

METAPOETRY AND METALANGUAGE IN LOPE DE VEGA'S *RIMAS HUMANAS Y DIVINAS DEL LICENCIADO TOMÉ DE BURGUILLOS*

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The sonnets of Lope de Vega's *Rimas humanas y divinas del licenciado Tomé de Burguillos* are often examined with respect to such elements as love, autobiography, and intertextual relations. One key aspect that remains to be further examined in these poems, however, is their metapoetic and metalinguistic content. Two types will be examined herein. One occurs when Lope, under the pseudonym of Tomé de Burguillos, composes a poem on love or female beauty which at the same time addresses the very act of creating such poetry. The other contains sonnets which make esthetic judgments regarding the quality and style of poetry, especially with respect to poetic language. In general, Lope uses such poetry to examine not only his reasons for and opinions regarding its creation, but also the broader literary contexts into which his poetry fits.

One example of the first type is the sonnet "Versos de almiar y de miel rosada" (*Obras poéticas* 1246), informally titled "Disculpa la humildad del estilo con la diversión de alguna pena". This poem fits into this collection's grouping of poems on the washerwoman Juana. Its first section, consisting of the two quatrains, contains a statement of the poet's impetus for writing and his examination of the ways in which he describes an unnamed woman. The second section, consisting of the tercets, contains direct commentary on his poetry as well as a defense of his style and of his choice to craft this particular poem. The title itself provides a pretext for the poem's composition: the pangs of romantic attraction have caused the poet to write in a certain style which the reader might deem humble or lowbrow. The first strophe of the sonnet also contains this notion, as well as the often contradictory elements of love:

Versos de almiar y de miel rosada
Amor me pide siempre que me topa;
y dame acibar en la dulce copa
de un partido clavel, gloria penada. (lines 1-4)

As he is asked by Love itself — the reason for his writing — to compose poetry that is sweet and devoid of pain, Lope is granted bitterness instead. Such bitterness and sweetness are juxtaposed in the antithetical elements of "acibar" and "dulce copa" (3), as well as the phrase "gloria penada" (4).

The second strophe focuses on the actual construction of poetry as well as the anonymous feminine object who, along with the poet's feelings for her,

provides the stimulus for writing. This quatrain cites the particular style which Lope employs throughout the sonnet:

Yo cantaré con lira destemplada,
 ¡oh sirena bellísima de Europa!,
 tu enfaldo ilustre, tu jabón, tu ropa,
 del patrio río en su cristal bañada. (5-8)

The poet's figurative lyre is described as "destemplada" (5), both untempered and out-of-tune, as he recognizes the fact that his poetry may not appear melodious. Shortly thereafter, Lope focuses briefly on the woman who, like the woman identified elsewhere as Juana, is really a common washerwoman by a river. An element of paradox is contained in her "enfaldo ilustre" (7), as her clothing, not inherently elegant, is granted nobility and grace by the poet who adores her. Lope not only describes a commoner according to conventions more traditionally reserved for the ladies of courtly love poetry, but also is aware of the very style which he uses. This lends the strophe, and the poem, a certain degree of metapoetic character.

The first tercet makes the transition between commentary upon the other to commentary upon the self and its relationship to poetry. It also makes a statement on the quality of the poet's writing as well as a declaration of his stance regarding the common masses whom he frequently disparages. Lope defends himself by remarking, "Quien no me entiende como yo me entiendo / sepa, dejando lo Aristarco aparte, / que del profano vulgo me defiendo" (9-11). Without even considering severe critics, Lope affirms that in spite of the simplicity and directness of his style, he does not associate himself with the unlettered masses whose demands, born from a lack of refinement, can taint literary trends. This statement contains an implicit subtext of defensiveness in the face of the poet's opposite elements in literary discourse, the *culteranos*, who often labeled him as an uncultivated poet.

The final strophe contains another statement of purpose and technique and concludes the poem focusing on its own construction: "Bien fuera justo del flamenco Marte / cantar las iras, pero yo pretendo / templar tristezas despreciando el arte" (12-14). Lope validates his individuality as a poet at the same time, stating that he could compose poetry on other topics, yet chooses differently. In these last lines, Lope provides varied meanings: in the phrase "templar tristezas" (14), Lope is both tuning — or attempting to refine through verse — and assuaging his sad feelings. In addition, the concluding phrase, "despreciando el arte", forces the reader to ponder whether Lope is consciously scorning "good" artistic conventions in this poem or whether he is in fact ironically describing his act of writing as such because it may be read

accordingly by the public. Lope adds an element of ersatz humility to the poem: in composing it, he is not intentionally trying to write something unrefined but instead honest and without unnecessary ornamentation. The "arte" that he would scorn would thus be the ornate artifice of his *culterano* competitors.

Another example in which Lope focuses on female beauty and its poetic elaboration is the sonnet "Bien puedo yo pintar una hermosura" (*Poesía selecta* 448) and titled "No se atreve a pintar su dama muy hermosa por no mentir que es mucho para poeta". This sonnet can also be divided in two sections between the second quatrain and the first tercet. The metapoetic element is contained in Lope's self-referential treatment of how he could describe his lady and how he actually does treat her. Although the poem can be grouped with the "Juana poems" of this collection, the first two strophes introduce other female characters as well and detail the possibilities of artistic expression:

Bien puedo yo pintar una hermosura,
y de otras cinco retratar a Elena,
pues a Filis también, siendo morena,
ángel Lope llamó de nieve pura.

Bien puedo yo fingir una escultura,
que disculpe mi amor, y en dulce vena
convertir a Filene en Filomena,
brillando claros en la sombra oscura. (1-8)

The poetic conventions which Lope could employ include coloring the very skin of his beloved differently ("nieve pura" instead of "morena" [3-4]), and creating a stylized name for her according to pastoral tradition ("Filomena" instead of "Filene" [7]). The anaphora of "Bien puedo yo" (1 and 5) highlights this option. In addition, his beloved "Filis" (3), usually identified in other poems as Elena Osorio, could be described as though she were "Elena" (2), or Helen of Troy. Lope not only examines the act of giving life to the poem but also to the artistic possibilities available to him.

The second section of the sonnet immediately introduces the opposite path which the poet chooses to take in constructing the image of female beauty. The first tercet reads: "Mas puede ser que algún letor extrañe / estas musas de Amor hiperboleas, / y viéndola después se desengañe" (9-11). Lope cautions the reader to consider the artistic conventions of describing female beauty as too often exaggerated and forces the reader to realize the true appearance of his beloved. The familiar theme of *desengaño* pervades the tercet and the

entire poem, as the aforementioned options of "pintar una hermosura" and "fingir una escultura" are discarded in favor of portraying someone truthfully.

Yet, the veracity of this woman's appearance is still subjectified in the final strophe. Lope justifies his treatment of this woman and demonstrates his awareness that although the previous artistic conventions are inaccurate idealizations, his own vision of her is not adversely affected by her unremarkable features. The poet concludes: "Pues si ha de hallar algunas partes feas, / Juana, no quiera Dios que a nadie engañe, / basta que para mí tan linda seas" (12-14). In spite of her flaws, and regardless of his voluntary disregard for convention, this generic woman, Juana, is nevertheless attractive enough for him. The accepted concepts of how pulchritude is constructed in poetry have been subverted and forced to cede to the interests of realism. Lope parodies, but does not condemn, the normative techniques of hyperbole in this construction. The metapoetic element in this poem examines how conventions are questioned and ultimately deconstructed, as the vehicle of such conventions, poetry is itself exposed as an artistic construct.

As part of the second type of poetry here, the sonnet "Si cumplo con la lengua castellana" (*Obras poéticas* 1315) and titled "Reprehende el poeta los que hablan enflautado" focuses on language and discourse in general. In this case, language is analyzed and judged according to its vocabulary and the effects produced by such vocabulary. The specific focus on language within this poem forces the reader to consider the broader ramifications of language for Lope's own poetry and for Spanish poetry as a whole. As Lope was an advocate of the use of a Spanish language unadulterated by what he saw as Latinisms and neologisms, this poem can be seen as both literary and national commentary on the Castilian tongue. In addition, as poetry constantly experiments with the creative uses of language, this intentional focus on language grants the poem a metalinguistic element which implicitly structures not only this poem but Lope's entire corpus as well. The poem sets Lope apart from other countrymen and other poets who use unnecessary adornment and uncommon vocabulary to communicate their ideas.

The first strophe presents Lope's thesis through the use of a rhetorical question directed at his generic interlocutor, Fabio (named later in the third strophe), and contains specific examples of the kind of language to which he is opposed. Such examples provide a metalinguistic vocabulary used to deconstruct improper language and are seen henceforth:

Si cumplo con la lengua castellana,
 resolución diciendo, ¿qué conceto
 es llamarla analisis, o a qué efeto,
 tópica a la invención, cosa tan vana? (1-4)

Certain words are unnecessary replacements for other ones already in frequent use: "análisis" for "resolución", "tópica" for "invención". (2-4) These phrases are part of a larger argument in favor of linguistic authenticity, which consists of uncluttered, autochthonous "Spanish" words as opposed to ostentatious locutions derived from Greek and Latin. The use of the word "conceito" (2) highlights Lope's broader reliance on tropes and creativity of ideas as opposed to forcibly elaborate vocabulary.

The second strophe explains Lope's ideas regarding national language in response to the rhetorical question posited in the first strophe. What the poet wants is a return to the original language of the Peninsula, allowing new and creative uses of it but excluding adulterations:

Ampliar la lengua propia es cosa urbana,
adulterarla es bárbaro defeto,
porque su idioma y cándido dialeto
con voces peregrinas se profana. (5-8)

Lope continues his metalinguistic commentary upon the use and abuse of language, as his notions of "true" language are also clearly nationalistic: foreign elements, the "voces peregrinas" (8), crowd and detract from the native tongue. The proper course any lettered individual should undertake is simply to add to a given language by using original expressions of what already exists in that language; hence, his judgment, "Ampliar la lengua es cosa urbana" (5). Lope follows the linguistic course of action plotted by the theorist Bartolomé Jiménez Patón, who had defined "barbarous" diction as follows:

Bárbara razón, que dicen 'bárbara lexis', es algo parecida al barbarismo; sólo hay diferencia que aquello se halla en dición sola y esto no, sino en oración entera. Es cuando usamos de diciones peregrinas, como mezclando latín en español y el español con latín... el lenguaje puro, propio y cortesano procura huir este vicio. (117)

The two tercets address his interlocutor and summarize his opinions with global commentary on how ordinary people speak. Although language is an evolutionary phenomenon, Lope believes that it should be kept accessible to all:

de los antiguos términos abstraen,
y así el remedio, Fabio, dificultades.

Unas voces se inventan y otras caen,
pues hasta las mujeres andan cultas,
hurtando a las naciones lo que traen. (9-14)

Although this poem focuses more on the use of language than the specific act of constructing poetry, its principles can be used to gain a better understanding of Lope's general views on poetry. If common spoken language cannot be understood due to improper elements, its creative expression through verse is stymied when such elements are forced into it as well. Mary Gaylord examines Lope's reaction to this language as seen in the poetry of the *culteranos* and his compartmentalization of poetic language and styles. "El mundo metafórico de la retórica anti-culterana de Lope es un mundo quintaesencialmente aristotélico y bíblico: en él todas las personas y las cosas tienen carácter, función y lugar propios" (32). Discourse must be structured along lines of clarity and eloquence as opposed to grandiloquence.

In conclusion, Lope believed that it behooved any serious poet to place his or her creation within the grasp of those who wished to read it, without neglecting intelligence and the uniqueness of lyrical language. At the same time, poetry can be a self-conscious experiment in engaging literary conventions and subverting or altering them according to one's perception of reality and one's affective state. There are many more examples of sonnets which explore these avenues in the *Rimas humanas y divinas del licenciado Tomé de Burguillos*, and in sum, such examples provide the reader with a broader understanding of not only Lope but also the literature of his place and time.

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