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Introduction to *The Youthful Deeds of Rodrigo* (*Las mocedades de Rodrigo*)

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Las mocedades de Rodrigo is an epic poem that narrates the legendary deeds of the young Rodrigo Díaz, later called the Cid. His heroic deeds are compelling and memorable, although there is little evidence to suggest that they are in any way historical. For example, we first learn of Rodrigo serving as the standard bearer in the army of King Sancho II of Castile, and yet the *Mocedades* portrays him as a youthful warrior during the minority reign of King Fernando I, Sancho's father. The poem's culminating episode is an invasion of France by the combined armies of the Christian kingdoms of Spain under the command of Rodrigo. It's a dramatic foray to the very gates of Paris, quite thrilling to behold, yet no such invasion ever occurred. The one episode in the poem that is documented previously is the single combat for the city of Calahorra. In the *Mocedades* version, Rodrigo fights for the king of Castile against a giant Navarrese warrior representing the king of Aragón. In the combat that ensues Rodrigo knocks the Navarrese champion from his horse and then dismounts and decapitates him, all for the greater glory of Castile.

The story of Rodrigo's legendary youth first appears in the *Crónica de de los reyes de Castilla* (c. 1300), a Castilian prose chronicle that was composed some one hundred years after the epic narrative of the mature Cid was put to parchment. The verse version of Rodrigo's youthful exploits was included in a manuscript that it shares with the earlier chronicle. The date 1400 is etched onto the final folio of manuscript text, although what this date means is an open question. The two versions of the narrative, one in prose, the other in verse, relate essentially the same sequence of heroic deeds, although they do differ in tenor. The best scholarly efforts to date the *Mocedades* have not provided a conclusive date for the composition of the poem. What we can assert with confidence is that a narrative of the youthful deeds of Rodrigo Díaz was known prior to 1300 and that the authors of the *Crónica de Castilla* considered it significant enough to incorporate it into their prose project. That same narrative, or a later version of it, was copied in verse form onto the unique manuscript that it shares with the chronicle in which, somewhat ironically, it first appeared.

It may come as a surprise that even though the *Poem of the Cid* enjoys more literary esteem than the *Mocedades*, subsequent recreations of the Cid's life invariably highlight his youthful deeds and tend to ignore the deeds of the mature Cid. The ballad tradition that emerges from the medieval period furnishes the sequence of events and the dramatic moments that the playwright Guillén de Castro incorporates into his highly regarded drama, *Las mocedades del Cid* (1612), a work centered exclusively on the Cid's early years. Guillén's *Mocedades* was later refashioned by Pierre Corneille as *Le Cid*, debuting in Paris in 1637 and considered the most significant play in the history of French drama. Guillén's play and Robert Southey's English prose *Chronicle of the Cid* (1808) are in turn the inspiration for the Hollywood blockbuster movie *El Cid* (1962), starring Charlton Heston and Sophia Loren. In this movie, the main drama revolves around the romance between the young Rodrigo and Ximena. The mature Cid's conquest and defense of Valencia are also featured, but the dramatic tension of the youthful romance is maintained throughout the film.

While the narrative of the young Cid provides a sequence of dynamic and stunning encounters, the poem is diminished by the effects of a copyist who seems to have omitted some transitional passages and neglected the metrical regularity we associate with the *Poem of the Cid*. In reading the poem, the narration conveys a sense of haste, of rushing along from one episode to the next with little time for either the narrator or the protagonists to pause and reflect, or to provide anything more than minimal details for the situations and the people being portrayed. Modern scholars have also been frustrated in their efforts to discern a narrative arc in



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the poem which, along with the problems associated with the poor quality of the manuscript copy, has contributed to the impression that the poem lacks coherence.

Yet, for the patient reader, the poem can provide unparalleled satisfaction and delight. The young Rodrigo first emerges as an unstoppable force of nature, burning with desire to engage in combat and vanquish his foes. After a cattle raid by Castilian count don Gómez de Gormaz, Ximena's father, against the property and subjects of Diego Laínez, Rodrigo's father, a retaliatory raid leads to a pitched battle between the two clans in which Rodrigo kills Count Gómez and takes his sons captive.

Asosegada estava la tierra, que non avié guerra de
ningún cabo.
El conde don Gómez de Gormaz a Diego Laínez
fizo daño,
Ferióle los pastores e robóle el ganado.
A Bivar llegó Diego Laínez, al apellido fue llegado.
Él enbiólos rezebir a sus hermanos, e cavalga muy
privado.
Fueron correr a Gormaz, quando el sol era rayado.
Quemáronle el arraval e comenzáronle el andamio,
e trae los vassallos e quanto tienen en las manos,
e trae los ganados, quantos andant por el campo,
e tráele por dessonra las lavanderas, que al agua
están lavando.
Tras ellos salió el conde con çient cavalleros fijos
dalgo,
rebtando a grandes bozes a fijo de Laín Calvo,
“¡Dexat mis lavanderas, fijo del alcalde çibdadano,
c'a mí non me atenderedes atantos por tantos!”
por quanto él está escalentado.
Redró Ruy Laínez, señor que era de Faro,
“Çiento por çiento vos seremos de buena miente e
al pulgar.”
Otórganse los omenajes, que fuessen í al día de
plazo.
Tórnanle de las lavanderas e de los vassallos,
mas non le dieron el ganado,
ca se lo querién tener, por lo que el conde avía
levado.
A los nueve días contados cavalgam muy privado.
Rodrigo, fijo de don Diego e nieto de Laín Calvo,
e nieto del conde Nuño Álvarez de Amaya,
e visnieto del rey de León.
Doze años avía por cuenta e aún los treze non son,
nunca se viera en lit, ya quebrávale el coraçón.

The land was at peace, there was no war in any
quarter.
Count don Gómez de Gormaz did harm to Diego
Laínez,
he attacked his shepherds and stole his livestock.
In Vivar arrived Diego Laínez, at the call to arms he
came.
He sent for his brothers to join him and he rides
swiftly.
They raided Gormaz when the sun came up.
They set fire to the outer dwellings and reached the
fortifications,
and he takes their vassals and all they have in their
hands,
and he takes their livestock, all the ones grazing in
the fields,
and he takes to their dishonor the washerwomen
washing at the water's edge.
The count struck out after them, with one hundred
noble knights,
challenging at the top of his lungs the son of Laín
Calvo,
“Set free my washerwomen, you son of the town
judge,
you won't face me with equal forces,”
because he is so furious.
Ruy Laínez replied, lord that he was of Haro,
“A hundred against a hundred we will be, ready for
you and in full force.”
They swear their oaths, that they would be there on
the appointed day.
They return some of the washerwomen and vassals,
but they did not give him his livestock,
because they wanted to hold it against what the
count had carried off.
After the full nine days they ride swiftly.

Cuéntasse en los çien lidiadores, que quisso el padre
o que non,
en los primeros golpes suyos e del conde don
Gómez son.
Paradas están las hazes e comienzan a lidiar,
Rodrigo mató al conde, ca non lo pudo tardar.
Venidos son los çiento e pienssan de lidiar,
en pos ellos salió Rodrigo, que los non da vagar.
Prisso a dos fijos del conde, a todo su mal pessar,
a Fernán Gómez e Alfonso Gómez, e tráxolos a
Bivar. (vv. 346-380)

Rodrigo, son of don Diego and grandson of Laín
Calvo,
and grandson of count Nuño Álvarez of Amaya,
and great grandson of the king of León.
He was twelve years old and not yet thirteen,
he had never been in battle, now his heart was
bursting.
He is among the hundred warriors, whether his
father wanted it or not,
and the first blows are struck between him and
count don Gómez.
The battle lines are set and they begin to fight,
Rodrigo killed the count, for he could not delay.
The hundred knights come up and begin to fight,
Rodrigo struck out after them, he gives them no
respite.
He captured two sons of the count, much to their
great displeasure,
Fernán Gómez and Alfonso Gómez, and brought
them to Vivar.¹

Ximena and her two older sisters travel to plea with Diego Laínez for the release of her captive brothers. She then travels to the king's court seeking justice for the death of her father. Her plea unsettles the young king, since he knows that any move against the unruly Castilians could easily lead to their open revolt against him, the king of León. Ximena provides the indecisive king with an ingenious solution, to marry her to the man who killed her father. The young king's tutor, don Ossorio, is delighted with Ximena's suggestion and tells the king to send for Rodrigo immediately.

Allí cavalgó Ximena Gómez, tres donçellas con ella
van,
e otros escuderos que la avían de guardar.
Llegava a Zamora, do la corte del rey está,
llorando de los ojos e pediéndol' piedat,
"Rey, dueña só lazrada e áveme piedat,
orphanilla finqué pequeña de la condessa mi madre.
Fijo de Diego Laínez fizome mucho mal,
príssome mis hermanos e matóme a mi padre.
A vós que sodes rey véngome a querellar.
Señor, por merçed, derecho me mandat dar."
Mucho pessó al rey e començó de fablar,
"En grant coita son mis reinos, Castilla alçarseme
ha,
e si se me alçan castellanos, fazerme han mucho
mal."

Then Jimena Gómez rode, three maidens go with
her,
and additional squires who were to protect her.
She arrived in Zamora, where the king's court is,
weeping from her eyes and asking him for mercy,
"King, I am a pitiful lady, have mercy on me,
as a little girl I was orphaned by the countess my
mother.
The son of Diego Laínez has wronged me greatly,
he captured my brothers and killed my father.
To you who are king I come to plea.
Sire, for mercy's sake, grant me justice."
This greatly grieved the king and he began to speak,
"My kingdoms are in great turmoil, Castile will rise
up against me,
and if the Castilians rise up against me, they will do
me great harm."

¹ All verse quotations are from Bailey, ed. *Las mocedades de Rodrigo*.

Quando lo oyó Ximena Gómez, las manos le fue
bessar,

“Merçed,” dixo, “señor, non lo tengades a mal,
mostrarvos he assosigar a Castilla e a los reinos
otro tal.

Datme a Rodrigo por marido, aquel que mató a mi
padre.”

Quando aquesto oyó el conde don Ossorio, amo del
rey don Fernando,

tomó el rey por las manos e aparte iva sacallo,
“Señor, ¿qué vos semeja?, ¡qué don vos ha
demandado!

Mucho lo deveades agradecer al Padre apoderado.
Señor, enbiat por Rodrigo e por su padre privado.”
(414-435)

When Jimena Gómez heard this, she kissed his
hands,

“If you please,” she said, “Sire, do not take it badly,
I’ll show you how to pacify Castile, and your
kingdoms as well.

Give me Rodrigo as my husband, the one who
killed my father.”

When count don Osorio heard this, tutor to king
don Fernando,

he took the king by the hand and drew him aside,
“Sire, what do you think? What a gift she has
requested of you!

You should truly thank the almighty Father.
Sire, send for Rodrigo and for his father
immediately.”

Rodrigo and his father are suspicious of the King’s missive, expecting that he plans to kill them in retribution for the death of the count. When they arrive at the court, Rodrigo’s fierce appearance frightens the king’s courtiers and the king himself, who moves quickly to subdue Rodrigo by presenting Ximena. When Ximena sees Rodrigo, she lets the king know that she is pleased by his appearance and with her decision to marry him.

Essas oras dixo el rey al conde don Ossorio, su
amo,

“Dadme vós acá essa donçella, despossaremos este
lozano.”

Aún non lo creyó don Diego, tanto estava
espantado.

Salió la donçella e tráela el conde por la mano.
Ella tendió los ojos e a Rodrigo comenzó de catarlo,
dixo, “Señor, muchas merçedes, ca éste es el conde
que yo demando.”

Allí despossavan a doña Ximena Gómez con
Rodrigo el castellano. (472-490)

Then the king said to count don Osorio,
his tutor,

“Get that maiden over here, we will
betroth this spirited lad.”

Don Diego still did not believe it, he was
so frightened.

The maiden came out and the count brings
her by the hand.

She raised her eyes and began to look
Rodrigo over,

she said, “Sire, many thanks, for this is the
count that I want.”

There they betrothed doña Jimena Gómez
to Rodrigo the Castilian.

Rodrigo is not pleased with the betrothal. He lets the king know that he will not consummate the marriage or pledge fealty to the king until he has won five pitched battles.

Most readers of the poem understand this as an admission by Rodrigo that he first wants to prove his worth as a young warrior before he takes on the responsibilities of adulthood, of a loyal vassal and husband. His first battle is against five Muslim lords and their armies. He defeats them and takes his prisoners and booty to king Fernando to report on his victory, but he refuses to grant the king the fifth part of the riches that the king assumes will be his. This encounter generates a testy exchange, but Rodrigo is very clear about his reasons for not granting the king his request, and in the process his principled leadership wins over a good number of the king’s vassals to his own army.

Estonçe dixo Rodrigo, “Solamente non sea pensado,
que yo lo daré a los mesquinos, que assaz lo han
lazrado.

Then Rodrigo said, “Let it not even be considered,
for I’ll give it to the poor, for they have suffered
a great deal.

Lo suyo daré a los diezmos, que non quiero su
pecado.
De lo mio daré soldadas a aquellos que me
aguardaron.”
Essas oras dixo el buen rey, “Dame a esse moro
lozano.”
Estonçe dixo Rodrigo, “Solamente non sea pensado,
que non, por quanto yo valgo,
que fidalgo a fidalgo, quando’ prende, non deve
dessonrarlo.
De más non vos daré el quinto, sinon de aver
monedado,
que darlo he a mis vassallos, que assaz me lo han
lazerado.”
Despediéronse del rey e bessáronle la mano.
Trezientos cavalleros fueron por cuenta, los que allí
fueron juntados. (545-556)

I’ll give the tithers their portion, for I don’t want to
be in sin.
From my portion I will give salaries to those who
supported me.”
At that moment the good king said, “Give me that
brazen Moor.”
Then Rodrigo said, “Let it not even be considered,
not for all that I am worth,
for among noblemen, when one captures another,
he should not dishonor him.
I won’t give you the fifth either, except for the
wealth here in coins,
for I will give it to my vassals, who have endured a
great deal.”
They bid farewell to the king and kissed his hand.
There were three hundred knights in all gathered
together there.

Rodrigo continues to speak truth to power in this way throughout the poem, striking a marked contrast to the comportment of the legendary mature Cid. As the poem progresses Rodrigo joins with King Fernando to challenge the demand by France and other European powers that Spain pay them an annual tribute. As the king forlornly laments his fate, Rodrigo stands firm, proudly vowing to make the Europeans eat their words.

Estonçe dixo Rodrigo, “Por ende sea Dios loado,
ca vos enbían pedir don, vós devedes otorgarlo.
Aún non vos enbía pedir tributo, mas enbíavos dar
algo,
mostrarvos he yo aqeste aver ganarlo.
Apellidat vuestros regnos, desde los puertos de
Aspa fasta en Santiago,
sobre lo suyo lo ayamos, lo nuestro esté quedado.
Si non llego fasta París non devía ser nado.” (837-
843)

Then Rodrigo said, “Let God be praised,
for they send asking you for a gift, you should grant
it.
He is not even asking you for tribute, rather he
wants to give you riches,
I’ll show you how to win this wealth.
Call your kingdoms to arms, from the mountain
passes of Aspa all the way to Santiago,
let us take it from them, and leave ours where it is.
If I don’t make it to Paris I should not have been
born.”

Rodrigo leads his army against the count of Savoy, routs his army, takes the count hostage, who then hands over his daughter, his only offspring and heir to his estate, in exchange for his own freedom. King Fernando takes the count’s daughter in concubinage at the insistence of Rodrigo (“enbarraganad a Francia” (v. 1045) / make France your mistress [charitably speaking]), and in what seems like very short order she gives birth to a son. The birth of the son leads to the end of hostilities, leaving Spain on the cusp of victory, and Rodrigo disappointed.

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