
In this book, Funes and Tenenbaum bring together original editions of three versions of the prequel to the Cantar de Mio Cid, the epic cycle Mocedades de Rodrigo (= MR): the Crónica rimada del Cid, the Refundición de las Mocedades de Rodrigo, and a conjectural reconstruction of the primitive cantar de gesta. These are preceded by an introductory study, and accompanied by full critical apparatus, detailed notes, a glossary, and onomastic, toponymic, and thematic indices.

Anticipating the inevitable — yet entirely reasonable — questioning of the need for a new edition, and in particular of a tripartite edition such as he presents, Funes explains that a critical edition of the manuscript tradition of the MR alone is insufficient for the study of the text in its socio-historical and poetic context. Therefore, all available traditions (oral and written, poetic and prosaic) must be considered together and considered as equal components in the study of the MR. In the author’s words, “la opción no es texto versus manuscrito, sino texto y manuscrito” (lxix-lx).

As Funes demonstrates quite aptly, this approach can be quite fruitful, and in the best case speaks to one of the core missions of the humanities: to understand what our study of our past says about us. He brings to bear upon his readings a solid command of the critical tradition, historical background, poetics, and, most notably, the socio-political context of the texts as poetic and literary practice. Funes is highly sensitive to the subtle interrelationship of socio-political climate and aesthetics, and introduces many original and very interesting insights on the topic in lean, fluid, engaging prose.

He begins with a consideration of the gesta version of the MR as a performance text, focusing on its social function, and the relation of same to the community’s idea of a heroic past (xii). He notes, for example, that due to its function as a site of the negotiation of national identity, juglaría is a cultural institution bearing considerable “autoridad ideológica” (xii). As such, juglaría is both sensitive to and formative of contemporary ideologies, a sort of workshop of cultural identity. It follows that the gesta primitiva of the MR, missing manuscript notwithstanding, rivals the Cantar de Mio Cid in assessing the mentality of (Re)conquest-era Castile and León.

The political instability and social crisis of early 14th-century Castile-León is likewise reflected in the “cosmovisión fragmentaria” (xiv) of the Refundición. This “cosmovisión” enables a non-linear, cyclical structure that enables a certain “flexibilidad ideológica” that, in the opinion of Funes, characterizes the Refundición. This phenomenon, he observes, is also present in the Libro de buen amor, whose irregular structure has been the subject of no little debate among specialists (I). The socio-political turbulence of the time that pitted clergy against nobility against monarchy also left its mark on the ideological orientation of the Refundición, which communicates a distinctly pro-ecclesiastical and anti-monarchic and anti-aristocratic point of view. The text, writes Funes, is a “mapa ideológico que enfrenta santidad (Bernardo) y heroicidad (Rodrigo) a los corrompidos poderes laicos: una nobleza traicionera y una monarquía irresoluta e incapaz” (lix).

According to Funes, this relationship between socio-political climate and the medieval reception of the MR also obtains in its modern reception. Successive generations of MR critics, he opines, “parecen hablarnos más de la época en que se formularon [sus] juicios que de la obra misma” (xv). To wit, to 19th-century scholars accustomed to regular versification and Victorian mores were scandalized by the irregularity of medieval Castilian and the outrageous conduct of the Rodrigo. In contrast, argues Funes, the current generation raised on the sound-bite and the cell phone text message would not raise an eyebrow at the structural incoherence of the MR. This is the type of reflection that puts highly specialized academic work in a larger context, and looks beyond diminutive academic fiefdoms toward more universal horizons.

Funes’ sound philology and sharp cultural insights are a powerful combination, and his credentials as a textual critic should be more than enough to temper would-be critics of his approach to medieval cultural production as social practice. He rightly reminds us that “la ecdótica es, insisto, una ciencia histórica, que no responde a una sola metología, sino que ajusta múltiples metodologías a los perfiles exactos de su objeto singular” (lxix-lx). As a member of a scholarly community that has tolerated bitter trans-generational infighting over questions of methodology, Funes demonstrates that there is room for more than one approach not only within the same community, but within the same book. We would do well to learn from his example.

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