

# ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE FÉNIX: LOPE AS WRITER OF AUTOS

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Hispanists have frequently lamented the loss of a large number of the *comedias* of Lope de Vega while, proportionately, there may be greater cause for regret in the case of his *autos*. Texts of only forty-odd of these are known today — a number quite different from the four hundred which Juan Pérez de Montalbán claimed that his friend had written. Montalbán's estimate is certainly overly high, as is his estimate of the number of Lope's *comedias*; but it seems unlikely that he has claimed for his mentor over nine times the number of *autos* actually composed. Noting Lope's fecundity and the Spanish towns' custom of commissioning new *autos* annually, Jean-Louis Flecniakoska insists that these plays are only «les vestiges d'une oeuvre qui a pu être considérable.»<sup>1</sup>

Other factors support the belief that a high proportion of Lope's sacred dramas may have been lost. It is well known that the author for a long time had less esteem for his theatrical works than for his other compositions. He carefully supervised the printing of his poetry and prose, beginning with *La hermosura de Angélica* in 1602, but delayed until much later the collecting and editing of his plays.<sup>2</sup> Lope's *autos*

received even less attention. Four were included in the first edition of *El peregrino en su patria* (1604); and then, as far as is known, no other efforts were made in their behalf.

Verses in the *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (1609) and the «Egloga a Claudio,» which was published posthumously, suggest that the playwright had less respect for the artistic achievements of the *auto* than for those of the *comedia*. In both poems he disparages *apariencias*, the elaborate scenic effects which were a customary feature of the *comedias de santos* and the Corpus plays. The poem to Claudio begins with memories of Lope's youth — of Filis, Belisa, and the Invencible — and then turns into somewhat of a literary selfevaluation. Lope looks back affectionately on his many books of poetry and his novels and says proudly of his plays: «Débenme a mí de su principio el arte...»<sup>3</sup> Nowhere in the poem, though, does he speak of his *autos*. That they were a significant part of his sacred writings seems to have been indicated only once — Montalbán reports that Lope exclaimed on his deathbed: «que . . . mucha parte de su vida había gastado en autos sacramentales, historias

sagradas, libros devotos, elogios de los santos y alabanzas de la Virgen Santísima y del Niño recién nacido . . . »<sup>4</sup> It is tempting to see in his apparent indifference toward his *autos* one reason for the perplexing problems of authenticity and chronology that accompany many of those that remain.

Lope's role in the evolution of the *auto sacramental* might be compared to that of Corneille in classical tragedy. Both were instrumental in refining the themes and techniques of a new genre, but their achievements would soon be exceeded by others. Recognizing the mastery of Calderón and Racine, one still finds much to admire in the works of their predecessors. There are in the best of Lope's *autos*, in my opinion, clear advances over those of most of his contemporaries—Vélez, Tirso, Mira, and Valdivielso. The characters of the Fénix seem more appealing, their speech livelier and more natural, and their moments of lyricism more touching. In general he deals imaginatively with the familiar themes and conflicts that are the stock topics of sacramental drama, turning often to popular lyric tradition as a source of material for exegesis. When he is at his best, the curious blend of doctrine and tradition is quite effective, and, incidentally, very much in harmony with the heterogeneous nature of Corpus Christi Day itself.

*La maya*, one of the *autos* from *El peregrino en su patria*, concentrates on turning a single folk custom to devotional purposes. Lope's allegory of the May Lady is perhaps his most intensive use of popular material. Behind the figure of the May Queen, as with the Maypole, there is a long vegetation tradition going back to the cult-legend of the Spring Festival and its associated rites. Both the Maypole and the May Lady have survived true to type in their essential features, in spite of the Beltane ceremonies having lost their earlier significance, becoming an occasion for merrymaking and the collection of gratuities.

The custom of the *maya* as practiced in Lope's time was described by Rodrigo Caro in his *Días geniales o lúdicos*:

Júntanse las muchachas en un barrio o calle, y de entre sí eligen a la más hermosa y agraciada para que sea la Maya; aderézanla con ricos vestidos y tocados; corónanla con flores y con piezas de oro y plata, como reina; pónenla un vaso de agua de olor en la mano; súbenla en un tálamo o trono, donde se sienta con mucha gracia y majestad, fingiendo la chicuela mucha mesura; las demás la acompañan, sirven y obedecen, como a reina, entreteniéndola con cantares y bailes, y suélenla llevar al corro. A los que pasan por donde la Maya está piden para hacer rica a la Maya: y a los que no le dan les dicen «Barba de perro, que no tiene dinero,» y otros oprobios a este tono.<sup>5</sup>

In the evening the money that was collected was used to provide a feast for all the girls. Like St. John's Eve, May Day was an occasion for merrymaking among court ladies as well as commoners. One seamstress' bill from the time of Philip IV records expenses for the costumes of the *mayas reales*.<sup>6</sup>

There were those who extended the privileges of the *maya* far beyond the first days of May. The 1734 edition of the *Diccionario de Autoridades* declared: «Tanto duran las Mayas como Mayo.»<sup>7</sup> The number of celebrants, another cause for concern, was satirized by Quiñones de Benavente:

*No sé por dónde vaya  
que no tope una maya y otra maya.  
Maya aquí, maya allí; ¡donoso talle!  
Mayando está en Madrid cualquier calle.*<sup>8</sup>

The patience of the authorities finally came to an end, and in 1777 Charles III issued a proclamation prohibiting the *mayas*. The ceremonies persisted despite

the royal edict, but less vigorously in Madrid than in rural areas.

The greater part of Lope's drama is really a sacred parody of the centuries-old ritual of the *mayas*. Surprisingly, perhaps, considering its material, the *auto* is on the whole a sensitive synthesis of popular and sacred themes. It opens with Cuerdo complaining to Entendimiento about the strict regimen which Alma is forced to follow. For his entertainment Entendimiento suggest that they enact a May festival with Alma as their queen. Cuerdo, contemplating the riches that they will gather, happily exclaims:

*Ahora sí que la verán,  
los galanes que pasean,  
y buen día se darán.*<sup>9</sup>

The verses here are among the many popular phrases which Lope has woven into the dialogue.

Awaiting the celebration, Regocijo, Contento, and Alegría, the musicians for the occasion, entertain Cuerdo with a lively *chacón* a lo divino:

*Vida bona, vida bona,  
vida, vámonos a la gloria.  
Si Dios dijo que era vida,  
camino y verdad notoria,  
¿qué vida será más buena?*  
.....

Soon the forces of evil begin to appear—first Gula, the *gracioso* of the play, and afterwards El Rey de las Tinieblas, whom Gula easily persuades to court Alma: «Ponte galán y pasea, / ... y lleva bien que ofrecer...»

Now Alma comes on stage with Cuerdo, Entendimiento, and the musicians. Arrayed in jewels and finery, she is seated behind a flower-bedecked table on which Entendimiento places a plate to receive the offerings. Then the celebrants begin their ancient ritual, to the accompaniment of tambourine, timbrels, and guitar. First they exalt the beauty and charm of their *maya*:

*Esta Maya lleva la flor,  
que las otras no.*

*Esta Maya tan hermosa,  
tan compuesta y tan graciosa,  
viene a ser de Cristo esposa,  
y la palabra le dio,  
que las otras no.*

*Las otras, que en el pecado  
están feas, no han llegado  
a tan alto desposado;  
y ésta por limpia llegó,  
que las otras no.*

The lyrics set forth in general terms the themes of the passage that follows, where Entendimiento explains the nature of mystical union and warns against moral evil. The folk refrain of the song, although frequently adapted for other purposes, probably originated in connection with the May festival.<sup>10</sup> Lope uses the formula in many songs and even works it into his dialogue on occasion.<sup>11</sup> The scene ends on a less successful note, unfortunately, with the musicians singing a piece distinct from primaverl lyric currents and of rather questionable taste.<sup>12</sup>

Lope proceeds to the heart of the May ceremony after the entrance of Mundo and Carne, sent by El Rey de las tinieblas to seek the hand of Alma. Using the ritual songs of the *mayas* the revelers greet each with request for gifts for their lady:

*Dad para la Maya,  
gentil caballero:  
más vale la honra,  
que todo el dinero.*

*Dad para la Maya,  
gentil mi señora:  
más vale la fama  
que la hacienda sola.*

Mundo's offer of pleasure and riches is promptly rejected, and he is sent on his way with the slightly ribald:

*Corrido va el Abad,  
corrido va.  
Corrido va el Abad.*

Corrido va el mundo  
de que no dio gusto,  
porque al Alma al justo  
sólo Dios le da;  
corrido va,  
corrido va el Abad.<sup>13</sup>

Carne, after promising rare delights, is dismissed in similar fashion:

Guarda el coco, niña,  
guarda, niña, el coco:  
guardad, Carne, aquesos motes,  
donde no haya resistencia,  
que está aquí la Penitencia,  
y os darán dos mil azotes:  
buscad otros marquesotes,  
que aquí vive Cristo solo.  
Guarda el coco, niña,  
guarda, niña, el coco.

The verses of dismissal here are not the characteristic *oprobios* recorded in other versions of the festival. Nevertheless, they are definitely modeled on folksongs and may be elaborations of verses that at some time figured in the celebration. It seems more likely, however, that they are Lope's additions to the tradition.

Furious at his emissaries' failure, El Rey de las Tinieblas comes to threaten the celebrants. Now Lope expands one of the customary *burlas* for their reply:

REGOCIJO.—Pase el pelado,  
que no lleva blanca ni cornado.  
Pase el pelado.

Pase, pase el mal vecino,  
que afrentar la Maya vino,  
porque de Cristo divino  
vio que era mesa y estrado.  
Pase el pelado, pelado.

REY.—Gentil Maya, fea y fría,  
no tendréis en todo el día  
quien os dé blanca, a fe mia.

ALEGRÍA.—Miente, señor licenciado,  
que no lleva blanca ni cornado.  
Pase el pelado, pelado.  
Blanca de gracia no tiene,

y aunque cornados mantiene,  
sin moneda de cruz viene,  
que es cuarto falso y mellado.  
Pase el pelado, pelado.

Cristo las almas buscando  
principio suave y blando,  
ya viene aquí desatando  
la bolsa de su costado.  
Vete pelado, pelado.  
que no llevas blanca ni corna-  
[do.]

And Satan an Gula depart defeated. The next to the last stanza develops an interesting play on words—*blanca*, *cornado*, and *cuarto* are all popular expression for coins.

A new suitor, El Príncipe de la Luz, appears on the stage, and they chant a final song of supplication:

Echad mano a la bolsa,  
cara de rosa;  
echad mano al esquero,  
caballero.

Rosa de rosa nacido,  
lirio entre espinas hallado,  
trigo blanco en cruz molido,  
del dedo de Dios sembrado:  
Echad mano a ese costado,  
y dadnos alguna cosa,  
cara de rosa.

Echad mano, aunque clavada  
a la cruz, que es bien que pueda,  
y aunque del clavo pasada,  
no se os caiga la moneda:  
dadme una blanca que exceda  
los tesoros y las joyas,  
cara de rosa.

Its *estribillo* is another of the traditional songs of the *mayas*. The reward for Alma's faith is *gracia* and *gloria*, mystical or Eucharistic union with Cristo. He gives in pledge of the wedding the Seven Sacraments and to the revelers he offers the Communion for their customary feast. The drama ends with a Eucharistic apotheosis followed by the folk epithalamium «Dio el novio a la desposada / corales y zarcillos y patenas de plata.»

N O T E S

<sup>1</sup> *La formation de l'«auto» religieux en Espagne avant Calderón (1550-1635)* (Montpellier, Paul Déhan, 1961), pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup> Hugo A. RENNERT and Américo CASTRO: *Vida de Lope de Vega (1562-1635)* (Madrid, Sucesores de Hernando, 1919), p. 186.

<sup>3</sup> *Obras escogidas*, ed. Federico Carlos Sainz de Robles, 3rd ed. (Madrid, Aguilar, 1961), II, 260.

<sup>4</sup> «Fama póstuma a la vida y muerte del doctor fray Lope Félix de Vega Carpio», Aguilar, II, 1544.

<sup>5</sup> SEVILLE: *El mercantil sevillano*, 1884, páginas 283-284.

<sup>6</sup> Manuel García Matos, Marius Scheider and José Roméu Figueras, eds.: *Cancionero popular de la provincia de Madrid* (Barcelona, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1951), I, xxxii.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Angel González Palencia and Eugenio Mele: *La maya: notas para su estudio en España* (Madrid, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1944), pp. 69-70.

<sup>8</sup> *La maya*, in *Entremeses*, ed. José Blecua (Zaragoza, Ebro, 1945), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> *Obras de Lope de Vega*, ed. Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, VI (Madrid, Atlas, 1963), 43.

<sup>10</sup> José Roméu Figueras, ed.: *Cancionero musical de palacio (siglos XV-XVI)* (Barcelona, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1965), III-A, 116.

<sup>11</sup> In his *autos* one finds songs beginning: «¡Esta sí que es dulce vida, que las otras muerte son!» (*La locura por la honra*); «¡Oh, qué misa de salud! / Esta sí que es misa de alma» (*El misacantano*); «Este es Rey y éste es Señor, / que los otros no» (*La isla del sol*). Versions of the phrase that appear in the dialogue of his *autos*: «... Este sí / que es galán que puede dar» (*La maya*); «Esta sí que es per-

la y piedra» (*La margarita preciosa*); «Esta sí que es dulce vida / llena de contento y gloria» and «Esto sí que no es rigor / de tantos preceptos hecho» (*El heredero del cielo*).

<sup>12</sup> To Gula's comments on the hard times («Es caro el año pariente / ...») Regocijo answers: «La carne es cosa cruel / pan y vino no es tan caro.» Then the musicians exalt the Eucharist:

*En año tan caro  
Dios hace barato.  
Quien compra en el mundo,  
caro compra el gusto,  
la carne es disgusto  
para muchos años,  
Dios hace barato.  
Carne y sangre entrega  
hoy Cristo al que llega  
a su santa mesa,  
donde de su plato  
Dios hace barato.*

<sup>13</sup> The same first verse and a similar flavor appear in a song in the collection of folk lyrics of Dámaso Alonso and José Blecua: *Antología de la poesía española: poesía de tipo tradicional* (Madrid, Gredos, 1957), pp. 87-88:

*Corrido va el abad  
por el cañaveral.  
El abad de Oriego,  
viendo que aparejo  
tiene la de Alejo  
para oír su mal  
por el cañaveral,  
vase allá derecho  
en amor deshecho,  
le da de su pecho  
bastante señal  
por el cañaveral.*

... ..