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CONTRIBUTIONS OF LOPE DE VEGA TO THE GOLDEN AGE OF SPANISH DRAMA

ONE of the "talking points" of people who try to interest students in modern foreign languages, is the so-called "general culture" value. They say that people can gain no adequate idea of works of literature unless these works are read in the language in which they were written. This argument is countered immediately by the advocates of the study of the "useful" subjects by the recommendation that if you just must read those old-fashioned, uninteresting, dry-as-dust books, written by men who lived long before our enlightened age, why don't you read them in English translation? In preparing this paper on the Contributions of Lope de Vega to the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age, I have been struck, as never before, by the thought: What chance would a person have of gaining a reasonable idea of the works of Lope, who after all, is the outstanding figure in Spanish dramatic literature, by reading him in English translation?

Now Lope was an amazingly prolific and energetic writer. According to his first biographer, he wrote eighteen hundred dramas and four hundred shorter religious plays called *autos sacramentales*. Twenty-two hundred plays! Is it any wonder that Cervantes called Lope a "Monster of Nature" or that he was commonly called by his contemporaries the "Phoenix of Geniuses"? Many of his plays have undoubtedly been lost,

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yet there are 426 extant, not counting *autos*. Of this still large number, but *five* have been translated into English at various times between 1805 and 1918.¹ Of these five, only one, "The Star of Seville," is readily available. It is included in Brander Matthews' collection entitled *The Chief European Dramatists*.² His non-dramatic works approximately equal in amount that of the plays. He also wrote novels of various sorts, long epics, verse epistles, ballads, and ream upon ream of lyric verse—an almost incredible output, of which hardly an infinitesimal part is available in English translation. But let us really examine Lope's work and see whether he is worth reading at all.

The Golden Age of Spanish literature was the period of approximately a century between 1550 and 1650, that is, from the appearance of the first great picaresque or rogue novel, the *Lazarillo de Tormes*, in 1554, to the retirement of Calderón from active writing in 1650. Calderón lived on until 1681, but in 1650 he took priestly orders and, unlike Lope, took his duties seriously, thereafter writing only religious *autos*. After Calderón there was a sudden and definite decline in Spanish letters paralleling the decline in political power due to disastrous foreign wars, bad management of affairs at home, and an economic situation which grew ever worse and worse. So that for some 150 years little of worth was produced. But during the Golden Age, Spain was at her zenith, a first-rate power with a brilliant Court life, wealthy, at least apparently, and with a large number of famous authors whose influence was felt abroad as well as at home.

The picaresque novel was the principal prose genre of the time, episodic in form, realistic in its portrayal of the life of the lower classes, sometimes obscene, always bitterly satir-

¹For footnotes see page 157 of this pamphlet.

ical. As for idealistic fiction, the romances of chivalry which Cervantes so cleverly burlesqued in the *Don Quixote*, were already in decline. The pastoral romance enjoyed a considerable vogue, both Lope and Cervantes writing one each. In poetry, the ballad reached the height of its popularity about 1580.³ The mystic poets too, including Santa Teresa de Jesús, Luís de León, who has been called Spain's greatest lyric poet, and San Juan de la Cruz, wrote their best works during the last half of the sixteenth century. Let me cite just one example of this Christian poetry, an anonymous sonnet admirably translated into English by Thomas Walsh entitled:

TO CHRIST CRUCIFIED.⁴

I am not moved to love Thee, O my Lord,
 By any longing for Thy Promised Land;
 Nor by the fear of Hell am I unmanned
 To cease from my transgressing deed or word.
 'Tis Thou Thyself dost move me, Thy blood poured
 Upon the cross from nailèd foot and hand;
 And all the wounds that did Thy body brand;
 And all Thy shame and bitter death's award.
 Yea, to Thy heart am I so deeply stirred
 That I would love Thee were no heaven on high,—
 That I would fear, were hell a tale absurd!
 Such my desire, all questioning grows vain;
 Though hope deny me hope I still would sigh,
 And as my love is now, it should remain.

Cervantes deserves a place apart from schools and movements. He needs no introduction to you. Let me merely remind you that the "world's greatest novel," *Don Quixote*, was published in two parts, in 1605 and 1615, and the *Exemplary Novels*, which would have established his fame as an author even had he not written *Don Quixote*, in 1613, at the very time when Lope had gained the position of master of the Spanish stage. It was always Cervantes' ambition to be a dramatist, but he failed to please the public. It is unfor-

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tunate for the drama that the one man who had the greatest powers of observation and the ability to analyze character should have been unsuccessful in the career which he chose. Perhaps if he had been a better poet and had been able to catch the popular fancy or had been able to mould the public taste according to his own conception of what the drama should be, the whole history of Golden Age drama might have been changed.

During the first years of the sixteenth century there lived two dramatists of some importance, Juan del Encina and Torres Naharro. Juan del Encina was a musician and priest, attached for a number of years to the papal court in Rome.⁵ He wrote several religious plays for Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter celebrations, and one farce. Shepherds and hermits were the characters who appeared. They were written in verse, very simple as to plot, in language a faithful imitation of the speech of the people. These productions were played before select audiences *outside the Church*. Thus the great contribution of Juan del Encina was to secularize the drama and make it popular with the aristocracy. He, as a writer of the farce, the pastoral play, and the religious *auto*, had innumerable imitators during the sixteenth and even in the seventeenth century.

His younger contemporary, Torres Naharro, greatly enlarged the picture of the primitive farce.⁶ He brought in not only shepherds and hermits but people of all classes and conditions: soldiers and monks, pimps and prostitutes, valets and butlers of cardinals, washerwomen; and from the higher classes even princesses of León, princes of Hungary, marquesas and high born ladies. He ingeniously complicated the plot, he for the first time devoted himself to the study of customs, and if he did not succeed in the comedy of character, he was at least the founder of the comedy of intrigue.

His conception of the *comedia* is fundamentally classic. In the prologue to his collected works, after citing various definitions, among them that of Cicero (*imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*), he gives his own in these terms: "The *comedia* is nothing else than the ingenious artifice of notable and, in short, *happy* events, represented by people." He goes on further to say: "As regards the kinds of *comedias*, it seems to me that two are enough for our Castillian language: *comedia a noticia* and *comedia a fantasia*. *A noticia* is to be understood as things seen and noted in truthful reality . . . *A fantasia*, things fantastic or imagined which have the color of truth though they are not. . ."

The next dramatist of note is Gil Vicente,⁷ a Portuguese, who wrote eleven plays in Spanish, sixteen in Portuguese, and seventeen in a combination of Portuguese and Spanish. He is most interesting for the lyrical beauty of his verse and for the variety of comic effects produced by the presentation of contemporary types: the shrew and the timid wife, the sluggard and the perpetual dancer, the old man or old woman in love, the negro trying to speak Portuguese or Spanish, the rustic at Court. His themes were mostly satirical: the criticism of the shrewd but ignorant judge, the Jews, the doctors, above all the monks and priests from the humblest mendicant friar to the Pope. It may seem unbelievable that such bitter satire against the Church should come from the most Catholic kingdom of Portugal, but the first third of the sixteenth century was a time when the relations between Rome and the various kingdoms were more or less strained. Henry VIII definitely cut them, other monarchs threatened to do so unless abuses such as the traffic in Bulls were discontinued. In one of Vicente's allegorical satirical plays, *Heaven's Boat*, the Devil complains that in two previous voyages he has had only one gentleman. Death

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promises to oblige him and a Count is forthwith brought, who, the Devil says, had during his life-time been full of pride and vanity, bowing down to vice and luxury, without fear of God, and who will now have his reward. A Duke is brought in by Death in the same way and then a King. The Devil tells the latter merrily that he is to dwell in yonder fires. He had been adored in life, careless of the poor, decreeing unjust wars. An Emperor then comes who had been regarded almost as a god on earth, and who had died of vainglory. It is now the turn of the Church. Death brings in a Bishop, who had earned a place in the Boat of Hell by his pride, although, as the Devil slyly adds, he was loved by his children. Then follow an Archbishop, who is upbraided for his avarice and ambition, a Cardinal, who, far from being grateful to God for having been raised from an humble estate to the purple, had died weeping that he had not been even two days pope, and finally a Pope, who has been licentious, proud, and simoniacal. Each of Death's victims, in turn, go to the Angels in the Boat of Heaven, confess their sins and finally are gathered in and take their places on the celestial thwarts. This happy and comfortable doctrine was worth waiting for.

Gil Vicente's stagecraft consisted in presenting a show as fine as could be devised, a miniature ship, a tower, or other fine spectacle, with elaborate costuming. He could do this, for as playwright for the King of Portugal he had almost unlimited funds at his disposal. His plots have little action and the play ends with music, dance, and song. He does not divide plays into acts or scenes, he does not develop plot or character, but in his mingling of comedy and tragedy and in the quality of his verse he foreshadows the coming Golden Age.

In the second half of the century taste changed: the

Italian *comedia* was becoming more and more known in Spain, often being put on in their original language. Prose triumphed in the theatre. All these divergent tendencies have been well summed up by Menéndez y Pelayo⁸ as follows: "It was an age of trials and 'feeling one's way'; many germs did not bear fruit; some literary forms devoured others with singular speed; toward the end of the century a kind of lyrical tragicomedy, half classic, half romantic in which both historical and traditional elements were mixed, made its appearance, thus preparing the way for the definitive form of the Spanish drama such as was to come from the hands of Lope de Vega."

Lope Félix de Vega Carpio was born in 1562. The seventy-three years of his life, until his death in 1635, just three hundred years ago, span nearly all the Golden Age, particularly as regards the theatre, for the Golden Age began when Lope, at about the age of twenty-three, began to write for the stage. The events of Lope's life⁹ had best be enumerated hurriedly. It certainly was not a life of strict bourgeois morality. He was twice married, once exiled from the Court for defaming the character of an actress and her father, he served in the expedition of the Spanish Armada against the English, and had many illicit love affairs. Late in life he was ordained priest without this solemn event making a great difference in his private life. In fact, on the eve of his ordination we find him complaining, in a whimsical manner, to his patron, that before being ordained he had to cut off his moustache. His attitude reminds us somewhat of that of Henry of Navarre, who, on accepting the Catholic Faith in order to become King of France, is said to have remarked that "Paris is well worth one Mass." After becoming a priest, we still find him acting as go-between in love adventures of his patrons, writing amorous poetry for them

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to use in their conquests. He kept on writing for the stage and in general conducting himself as before. He always loved luxury, and though he received a large income from his works he was always pressed for money. His death was hastened and his last years made bitter by the death of his favorite son, who was drowned in the New World, and by the elopement of his youngest daughter under mysterious circumstances.

Yet, we can surely say that Lope was not a vicious sinner. He seems to have realized his shortcomings and to have tried in vain to overcome temptation, a thing impossible to one of his sensitive nature. At this distance in time we prefer to look at the side of his character shown in some of his religious poetry which shows a depth of feeling seldom expressed so well by either churchman or layman. Let me cite just one example, a sonnet, entitled "Tomorrow," translated by Longfellow as follows:

TOMORROW¹⁰

Lord, what am I, that with unceasing care
Thou didst seek after me, that Thou did'st wait
Wet with unhealthy dews before my gate
And pass the gloomy nights of winter there?

Oh, strange delusion, that I did not greet
Thy blest approach, and oh, to heaven how lost
If my ingratitude's unkindly frost
Has chilled the bleeding wounds upon Thy feet.

How oft my guardian angel gently cried,
"Soul, from thy casement look, and thou shalt see
How He persists to knock and wait for thee!"

And oh, how often to that Voice of sorrow,
"Tomorrow we will open," I replied,
And when the morrow came I answered still "Tomorrow."

When Lope died, however, he seems to have been in good repute with the Church. He was given a royal burial, the ceremonies lasting nine days. Nine bishops read the mass, one after the other. All the religious congregations at-

tended. On the day of the burial, if we may believe the legend, a woman who knew nothing of what was happening but seeing all Madrid in mourning remarked: "This can be nothing less than the burial of Lope."¹¹

How did Lope attain this great popularity? By catering to the public taste. He found the formula which pleased the audience, namely, an intricate plot with lots of action for the rabble and bursts of lofty lyric poetry for the cultured element. In dealing with the Spanish theatre of the Golden Age we are dealing with a truly national theatre, that is, one in which the public influenced writers to such an extent that the theatre as a whole is the expression of the ideas, the ideals, the likes and dislikes of the people considered collectively rather than the artistic production of individual authors. Lope himself explains his attitude toward the public in an address,¹² written in verse, which he delivered before a literary academy in Madrid in 1609, as follows: "When I am about to write a *comedia*, I lock the precepts up with six keys, I take Terence and Plautus out of my study, so that they cannot shout at me, for the truth is accustomed to cry out even in mute books, and I write according to the art that those who sought the applause of the public, invented, because, as the rabble pays, it is just to speak to it foolishly to give it pleasure."¹³ And later he remarks that the academy had asked him to write an "Art of Writing Plays in Spain" where "everything that is written is contrary to the rules of Art."¹⁴

Let us examine, now, the external conditions which influenced Lope so greatly in his policies, the condition of the theatres and the elements found in his audiences.

The old farces had been put on only by wandering troupes. Cervantes tells us that he could remember the time, in his boyhood, when all the equipment of a director was enclosed

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in a sack and consisted of the articles necessary for the disguise of a shepherd.¹⁵ He says: "In those days there was no stage machinery, no battles of Moors and Christians, no gentlemen on horseback. There was no figure which came out or appeared to come out of the centre of the earth through a hole in the stage which was composed of four or six boards laid on benches which rose about four palm lengths above the ground. Neither did clouds come down from heaven with angels or with souls. The adornment of the theatre was an old blanket pulled by two cords from one side to the other, which made what they called a vestuary behind which were the musicians singing some old ballad without any guitar." By Lope's time, however, the false beards had been taken off, clouds, thunder and lightning, duels and battles had been invented and there were permanent theatres.

In 1561 the Court was transferred from Toledo to Madrid with a resultant rapid increase in population and riches. By 1582, two permanent theatres had been built,¹⁶ controlled by two religious brotherhoods, charitable organizations whose purpose was to feed and clothe the needy and to maintain a hospital for women with contagious diseases. The brotherhoods usually cleared a profit of some ten dollars¹⁷ a performance after paying all expenses. These two theatres proved to be very popular and the income from them rapidly increased, so the Madrid General Hospital was given a portion of the profits but the brotherhoods retained the concession for selling water, fruit, *aloja* (a drink made of water, honey and, spices), and candy.

The theatre itself was merely an open space between buildings with a stage at one end and a low balcony built facing it, in which women sat, separated from the main part of the theatre by an iron grating. The nobility occupied the

boxes, that is, the windows of the adjoining buildings which they rented by the season. The ground floor, which was literally the ground, had no seats. It was here that the rabble, the "great unwashed" stood, talked, ate, drank, and watched the performance, vociferously expressing their approval or disapproval of what went on on the stage.

The stage was raised slightly from the ground level. There was no appeal to the eye except in the matter of costuming which was often very elaborate. There was no front curtain, only a back drop. To indicate a change of scene the actors simply left by one exit and came back in by another, indicating by the lines the scene of the action. For example in the opening lines of "Struggle on unto Death" the leading character says: "Is that an inn?" and his servant replies: "That is the famous inn of Alcolea." The master then asks: "And is that the famous bridge?"¹⁸ The audience at once knows that the two men are approaching the outskirts of Córdoba where this famous inn is located. Sometimes a change of scene was indicated by lifting the back curtain on which a scene was painted, leaving a different one exposed.

These are the conditions under which the drama was to be developed by Lope and his imitators practically without interference from anyone. Spain never did abide much by literary criticism. In fact during the Golden Age we find no first class dramatic critic.¹⁹ No one could speak with authority or influence. Only the voice of the Church carried any weight. Thus the *auto sacramental* came in for some discussion from churchmen, and as the guardian of public morality the secular drama came in for some criticism, but only in regard to the dances, ideas, and times of performances, not in regard to the artistic side of the construction of plays. Controversy was not very violent until the time of Lope when the drama became a means of popular amuse-

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ment and when certain writers tried to catch the public approval by appealing to their baser instincts. The Church, at times, succeeded in more or less controlling certain abuses but the public will was stronger, and moreover, the religious fraternities were deriving a large part of their income from the presentation of *comedias*, so that, though the theatres were closed for short periods, the authors and public in conjunction felt relatively little interference in the development of what the public wanted in the way of entertainment.

Let us return now to Lope's "New Art of Writing Plays" and examine further features of his dramatic technique. Lope says: "Let the author choose his subject, and let him not mind whether it concerns kings."²⁰ In other words, anything is a proper subject for a play. In fact Lope with his enormous number of plays practically exhausted the possible sources. He wrote about everything, scenes from the Bible, events from the history of Spain both written and legendary, events from Classical literature, contemporary events, and many entirely original subjects. Is it any wonder that he used the same materials for two or three different plays at times and that individual scenes in different plays sometimes have a strange similarity. Self-plagiarism is practically inevitable when a man writes 1,800 plays. I think we may safely say, however, that Lope seldom copied the works of any other dramatist, though this was not considered unethical in his day. He simply found it easier to devise a plot from his fertile brain than to take the trouble to read a play to get one. Other dramatists frequently reworked his plays, however. Let us not forget that Lope was not the only prolific producer of his time. Tirso de Molina wrote more than 400 *comedias*, Guillén de Castro wrote 43, Vélez de Guevara more than 400, Pérez de Montalbán, Lope's first

biographer, 50 or more, Rojas Zorrilla 60, as well as 15 *autos* and 2 farces, Agustín Moreto wrote about 100, Quiñones de Benavente wrote 900 short comic pieces, and Calderón wrote 120 dramas, 80 *autos*, and 20 comic interludes.²¹ In fact, any single play of the period should be judged with an eye to the background of four or five thousand other plays.

Scarcely a single tragedy is found in all this great deluge of plays. Lope set the form as tragicomedy and other authors followed his lead. He says: "Let the tragic and comic be mixed; make one part serious, another ridiculous, for this variety is very delightful; Nature gives us a good example for She attains beauty through such variety."²²

As regards the three famous unities, Lope recommends the unity of action,²³ though he violates it at times. But he says that it is not at all necessary for the action to take place in a period of one day.²⁴ The action should take place in the least time possible considering the subject, except in historical plays in which the passage of time is not important. As for the unity of place, if it is necessary for a character to make a journey, let him make it, "a thing which offends the people who follow Aristotle's precepts," but, he adds: "if one is offended, let him not go to see them."²⁵ Lope argues this as a practical necessity, for he says: "The anger of a Spaniard seated (in the audience) is not appeased unless you show him in two hours everything from Genesis to the Judgment Day, so I find that, if one is to please, that which succeeds is the most just."²⁶ In other words, nothing succeeds like success.

Another contribution of Lope was the reduction in the number of acts to three. Torres Naharro had used five acts according to the classic precept. In the last half of the sixteenth century most writers had written one-act plays or had

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made no division into acts at all. Some had used four acts. Lope popularized the three-act play. His usual technique is to introduce all characters in the first act and involve the plot more and more until the middle of the third act when the solution begins. But, he warns us: "Do not permit the solution until the last scene arrives, because, when the rabble finds out what the end of the play is, they turn their faces to the door."²⁷

Lope doesn't always follow his own advice in this respect. Due to his hurried composition his last acts are frequently weak.²⁸ The demand for new plays was so great that revision was impossible. Plays seldom ran more than a week, and Lope tells us elsewhere that he composed a hundred of his plays in the space of twenty-four hours each. The Spanish audience wanted action, a complicated plot, and a dénouement. They cared little about the delineation of character or psychological analysis. The make-up of the troupes of players, too, had its influence. Troupes were licensed by the government (there were twelve in 1615), and they consisted usually of three "gentlemen," three "ladies," one clown, who was nearly always the servant of the leading male character, his female counterpart, servant of the leading lady, one old man, and three or four handy men who could play minor parts: soldiers, ruffians, servants, etc. When a troupe was putting on a new play every week or so there was little time for rehearsal, so the characters had to be kept more or less the same in all plays. When an actor played the same part all the time he could get along fairly well with his new lines by improvising when he got into trouble. The dread of the whistle of the "illustrious senate," for such the rabble was commonly called, must have encouraged the actors to do their best at memorizing their lines. Even so, the prompter must have been a busy man.

Lope goes on to recommend that "Very few times should the stage remain empty, without a person speaking, for when this happens the rabble becomes restless and the story is greatly prolonged."²⁹ that is, it takes considerable time to get the audience quieted down so that the show can go on.

One critic has aptly remarked that it is easier to praise Lope than it is to understand him. He knew Latin well, more than a little Greek, and considerable Italian. He also seems to have had an average acquaintance with knowledge in many fields.³⁰ He, as well as many other poets of his day, borrowed many words from religion such as "altar," "confessor," "glory," "grace," "heaven," "hell," "immortal," "angel," "seraphim," which become a usual element in erotic poetry. In the *comedia* he uses such words in profusion, making the divine descend to the human, not, however, raising the human to the divine. Sometimes, words of religious origin are also used for burlesque, comic effect by the *gracioso*, such as "*fraila de Mahoma*," "*sacristán de luteranos*." *Fraila* is an imagined feminine of *fraile*, "monk," therefore "monkess of Mohammed," "Lutheran sacristan." The religious poems, *autos*, lives of saints, singularly enough are relatively free of religious words. For example, in "The Shepherds of Bethlehem" he designated the Holy Virgin by "*niña*," "girl," "*pastorcilla*," "little shepherdess," and "*morena graciosa*," "graceful brunette."

Lope, like most priests of his day, probably believed somewhat in astrology, though he did distinguish between astronomy and astrology, both of which were expressed by the same word. He uses astronomical terms in great profusion, often to indicate the passage of time. Such use in the *comedia* reveals a more or less widespread interest in the subject by a fairly extensive public. Medical terms, too, are rather frequent, though they are used in the current sense rather

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than the scientific one. For example, love is frequently compared to a fever. Many birds and animals are also mentioned, sometimes with minute descriptions in the technical language of zoology. He also describes imaginary and exotic animals. References to animals often offer difficulties to the modern reader as for example, "*un título camaleón*," "a chameleon title." The chameleon, according to popular belief, existed on air, therefore, "a vain or empty title." He borrows words also from botany, aesthetics, architecture, and music. Of course there was a great variety of names of colors. Color symbolism is extremely common in all authors of the time. White was used for purity, dark red for love, pink for cruelty, orange for faithfulness, black for sorrow, gray for sadness, bright red for shame, brown for difficulty, blue for jealousy, turquoise for pride, yellow for despair, green for hope.³¹ Sometimes he uses the name of the emotion instead of the color. Thus "cruel lips" might mean simply "red lips," "jealous eyes" simply "blue eyes."

His language as a whole is composed of widely varied elements.³² Accumulations of special words occur, however, only in works destined for a lettered public. In the *comedia* his language reflects that of the elegant social class of his age, the *gracioso* using any sort of language so long as he is funny and satirical and not difficult for his audience to understand. Sometimes the *gracioso* speaks in a sort of pig-Latin, Latinized Spanish. Perhaps I should point out that the character of the *gracioso* was one of Lope's most interesting innovations. He was a sort of combination of the anti-hero of the picaresque novel plus the common sense of a Sancho Panza. He wanted to avoid trouble when possible, he would much rather run away than fight, he was usually hungry or sleepy or tired. He was always very intelligent, full of tricks, and always giving advice. He was faithful to

his master, though he had an overwhelming distrust of love and women, especially veiled women. All in all, he represents the point of view of the rabble in the audience. He is scornful, witty, and not above asking for a reward before he tells his master some bit of good news.

As to the use of elegant language, Lope advises in the *Arte Nuevo*: "Do not waste thoughts and concepts on domestic scenes . . . but when the person that you introduce persuades, advises or dissuades, then you should use sententious words and concepts, because, doubtless, one thereby imitates the truth, for when a man advises, persuades or dissuades he speaks in a different style from his usual one."³³ Perhaps the interpretation of these concepts, and the plays of Lope are full of them, causes the modern American reader more trouble than any other feature of the language. We must not consider them artificial and silly, however. We must remember the Spanish taste for bombastic language, sonorous epithets, and extravagant similes. Let me cite one or two examples of *conceptos*: in "Struggle on unto Death," Macías, the unsuccessful lover, is speaking to his servant. He says, "Have you never seen a fire? Thus the house of my soul was burning, and then blind understanding begged with a thousand supplications from the fountains of the eyes water to temper the fire."³⁴ He means that on seeing his sweetheart engaged to another man, he wept and then felt better. Often a play on words is made using the name of a character. In "Punishment Without Vengeance" one of the female characters has the name Aurora. The following dialogue occurs:

FEDERICO. That is not Aurora; you are mistaken.

CASSANDRA. Well, who is it?

FEDERICO. The sun itself;

For I find that it often dawns from these
Auroras.³⁵

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Lope is very insistent that this sort of language is effective. In another play he makes fun of works "in which carpentry is substituted for concepts and intrigue."³⁶

Lope also recommends "deceiving with the truth" and "equivocal speech," for he says, "each individual of the rabble thinks that he is the only one who understands what the actor means."³⁷

As to the length of plays, "they should not be so long as to try the patience of the audience."³⁸ As a matter of fact they average from 3,000 to 3,200 lines. Many of the editions which have come down to us are very defective, for an author sold a manuscript outright to a producer, who, if the play promised to be successful, had it printed in pamphlet form. There was a convention among printers that no play should be longer than thirty-two double column pages.³⁹ If a play should be longer than this they simply cut it down. The producers, too, often made changes which they thought desirable, so that we have little assurance in reading one of these pamphlet editions that we are reading what the author actually wrote. A still more vicious practice was that of pirating plays. We often read of a man called Gran Memoria, "great memory" who could attend one showing of a play and remember enough of it to write it down and sell it to a printer. These editions, of course, are particularly corrupt.⁴⁰

As to the most popular kind of plays, Lope truly says, "Affairs of honor are the best because they forcibly move all people; . . . for virtue is beloved everywhere and we see that, if perchance an actor plays the rôle of a traitor, he is so odious to everyone that people will not sell him what he wants to buy, the rabble flees from him when they meet him; but if he is loyal they lend him money, and invite him out and even the nobles honor and love him and seek after

him, regale him and acclaim him."⁴¹ Lope is referring here to the so-called cape-and-sword play which he invented and which was the most popular type all through the Golden Age. The honor code seems to us who live in modern times and in a democratic country, artificial, cruel, illogical. But in seventeenth-century Spain it was almost a religion transcending the Christian religion and that in a country and a time noted for religious fanaticism. If a man were to fight a duel he risked not only his life but what was more important his soul as well; and this happened often because of affairs which we would now consider insignificant. In fact the government found it necessary to outlaw duelling and a third risk was created, that of being punished by the courts.

Honor⁴² was conceived as the reputation which a man had among his peers. The nobility were endowed with honor *per se*. Honor, however, could be acquired by doing deeds generally approved of, such as performing brave deeds in the army. It could be increased but not diminished. It could only be lost entirely. Commoners who spoke of their honor were generally laughed at. Yet commoners in positions of authority, such as the mayor of a city, were esteemed as were members of the nobility.

Honor was a man's most valued possession, far surpassing love or wealth. In fact, life without honor had no meaning whatsoever.

Anything which tended to lower a person in the estimation of his fellows constituted an insult and consequent loss of honor. For instance, if, by bribing a servant, a man succeeded in gaining entrance to the house of a lady who had scorned him, she and all the male members of her family automatically lost their honor. Nor was an overt act of this sort even necessary; a mere statement, true or untrue,

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uttered publicly was sufficient. For example in "The Doctor of his own Honor"⁴⁸ Margarita seeks justice from the king because don Jacinto had deserted her on the eve of their marriage. She is informed that he did so because he suspected her. She thereupon drops the complaint. Her honor is lost and she enters a convent.

An offense to one's honor must be washed out in blood. Strangely enough, duels were the result of only minor offenses. The adulterous wife was murdered, or executed, if you like, but secrecy was indispensable. If the wronged husband could so devise his vengeance as to punish the other man also, so much the better. But the main thing was to keep the matter secret, for the more people who knew of the offense, the greater the dishonor.

The king, being able to create nobles, was superior to questions of honor between his subjects. A man had no recourse when dishonored by the king. He owed the king his complete loyalty: his life and, what was greater, his honor. Lope and most other dramatists, usually avoided the situation in which the king wronged a subject. There was too much danger of offending the ruling monarch and, furthermore, the king was conceived of as God's representative on earth, and as such, practically incapable of a dishonorable action. Such was the monarchical sentiment of the age.

The long-continued popularity of honor plays is ample proof that this conception of honor was not an invention of dramatists but a belief held by a majority of the people, and it even had the approval of the Church, which surely cannot be accused of radicalism. The Spaniards have always had the reputation of being extremely touchy on points of honor. What was the cause of this? There are probably two reasons. First, the people, and particularly the nobility, were a homogeneous group, with religion as a nucleus. Political

thought, too, was highly centralized. Lack of conformity to existing standards was very seriously regarded so that the force of public opinion was greater than in a country containing relatively large groups of dissenters.

Next to honor, love was the most important motive of the cloak-and-sword play. Most honor situations arose from some phase of the relations of men and women. Again we should try to understand the attitude toward love if we are fairly to judge a play in which love is a principal element. To us, most of the men of Golden Age plays seem to be egotistical, overbearing, insanely jealous, and none too fair in their dealings with women, who in turn seem to be rather spiritless, supine creatures, all too ready to give in to the man's desires.

It is well known that Spanish girls were closely guarded before marriage and that courtships had to be carried on in a clandestine fashion. Marriages were arranged by parents, with or without the consent of the young people. In any case, the young man and the young woman seldom if ever became well acquainted before they were married. After marriage, the husband was definitely the head of the house. Now the attitude toward love, as exhibited in the Golden Age drama is entirely from the man's point of view, an attitude which Doctor César Juarros, a present-day Spanish psychiatrist terms the "national masculine sentiment."⁴⁴ He believes that it is still the prevalent attitude among all except the most highly refined people of the upper classes and that it is the main cause of most marital difficulties. Dr. Juarros finds that there are five basic ideals which go to make up the "masculine psychology": the infidelity of the wife constitutes a dishonor; woman is inferior to man; the more women a man has possessed, the more manly merit; one truly in love must be jealous; to buy love is not humiliating.

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The first of these ideas we have taken up in dealing with the honor question. As regards woman's inferiority, we find men taking the attitude that the woman to whom he takes a fancy should fall in love with him at once, in fact she should feel highly complimented that he has deigned to notice her. When two men take the same notion at the same time there is inevitably a conflict. This is a stock situation. Do not be surprised if a man upbraids his sweetheart for her inconstancy, even when he has no reason to do so whatsoever. That merely proves that he loves her. One way to gain a woman's love was to flatter her father or brother with promises of honors or authority. The fathers and brothers seem to be rather willing to give their consent, too, and once they have pledged their words they cannot back down. Now in case the woman loves another, the solution is rather difficult. It usually involves the removal of the villain in some way or other.

Lope also made use of popular songs,⁴⁵ sometimes incorporating them in the plot, sometimes interpolating them bodily, usually re-working, and polishing them. He surely composed many of them himself. He had a peculiar knack of imitating popular poetry and it is often difficult to tell what he wrote himself and what he simply included. The situation is further complicated by the custom of the time of leaving the choice of a song to the producer of the play and in many cases, when Lope did not revise a play before publication, the songs may have been the ones included by the impresario on his own initiative.

Lope also popularized the "little story."⁴⁶ These stories were used for comic effect and usually related by the *gracioso* to prove some point he had made. One or two examples will give a sufficient idea of them. A captive bargained with the king to teach an elephant to speak before a period of ten

years had elapsed. Upon being asked privately why he had made such a rash boast, he replied: "Within ten years either the king, the elephant, or I will be dead."

In another play a monarch, before besieging a certain city, gave permission to the women to carry out anything they could bear on their backs. They carried out their husbands.

Another example: The wives of Roman senators boast that they are the strongest in the world: Rome is mistress of the world: its senators rule Rome: the senators are ruled by their wives.

Just one more: The servant of an astrologer made true prognostications by writing the opposite of his master. After his master died the servant ceased his predictions for he could predict only by contradicting his master.

Like other poets of the Golden Age, Lope's reputation waned during the eighteenth century, the period when the neo-classic spirit was felt most strongly in Spain.⁴⁷ The romantics, generally speaking, were the first to give attention to the Golden Age theatre, but Lope received the scantiest attention of all. Until relatively modern times Calderón was considered to be the supreme dramatist of the period. Recent critics, however, have placed Lope in the place which he deserves in the history of Spanish dramatic literature and today we recognize that it was Lope, who, by respecting the elements of militant patriotism, religious fanaticism, respect for family traditions, points of honor, taste for sonorous verse, elements deeply rooted in the national consciousness, brought order out of chaos and almost single handed established a popular national theatre.

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NOTES

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- ²*The Chief European Dramatists*, selected and edited with notes, biographies, and bibliographies, by Brander Matthews (Houghton Mifflin, 1916).
- ³Milton A. Buchanan, *The Chronology of Lope de Vega's Plays*, University of Toronto Studies, Philological Series, No. 6 (1922), p. 13.
- ⁴Quoted in: G. T. Northup, *An Introduction to Spanish Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1925), p. 197.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, p. 229 ff.
- ⁶M. Menéndez y Pelayo, "Bartolomé de Torres Naharro y su propaladia," in *Estudios de Crítica literaria*, III, 9-183.
- ⁷A. F. G. Bell, *Gil Vicente*, Hispanic Notes and Monographs, Portuguese Series, I (Oxford, 1921).
- ⁸*Crítica literaria*, III, p. 181.
- ⁹Rennert y Castro, *Vida de Lope de Vega* (Madrid, 1919).
- ¹⁰Quoted in: Northup, *Introduction*, p. 267.
- ¹¹Alfred Gassier, *Le Théâtre Espagnol* (Paris, 1898), 50-51.
- ¹²*Arte nuevo de hazer comedias en este tiempo*. The best text is that of Morel-Fatio included in H. J. Chaytor, *Dramatic Theory in Spain* (Cambridge, 1925), 14-29.
- ¹³*Arte nuevo*, ll., 40-48.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, ll., 134-35.
- ¹⁵Emilio Cotarelo, Prologue to the Academy edition of Lope de Rueda, *Obras*.
- ¹⁶Rennert y Castro, *Vida de Lope de Vega*, 113-32.
- ¹⁷An approximate equivalent of the 140-200 reales of Rennert y Castro. The buying power of money in late sixteenth-century Spain, too, was somewhat greater than in present-day America.
- ¹⁸Lope de Vega, *Porfhar hasta morir*, ll., 3-5.
- ¹⁹H. J. Chaytor, *Dramatic Theory in Spain*, Introduction, xi-xii.
- ²⁰*Arte nuevo*, ll., 157-58.
- ²¹M. Romera-Navarro, *Historia de la Literatura Española* (Heath, 1928).
- ²²*Arte nuevo*, ll., 177-80.
- ²³*Ibid.*, ll., 181-87.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*, ll., 188-95.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, ll., 199-200.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*, ll., 205-10.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, ll., 231-39.
- ²⁸James Fitzmaurice-Kelley, *Chapters on Spanish Literature* (London, 1908), p. 182.
- ²⁹*Arte nuevo*, ll., 240-43.
- ³⁰L. Salembien, "Le vocabulaire de Lope de Vega," *Bulletin Hispanique*, XXXIV (1932), 97-127, 289-310; XXXV (1933), 51-69, 368-91.
- ³¹On color symbolism see: H. A. Kenyon (*romances*) in *Romanic Review*, VI (1915), 327-40; S. G. Morley (Tirso) *Romanic Review*, VIII (1917), 77-81; W. L. Fichter (Lope) *Romanic Review*, XVIII (1927), 220-31; Barbara Matulka (fifteenth century), *The Novels of Juan de Flores* (New York, 1931), p. 266 ff.; and E. Buceta, *Bulletin Hispanique*, XXXV (1933), p. 300.

³²L. Salembien, *op. cit.*

³³*Arte nuevo*, ll., 250-56.

³⁴Lope de Vega, *Porfiar hasta morir*, Act II, Scene XI.

³⁵Lope de Vega, *Castigo sin venganza*, Act II.

³⁶*Ay verdades que en amor.*

³⁷*Arte nuevo*, ll., 319-26.

³⁸*Ibid.*, ll., 338-40.

³⁹H. J. Chaytor, *Dramatic Theory in Spain*, note p. 27.

⁴⁰*Loc. cit.*

⁴¹*Arte nuevo*, ll., 327-37.

⁴²A. Castro, "Algunas observaciones acerca del concepto del honor en los siglos XVI y XVII," *Revista de filología española*, II (1916), 1-50, 357-86.

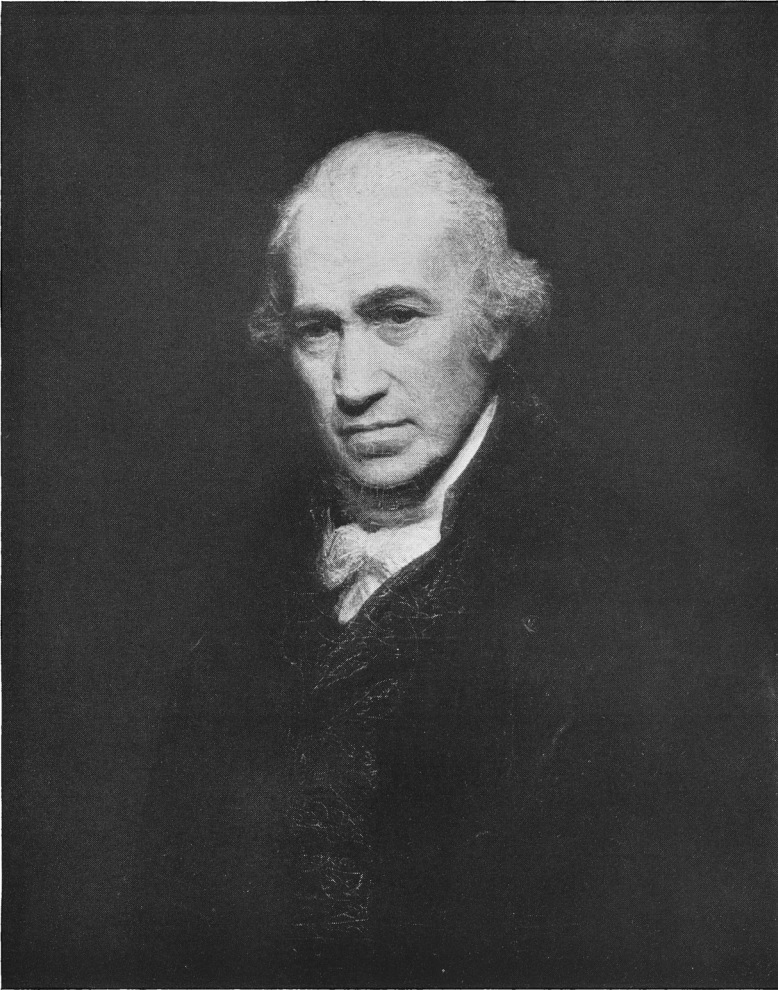
⁴³*El médico de su honra.*

⁴⁴*El amor en España* (Madrid, n.d.).

⁴⁵Lope de Vega, *Cancionero teatral*, prólogo y notas de J. Robles Pazos (Johns Hopkins Press, 1935).

⁴⁶Milton A. Buchanan, "Short Stories and Anecdotes in Spanish Plays," *Modern Language Review*, IV (1908), 178-84, V (1909), 78-89.

⁴⁷M. Menéndez y Pelayo, "Lope de Vega y Grillparzer" in *Estudios de Crítica literaria*, II, 313-47.



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Figure 1. Portrait of Watt in his 66th year

