

THE LORD OF BEMBIBRE

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ENRIQUE GIL



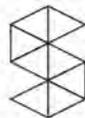
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DESTINO FRANKFURT 2022 [*Enrique Gil: un romántico en la construcción de Europa*] es una acción cultural transversal y colectiva, desarrollada en 2021 y 2022 implicando a una amplia comunidad editorial, literaria y artística, en torno a un relato de actualidad: los inicios de la construcción de Europa, desde la primera mitad del siglo XIX, y el Romanticismo —entendido a la manera progresista e integradora de Enrique Gil—, como motor y cauce de un diálogo cultural profundo y enriquecedor.

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The Lord of Bembibre
The Spanish Templar

The first translation into English of
Enrique Gil's *El Señor de Bembibre*

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Prologue

Here we have the long-awaited first English version of Enrique Gil y Carrasco's historical novel *El Señor de Bembibre*, generally regarded as the best of its genre in the Spanish Romantic period. It has indeed been reprinted in an unusual number of new editions in Spain but has never achieved such wide readership elsewhere, something that we hope this English version may remedy.

How will an English reader of the 21st Century react to this work written in 1844 but depicting the early years of the 14th? A time when the huge power of the Crusader Knights of the Temple, extending over France, Spain and elsewhere in Europe, was coming to its end.

Armoured knights, picturesque castles and ladies in distress have acquired a certain popularity in our modern TV series or films but they in no way convey the complexity of Medieval chivalry, the immense power and influence of the Church. Or, for example, the subjugation of noble women as pawns in great power games.

Gil has chosen an ancient structure on which to build his concept of those days: ambitious domineering father, docile unhappy daughter, ill-starred lovers one, or both of whom doomed to die. Such tragedies have formed the basis of innumerable works of fiction, drama, painting and music, each artist giving them a personal “habitation and a name”. The originality of Gil's novel lies precisely in its unusual setting, in a relatively unknown region of Spain, El Bierzo, his own homeland, which he records with great fidelity.

Gil is essentially a pictorial writer who invites his reader to visualize his scenes, painted with the utmost clarity and precision. Some derive from his own recollection of his homeland, El Bierzo, capturing the seasonal changes as reflected in skies, mountains, rivers and vegetation with a profound awareness of Nature reminiscent of English Romantic poets such as Keats or Wordsworth who preceded him.

At other times he surprises us with vivid, almost cinematographic action as he leads us through the besieged Castle of Cornatel or narrates the desperate duel between the old veteran Commander Saldaña and the Count of Lemos, scenes that make us think of Alexandre Dumas' hugely successful *Les Trois Mousquetaires* published in the very same 1844 and

pointing towards a new concept of historical fiction.

Gil's novel is basically sombre. A veil of melancholy overshadows the story as we follow the changing moods of a confused and lachrymose young woman, Doña Beatriz, entangled in a terrible network of opposing loyalties and fervent spirituality. The feverish episodes of her final delirium are in accordance with an age when so many young men and women, including the author himself, were destined to an early death.

The light relief comes with the delightful secondary characters: the vivacious and resourceful handmaiden Martina, the stalwart and loyal squire Millán or the noble hunter, Cosme Andrade, sturdy representatives of that country known as El Bierzo.

El Bierzo? What and where is El Bierzo? I asked this question long ago when Europe was just recovering from the most destructive period of its history —World War II— and I was living in the centre of its ruins. El Bierzo, I was told, is a wondrous region of North-West Spain, a land of high mountains circling fertile plains, many rivers, giant chestnut trees, ancient ruined castles and extraordinary Roman remains. "You certainly must visit El Bierzo". So I went and have now been going there repeatedly for more than 60 years. I have loved its beauty, its towns and villages, its captivating landscape and the warm hospitality of its inhabitants.

El Bierzo has long ceased to be the terrain of Knights Templar resplendent on their war horses. Nor is it quite the landscape that Enrique Gil may have recalled nostalgically on his untimely deathbed in far off Prussia, but today most of its topography remains. We hope that the readers of this book will feel inclined to visit or revisit the land he so vividly described.

DOIREANN MACDERMOTT

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Chapter I – Servants gossip on their way from the fair

One afternoon in May of one of the earliest years of the fourteenth century, three men, presumably the servants of some of the great lords who at that time shared the dominion of El Bierzo, were returning from the fair of San Marcos in Cacabelos. The first one, called Nuño, who was about fifty-six years old, was riding a Galician nag of no great merit but which at the range of a crossbow revealed a robustness and endurance suitable for the sports of hunting. In his left fist, which was covered with a glove, stood a hooded falcon. Searching both sides of the road, but attentive to his master's voice and signals, went a well-bred bloodhound. Nuño had a lean and flexible body, with a lively, sunburned face and in all his bearing and movements, he revealed that he was a huntsman.

The second traveller, named Mendo, was aged about thirty-six, and he was the opposite side of the coin. He had a bulging face, showing very little expression, and a massive and heavy body whose contours, never very elegant, obesity had begun to erase. The presumptuous air with which he managed the superb Andalusian foal on which he rode, and the precision with which he forced his mount to all kinds of movements, made it obvious that he was a horse trainer or groom.

The third man, called Millán, was riding a good war horse and was a little more luxuriously dressed than the others. He was a young man of very agreeable presence, great ease and self-assurance, with a somewhat malicious face and in the flower of his years. Anyone would have identified him without hesitation as the squire or spear bearer of some illustrious lord.

The three men were having a lively conversation, as one might expect, about their respective masters, often praising them but also intermingling compliments with the usual layer of gossip.

"I am telling you Nuño," said Mendo the groom "that our master is doing as a man should, because to give his only daughter and heiress of the house of Arganza to a fellow that is only a second-rate country squire, when he can marry her to a gentleman as powerful as the Count of Lemos would be worse than throwing fat into the fire. A fine match a lord of Bembibre would have been!"

"But my friend," replied Millán the squire, sarcastically, even if the words of Mendo the groom were not addressed to him directly, "what fault does my master have if your young lady's handmaid is friendlier to me than to you, for you to be so set against him? I would have asked God to give you a little more understanding and leave you a little less flesh, so that Martina would look on you differently, and the master would not suffer for the sins

of the servant. "

Mendo's face lit in anger, and stirring the colt, he began to stare at the squire. For his part, Millán repaid in the same coin, and laughed his head off, so that without the mediation of the huntsman Nuño, we do not know what would have been the outcome of that ill-started conversation.

"Mendo," Nuño said to the groom, "you have shown little restraint in speaking about the Lord of Bembibre, who is an important knight whom everyone in the country loves and esteems for his nobility and valour. And you have exposed yourself to Millán's somewhat excessive mockery, who undoubtedly cares more for the honour of his lord than for the charity to which we Christians are bound."

"What I say is that our master does very well not to give his daughter to Don Álvaro Yáñez, the Lord of Bembibre, and that *velis nolis*, like it or not, she will come to be Countess of Lemos and the mistress of half of Galicia."

"He doesn't do well," replied Nuño the wise huntsman, "because Doña Beatriz does not care for the count any more than I would an old and blind falcon. Even if the count has the advantage over the Lord of Bembibre in terms of property, he falls far behind him in virtues and good reputation, and above all in the desires of our young lady, who has certainly shown more discernment in her choice than you."

"The Lord of Arganza, our master, has not committed himself," replied Mendo, "and so Don Álvaro should go back where he came from and run off to Galicia, his mother's homeland."

"It is true that our master has not committed his word or made a pledge, as I understand the matter. But in that case, he should not have welcomed Don Álvaro as if he were to be his son-in-law and allow his daughter to associate with a person who has captivated the whole world by his behaviour and gallantry, and that a maiden of such discretion and beauty as Doña Beatriz was bound to fall in love with."

"Well, if she fell in love, let her fall out of love again," replied the stubborn groom Mendo. "And besides, she will cease to love him as soon as her father raises his voice, because she is as humble as the earth, and as affectionate as an angel, the poor girl."

"You are very misguided in your judgments," answered Nuño the huntsman, "I know her better than you do because I have known her from birth. And although Doña Beatriz will give her life for a good cause, if they force her will and treat her badly, only God will be able to cope with her."

"But speaking now without passion or anger," Millán said, "What has my master Don Álvaro done to you, Mendo, for you to be so hostile? No one on this earth, as far as I know, speaks of him as you do."

"I do not dislike him so badly," said Mendo, "and if it had not been for

the Count of Lemos, I wouldn't have minded having him as master in our household. But what do you want me to say, my friend? Nobody would exchange a count for a mere lord."

"But my master, Don Álvaro, though he is not a count, is noble and rich, and what is more, he is the nephew of the Master of the Templars and an ally of the Order."

"A bunch of heretics and sorcerers," said Mendo.

"Quiet!" Nuño said in a low voice, pulling his arm in anger. "If they could hear you, they would crucify you like they did Saint Andrew."

"Do not fear, my friend," replied Millán, to whose ready ear not a single word had escaped, though spoken in a low voice. "Don Álvaro's servants were never spies, nor malicious, thank God. Because in the end, those who follow after knights always try to be like them."

"The Count of Lemos is also a lord, and he has done more than one good deed."

"Yes," said Millán, "he does so, provided he can go before people to proclaim it at once. But would your admired count be able to do for his own father what Don Álvaro did for me?"

"What was it?" Asked the two companions at once.

"A thing that I will never forget. We passed the old Ponferrada bridge, which, as you know, does not have handrails, with a tempest raging, and the river running from one bank to the other, roaring like the sea. Suddenly a cloud bursts and a flash of lightning passes in front of my palfrey so that it reared up, blinded with the brightness. Without knowing how, splash, we both go head over heels into the river! What do you imagine that Don Álvaro did? Well, sir, without committing himself to God or the devil, he spurred on his horse and threw himself into the river to save me. In short, we were lucky that we did not both drown, with our horses too. At last my nag was swept down the river, and I, half stunned, made it to the shore, because Don Álvaro dragged me there by the hair. When I recovered, I really did not know how to thank him, because I got a lump in my throat and could not speak. But he just smiled and said: 'Come on man, it's all right. It was nothing, just a dip in the river. Calm down and don't go talking about what has happened, or else people might think you are a poor rider.'"

"A brave deed, upon my life," exclaimed Mendo, with an enthusiasm that could scarcely be expected from his previous prejudices and his lymphatic temperament, "and without losing his stirrups! Ah, good knight! The devil take me if a deed like this is not worth almost as much as the best county in Spain! But, well," he went on as if controlling his enthusiasm, "if it had not been for his gallant horse *Almanzor*, God knows what would have happened to him ... Animals are quite something!" he continued, caressing

his foal's neck with almost paternal satisfaction, "And tell me, Millán, what happened to your horse, finally? Did the poor thing drown?"

"No," said Millán, "he ended up a good way further down the river, and there he was rescued by a Moorish slave of the Temple who had gone to Pajariel for wood. But the poor animal had been so knocked about that he was not right for more than three months."

With these and other stories, they arrived at the town of Arganza, and dismounted at their master's manor house, the residence of the illustrious Don Alonso Ossorio, Lord of Arganza.





Chapter II – The last hopes of two great houses

By now our readers may have surmised something about the situation in which the Arganza family and the Lord of Bembibre found themselves at that time, thanks to the loquacity of their respective servants. However, even if their reports do not entirely depart from the truth, they are so incomplete that they oblige us to provide new and essential details to explain the events of this lamentable story.

Don Alonso Ossorio, Lord of Arganza, had had two sons and one daughter. But the first of his sons died before leaving childhood, and the other died fighting valiantly in his first campaign against the Moors of Andalusia. So all Don Alonso's hopes had come to rest on his daughter, Doña Beatriz, who was then only a child, but who already promised as much beauty as talent and generosity. There was in her character a mixture of the energy that distinguished her father and the sweetness and melancholy of Doña Blanca de Balboa, her mother, a saintly lady whose life had been a living and constant example of goodness, resignation and Christian piety. Although with the early loss of her two sons, Doña Blanca's complexion, unfortunately very delicate, had been completely ruined, this was not an obstacle to the use of her uncommon education in her daughter's careful upbringing, and to enhance the favourable gifts with which nature had lavishly endowed her. Doña Blanca had no other hope than her daughter, a creature so dear and beautiful, and on this child she accumulated her tenderness, her dearest expectations and her dreams for the future. Doña Beatriz grew like a gentle, fragrant lily in the warmth of her maternal affection, defended by the name and power of her father and surrounded on all sides by the respect and love of her vassals, who saw in her a reliable mediator to alleviate their hardships and a constant dispenser of benefits.

The years flew by as fast as they usually do, and with them flew the childhood of that noble, gracious and rich young woman. And for this reason, her father thought to seek for her a husband of superior qualities, worthy of her class and wealth. In El Bierzo at that time, there were only two houses whose estates and vassals were suitable: one, that of the Arganza family and the other, that of the ancient Yáñez family, whose dominions included the fertile banks of Bembibre and most of the surrounding mountains. This lineage had provided two masters to the Order of the Temple and was very honoured and respected in the country. By a rare coincidence, in the same way that the surname Ossorio hung from the fragile existence of a young woman, the continuance of the Yáñez lineage was linked to that of a single man, a situation no less fragile and unstable in

those times of affliction and turbulence. Don Álvaro Yáñez and his uncle Don Rodrigo, provincial Master of the Temple in Castile, were the only two remaining members of that illustrious and numerous race. The one was a dry and barren branch, by age and vows, and the other stem was full of sap and freshness that promised long life and seasoned fruits. Don Álvaro had lost his parents as a child, and his uncle, then a commander of the Order, had brought him up as befitted a noble knight, having the satisfaction of seeing his efforts and dedication crowned with the most brilliant success. Don Álvaro had fought his first campaign in Andalusia, under the orders of Don Alonso Pérez de Guzmán, and returned with a distinguished reputation, mainly because of his efforts to save the Infante Don Enrique from the hands of the Moors. Moreover, the high esteem in which he was held by all, as we have heard from the account of the three servants in the previous chapter and the story told by his own squire, will testify better than our own words to Don Álvaro's chivalrous and generous character.

The potent influence of the stars seemed for all these reasons to bring together the fate of these two young people, and yet we must confess that Don Alonso had to overcome a powerful aversion to enter into such a plan. The close alliance that the Yáñez family had always established with the Order of the Temple was a thousand times on the point of disrupting this project that would result in the enlargement of two illustrious houses and the happiness of two universally esteemed people.

The Templars had reached their period of wealth and decay, and their pride was truly unbearable to most of the independent lords. The Lord of Arganza had experienced it more than once, and devoured his wrath in silence, because the Order, which owned the castles of that land, could flout the wishes of them all. But his spite had turned into hatred for that military order, as courageous as it was unlucky. Fortunately, Don Rodrigo Yáñez was promoted to provincial Master of Castile, and his temperate and prudent character curbed the excesses of some knights and won back the friendship of many disgruntled neighbours. Of these Don Alonso was the first who could not resist the courteous and delicate conduct of the master, and without being completely reconciled with the Order, he ended up embracing Don Rodrigo Yáñez with sincere friendship. And so the plan to join the two houses by marriage was cemented, although the Lord of Arganza could not quell the uneasiness caused by the idea that one day his duties as a vassal to the king could force him to fight against the Order which was already the object of jealousy and envy, and also against his future son-in-law whose honour would not allow him to abandon his allies. However, the power of the Templars and the weakness of the crown seemed to remove this contingency indefinitely, and it did not seem wise to

sacrifice to these fears the honour of his house and the happiness of his daughter.

Don Alonso and Don Rodrigo would have wished that such a union should have been carried out promptly. But Doña Blanca, whose heart was all tenderness and kindness, did not want to abandon her only daughter into the arms of a man almost unknown to her. This was because she reasonably believed that knowledge of each other and consonance of feelings are more certain guarantors of peace and domestic happiness than reasons of state and calculations of convenience. Doña Blanca had suffered greatly from the harsh and violent character of her husband, and she was eager to spare her daughter the regrets that had embittered her life. She pleaded and begged so much that at last she won her noble husband's consent that the young people should get to know each other without being aware of their intended fate. A baleful and bitter request for all, as it turned out!

This was the beginning of a love whose splendid dawn was soon to become a day of mourning and darkness. Shortly after, a storm began to form in France, which finally caused the downfall of the famous chivalric Order of the Temple. Similar menacing clouds were piling up on the horizon against the Spanish Templars, and the fears of the Lord of Arganza were awakened. For he understood Don Álvaro, the Lord of Bembibre, was incapable of abandoning in misfortune those Templars who had been his friends in fortune and, seeing the course this noisy dispute appeared to be taking, it was not impossible that his own family would come to offer the painful spectacle that always darkens civil struggles. To this motive, which at heart was not lacking in reason or good sense, another unfortunately more powerful one was added. The Count of Lemos had requested the hand of Doña Beatriz in marriage through the Infante Don Juan, who was an uncle of King Don Ferdinand IV, with whom Don Alonso himself had relations of duty and friendship from the time of his short-lived reign in León. And attentive only to his ambition of connecting his own lineage with one so rich and powerful as that of the Count of Lemos, he ignored his pact of marriage with the Templar Master Don Rodrigo Yáñez, neither did he hesitate in violating his daughter's wishes to achieve his own desires.

Such was the state of affairs in both families on the afternoon that Don Alonso's servants and Don Álvaro's squire returned from the fair in Cacabelos. Don Álvaro, the Lord of Bembibre, and Doña Beatriz, meanwhile, were seated in the hollow of a pointed arch window, open because of the lovely weather, which illuminated a room that was splendidly furnished and decorated. She was of tall stature, of slender, regular proportions, white-skinned, with black eyes and hair, and a Greek profile of extraordinary purity. The normal expression of her features manifested an

angelic sweetness, but in her mouth and on her forehead any average observer could have discovered signs of a passionate and lively character. Although she was seated, you could tell that in her walk and movements, style, majesty and decorum would reign. The rich dress embroidered with flowers in very vivid colours that covered her body enhanced her bearing, already full of a natural attractiveness.

Don Álvaro was tall, gallant and vigorous, with light brown eyes and hair, an open and noble face, and features of admirable regularity. His gaze was piercing, and his manners showed great ease and dignity. He was wearing large gold spurs, a sword with a rich hilt and around the neck, a finely crafted silver hunting horn, that stood out over his exquisite dark doublet, which was trimmed with fine furs. In a word, he was one of those men who show to advantage the noble qualities that adorn them, and involuntarily captivate the attention and sympathy of everyone who looks at them.

The sun was setting behind the mountains that divide the regions of El Bierzo and Galicia and covered them with a kind of luminous aureole that contrasted curiously with their dark areas. Some clouds of capricious and changeable shapes, scattered here and there in a beautiful and very pure sky, were tinted in different colours as the rays of the sun touched them. In the groves and orchards of the house all the roses and most of the fruit trees were in flower, and the wind that gently moved them was laden with perfumes. Some nightingales and goldfinches sang melodiously, and it was difficult to imagine a more delicious afternoon. No one could really believe that a theatre such as this would be the stage for so painful a scene.

Doña Beatriz set her wandering, tear-stained eyes sometimes on the sunset, at others on the trees in the grove, and then on the ground. And Don Álvaro fixed his eyes on hers, watching all her movements intently. Both were in a painful state of anticipation, without daring to break the silence. They loved each other with all the depth of a new, generous and delicate feeling, but they had never confessed it. True affections have a characteristic modesty and reserve, as if words would take away their brightness and purity. This is exactly what had happened to Don Álvaro and Doña Beatriz who, imbued with their happiness, had never thought of naming it or pronouncing the word "love". And yet this happiness seemed to leave with the sunset, and it was necessary to remove the fallacious prism from their eyes, which had hitherto presented life to them as a delightful garden.

Don Álvaro, naturally, was the first to speak.

"Will you not explain to me, my lady," he said in a low and melancholy voice, "what is the meaning of your father's reserve towards me? Is it true what my

heart has been prophesying to me since certain poisonous rumours about the Count of Lemos have begun to go around? Are they really thinking of separating me from you?" he continued, rising to his feet with a very rapid movement.

Doña Beatriz lowered her eyes and did not respond.

"Oh, so it's true?" continued the sorrowful knight. "And will it also be true," he added in a trembling voice, "that they have chosen your hand to strike this blow?"

There was another moment of silence, and then Doña Beatriz lifted her beautiful eyes, bathed in tears, and said in a voice both sweet and painful, "It's also true."

"Listen to me, Doña Beatriz," he said, trying to calm himself. "You do not yet know how I love you, or how much you subjugate and overwhelm my soul. Never before have I told you ... Why should I make a statement that the tone of my voice, my eyes and the smallest of my gestures were unceasingly revealing? I have lived in the world alone and without family, and this impetuous heart has not known the caresses of a mother or the sweetness of a family home. As a pilgrim, I have crossed the desert of my life to this point. But when I saw that you were the sanctuary where my uncertain steps were directed, I would have wished my sufferings a thousand times greater, so that I would come to you proven and purified. It was too proud a thought, to want to come up to you, an angel of light. Now I see that. But who, who in the world, Beatriz, will love you more than I?"

"Oh, none, none," Doña Beatriz exclaimed, in a heart-rending voice, wringing her hands.

"And yet they separate me from you!" continued Don Álvaro. "I will always respect your father. No one would honour his house more than I, because since I love you, new forces have developed in my soul, and all the glory, all the power of the earth seems to me little to lay at your feet. Oh Beatriz! Beatriz! When I came back from Andalusia, honoured and praised by the noblest knights, I loved glory because a secret voice seemed to tell me that one day you would adorn yourself with its rays. You are the light of my way; without you, I will dash into the abyss of despair and turn against Heaven itself!"

"Oh, my God!" murmured Doña Beatriz, "is this to be the end of so many dreams of happiness and sweet joys?"

"Beatriz," exclaimed Don Álvaro, "if you love me, if you look into your heart, it is impossible for you to comply with your father's wishes that would be my undoing and perhaps yours too."

"You are right," she said, trying to calm down. "I will not be the one to

drag this heavy burden. But now that I speak to you for the last time for the sake of your happiness and that God reads in my heart, I will reveal its secret to you. If I do not give you the name of husband at the foot of the altar and in front of my father, I will die with the veil of the virgins. But it will never be said that the only daughter of the house of Arganza stains with a disobedience the name she has inherited."

"And if your father forces you to give your hand in marriage?"

"You know him; my father has never used force against me."

"Pure and innocent soul, you do not know how far ambition leads men!" And if your father did force you, what resistance would you offer?

"In front of the whole world I would say: no!"

"And would you have courage to resist the idea of the scandal and the embarrassment of your family?"

Doña Beatriz rolled her eyes, slowly and terribly as if she had a violent convulsion, but then she recovered suddenly, and said:

"Then I would ask the Almighty for help, and He would give me strength. But I repeat the promise, I will be yours or I will be no one's."

The strength with which those short words were uttered revealed a determination that no human force could alter. Don Álvaro contemplated her as if spellbound for a few moments, after which he said with deep emotion:

"I have always revered and adored you, my lady, as an almost superhuman creature, but to this day I had not known the heavenly treasure that you embody. Losing your love now would be like falling from the sky to crawl among the miseries of men. The faith and trust that I place in you is blind and without limits, as is the trust we put in God in the hour of our misfortune."

"Look," she said, pointing to the sunset, "the sun has set, and it is time we said good-bye. Go in peace and keep yourself safe, noble Don Álvaro, even if they can take you away from my sight, it will not be so simple for them to overpower my determination."

With this the knight bowed, kissed her hand with a silent gesture, and slowly left the chamber. When he reached the door, he turned his head, and his eyes met those of Doña Beatriz to exchange a long and painful look, which seemed as if it would be their last. Then he hurried to the courtyard where his faithful Millán held with his right hand the famous horse *Almanzor*, and rising onto his mount, Don Álvaro emerged like a thunderbolt from that house, where only an unhappy maiden thought of him. And she, at that moment, despite her efforts, was falling into bitter tears.



Appendix

I - Summary

In the North West of Spain, in the early years of the Fourteenth Century, the last progeny of two great houses have fallen in love, despite the wishes of the lady's father and amid the tumult of war that calls her suitor to battle.

Doña Beatriz Ossorio is the last surviving offspring of Don Alonso Ossorio, the Lord of Arganza, and Doña Blanca de Balboa. And Don Álvaro Yáñez, Lord of Bembibre, is also the last of his line. Although they have pledged their love to each other in the high chivalric manner, the lady's father has promised her hand in marriage to the Count of Lemos, seeking advantage for himself and his family from an alliance with a powerful nobleman and protégé of the Infante Don Juan, uncle of the King of Castile. After failing in an attempt to spirit Doña Beatriz away to a safe place, Don Álvaro goes to Castile to join battle with the royal forces besieging the castle of Tordehumos, but he is wounded and captured.

Her father's insistence on the arranged marriage affects Doña Beatriz's physical and mental state, and when she receives news that Don Álvaro is taken for dead, the lady agrees to her mother's dying request and consents to marry the Count of Lemos. But Don Álvaro was imprisoned, not dead, and when he is released and learns of Doña Beatriz's marriage, contrary to her promise to him, he joins the Order of the Temple. He takes part in the defence of the Templar stronghold of Cornatel, in which the Count of Lemos is killed. Although Doña Beatriz is now free to marry, Don Álvaro is tied by his vows to the Order, pending a decision to be taken by the Church at the Council of Salamanca, which is judging the matter of the dissolution of the Templars.

The anxiety of their situation causes the lady's health to deteriorate further, so that when a dispensation arrives from the Pope, the distress brings on a crisis and Doña Beatriz, on her deathbed, is married to Don Álvaro. Disconsolate, the Lord of Bembibre settles his affairs and disappears from Spain, only returning near the time of his own death to watch over the burial place of his lady from the heights of Mount Aquiana.

II – Principal characters of the story

- Doña Beatriz, heiress to the house of Arganza
- Martina, Doña Beatriz's resourceful, quick-tempered and cheerful handmaiden
- Don Alonso Ossorio, Lord of Arganza, father to Doña Beatriz
- Doña Blanca de Balboa, mother to Doña Beatriz and long-suffering wife of Don Alonso
- The Abbot of Carracedo, of the Cistercian Order founded by Saint Bernard; confessor to the Arganza family
- Nuño, an old hunter and gamekeeper, faithful servant to Don Alonso's house and to Doña Beatriz
- Mendo, the ill-tempered groom and stable master of Don Alonso, Lord of Arganza
- Don Álvaro Yáñez, Lord of Bembibre, heir to the house of Yáñez
- Millán, the faithful squire, arms-bearer and servant of Don Álvaro, the Lord of Bembibre
- Don Rodrigo Yáñez, provincial Master of the Knights Templar in Castile and uncle to Don Álvaro
- Don Gutierre de Saldaña, Commander of the castle of Cornatel, an old Templar and friend of Don Álvaro
- The Count of Lemos, Don Pedro Fernández de Castro
- Cosme Andrade, a mountain dweller from Cabrera, one of the Cabrerans who fight for the Count of Lemos
- Don Juan Núñez de Lara, the king's steward and lord of the castle of Tordehumos in Castile
- Rabbi Ben Simuel, Don Juan Núñez de Lara's physician
- The Infante Don Juan, uncle to the King of Castile
- King Ferdinand IV of Castile
- King Don Dionís of Portugal
- Pope Clement V, the weak incumbent of the Throne of St. Peter, known for his suppression of the Templars and for moving the Roman Curia from Rome to Avignon, in France
- Aymerico, the Apostolic Inquisitor

III - Places of interest in the novel and map

- The manor house of Arganza
- The castle of Bembibre
- The Templar castle of Ponferrada
- The region of El Bierzo
- The river Boeza
- The river Sil
- The river Cúa
- The monastery of Carracedo
- The castle of Tordehumos, in Castile
- The convent at Villabuena
- Cornatel castle
- The ancient Roman mines in Las Médulas
- Lake Carucedo
- Mount Aquiana in the Aquiana range

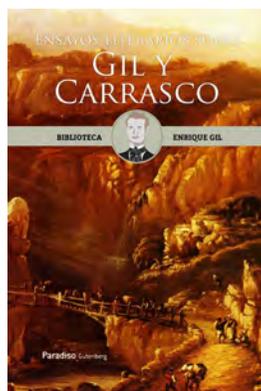
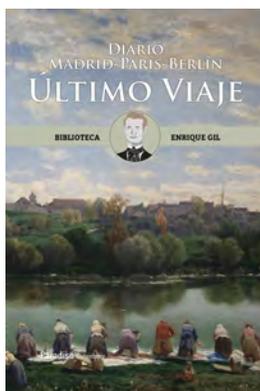
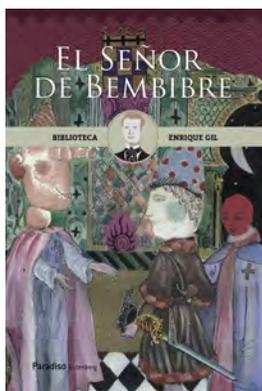
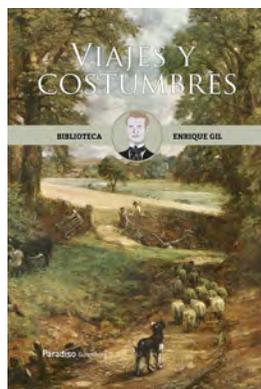
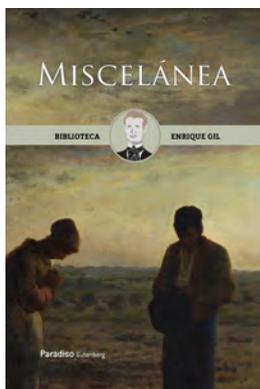
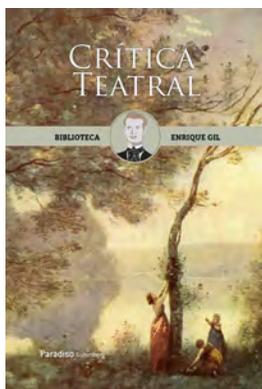
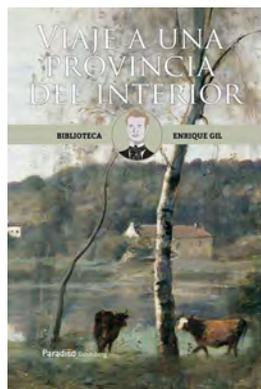
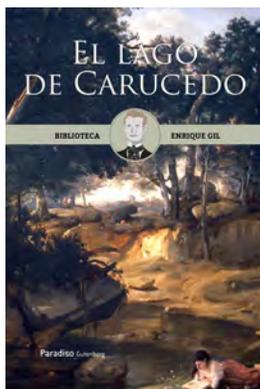
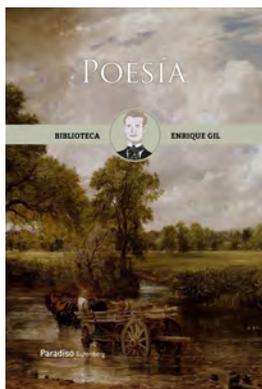
IV - Map of El Bierzo



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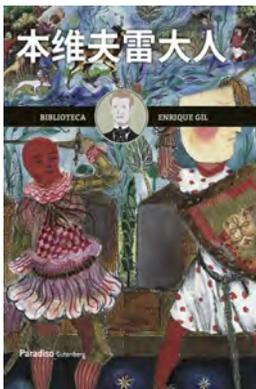
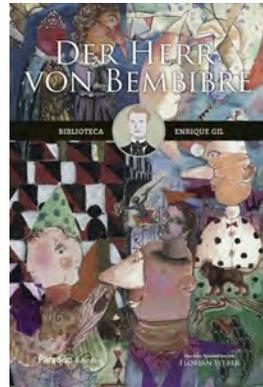
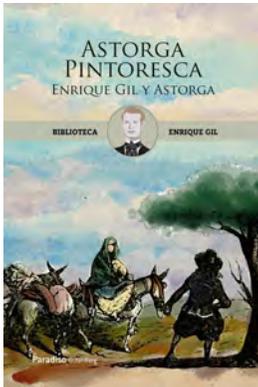
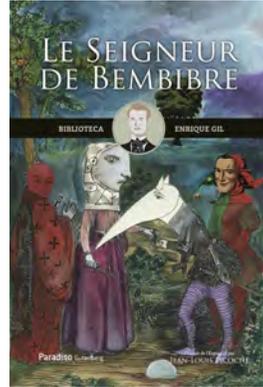
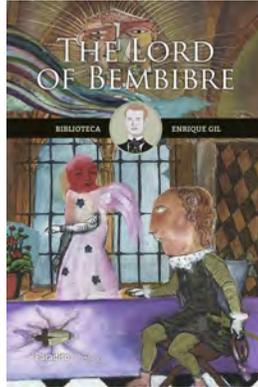
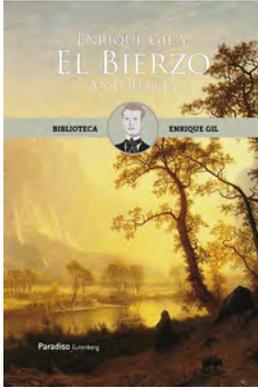


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