

A COMPANION TO
LOPE DE VEGA

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TAMESIS

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FOREWORD

We would like to thank everyone who participated in and made the conference out of which this volume arose, *Metamorphosis and Transformation in the Life and Work of Lope de Vega* in the summer of 2006, such an enjoyable and successful experience. Any introduction to the life and work of a figure as mercurial and prolific across all major literary genres as Lope must confront the problem of combining coverage with depth. This volume reflects our own vision of the *Fénix* and its origins in a consideration of change. We hope, nevertheless, that it will be useful to undergraduate students and their teachers as a sourcebook as well as inspiring well-travelled *lopidistas* to look again at particular themes and approaches or ponder other important questions.

Some of the contributions focus on providing a synthesis of what has been written on a particular text or area, introducing for an undergraduate audience the state of the field, whilst at the same time indicating where more detailed and in-depth considerations of these issues are to be found. Other contributors offer fresh insights or enriching perspectives on well-known material, whilst others again have taken this opportunity to bring centre stage less well-known and perhaps unjustly neglected aspects of his output. What is clear is that in the face of the myriad of possible texts and approaches to Lope, we hope this volume showcases at least some of the exciting new developments in Lope de Vega studies today and reflects the freshness and energy pervading the field.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Charles Davis for his extraordinarily careful readings and numerous suggestions for improvements, this volume's successes would not have been possible without him. Finally, it remains to thank Merton College, Oxford for providing a grant to help with the final stages of editing the volume and Ellie Ferguson, of Boydell and Brewer, for her assistance throughout.

Introduction: Lope's Life and Work

ALEXANDER SAMSON and JONATHAN THACKER

Pocas obras hay en ninguna literatura más personales que la de este genial romántico. Al margen de cada uno de estos tremendos episodios de su vida crece frondosa la poesía, índice de sus emociones, y aquí más que nunca «fermosa cobertura» de las frivolidades de aquel para quien todos los sentimientos eran familiares, salvo el de la responsabilidad moral de sus propios actos. La vida de Lope pendía de su impulsivo y anárquico temperamento. Pero seamos indulgentes: tal vez nadie, en la historia de las literaturas, ha sabido dejar tras de cada acción liviana una tan brillante e inmaculada estela de belleza.¹

[There are few works in any literature more personal than those of this outstanding romantic. In the margins of each of those momentous episodes of his life poetry grows luxuriantly, an index of his emotions, and here more than ever it is 'the beautiful covering' of the frivolities of the man for whom all feelings were familiar, except that of moral responsibility for his own actions. The life of Lope hung from his impulsive and anarchic temperament. But, let us be indulgent: perhaps no-one, in the history of literature, has managed to leave behind each fickle action a wake of such shining and immaculate beauty.]

Lope Félix de Vega Carpio (1562–1635) was perhaps the most extraordinary writer to leave his mark on early modern Spain, the period that Spaniards have designated their artistic Golden Age. Beyond Spanish borders it tends to be Cervantes who possesses the highest cultural capital for his role in the creation of the novel; Velázquez is the painters' painter; Quevedo and Góngora are admired for their poetic brilliance; and only Calderón's theatre is typically assumed to come close to the power and philosophical reach of Shakespeare's. Within Spain Lope is better known, of course, but it is probably true to say that his popular renown stems in roughly equal measure from his exceptional productivity and his eventful life. The 'Lope myth' which has grown up around him presents the man as a flawed character possessed of a unique genius.

Artistically, Lope is best known as a playwright, indeed as the creator of a national drama usually called the *comedia nueva*. The generically mixed type of play that he was instrumental in developing in late sixteenth-century Spain — not dissimilar in many respects to plays performed in Shakespeare's England —

¹ Américo Castro & Hugo A. Rennert, *Vida de Lope de Vega (1562–1635)*, 2nd edn (Madrid: Anaya, 1968), p. 44.

remained popular for well over a hundred years and would be sufficient on its own to guarantee his immortality as a writer. Plays such as *Fuente Ovejuna*, *Peribáñez y el comendador de Ocaña*, *El caballero de Olmedo*, *El perro del hortelano* and *El castigo sin venganza* have assured Lope a place in the pantheon of world dramatists.² However, as we shall see, Lope is a fascinating figure not only because of the scenes he created, the worlds he so skilfully depicted on the boards of the early modern playhouses of Spain, but for a host of other reasons, narrowly literary, broadly cultural and historical, and pertaining to his personal life.

In his hagiographical account of his mentor's life, Lope de Vega's contemporary and disciple, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, describes the state of the private chapel in the playwright's house on Francos street in Madrid: after Lope's death his friends discovered 'en un aposento donde se retiraba salpicadas las paredes y teñida la disciplina con reciente sangre' [in a chamber to which he would retire the walls were spattered, and his scourge stained, with fresh blood].³ The extremity of his mortifications of the flesh and penitential practices testifies to the profound piety of a man whose first biographer sought to present to posterity a saintly figure who died mouthing the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. Later biographers, however, have refused to whitewash his peccadilloes, unable to overlook the extramarital relationships and large brood of illegitimate children, some of whom were conceived even after he took holy orders in 1614. The religiosity underlined by Montalbán's description of his friend cannot, however, be easily dismissed as hypocrisy and, while the *Fama póstuma* cannot be taken at face value either, it does point to an essential aspect of Lope's biography that demands more serious attention than it has hitherto received. The modern Lope is largely the creation of Cayetano Alberto de la Barrera y Leirado and his monumental *Nueva biografía de Lope de Vega*. Although it was completed in 1864, the work did not appear uncensored until 1890 when the Real Academia Española brought it out as the first volume of Lope's complete works. Despite its winning a prize, the panel of the Biblioteca Nacional had suppressed La Barrera's biography, worried that 'podía contribuir a rebajar el valor moral del Fénix de los Ingenios, considerado como hombre y como sacerdote' [it could contribute to the lowering of the moral standing of the Phoenix of Wits, as a man and as a priest].⁴

La Barrera's biography constituted such a significant development in the understanding of Lope's life because of its incorporation of material from the collections of his letters discovered in the Altamira archive in April 1863.⁵ Two of

² Translations of titles of works by Lope can be found at the back of this volume, listed by genre and in alphabetical order.

³ Juan Pérez de Montalbán, *Fama póstuma a la vida y muerte del doctor frey Lope Félix de Vega Carpio y elogios panegíricos a la inmortalidad de su nombre*, ed. Enrico di Pastena (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2001), p. xx. The house, in which Lope lived for a quarter of a century, is today a museum in the street now called Calle Cervantes.

⁴ Cited in Lope de Vega, *Epistolario de Lope de Vega Carpio*, ed. Agustín G. de Amezúa, 4 vols (Madrid: Aldus, 1935-43), II, p. 6.

⁵ The 10th Duke of Sessa's daughter, who succeeded her father, married the Conde de Altamira, Marqués de Astorga, in 1731.

the five codices transcribed at the instigation of the then head of the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, the dramatist Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch, have subsequently disappeared. Similarly, twenty-one of the letters originally in the codex now housed in the Museo Lázaro Galdiano, also in the Spanish capital, have gone missing in what is one of the most mysterious episodes in modern literary scholarship. The codices were labelled *Cartas de Belardo a Lucilo*, the former a pseudonym used by Lope in various works and the latter a reference to his most important and long-lived patron, the Duke de Sessa. (Lucilo – Lucilius – was a disciple of Seneca and addressee of his letters, the *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*; the name also refers to the satirist Lucilius, who was born in Sessa, the duke's seat, near Naples, and its initial recalls his first name Luis.⁶) The survival of their correspondence is in part a tribute to both Sessa and Lope's awareness of literary fame, an attempt to live on through their epistolary life, cementing their posthumous reputations as patron and artist respectively. The edition of the *Epistolario* by Amezáa was supplemented in the 1980s by Nicolás Marín, who gathered, from a variety of printed and manuscript sources, another four letters not included in the earlier collection.⁷ The discovery of archival documents relating to the dramatist's failed relationship with Elena Osorio, published by Cristóbal Pérez Pastor, along with a number of further papers (in the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid) notably those drawn up before Lope's friend, the notary Juan de Piña, largely completes the documentary picture we have of the subject of this *Companion*.⁸ All of these sources, amounting to over a thousand documents, have recently been united and published in a two-volume work by Krzysztof Sliwa.⁹

While the documentary record may be largely complete, some new discoveries are still being made. An unknown letter resurfaced recently,¹⁰ and more material has been discovered in the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid. The latter relates to the dowry of a hitherto unknown sister, Catalina (in addition to a brother, Francisco, and two further sisters, Isabel and Juliana), the payment of Lope's pension from the archbishopric of Santiago de Compostela and an

⁶ Lope de Vega, *Cartas*, ed. Nicolás Marín (Madrid: Castalia, 1985), p. 48 and n. 78. In this sense Lope is implicitly casting himself as Seneca, comparing their correspondence with a classical paradigm of the epistolary genre.

⁷ *Cartas*, ed. Marín, and see his 'Un volumen de cartas de Lope poco conocido', *Cuadernos Bibliográficos*, 32 (1975): 63–75.

⁸ See A. Tomillo & C. Pérez Pastor, *Proceso de Lope de Vega por libelos contra unos cómicos* (Madrid: Fortanet, 1901) and Cristóbal Pérez Pastor, *Noticias y documentos relativos a la historia y literatura española*, 1 (Memorias de la Real Academia Española, x) (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1910), pp. 274–88. There is also José Simón Díaz, *Ensayo de una bibliografía de las obras y artículos sobre la vida y escritos de Lope de Vega Carpio* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios sobre Lope de Vega, 1955).

⁹ Krzysztof Sliwa, ed., *Cartas, documentos y escrituras del Dr. Frey Lope Félix de Vega Carpio (1562–1635)*, 2 vols (Newark, DE: Juan de la Cuesta, 2007).

¹⁰ Private communication. See also Joaquín Entrambasaguas, 'Un código de Lope de Vega autógrafo y desconocido', *Revista de Literatura*, 38 (1970): 5–117.