *El Cantar de Las bodas*: The Cid conquered Valencia and defeated the King of Seville. King Alfonso was reconciled with the Cid and arranged the marriage of the Cid's two daughters (doña Elvira and doña Sol) to the Princes (Infantes) of Carrión.

(3) *El Cantar de La afrenta (outrage, dishonor) de Corpes*: The final part describes the shameful behavior of the Infantes towards their wives and the Cid's revenge upon

them. All was due to a ridicule that the Princes, being coward in the battle, were fearful at the sight of a lion in front of the Cid's courtesans. In order to take revenge, they left Valencia with their wives, while arriving at Corpes, abandoned them, whipped them cruelly. The Cid asked the King for the justice, summoned the court of Toledo, and the Cid's warriors defeated the Princes. The poem ends with the new weddings of the Cid's two daughters with the Princes of Navarra and Aragón.

IV. The technique, style and significance

The poem is notable for its realism and humanity---- with the characterization of characters, especially of the Cid which portrays us a man of hero in the battle, delicate and affectionate in his private life, a faithful vassal to the King as well. In this instance, the work does not contain fantastic elements, but embraces a high value of realism and historicism due to the precision of its geographic allusions and of social customs of that period. In terms of the style, compared to the French epic poems, *The Poem of the Cid* is more spontaneous and more sober.

In addition to its literary value, *The Poem* symbolizes the Castilian spirit, the sentiment of heroism in conjunction with the concept of democracy.

On the other hand, the issue of historicism and fictionalization is fairly controversial. The Cid became a universal hero to the Spanish (thanks to the influence of the 12th- century epic poem of Castile), and his story was elaborated by numerous ballads, legends, and other tales until the historical figure was almost completely obscured by the fanciful literature. The Cid was speedily elevated to the status of national hero of Castile, but the legend played a dominant role in idealizing the complex heroic biography. The Cid was rescued from fiction by the Spanish scholar

Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who devoted his entire long life to discovering the historical Cid and in portraying the Spain in which he lived.