

Lope de Vega's Religious Voices

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I, Michael Rolfe, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the text.

Abstract

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This study investigates Lope de Vega's religious language in a cross-section of his poetic and dramatic works. Chosen as the most significant examples of his religious poetry, they comprise *Isidro* (1599), *Pastores de Belén* (1612), *Rimas sacras* (1614), and *Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* (1626). They also include two Saint's Plays, *Lo fingido verdadero* and *Barlán y Josafá*. The thesis explores the relationship between the poetic expression of the author and prevailing religious discourses. It shows how the voices and constructed literary personae correspond with the self-fashioning characteristic of his work. The conspicuous presence of the authorial figure draws attention to the links between art and life, advancing biographic readings simultaneously frustrated by the metafictional nature of the texts. In examining the tensions between poetic and religious objectives inherent in the artistic process, the metaliterary qualities of the works are shown to conflict with the aim of inducing spiritual devotion and piety, whilst dramatic and poetic excess overwhelm and undermine the ostensible devotional purpose. Implicit in the ambivalent language are alternative readings that occupy an indeterminate space between simple appropriation of religious material for poetic ends and the articulation of voices of troubled, emergent Baroque selfhood, a situation that reflects the heterodox religious landscape of early modern Spain presented in recent scholarship. The thesis posits that, by straying into the religious genre, bound by its own set of conventions, the language consciously tests the role writer and reader play in artistic interpretation and religious devotion and explores the interaction between them.

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Abbreviations

<i>AIH</i>	<i>Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas</i>
<i>BCom</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Comediantes</i>
<i>BH</i>	<i>Bulletin Hispanique</i>
<i>CL</i>	<i>Comparative Literature</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>Hispanic Review</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RC</i>	<i>Religión y Cultura</i>
<i>RF</i>	<i>Razón y Fe</i>
<i>RHM</i>	<i>Revista Hispánica Moderna</i>
<i>RL</i>	<i>Revista de Literatura</i>
<i>VV</i>	<i>Verdad y Vida</i>

Modernizations

Quotations taken from original texts have been amended by the replacement of the character ‘ŕ’ with an ‘s’ and the insertion of missing letters in abbreviated words, but otherwise have been left unmodernized.

Lope de Vega's Religious Voices

Introduction

This study investigates Lope de Vega's religious language as represented in a cross-section of his poetic and dramatic works and has the objective of exploring the relationship between the poetic expression of the author and prevailing religious discourses. The thesis identifies a variety of religious voices and constructed literary personae and examines how these correspond with the self-fashioning characteristic of his work. It explores how the conspicuous presence of the authorial figure draws attention to the links between art and life, a process that advances biographic readings which are simultaneously frustrated by the metafictional nature of the texts. In examining the tensions between the inherent artificiality of the artistic medium and religious truth, I highlight an opposition between poetic and religious objectives inherent in the artistic process in which the metaliterary qualities of the works are shown to conflict with the aim of inducing spiritual devotion, whilst dramatic and poetic excess overwhelm and undermine the ostensible devotional purpose.¹ Implicit in the ambivalent language are alternative readings that occupy an indeterminate space between simple appropriation of religious material for poetic ends and articulation of voices of troubled, emergent Baroque selfhood, a situation that supports the heterodox view of the religious landscape of early modern Spain presented in recent scholarship. I posit that, by straying into the religious genre, bound by its own set of conventions, the language consciously tests the role writer and reader play in artistic interpretation and religious devotion and explores the interaction between them.

¹ See Robert J. O'Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978). For instance, p. 55: 'There are several critical differences between human and divine artistry, however: only God can create out of nothing'.

Throughout this thesis I have used the terms ‘early modern’, ‘Golden Age’, ‘Renaissance’, ‘post-Tridentine’, and ‘Baroque’ as signifiers of a cultural epoch for which this thesis requires an, albeit necessarily simplified, denomination. It is, perhaps, the term Baroque which, despite all its complexities, offers the most comprehensive key to many of the issues involved. Whilst the abbreviated explanation that follows does not encompass the cultural complexity and breadth of issues at stake in any discussion of the period, it attempts to set out the nature of some of the tensions that I refer to as ‘Baroque paradoxes’ and lay the ground for the idea of subject formation and self-fashioning that are covered in this study. My use of the term is less in its capacity as a ‘literary mode [.....] characterised by an intricate and extravagant style’, even though, as we will see, Lope’s work is undoubtedly influenced by *culteranismo* and *conceptismo*, and more in the features of the age of which such characteristics are a product.² John Beverley describes the Baroque as ‘a form of negotiation [....] between feudalism and modernity’.³ Jeremy Robbins depicts it as a time of ‘intellectual crisis’, ‘uncertainty’, and ‘dilemmas’ which led to the examination of ‘the complex relationship between reality and illusion, fact and fiction’.⁴ At the heart of this were two opposing philosophies. Stoicism provided the notion of *desengaño*, ‘the profound, almost existential, realization of the absolute vanity of human values and possessions, together with a realignment of priorities in the light of such a realization’ (Robbins 17), whilst scepticism offered an attitude that questioned the nature of truth as judged by human senses, regarded as fallible. The period’s ‘all-pervasive fascination with perception’ (Robbins 25) and the ‘innate sense of theatricality’ (Robbins 37) were the hallmark of the Spanish Baroque. The performative nature of existence was accentuated by the flamboyance and spectacle of public life as seen in church, theatre, and at court and contrasted with the necessarily private assessment of the transient nature of life. The focus of interpretative responsibility back onto the individual, to ‘reflect for themselves upon the complex question of the nature of

² Isabel Torres, ‘Introduction: *Con pretensión de Fénix*’, in *Rewriting Classical Mythology in the Hispanic Baroque*, ed. by Isabel Torres (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2007), pp. 1–16 (p. 2).

³ John Beverley, *Essays on the Literary Baroque in Spain and Spanish America* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008), p. 141.

⁴ Jeremy Robbins, *The Challenges of Uncertainty: An Introduction to Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literature* (London: Duckworth, 1998), p. 10.

the human engagement with reality' (Robbins 148), emphasizes the ontological questioning of 'selfhood' that was characteristic of the early modern period. In particular, the performative possibilities of the Baroque exposed how the 'self' was influenced by perception and could be fashioned by performance both in the fictionalized world of art and in the world outside it, a process I refer to as 'self-fashioning'. In the face of such instability religion offered a solid foundation, a transcendent perspective beyond the immanence of the sense world. The Church was seen as the upholder of a fixed and stable world order which, together with the Inquisition and monarchy, constituted the monolithic authority and control, 'el autoritarismo barroco', that is the traditional Maravallian image of early modern Spain.⁵ This sets up a figurative opposition between a fluid notion of 'self' governed experientially and the rational, even physical, control of the monolith, presenting a dichotomy between self and a selflessness associated with subjection. The contradictory qualities of the Baroque are reflected in the conflict between public and private, the sensual and rational, truth and fiction, and, above all, illusion and reality.

Devotional poetry has been categorized by some 'as a variety of *minor* poetry' and by others as simply not poetic.⁶ Dr Johnson wrote: 'contemplative piety, or the intercourse between God and the human soul, cannot be poetical'.⁷ Diehl phrases the problem in the following way:

Whatever our personal religion or irreligion, few of us are likely to warm instinctively to religious poetry. Those who do probably think of it as a privileged category not subject to the demands and expectations placed on other sorts of poetry. The majority simply avoid it as an unappealing contradiction in terms. Both groups are in fact operating within the same set of rules that include the following precepts: (1) poetry should be the expression of individual not institutional opinion; (2) poetry should offer experiential not doctrinal truth; (3) poetry should have no "palpable design" (Keat's phrase) upon the reader.⁸

⁵ José Antonio Maravall, *La cultura del Barroco* (Madrid: Ariel, 1980), p. 167.

⁶ T.S.Eliot, as quoted by Helen Gardner in John Donne, *The Divine Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. xvi.

⁷ Dr. Johnson as quoted by Gardner, p. xv.

⁸ Patrick S. Diehl, *The Medieval Religious Lyric: An ars poetica* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 5,

The assumption that poetry is personal and experiential, not doctrinal and propagandist, contrasts the prescriptive and institutional features intrinsic to religious discourse with poetry's function as a vehicle for individual expression and the imaginative possibilities of language. Devotional poetry depends on a poetics of transparency and self-evident sincerity not found in secular poetry. Uniquely, the need for a reader to suspend disbelief is attenuated by the implicitly authoritative nature of its subject, whilst the vatic voice is validated by the invocation of a divinity which the reader is required to have faith in and with whom they stand as 'collective witness' to the truth of the words uttered.⁹ This creates a distinction from other forms of literature. The problem with the promise of transparency is the inherently constructed and artificial nature of the medium. Gardner argues:

In all poetry which attempts to represent the intercourse between an individual soul and its Maker there is conflict between the ostensible emotion — adoring love, absorbed in the contemplation of the object, or penitence, overwhelmed by the sense of unworthiness — and the artist's actual absorption in the creation of his poem and his satisfaction in achieving perfect expression. (xv–xvi)

She points to the self-consciousness of poetic expression which is extraneous to the loss of self implicit in immersion in divine, ineffable experience and which contributes to an irreducible sense of the inappropriateness of the vehicle for the sublimity of experience it seeks to convey. 'Satisfaction' in the achievement of 'perfect expression' refers to a self-interest which, by drawing attention to the poet's motives, interferes with the undertaking and diverts the focus away from the religious purpose. The creative process is at once ultimately centred on the self and aesthetic motives and, at the same time, involves a loss of self seemingly coming from outside and ultimately opaque, hidden and inaccessible to rationalization or conscious introspection. Fundamental inequality between the speaker and the object of devotion creates the need to mitigate an interest in the poetic act: 'the divine poet must omit more of himself than the love poet' (Gardner xvi).

In the religious poetry examined here the problematic of the inadequacy of poetry to its subject and of the subject to its object is exacerbated by the powerful autobiographical

⁹ Webb Keane, 'Anxious Transcendence', in *The Anthropology of Christianity*, ed. by Fenella Cannell (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 308–23 (p. 318).

strain in all of Lope's work, a corpus which is an extended negotiation of his self-fashioning and the ability of his poetic voice to shape possibilities for him in the world outside the fictive text.¹⁰ This poetry constantly directs attention to the figure of the poet as author. As Antonio Sánchez Jiménez explains, 'al enfrentarse a la poesía de Félix Lope de Vega Carpio el lector medio de nuestras días tiende a preguntarse cada pocas estrofas si el autor está hablando de sí mismo'.¹¹ Lope gives the impression he is writing about himself and his own experiences (Sánchez Jiménez 3). Alan Trueblood writes of 'the persistence and ease with which private experience becomes the substance of Lope's art' (4). This has led many critics to establish Lope's religious conviction as the foundation for an understanding of his devotional writing; they assume that his artistic creations are motivated by religious inspiration. The intimations of autobiography imbue the works with a sense of authenticity which endorse the poetry as sincere expression, reflections of the author's communion with God. These same autobiographical elements, however, draw attention to the inconsistency between his notorious private life and the personae he created, thereby making the relationship between author and text doubly complex and inviting the interest of the reader to, as Trueblood puts it, 'clarify the premises on which he is proceeding'.¹² This is one of the principal problems and paradoxes of Lope's religious expression: how such an artistically self-conscious and self-regarding confection can be the sincere vehicle of religious devotion and genuine piety.

For Parker, 'sincerity' has 'nothing to do with fidelity to a writer's personal experience, but with the quality of his creative imagination and of the artistry that gives it form'.¹³ Similarly, Heiple has demonstrated how the use of 'sincerity' as a critical tool becomes a difficult and fruitless task. He points to the precedent created by Garcilaso who used 'sincerity' as a stylistic device, fabricating authenticity through more personal and less abstract verse, thereby intimating personal experience and autobiography. It was

¹⁰ See John G. Weiger, 'Lope's Role in the Lope de Vega Myth', *Hispania*, 63 (1980), 658–65, and Alejandro García Reidy, 'From Stage to Page', in *A Companion to Lope de Vega*, ed. by Alexander Samson and Jonathan Thacker (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008), pp. 51–60 (p. 59).

¹¹ Antonio Sánchez Jiménez, *Lope pintado por sí mismo: mito e imagen del autor en la poesía de Lope de Vega Carpio* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2006), p. 1.

¹² Alan S. Trueblood, *Experience and Artistic Expression in Lope de Vega: The Making of La Dorotea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 1.

¹³ Alexander A. Parker, *The Philosophy of Love in Spanish Literature* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1985), p. 8.

a 'style' that followed an Italianate school which valued the 'superiority of spontaneous communication (suggesting sincerity) over contrived eloquence (suggesting "artificio")' (Heiple 25). Whilst these issues might create difficulties for literary criticism, the 'rhetoric of sincerity' (Heiple 20) is an effective and valid literary device in the simulation of spontaneity, a strategy for producing 'the impression of sincere sentiment' (Heiple 17). However, in the context of religious writing, its nature is more uncertain. Artifice always possesses connotations of duplicity (Heiple 23), a problem made acute in the case of Lope's devotional writing because it was deliberately framed as religious inspiration, a genre in which authenticity is more than style, rather it is the essence of the text.

Unable to judge 'sincerity', the reader is directed to the aesthetic attribute of 'decorum'. Paul Julian Smith points to the need to balance 'persistent faith in the presence of meaning in language and of the author in the text' with both the 'Renaissance' and 'post-structuralist theorists' who believe 'there can be no direct presence of the author in the language that issues from him, no representation in language uncompromised by the discursive frame in which it is formed, and no natural human experience prior and immune to cultural inscription'.¹⁴ He identifies an acceptance of artifice and artificiality in Renaissance and Baroque art and literature in which the principal value was decorum, the appropriateness of style to subject, an 'infinite adaptability of diction to speaker, audience, and subject matter that is constant only in its mutability' (3). Decorum, the balance of text and subject, offers a resolution to what Heiple describes as the circular argument between 'sincerity versus poetic craft' (Heiple 17). However, here again Lope's religious poetry creates unease. The self-consciousness of his style, its Baroque energies, copiousness, and excess, point to an artistry that overruns the ostensible religious purpose and works against spontaneity and sincerity. Mary Gaylord Randel summarizes the difficulties faced by critics when approaching Lope's secular lyric poetry. She writes of 'a *disintegrative poetics*', a combination of

¹⁴ Paul Julian Smith, *Writing in the Margin: Spanish Literature of the Golden Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 4–5.

what she calls ‘excessive artifice’ and ‘excessive nakedness’.¹⁵ On the one hand, his ‘self-conscious practice of poetic imitation’ (225) with its ‘inherited topoi and rhetorical figures’, ‘the repetition of situations, images, [and] words’ serve to obstruct a ‘concrete means of getting at Lope’s own originality’ (222). While, on the other hand, there is his ‘personal lyric self-fashioning’ (225) which offers resolution through the promise of an autobiographical unmasking, self-revelation, which will allow the reader to ‘gaze into his soul’ (226) and find a ‘genuine lyric self’ (242). But, far from relieving the discomfort, his idiosyncratic style leaves the reader stranded ‘in an awkward middle space’, travelling between the mimesis and representation of poetry and autobiography, and points to the failure of decorum. The ‘space’ between artifice and revelation has its parallel in the literary style forged on the indeterminate ground between ‘ornamentation’ characteristic of his ‘*culterano* competitors’ and the plain speaking, ‘llano’, form advocated by the poetic speaker in *Isidro*.¹⁶ This thesis shows how his religious poetry similarly incorporates a bewildering array of literary conceits and intertextual references and utilizes the almost unlimited scope offered by religious language for borrowing and recycling imagery and metaphor interchangeably between secular and divine spheres. This has the effect of making the ‘excess’ even more extreme in his religious works. Whilst such hyperbole could be taken to represent depth of religious feeling, it also challenges the decorum of its subject. What emerges is a poet who delights in the ‘possibility of poetry’s play’ (Randel 242) and leaves the reader with a sense of deliberate evasion, a withholding of ‘something’ ‘beyond art’, outside the text (Randel 245). Whilst such playfulness may be considered a valid tool within the fictionalized world of secular literature, it has an irreducible ambivalence in the realm of devotional writing, in which poetic play undermines the sincerity of its communication with the ‘maker’ and is a cause of unease for the reader.

Theatricality is a conspicuous characteristic in Lope’s religious poetry. The population of the poems with characters, such as the shepherds of *Pastores de Belén* and Iván in

¹⁵ Mary Gaylord Randel, ‘Proper Language and Language as Property: The Personal Poetics of Lope’s *Rimas*’, *MLN*, 101 (1986), 220–46 (p. 224).

¹⁶ Mark J. Mascia, ‘Metapoetry and Metalanguage in Lope de Vega’s *Rimas humanas y divinas del licenciado Tomé de Burguillos*’, *Cincinnati Romance Review*, 17 (1998), 72–78 (p. 74). See also David H. Darst, *Imitatio: Polémicas sobre la imitación en el Siglo de Oro* (Madrid: Orígenes, 1985), pp. 51–82.

Isidro, together with the pervasive presence of a highly wrought narrative voice throughout, add to this quality. Each of the works studied is structured within a conceptual framework whereby the impression of the poet is communicated through metapoetic and, at times, metatheatric devices. The poems operate on two levels: firstly, as self-conscious artistic forms, fully aware of their own literary foundations and, secondly, dramatized situations whose emotional power and absence of obvious didacticism, renders them similar to the affective piety typically encouraged by the contemplation of the *tableau vivant* and altar piece. Whilst affective piety was central to post-Tridentine religious thought, as exemplified in Loyola's *Spiritual exercises*, without the support of any obvious doctrinal foundation in Lope's poetry, its effect tends to appear over-sentimental and theatrical. Additionally, this dramatic quality heightens ambiguity, the irony on which drama depends, and accentuates the ambivalence always already present in the language. His devotional poetry is driven by poetic and dramatic instincts which, together with obvious self-promotion, at times overwhelm the stated religious function of the texts. Such appropriation of the religious genre opens the poet to charges of hypocrisy. However, whilst such a view does not necessarily imply that his work was inconsistent with his faith, it does make the texts available to an alternative and wider range of interpretative possibilities which respond and are orientated in relation to the creative ambivalence and ambiguity that the texts appear to contain.

The notion of Spain as a homogenous bastion of Catholic Reformation orthodoxy has been questioned in recent years by revisionist historians such as Sarah Nalle, Henry Kamen, and Helen Rawlings. Their work reveals just how diverse religious practices remained at the end of the sixteenth-century.¹⁷ Lope's position as the political mouthpiece of the establishment has, similarly, been challenged by Melveena McKendrick who has identified subversive elements in his drama.¹⁸ However, there is little evidence of any attempt to read his religious writing as anything other than an

¹⁷ Sarah Nalle, *God in La Mancha: Religious Reform and the people of Cuenca, 1560–1650* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 61; Helen Rawlings, *Church, Religion and Society in Early Modern Spain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 83; Henry Kamen, *Crisis and Change in Early Modern Spain* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), p. 3.

¹⁸ Melveena McKendrick, *Playing the King: Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2000), p. 32 and p. 213.

orthodox outpouring of religious expression. As will be seen in Chapter III, Alison Weber has suggested an alternative interpretation of his poem about the death of his son, Carlos. She notes a ‘critical indifference to religious writing by men in early modern Spain’, seen ‘almost exclusively in terms of conformity’ and calls for wider exploration of ‘the full range of meanings’ encoded in such texts.¹⁹ Barbara Simerka has used what she refers to as the ‘concept of discursive plurality’ to identify ‘oppositional theologies’ in Tirso de Molina’s *El burlador de Sevilla*.²⁰ Within the historicized response of the ‘early modern reader / audience’ she exposes a ‘cultural complexity’ which permits a wide range of ‘heterodox possibilities’ (221). The suggestion of competing ideological discourses within drama raises the possibility of less straightforward interpretations of religious poetry, moving away from the traditional view of monolithic theocentrism generally associated with early modern Spain. It is these unconventional perspectives that have guided the readings in this thesis to signal elements of non-conformity in the poetic speakers and characters of the texts studied.

As Mary Gaylord Randel has recognized, most approaches to Lope’s poetry have ‘had the man as its real target’ (223). Prompted by the poet’s own invitation, they have tried to identify the personae contained in his work as *alter egos* and used biography as a means of interpreting the texts. As she has observed, this is to turn ‘Art *back* into Life’ (224). However, if, as the New Historicists would argue, we accept individuals as ‘cultural artifacts’, we can look beyond the intentions of the poet and the intentionality of his language to the text as a reflection of contemporary discourse and search for examples where alternative readings make themselves available, thereby testing the revisionist hypotheses put forward by the social historians.²¹ The ‘Old Christian’ values of the ‘llano’, artless poet in *Isidro* contrast with the artistic self-consciousness of the repentant sinner in *Rimas sacras*; both figures are dramatic characters who conform to models

¹⁹ Alison Weber, ‘Lope de Vega’s *Rimas Sacras*: Conversion, Clientage, and the Performance of Masculinity’, *MLA*, 20 (2005), 404–21 (p. 417).

²⁰ Barbara A. Simerka, ‘Eros and Atheism: Providential Ideology in Don Juan’s Plays of Tirso de Molina and Thomas Shadwell’, in *Echoes and Inscriptions: Comparative Approaches to Early Modern Spanish Literatures*, ed. by Barbara A. Simerka and Christopher B. Weimer (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 2000), pp. 220–33 (p. 220).

²¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 3.

present within Catholic Reformation culture. Ginés in *Lo fingido verdadero* challenges the audience to assess how far he will go to distinguish between his role as an actor and a real self and, in doing so, questions whether or not, as a Christian, there is a difference. Perhaps Lope suggests such a distinction is not something that can be judged or discovered from exterior appearance and is even veiled from the subject themselves. The period's obsession with external appearances and their deceptiveness, because of the fundamental dependence on ambiguity of all representation, makes the testing of 'reality' a rich topic for all forms of art. It lies at the heart of the Baroque paradoxes and therefore touches on a myriad of Golden Age themes, the most significant of which are the divisions between art and nature, and truth and imitation. It is this point the critics seem to miss. Even in a religious context, Lope toys with the truth of fiction and the fictive nature of truth.

The various critics who have studied Lope's religious poetry have fallen into three broad categories. The main group comprises those who consider his devotional writing as inspired by a spiritual reawakening that took place in the period 1611 to 1614. These commentators attribute religious motivation to his work in this period and assume it to carry personal 'authenticity'. Such critics, the most significant body of whom wrote and studied around the time of the tricentenary of his death in 1935, attribute Lope's religious poetry to deeply held convictions; such attribution has prejudiced and preempted any alternative approach. This group includes Joaquín de Entrambasaguas, Félix García, José Rubinos, Valbuena Prat, and Sister Audrey Aaron whose book, *Cristo en la poesía lírica de Lope de Vega*, remains the most comprehensive study of Lope's religious writing.²² She, like the rest of the group, refers to his 'sincerity' as the predominant quality of his religious work. She writes: 'No es posible dudar de su sinceridad'.²³ When she concludes, 'puede decirse con certeza que ninguna otra alma ha vivido la religión con tamaña

²² José Rubinos, *Lope de Vega como poeta religioso* (Habana: Cultural, 1935); Félix García, 'La sinceridad religiosa de Lope de Vega', *Religión y Cultura*, 32 (1936), 161–73; Joaquín de Entrambasaguas, *Lope de Vega y su tiempo* (Barcelona: Teide, 1961), p. 73; Ángel Valbuena Prat, *Estudios de literatura religiosa Española* (Madrid: Afrodísio Aguado, 1964).

²³ M. Audrey Aaron, *Cristo en la poesía lírica de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1967), p. 15.

variedad, versatilidad, entusiasmo y conflictos agónicos' (237), she labels Lope's devotional work as an endorsement of his faith.

More recently, Yolanda Novo has dealt with Lope's religious poetry from a 'structuralist' perspective, analysing his *Rimas sacras* in terms of a linguistic pattern.²⁴ This 'text-based' approach assumes a biographical background be excluded from an understanding of the texts, which are read only on their own terms. Additionally, Arantza Mayo's book *La lírica sacra de Lope de Vega y José de Valdivielso*²⁵ has demonstrated how the verse of both writers mirrored the precepts established in Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. These approaches preclude wider and richer interpretative possibilities of a third category, loosely described as 'postmodern' or 'New Historicist', which reunites the author with text by assuming them both to issue from the same set of culturally determined linguistic acts. Amongst these is Pedraza Jiménez who includes a chapter on Lope's religious poetry in his book *El universo poético de Lope de Vega*.²⁶ A recent study by Antonio Sánchez Jiménez, *Lope pintado por si mismo*, also falls into this category. He identifies the ways in which Lope's religious personae are part of a collection of literary 'masks' adopted throughout his career. While he acknowledges that the 'gran parte de la crítica ha usado la sinceridad como parámetro para el estudio de la poesía sacra del autor', he, too, points to 'sincerity' as an inadequate measure for literary analysis: 'pues el grado de sinceridad del texto de Lope resulta irrelevante como instrumento de análisis literario'. Instead, he approaches Lope's religious writing as an act of self-fashioning designed to create a particular image of himself: 'De hecho, el tema central de las *Rimas sacras* es corregir la imagen del autor que Lope había construido en obras como las *Rimas*' (136). His point of view establishes the artist as disingenuous, implicitly undermining the notion that deeply held religious convictions were the motivation and inspiration for Lope's religious production. His scepticism is inferred in the words 'la vivencia religiosa de Lope, *sincera o no*, no tiene por qué haber producido necesariamente las *Rimas sacras*' (135, my emphasis). Despite this position, he and

²⁴ Yolanda Novo, *Las 'Rimas sacras' de Lope de Vega. Disposición y sentido* (Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 1990).

²⁵ Arantza Mayo, *La lírica sacra de Lope de Vega y José de Valdivielso* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2007).

²⁶ Felipe B. Pedraza Jiménez, *El universo poético de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Laberinto, 2003).

Antonio Carreño, as co-editors of the recent edition of *Rimas sacras*, a volume that provides an invaluable access to what is the most important of Lope's religious texts, again find it necessary to refer to Lope's 'sincerity': 'Las *Rimas sacras* serían, por tanto, la expresión sincera de la profunda experiencia religiosa de Lope'. They then qualify this, writing: 'pues fijarla por el grado de sinceridad resulta problemático como instrumento de análisis crítico'.²⁷ Whilst the editors make it clear that 'sincerity' is an imprecise tool for literary criticism, by first asking their readers to acknowledge it as an important aspect of the work and then requesting them to ignore it, they fail to either resolve the issue or provide a satisfactory alternative method with which to address the book. The lack of resolution exemplifies a void in the approach to Lope's religious writing, seen, on one hand, as a 'sincere' reflection of his religious state of mind and measured against the authenticity of a prescribed religious expectation and, on the other, dismissed as literary and personal self-fashioning, leaving a vague insinuation of religious hypocrisy. Neither of these views appears to adequately respond to the interpretative possibilities of the texts and the acknowledged complexity of Lope as a poet.²⁸ With the exception of Aaron, the critics have tended to examine only a narrow sample of his works without drawing overall conclusions on the body of his religious writing or the plurality of the voices they contain. This study attempts to offer a more substantial understanding with fresh readings driven by a more holistic approach which draws on a broader spectrum of texts and, whilst done in the awareness of all previous critical approaches, is mindful of the heterodox possibilities they contain. It is generally guided by Catherine Larson's words:

Interpretation in the age of poststructuralism asks us to acknowledge the problems inherent in the concept of safe readings precisely because it challenges the idea that there is a fundamental truth at the core of every literary text, leaving us with the uncomfortable thought that nothing – and certainly not language – is sacred. The ideas that every reading is ultimately a misreading, that there is afoot a way of viewing the disruptive effects of language on and in a text, and that every text posits a series of aporias or deconstructive moments when its internal logic breaks down, when the text turns in on itself, and when the secure world we knew is turned

²⁷ Antonio Carreño and Antonio Sánchez Jiménez in Lope de Vega Carpio, *Rimas sacras* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006), p. 33. Further references to this edition are given in the text, identified, where necessary, by the abbreviation 'RS'.

²⁸ For example, McKendrick, p. 201.

upside down, form a central aspect of contemporary theory and practice. Philosophers and literary critics have redrawn the line that separate their respective disciplines, actively involving the reader in the process of textual explication and engaging that reader in a cocreative enterprise that, for all its use of challenging terminology, invites ever new ways of confronting the texts that we study.²⁹

The labels given by previous views of Lope's religious poetry now appear the 'safe' ground on which this study intends to build using the full range of tools that such new criticism offers to explore the 'communication that occurs between and among the author, the text, and the [reader]' (Larson 21).

I have previously referred to the biographic details of Lope's life which have been seen to conflict with the religious personae he creates in his writing. In order to understand the circumstances and issues surrounding such inconsistencies and to provide a background for the study that follows I include a brief biographic overview of the factors that surrounded his so-called 'faceta religiosa' (Sánchez Jiménez 135). He was a predominantly secular playwright and poet who became an ordained priest at the age of fifty-two in 1614, just before the publication of *Rimas sacras* and two years after he published *Pastores de Belén* and *Cuatro soliloquios* in which, as I will demonstrate, Lope represents himself in a public process of repentance and avowed change. The image of confession and repentance has fomented the idea that he experienced some form of religious crisis which motivated an intense period of devotional writing, itself a reflection of a newly heightened spirituality. Lope's friend and first biographer, Juan Pérez de Montalbán, introduced the idea that personal events provoked a change in his character and resulted in his ordination. The *Fama póstuma* written in 1636, one year after his death, describes this religious metamorphosis as follows:

Quizá para más bien de la difunta y para mayor desengaño de Lope [...] se resolvió a no admitir tercero casamiento y a buscar nuevo modo de vida humana que le asegurase la divina. [...] Retiróse de las ocasiones más leves; trató sólo del remedio de su alma; solicitó el hábito de la sagrada Orden Tercera, entró en la congregación

²⁹ Catherine Larson, *Language and the 'Comedia': Theory and Practice* (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 1991), pp. 109–10.

del Caballero de Gracia [...] y últimamente, resuelto a lo mejor, se fué a Toledo y volvió sacerdote.³⁰

Montalbán details his passing in saintly terms, ‘los ojos en el cielo, la boca en un crucifijo y el alma en Dios, expiró la suya al eco del dulcísimo nombre de Jesús y de María’ (*OE* II 1548b); he also reveals him as a religious flagellant: ‘averiguado con ver en un aposento donde se retiraba salpicadas las paredes y teñida la disciplina con reciente sangre’ (*OE* II 1547a). It was these images of Lope that prevailed until the rediscovery, in 1863, of letters written to his Patron, the Duke of Sessa, and Barrera’s *Nueva biografía* written in 1864.³¹ Sánchez Jiménez and others have pointed out that Lope’s devotional writing in fact spanned most of his life, starting in 1582, and there is no evidential support to suggest that a revitalized religiosity was the motivation of his religious texts in the period 1611 to 1614 (132–36). He writes: ‘La preocupación religiosa del Fénix [.....] formaba una parte esencial e integrante de su vida, como por otro parte era común en la época’ (135). The religious involvement noted by Sánchez Jiménez probably refers both to evidence provided in his letters and to Montalbán’s descriptions in *La fama póstuma*.

The letters contain clear and consistent references to devotional practice, the first of which is in April 1610. Commenting on a stay in Toledo, he writes: ‘Aqui es toda reformation de costumbres y exercicios espirituales’ and ‘desseo aprender aqui lo que alla no he podido’.³² Lope appears to reflect a desire to improve himself through ‘spiritual exercises’, an activity which he intimates is new. The overall content of these early letters reflects a close involvement with religious practice and alludes to a notable level of piety and devotional activity; but, the references are inconsistent and do not reveal either the scale of the religious commitment or a heightened state of devotion one might expect of someone about to take holy orders. They also contain examples of a far less devout character. Sánchez Jiménez cites an example contained in a letter dated 15th

³⁰Juan Pérez de Montalbán, ‘La fama póstuma’, in Lope de Vega Carpio, *Obras escogidas*, ed. by Frederico Carlos Sainz de Robles, 3 vols (Madrid: Aguilar, 1953), II, pp. 1545b–46a. Further references to this edition are given in the text, identified, where necessary, by the abbreviation ‘*OE*’.

³¹ Cayetano Alberto de la Barrera, *Nueva biografía de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1973), p. 9.

³² Lope de Vega Carpio, *Epistolario de Lope de Vega*, ed. by Agustín Amézua, 4 vols (Madrid: Artes Gráficas, 1941), III, p. 19. Further references to this edition are given in the text, identified, where necessary, as ‘*Epistolario*’.

March 1614, an instance he does not attempt to reconcile with the ‘la preocupación religiosa’ that he ascribes to the poet. The letter in question announces his ordination:

Llegué, presenté mis dimisorias al de Troya, que assi se llama el Obispo, diome Epistola; para que Vex.^a sepa que ya voy acercando a capellan suyo; y sería de ver quán a proposito ha sido el título, pues solo por Troya podía ordenarse hombre de tantos incendios; mas tan cruel como si hubiera sido el que metio en ella el caballo, porque me riñó porque lleuaba vigotes; y con esta justa desesperaçion yo me los hize quitar, de suerte que dudo que Vex.^a me conozca. (137–38)

The frivolous tone of this letter is inconsistent with the sentiments of a man entering the priesthood.³³ Four days later he attempts to dispel any suggestion that his relationship with the actress Jerónima de Burgos has interfered with his duties:

desde que me ordené de Epistola, como significué a Vex.^a no he pretendido otra fiesta de mi venida, que este fue el prinçipal sugeto; aunque esta persona me ha honrado con su natural condicion. (139)

The subject matter of many of the letters is prurient and involve Sessa’s sexual dalliances. Several trace the problems encountered when Lope’s confessor refuses to take his confession unless he stops writing love letters on Sessa’s behalf. They reveal a conflict between his ecclesiastical responsibilities and his duties to Sessa (159). It is a dilemma in which the Duke soon prevails. After a few more protests (159, 160, 161, and 162), Lope continues with his letters without further mention of misgivings, thereby suggesting that his religious principles were compromised. In a letter dated June 1615 Lope describes himself ‘huyendo de las ocassiones en que la lengua de vna muger faboreçida infame puede poner vn ombre de mi háuito’ (189). Whilst the same letter professes his chastity since becoming a priest, the very suggestion of scandal raises doubts about the propriety of his lifestyle. The letters continue to reveal sexual liaisons with ‘La Loca’ (254)³⁴ and at least one other unnamed woman (259); then, towards the end of 1616, they begin to refer to Marta de Nevares (262) who was to become his partner until her death in 1632. Lope himself refers to his sexual proclivity: ‘Ya estos

³³ See Américo Castro and Hugo A. Rennert, *Vida de Lope de Vega (1562–1635)* (Madrid: Anaya, 1968), p. 206.

³⁴ There are numerous references; but for examples see pages 199, 200, 238, 239 and 241.

delitos mios corren con mi nombre, gracias a mi fortuna; que no me han hallado otra passion viziosa fuera de natural amor' (258). He does not refer to any religious misgivings about his sexual activity or moral shortcoming.

Whilst the contents of the letters support Sánchez Jiménez's assertion that religion was an integral part of his life up to his ordination, and that such a level of religiosity was in keeping with the customs of the time, they do not reveal evidence of a devout character; their tone remains always too humorous and playful to allow firm conclusions. His ordination could well have resulted from social and financial, rather than sacred, impulses. The letters after his ordination often reveal a character of a scurrilous nature and impart enough ambivalence to justify the alternative readings that form this thesis.

Rubinos estimates that Lope's religious poetry comprised 600,000 lines of verse (9). His definition includes poems with 'títulos de obras poéticas religiosas' and 'los innumerables versos que entreteje (sic) en los diálogos de sus comedias' of which 'la mayor parte [.....] son religiosos' (9). To the modern critic, fully aware of the huge extent of Lope's secular drama, Rubinos' words suggest an element of exaggeration that appears to have been intended to foment the impression that Lope's reputation as a religious poet has been understated. Sánchez Jiménez puts it in a more balanced way when he concludes that Lope's 'enorme corpus de poesía religiosa' is merely 'representativa de la producción de la época' (136). The extent of Lope's devotional poetry has been confused by the subsequent republication of *suelto* versions within printed collections and the re-editing and re-inclusion of many individual and collections of poems within later books. For example, the *Romancero espiritual* of 1621 comprises the romances previously included in *Rimas sacras* while the *Cuatro soliloquios* of 1612 is reprinted and expanded under the title of *Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* in 1626. *La virgen de la Almudena*, published as a *suelto* in 1623, appears again in *Triunfos divinos* in 1625. In fact, his published religious poetry can be distilled down to a reasonably concise list. Sánchez Jiménez's own version of the canon provides a useful basis: *Los cinco misterios dolorosos de la pasión y muerte de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo con su Sagrada Resurrección* (1582, but never published); *Isidro* (1599); *Cuatro soliloquios* (1612); *Pastores de Belén* (1612); *Contemplativos discursos* (1613); *Segunda parte del*

desengaño del hombre (1613); *Rimas sacras* (1614); *Conceptos divinos al Santísimo Sacramento a la Virgen Nuestra Señora* (1615); *Alabanzas al glorioso San José* (1616); *Revelaciones de algunas cosas dignas de ser notadas de la Pasión de Cristo* (1621); *La Virgen de la Almudena* (1623); *Triunfos divinos* (1625); *Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* (1626); and *Corona trágica* (1627). He also lists *Sentimientos a los agravios de Cristo* of unknown date.

Notably, Sánchez Jiménez does not mention the poem *Jerusalén conquistada*, written during or before 1604, but not published until 1609 (*OE* II 614); it consists of some 16,000 verses and, whilst not referred to by Rubinos, undoubtedly forms part of his total. *Jerusalén conquistada*, whilst ostensibly religious in nature, is described by Castro and Rennert as ‘un libro de caballerías; pero más principalmente es una crónica poética de cosas de España’ (171). It is a reworking of Torquatto Tasso’s epic chronicle of the same name and follows the Crusades of Richard the Lion Heart at the end of the twelfth century. However, it demonstrates a strong Spanish nationalist bias, the extent of which transforms the feats of ‘el inglés Ricardo generoso’ into ‘las heroicas sumas / de España triunfos, de la fama plumas’ (*OE* II 617). The sense of patriotism and the epic character of the work undermine its religious import which limits itself to the extolling of the military might of the Catholic forces over those of Saladin; it should be therefore correctly excluded. The list, though, does include the *Corona trágica*, a 5,000 line versification of a history of the life and death of Mary Stuart. Lope describes the contents as a ‘verdadera Historia de nuestros tiempos’ and an ‘admirable asunto, dilatada materia, sugeto heroico para los ingenios que oy florecen en España’.³⁵ This description indicates that the primary objective is more deliberately nationalistic and historical than religious. Whilst clearly a factor in Spanish religion, the association between patriotism and the Church is not a focus in this study which is directed more to Lope’s personal devotional works. The same principle applies to *Triunfos divinos* dedicated to the Condesa de Olivares for whom Lope acted as personal chaplain.³⁶ The poem, written in octaves like

³⁵ Lope de Vega, *Corona tragica, Vida y muerte de la serenísima reyna de Escocia María Estuardo* (Madrid: Alonso Perez, 1627), ¶ 2.

³⁶ Lope de Vega, *Triunfos Divinos con otras Rimas sacras* (Madrid: Alonso Martin a costa de Alonso Perez, 1625), frontispiece.

Jerusalén conquistada, is also similarly characterized as an epic. *Triunfos divinos* does, though, include additional poems, titled *Otras Rimas sacras*, and, as previously mentioned, the *La Virgen de la Almudena*, subtitled ‘Poema Historico’, indicative of a secondary motivation. *Contemplativos discursos* comprises two pieces: a dialogue of one hundred and ninety lines between Saint John and the young Christ and the Romance ‘A la negacion y lagrimas de san Pedro’ of one hundred and ninety-two lines. This work later appeared together with the short poem *Segunda parte del desengaño del hombre* in 1615. *Las rimas humanas y divinas*, written at the end of Lope’s life, contains only nine devotional poems and therefore the overall tone of the work is not considered to be religious. This brief analysis supports a shorter and therefore more manageable catalogue of Lope’s religious verse than that indicated by Rubinos’ statement.

This study investigates four principal poetic texts: the hagiographical poem *Isidro* (1599); *Pastores de Belén* (1612); *Rimas sacras* (1614); and *Los solioquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* (1612–1626). However, in the course of the thesis I will also consider and utilize examples taken from other works such as *Los cinco misterios*, which was never published, and *Segunda parte del desengaño del hombre*. The choice of works addressed is intended to form a representative sample of his devotional writing.

The study also includes an analysis of two Saint’s Plays, *Lo fingido verdadero* and *Barlán y Josafá*, selected from a list of twenty-five catalogued by Morrison.³⁷ The inclusion of drama in this study responds to the dramatic nature of much of his poetry. The theatre as a dialogic space provides a more obvious indication of the contemporary reception of devotional subjects and can therefore be used as a useful complement to the issues raised in the examination of his verse. The approach has been determined in order to highlight and confirm themes and qualities previously identified in Lope’s poems rather than as being characteristic of his religious drama as a whole, an objective which would necessarily involve a separate and more wide-ranging study. However, the plays chosen are not uniquely illustrative of these points; there are similar characteristics in other plays such as *El divino africano* and *El niño inocente de La Guardia*. Reference to such examples have been excluded from this study for reasons of space. The decision to

³⁷ Robert R. Morrison, *Lope de Vega and the ‘Comedia de Santos’* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000), p. 321.

use the Saint's Plays, rather than the *autos sacramentales*, is guided by the restriction inherently imposed on the poet when working in the obviously didactic framework of church pageant, associated with the *autos*. Likewise, I have excluded reference to the three plays about San Isidro written to support the established image of the saint and therefore governed by an obvious propriety.³⁸ Similarly, it is known that the play *La limpieza no manchada* was specially commissioned to commemorate a particular occasion (Morrison 283); the same circumstances may well have applied to other works for which the playwright may not have been responding to the expectations of a representative paying audience. The omission of identified aspects of his writing is therefore less important than their inclusion which signals a deliberate attempt to engage with the audience or reader.

Whilst many of the points that emerge could equally have been made using a smaller number of texts, in order to prove the range of his religious language and voices, the methodology specifically demands as wide a cross-section as is practical, balanced with the constraints of space and the depth of analysis necessary to support the conclusions. Each of the chosen texts has been addressed in response to a specific subject intended to support the argument of the thesis. As a result of these limitations it has not been possible to fully examine the extent of the intertextual relations and metapoetic and metalinguistic aspects of these works beyond the extent necessary to demonstrate how the poet's literary designs blur the boundary between the religious and the secular and thereby compromise his ostensible devotional purpose. There is, I believe, considerable scope for further detailed examination of these aspects in support of Mark Mascia's conclusion that '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' (Mascia 77).

The first chapter, 'The Poet with a Cause', addresses the formation of religious personae in *Isidro*, written at least ten years before the period of Lope's so-called religious crisis. It demonstrates how Lope developed a poetic speaker around a projection of himself, how he appropriated and promoted a religious subject for political and

³⁸ Elaine Canning, *Lope de Vega's comedias de tema religioso: re-creations and re-presentations* (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2004), p. 45.

personal ends, and how he adopted an apparently orthodox religious position to protect himself against the potential risks of such controversial self-promotion. The chapter also provides the social and historical context for the period in which Lope wrote and examines what appears to be the rudimentary religious dogma of the period. The next chapter, 'The Role of the Poet', examines *Pastores de Belén* in order to understand how Lope understood the poet's art and his responsibilities in relation to the expectations of contemporary literary theorists. It reveals an acceptance of conventional precepts, but shows how he was prepared to compromise such literary ideals for popular appeal with poetic conceits and images that conflicted with conventional doctrinal messages, thereby signaling a readiness to subvert traditional religious interpretations. The third chapter, 'Lope's Dramatic Confession', explores the nature of the autobiographical and confessional personae contained in *Rimas sacras*. It reveals how, despite allusions to autobiography, the structure of the work follows the framework of *a lo divino* and *contrafacta* which, through their association with the genre of courtly love poetry, promote ambiguous readings. The manipulative power of the 'author' in constructing the persona of the protagonist leads us to question the book's ultimate character. Chapter IV, '*Rimas sacras*: A "Curious Frame"', considers the work using Novo's structural analysis as a basis. It reveals a haphazard design which, while conforming to the requirement for affective religiosity endorsed by the Council of Trent and the *Spiritual Exercises*, does not comply with any one didactic model nor impart any coherent theological message. Rather, the book is shown to constitute a discourse which primarily revolves around the emotional tribulations of the narrator's relationship with his God. By comparing the work with the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz and José de Valdivielso, Lope's search for the effable and dramatic is shown to be designed to expose contradictions rather than provide resolution or approximation to God. It reveals how the poet's tendency to hyperbole, at times, produces images that appear to breach the bounds of decorum and identifies traces of an emerging idea of selfhood in tension with authority. The fifth chapter, 'Death and Disillusion', explores *Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* as an example of Lope's asceticism in order to examine his attitude to death. It demonstrates how the prose versions of the poems impart a clearer idea of the state of mind of the narrator than their

verse equivalents, something that confirms the efficacy of poetry to stir emotions rather than promulgate doctrine. It also identifies and examines an underlying discourse attributable to *desengaño* and a wider societal unease. It exposes the dramatic potential and conflictive nature of these 'Baroque paradoxes'. The last chapter, 'Invisible Bullets', reviews his drama to provide a comparison with the voices identified in his poetry. The two plays studied reveal similar ambivalence and ambiguity, but, arguably, in more pronounced and noticeably subversive ways. What emerges in these plays is a notion of troublesome individuality ineffectively contained by Church and state. Greenblatt explains how the theatre, as a harmless arena for expending 'social energy', allows for such discourses without retribution.³⁹ This suggests that the audience would not only have noted these ambivalences, but would have delighted in 'alien voices' as a form of catharsis before submitting once again to monolithic control. Simerka's observation of the 'presence of multiple discourses of power and ideology' (230) endorses the application of this concept within the Spanish *comedia*. I suggest that, in his religious poetry, Lope achieves something similar; he was, at heart, a dramatist and he displays the impersonal and, in fact, anti-personal nature of his ideas of religion in conflict with the sense world of human experience. Additionally, as social commentary, his religious poetry reveals a society in a state of uncomfortable subjection to authority.

³⁹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 7.

Chapter I

Isidro: The Poet with a Cause

This chapter examines the poem *Isidro*, written in 1599, ten years before the period of Lope's so-called religious crisis. It highlights several features that would become characteristic of his later work. In particular, it investigates how the poet fashions the poetic speaker of the poem as a direct representation of himself as author and aligns the interest of this narrative persona with that of his subject, Isidro, for whose canonization the poem campaigns. The association creates a range of nuances which subvert the poem's apparently altruistic motivation. By making the speaker a metonymic substitute for the prospective saint, the poem equates the poet's role with that of the soon to be beatified Isidro and thereby draws an ironic comparison between the possibilities of self-fashioning within the text and the propaganda constructed in the same way for the prospective saint. The self-promotion implicit in the association with Isidro and the metafictional rhetoric of the text as poetic product is in contrast to the stated religious and nationalistic agenda served by the poem. The work is framed as a self-conscious literary exercise served by intertextual and metalinguistic references which make explicit the literary appropriation of the subject; but, it also contains a subtext of social and political commentary which further erases the boundary between the secular and religious and confuses the distinction between devotional and literary effect. The identification of these characteristics in *Isidro* will serve as a useful comparison for similar features in later chapters.

Isidro recounts the life and miracles of San Isidro who is presumed to have lived in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries near Madrid. The work was published in early 1599; but, in the opinion of Sainz de Robles, was written between then and 1596 when Lope met fray Domingo de Mendoza and was handed the historical details of Isidro's life, which primarily consisted of a history written in the mid thirteenth-century by fray

Juan Gil de Zamora.¹ Until 1588, when Mendoza started to press for his canonization, Isidro was merely an ‘objeto de cierta tenue devoción local en una pequeña área situada entre Madrid y Guadalajara’.² In 1596 the Cortes backed an official request to the Pope for Isidro’s canonization, a request that met with a lukewarm response in 1599 after the publication of Lope’s poem. The cause lost momentum when the court moved to Valladolid in 1601, but was revitalized on its return in 1606; however, it was not until 1619 that Pope Paul V finally gave approval for Isidro’s beatification and then, in 1622, Pope Gregory approved his canonization. Lope played an important part in poetry competitions organized as part of the fiestas held to commemorate both events (Márquez Villanueva 106–14, Castro and Rennert 162). His involvement with the process of Isidro’s canonization spanned at least twenty-six years and is marked, not only by the poem *Isidro*, but also by the play *San Isidro, Labrador de Madrid*, written in the same year, and two later plays, *La niñez de San Isidro*, and *La juventud de San Isidro*, both performed at the 1622 celebrations (Castro and Rennert 248–52 and 264–65). Isidro clearly therefore had an important significance for Lope, as he did for madrileños of the period. Márquez Villanueva notes how the ‘entusiasmo isidrista es claramente paralelo al afincamiento y arraigo de la Corte en Madrid’ (26). The canonization was part of a campaign that sought to provide Madrid with its own patron saint and to add support to the endorsement of Madrid as the permanent home of the court. The elevation of Isidro from an obscure local saint to the patron saint of Madrid is a fabrication which had political motivations, one in which Lope played a willing and determining part for both personal and patriotic reasons. Márquez Villanueva writes: ‘San Isidro, es [.....] un perfecto ejemplo de un santo “construido” y dicha responsabilidad mitopoética ha sido asumida por Lope como una de las grandes razones de su vida en el arte’ (125). Isidro’s literary construction has parallels with Lope’s own self-fashioning in the poem and his objective of attaining the post of royal chronicler (Castro and Rennert 251–52). The creation and promotion of Lope’s own literary identity is a process I will illustrate in the study of the poem.

¹ *OE* II, p. 365; Timoteo Rojo Orcajo, *Las fuentes históricas de “El Isidro” de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Tipografía Católica, 1935), pp. 39–47; and Castro and Rennert, p. 132.

² Francisco Márquez Villanueva, *Lope: vida y valores* (Puerto Rico: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1988), p. 26.

Several critics have commented on the close assimilation of the poem's narrative voice with that found in more explicitly autobiographical texts. Castro and Rennert note that 'el poema no abandona nunca el tono descriptivo, pero es perceptible que la visión personal de Lope late bajo la elegancia de esas quintillas saltadores' (136). They appear to attribute the work to some form of heartfelt design generated by feelings resembling the 'authenticity' referred to in the Introduction. Audrey Aaron, in particular, supports this view. For her, it is Lope's uncontrollable religious sensibility that draws him to this subject. She refers to 'la sensación de que (Lope) vive su tema' and concludes it is a celebration of 'un santo por el que siente una honda simpatía personal' (70). The prologue declares Lope's purpose as 'por la dulçura del amor de la patria [.....] y por la deuocion deste Labrador suyo que todos los que en ella nacimos, tenemos por padre'.³ Lope suggests religion and patriotism as motives for the poem, but also identifies himself with the saint in the words 'Labrador suyo'. From the outset, therefore, Lope associates himself as poet with the subject of his poem and invites the reader to link him metonymically with the potential saint for whose canonization he is campaigning. The cause of Isidro and the cause of the poet are clearly not based on the same moral premise and the notion that Lope wanted to create his own image around that of the saint has a distinctly subversive nuance. His appropriation of Isidro for literary and personal purposes alerts us to a similar possible motivation in all his devotional writing. Religious lyric was a genre that enjoyed a certain kudos and reflected a social status that would have enhanced his reputation as a writer known largely for popular commercial theatre. The ambiguity of this conceit is a common feature of his religious writing, one that I refer to throughout this thesis.

Constructing a persona

Isidro is a chronicle of the saint's life and miracles written as a third-person omniscient narrative in an epic and dramatic style. It is permeated with Lope's authorial presence. He is not only in evidence as the author, but also the narrator and, at times, presents himself as a character in the story itself. The work is written and dedicated to the 'Villa de

³ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Isidro. Poema Castellano* (Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1599), ¶ 3. Further references will be to this edition and indicated in the text.

Madrid' who the narrator addresses directly at several points during the book. The opening introductory verses outline the basis of the endeavour and capture the declamatory style in which the narrator engages directly with the supposed reader:

Vos, Madrid, patria dichosa
Deste Labrador, y mia,
Oyd mi dulce Thalia,
Que ya en mar tan espaciosa
Lleuo vuestra luz por guia.

Si de vn hijo vuestro escriuo,
Y de serlo yo reciuo
Tal bien por el y por vos,
De mi recibid los dos
Aqueste don primitivo.

Y vosotras vegas santas,
Oyd a Isidro y a mi,
Que si Vega, y vuestra fuy,
Y el estampó en vos sus plantas,
Tambien las ha puesto en mi. (2–3)

From the beginning he creates a bond between the 'patria' of the reader, 'Vos, Madrid', the subject, 'este labrador' and the author, 'mia'. This sense of unity is defined within both a filial and geographical analogy. They are all sons of the heritage of the 'patria' and the hallowed physical space they collectively inhabit, the 'vegas santas'. The pun on his own name and the ambiguity of the word 'plantas' sets up a metonymy and synecdoche that stresses a union between the land of the fields of Castile and Spain and the printed word. Isidro imprints himself, 'estampó', on the land as the author does on the page. Crops and art symbolize a shared lineage and community across time that is the collective growth of each and all madrileños, both physically and spiritually, and whose source is Isidro. Cohesion is a dominant feature in the language, as the use of possessive pronouns demonstrate; Isidro is 'Labrador divino *mío*' (78b, my emphasis), 'vuestro' (251a and 253b) and, on repeated occasions, 'nuestro' (9b, 74b, 117a, and 249b). Maria and Isidro are '*nuestros* casados' and '*nuestros* labradores' (115a–b); the river Tajo is '*nuestro* rio' (78b). This all serves to accentuate a strong communal bond between reader and author.

Lope's part in creating this mutual bond is made clear; it is his pen and hand that are the instigating forces behind the enterprise: 'mi pluma mi lengua y mano' (220a). He is the self-appointed chronicler of the 'sucinta historia' (254b), 'Y assi, de fama, y de vista / ya soy vuestro coronista' (79b). The reader is constantly reminded of his co-presence alongside Isidro: 'oyd a Isidro y a mi'. They are reading about Isidro; but they are reading him. 'Vega' the poet is established as the narrator. The adoption of the hagiographical campaign for Isidro, in which the author is represented as his metonymic substitute, has a distinctly subversive connotation in which self-interest is blurred with devotion. The ambivalence inherent in the poet's dual function in *Isidro* anticipates a conflict between religious and literary purposes that runs throughout his devotional writing.

Sánchez Jiménez interprets this ubiquitous authorial presence as part of a deliberate act of self-fashioning designed to promote Lope's social and literary standing. There is nothing to disprove that view. The final verses of *Isidro* function as an epilogue to Lope's efforts and their objective:

Y yo, puesto que no enbidio
 (Aunque es la fama la joya
 En que el trabajo se apoya)
 La fama que el grande Ouidio
 Pide a los Dioses de Troya,
 Ni a bronce y marmol apremio
 Del coro de Apolo el gremio,
 que a Dios de quien todo emana
 Pide mi musa Christiana
 A Isidro, que pida el premio. (256a)

The 'premio' is at once the parenthesized jewel of fame of Isidro's beatification, Isidro's intercession with God for Lope's soul, and the poet's own recognition. The term 'gremio' provides an image of workmanship while the 'musa Christiana' is an oxymoron that takes an implicitly secular image and sacralizes it. All these images reinforce the idea that the project is enveloped in a poetic self-consciousness. The dedication to the 'Insigne Villa de Madrid' contains further comments on Lope's purpose:

escriuo su vida, porque estaua a cuenta del cielo su memoria: ésta presento a mi patria en reconocimiento de ser su hijo; de suerte que el don, el tiempo, y la mano, todo es suyo, y la causa de mi amparo, la de ser su hechura. (¶¶ 1)

The notion ‘hechura’ has three possible connotations. It could be a reference to the poet as God’s or heaven’s creature and servant, ‘del cielo’, in which the relationship between patron and client sees the work as a heaven sent commission. It could be an identification with the ‘patria’, whose son Lope also is, thereby setting up a filial relationship between the writer and his work, or, finally, the making of a Saint.⁴ The book’s stated rationale therefore oscillates between religious, personal, and poetical motivations. He aligns his poetic gifts with divine inspiration. The idea of his talent, his ‘don’, being a divine gift now repaid through his divine poetry as obligation in a reciprocal act is a theme also discussed in the next chapter and is a metaphor throughout Lope’s religious poetry. The notion of divine inspiration is balanced by humility. He tempers his eulogy to Isidro in Canto V with modesty:

Y si tu ser soberano
Ofende mi ruda mano
Labra mi ingenio mejor,
O celestial Labrador,
Pues eres ya cortesano. (122b)

The conceptualization of his art conveyed in the description of his ‘ruda mano’ associates his enterprise with the divine Isidro even as the ‘labrador’ is dignified and becomes ‘cortesano’; all that may be lacking is the additional application conveyed in the word ‘labra’.

The self-consciousness of the process of writing and the involvement and presence of the writer is a deliberate device. Several times in the work the narrator’s voice breaks in and assimilates itself into the text. For example, at the end of Canto VIII, in the process of recounting Isidro’s visit to a hermitage, the fictive writer interrupts a monk’s story to bring the chapter to a close:

⁴ For the metaphor of ‘poem-as-progeny’ see Tyler Fisher, ‘Imagining Lope’s Lyric Poetry in the “Soneto primero of the *Rimas*’ in *A Companion to Lope de Vega*, ed. by Alexander Samson and Jonathan Thacker (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008), pp. 63–77.

Y estando con este intento:
Pero interumpase el cuento
Que el monge a Isidro refiere,
Que para lo demas quiere
Mi pluma tomar aliento. (205a)

The last line is a *prosopopoeia* and metonym that inserts the authorial function into the third person narrative and draws the reader's attention to the act of writing. The 'aliento' is a stylized metaphor for the introduction of the pause necessary to revitalize and increase the intensity of his poetry, his 'pluma'. The effect of a narrator placing himself self-consciously within the poem adds to its immediacy and heightens the dramatic quality of the representation. The narrator begins Canto IX with an invocation to the Virgin and then uses the same self-dramatizing device as a means to return to the monk's account:

Y vos imagen divina
De mi patria, y de Madrid,
Esta intencion recibid,
Y el amor que en vos me inclina
Como Señora admitid.
[.....]
Con pluma sola nací
Como el ave, aunque hombre fuí:
Esta os doy; el mundo agora
Escuche quien sois, Señora,
Que ya el monje dize assi: (208a)

In Canto X the figure of the author again breaks into the narrative, dramatizing the reaction to the intensity of his own description of the moment when Isidro enters heaven:

Mas donde voy desta suerte
En extasis tan altiuo
Que digo, canto y escriuo? (248b)

The narrator is unable to distinguish the act of writing from the experience he depicts and he expects the reader to be overcome with the same ecstasy. The extensive interjections

of the narrator in the poem, together with the establishment of narrator as author, have a twofold effect: they encourage the reader to identify Lope with Isidro and create a direct and dramatic access to Isidro. The narrator not only professes total commitment to the bond with his subject, but also, while displaying a sufficiently decorous amount of humility, suggests that he and Isidro could reverse their respective roles:

Esto os ofrece vna Vega,
Que en las que Isidro piso
Humildemente nacio;
Quien lo que tiene no niega
Todo lo que pudo dio.

Si ninguna mortal vista
Puede ser, gran Dios, que asista
Al Sol de esse resplandor,
Yo vengo a ser Labrador
Quando Isidro coronista. (255b)

Both have shared the same heritage and have done their best in the eyes of God thereby creating credentials sufficient to support the author's role as chronicler. At the same time, though, there is an implication that such a role merits equivalent reward.

Throughout, the work uses the language of artistic creation. The second stanza of the book sees a comparison of the narrator to a musical instrument:

Si voz y plectro me falta,
Mi ronco instrumento esmalta,
Palestina virgen Pales,
De las cuerdas celestiales
Del Alemania mas alta.
[.....]
Pongamos prima á la Lira, (2a)

The 'instrumento' is 'ronco' and the end product may not have succeeded: 'si he faltado, perdonad' (255b). The language is tempered with a sense of humility, almost a false modesty. The 'cuerdas celestiales' evoke an Orphic connotation which underlines the poetic nature of his enterprise. The image of the lyre suggests an intertextual reference to Garcilaso's 'baja lira' in the 'Ode ad florem Gnidi' and highlights the use of stock poetic

images.⁵ ‘Alemania’ resonates with Garcilaso’s ‘alemanes’ whilst ‘Palestina’ and ‘Pales’ play with his ‘palestra’, thereby connoting the idea of poetic joust in which Lope outdoes his opponent by achieving greater sublimity in the use of his images, a challenge conveyed in the words ‘mas alta’. Such intertextuality is more obviously evidenced later in the first sonnet of *Rimas sacras* which is an *imitatio* of Garcilaso’s first sonnet (Garcilaso 37). Lope also uses the pictorial form as a metaphor of artistic creation. The representation of Isidro in Canto VII unexpectedly becomes the description of a painting:

Esta labor nos quedó
Desta historia, que otra no,
Y della alguna pintura
quatrocientos años dura,
Adonde la he visto yo. (176b)

Towards the end of the final Canto Lope refers to his work as a portrait gifted to Isidro:

que tengáis esta memoria,
mas imitando al retrato (254b)

His approach to painting and the topic of *ut pictura poesis* is examined more fully in the following chapter. Here it is important to note how *Isidro* is conveyed as a self-conscious and self-referential act of artistic creation, one in which the author’s persona is never far from the text.

A picture of unity

Whatever the motivation, the cause of Isidro’s canonization occupied Lope for many years. Patriotism and religion are linked in the portrayal of Isidro who becomes an emblem of Christian and Spanish political unity, equally applicable to Madrid, Castille, and Spain together as one cohesive and inclusive identity: Isidro is ‘Vn Labrador Español, / Castellano, y de Madrid’ (44b). The church is depicted as the cornerstone on which this society is built:

⁵ Garcilaso de la Vega, *Poesías castellanas completas*, ed. by Elias L. Rivers (Madrid: Castalia, 1986), p. 93–95.

Alli fue la piedra vngida,
Reparo de nuestra vida,
Por angular del cimientto,
Del Christiano ayuntamiento
Exaltada y conocida. (80b)

The chrisms is compared to the cement with which the church building is held together. The ‘piedra vngida’ carries the dual connotations of pagan sacrificial ceremony and royal coronation. The unity of Spain depends on the contract between God, monarchy, and ordinary man represented by Isidro, as the opening lines of the dedication to the King contained in the preface hint:

Vuestros antecessores le han honrado,
Ya Reyna en Dios, si Labrador ha sido,
juntad el cetro a su diuino arado. (¶ 4)⁶

It is an image of radical Christian egalitarianism which bridges the divide between the monarch and the ‘labrador’. Lope suggests that the King put his political weight, ‘juntad’, behind the simple ploughman, identified with Lope himself. *Isidro* offers a solution through the elevation of Isidro and recognition and reward of his divine nature by the worldly authorities of church and state through beatification. Isidro is represented as a humble and simple farm labourer who has no need for sophisticated education or recourse to lineage to prove his virtue. He espouses Christian values without dogma or doctrine:

No sabio, mas Labrador
[.....]
Mas con rustico vestido (8b–9b)

He follows the Franciscan ideal of dedication to simple devotion and piety.⁷ His path from humble origins to divine status follows an ironic and seemingly paradoxical path. It

⁶ For plough as Christian symbol see Luke, 9. 62, and Deuteronomy, 22. 10. In this context the symbolism is probably connected to the sowing of seed, an allusion to spreading of the Word of God.

⁷ See Aaron, p. 71, Sánchez Jiménez, p. 97, and Márquez Villanueva, p. 57, who note the adoption of the Franciscan model.

is his role as a ‘sieruo fiel’ (53b) and his obedience to a secular master that earns him the miracles that are subsequently bestowed on him and lead to his prospective beatification, an ascent that Lope understands through a metaphor of transformation into a courtier, ‘ya eres cortesano’. This rise to a position of prestige is in tension with the humility that got him there. The miracles themselves are called for by God to reward him for his devotion. He instructs his angels:

Que quiero con este aumento
Sossegar su pensamiento,
Premiando al que tiene arado
Con su oracion y cuydado
El campo del firmamento. (53a)

The heavenly ‘campo del firmamento’ is cultivated through prayer and ‘cuydado’, a reference to his conscientiousness. Curiously, the reward is designed to assuage, ‘sossegar’, his thoughts, as if to remove any hidden reservations he might have over the benefit of his devotion. Notably, it is the miracles associated with Isidro that are evidence of his divinity and not his innate goodness. He is singled out from his peers for actions available to all and not causally linked to the preferential treatment received by him. The book describes six miracles attributed to Isidro: angels are sent by God to plough his fields while he prays (52–65); a wolf is mysteriously slaughtered to protect Isidro while he prays (95); Isidro produces food for a pilgrim when none is available (100); he feeds the poor when there was ostensibly no food (126); he finds water in a sandy desert (178); and brings the horse of his master, Iván, back from the dead (222). The first two miracles are not only given as a reward, they are conferred to enable him to continue his devotion uninterrupted:

Para que a Isidro impidiese
Que la oracion le tuuiesse
Con Dios tanto tiempo vnido. (95b)

Isidro’s story follows a linear path. He is born into a modest household; he marries, has a child, and, after a series of miracles, dies a natural death. It is a simple story that does not follow what Rosenberg regards as the traditional Christian and classical vision of ‘fall

- redemption – reunification’ which we will see is the basis for much of Lope’s later religious writing.⁸ It is an account more in tune with medieval values determined by an inherited *habitus* devoid of the notion of ‘self’ associated with Renaissance humanism.⁹ The individuals within the text are not depicted with the detail necessary to reflect a human story, but neither does the work evince a strong ideological purpose. It falls into a detached middle ground. The recounting of a model life necessarily conveys a broad doctrinal message, but Isidro himself does not sermonize or encourage others to devotion or piety; he is involved solely in his own life. As a result, Lope’s representation lacks a sense of reality and the narrative is imbued with a fairytale, *Beatus ille* quality, underlain by imagery of the natural world. The shepherd’s description of events that took place in and around Madrid link the story with Spain’s national history, but also invest it with a magical, *locus amoenus* property, a characteristic which extends to the work as a whole. The narrator concludes the shepherds’ response to the final miracle at the close of Canto IX as follows:

Cantauan pues los pastores
Estas cosas, y otros tales,
Y que a sus claros finales
Siruieron los ruseñores
De trompetas y atabales.
Y las ninfas de sus faldas
Hecho vn arbol de esmeraldas,
Con esso, y madroños de oro,
Le colgo de vn verde Loro
Con festones y guirnaldas. (230b)

The geographical space of Madrid is presented as an Arcadia, a natural world redolent with mineral and other riches. Marsha Collins quotes Wolfgang Iser when she refers to the pastoral setting as a ‘play space’, an ‘as if’ for writers which forms a ‘fictional mode congenial to the embedded staging of other literary genres’.¹⁰ She suggests that the

⁸ John R. Rosenberg, *The Circular Pilgrimage: An Anatomy of Confessional Autobiography in Spain* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), p. 19.

⁹ See Rosenberg, pp. 16–20; also Sánchez Jiménez: ‘la visión medieval del sujeto como un *habitus* heredado y difícilmente alterable’, p. 7.

¹⁰ Marsha S. Collins, ‘Lope’s “Arcadia”: A Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 57 (2004), 882–907 (p. 884 and p.893).

contemporary reader would have been accustomed to look for alternative discourses and meanings emanating from such a space beyond the immediate and obvious. Lope appears here to merge the pastoral genre in this work with hagiography and thereby create a safe ‘space’ that allowed him to articulate various sub-texts.

The idyllic simplicity of this setting lends itself to the Franciscan ideals which Isidro embodies. Aaron summarizes these qualities:

1) El voluntarismo o anti-intelectualismo de la piedad afectiva; 2) El acento sobre el papel de la pobreza, y 3) La presencia de un acercamiento fraternal a la naturaleza. (72)

These characteristics are apparent throughout. Affective piety and anti-intellectualism are values emphasized in the description of Isidro:

Luego nuestro Isidro tiene
Quanta ciencia le conviene,
Si es Filosofia obrar,
Quien tanto obró por amar,
A ser Filosofo viene. (9a)

Intellectual rationalization, ‘ciencia’, and human endeavour, ‘obrar’, is subsumed within and limited to the adoration of God. Isidro’s poverty and affiliation with the natural world is captured in an analogy with Christ’s birth: ‘entre animales naciendo (12b), [.....] / Criose en esta pobreza’ (13a). The manner in which Isidro is projected as a symbol of Christian unity, used to create a bond between author, reader, as both Madrileño and Spaniard, and text conforms to what Aaron describes as the unifying effect of post tridentine religion which serves to ‘nivelar las alturas de énfasis teocéntrico de la Edad Media y su interés de orden intelectual’. The Church is seen as the homogenizing force for this process which she characterizes as ‘una tendencia *horizontal*’ (32) working in opposition to the divisive aspects of the religion of the Middle-Ages which she terms as ‘vertical’ (31) movement. She refers to the action by which doctrine is brought down to the level at which it could be understood and its application broadened. Aaron sees this as an important aspect of Franciscan devotion which sought to widen the reach of religion by making it accessible to the populace by stressing ‘la Humanidad de Cristo’ (34),

thereby allowing them to identify with Him and be affected by religion without having to resort to theological education. She regards the humanization of Christ as a baroque project in which Lope plays an important part (34): ‘conmovido’ by the spiritual need to ‘estimular la devoción insistiendo en las virtudes atrayentes del cristianismo’ (28). This suggests a religious rather than literary or political purpose. However, while the poem is consistent with the religious precepts she recognizes, it cannot be read solely as a Christian treatise. Lope never allows the work to become merely a panegyric for Isidro and his Christian values. Instead, he develops a plot and characters that create a dramatic tension which works against the synthesizing process of religion that the overall work appears to espouse. Isidro’s devotion is set against his responsibility to his employer, Iván de Vargas, and his relationship with his fellow farmers whose rumour-mongering leads to aspersions over his wife’s fidelity. Such dramatization, of course, makes the essential story more easily available to the reader, what Aaron describes as the humanizing effect of Lope’s writing, but the dramatic tensions introduce further nuances that transcend the religious values ostensibly promoted. To have simply created a hagiographical account of the devotional aspects of an exemplary life would have produced a one dimensional doctrinal narrative; which *Isidro* is not.

Franciscan devotion, while ostensibly unifying, is anti-elitist and finds its antithesis in the hierarchy of established authority: the leveling force itself serves to highlight inequality. The fundamental tension in this work lies precisely in the contrast between anti-intellectual religious values found in the humanization of Christ and the centralizing control of the established institutional Church. The emancipation of the poor and the dignifying proximity to nature symbolized in the contrast between town and country underlines the division between ‘villano’ and ‘dueño’. These issues are firmly represented in the contrast between Isidro and Saint Isidoro of Seville, his namesake and spiritual predecessor, whose bones were carried by Fernando I to León past Madrid, thereby presaging the arrival of Isidro whose birthplace becomes blessed by the passage of the Saint. The first part of Canto I is occupied with this historical context:

Del santo Isidro que canto,
Por esto el nombre seria,

Si poco despues del dia,
Que passo á Madrid el santo,
El santo en Madrid nacia. (8a)

In order to make the case of his saint's superiority the poet first has to justify Isidro's greatness through the sharing of the Visigothic heritage passed down from Isidoro, 'Assi Isidro a Isidro hereda' (12b), and then accentuate the differences. Whilst the 'Sabio of Sevilla' is bestowed with the honour of the title 'Patron de España, y luzero / De la Iglesia' (7a), the imitation of him by Isidro is limited to humility and goodness: 'que imita el primero en cuanto / fué humilde, perfecto y santo' (9b). Isidoro as a symbol of Seville and Isidro of Madrid symbolize the rivalry between the two cities:

Alli ay baculo dorado,
Aqui arado tosco herrado:
Alli ay capa, aqui capote:
Brocado alli, aqui picote:
Almas alli, aqui ganado. (9b)

Seville, 'alli', is portrayed as emblematic of wealth and flamboyance; the 'brocado' representative of sophistication. Madrid, 'aqui', is seen as the opposite: frugal, hardworking, and attached to the land, 'arado'. The double significance of the word 'ganado' emphasizes that Madrid's wealth lies in something superior to the souls cared for in Seville. The comparison comes dangerously close to criticism. However, by denigrating Isidoro, he would attack the foundation of the religious roots that he ascribes to him and would undermine the basis for his promotion of Isidro's own saintliness. Whatever the motives, *Isidro* reflects a clear endorsement of 'vna fiel ignorancia' rather than the 'temeraria ciencia' (11a) associated with the intellectual and theological development attributed to the Dominican movement:¹¹ Isidro 'imito su santidad, / Pero no imito su ciencia' (8b). While he doesn't specifically refer to the Church Lope appears to be taking an unambiguous stand in the context of Spain at the turn of the sixteenth century. However, as with most attempts to identify unequivocal postures in Lope's work, this one has to be tempered with a reflection on the very nature of the project of

¹¹ Dominicans were the theological advisers to the monarchy (Rawlings, p. 77).

Isidro. Mendoza, with whom he was collaborating, was a Dominican and it is difficult to reconcile this apparently critical, anti-Dominican position. This, though, merely reflects the difficulty Lope has in addressing any religious subject in the scenario of Spain in 1599 in which the Church was not only embroiled in its own ‘drive for conformity’ (Rawlings 147), an effort to standardize religious practices, but also involved within the debates of the *arbitristas*, who as Rawlings explains, were a ‘heterogeneous group of commentators’ attempting to address Spain’s economic and social crisis by putting ‘forward diverse remedies for curing the ills afflicting the body politic’ (Rawlings 120).

Márquez Villanueva construes Lope’s enterprise in this poem as an attempt to enter into these debates. He notes: ‘con su poema de 1599 Lope ha entrado a su manera en el arbitristo del día, retorciéndolo con un inesperado discurso poético y con la paradoja de una reforma antirreformista’ (139). It is in the light of the wider political and social issues facing Spain at the time that several of the themes developed within the poem take on a clearer significance. The utopian society espoused by the poem is in direct contrast to the historical reality of life at the time. Historians paint a grim picture of the loss of political and military power through the squandering of the country’s fortunes on the wars in Holland, the imposition of taxes that made subsistence in the countryside untenable and forced migration to the cities, and the resulting food shortages and poverty for the population as a whole.¹² Rawlings notes ‘the catastrophic level of human devastation wrought by hunger and human disease’ and points to a resurgence of the plague between 1596, the year Lope is thought to have begun work on his poem, and 1602 in which time nine per cent of Castile’s population had died (119). Whilst Márquez Villanueva places the poem within ‘la conciencia de crisis’ (60) that provoked the *arbitristas*, neither he nor any of the other critics that have studied this work have stressed the significance of the historical background in which it was written and should be contextualized. Rawlings describes the tenor of these circumstances which:

prompted educated Spaniards to examine their own consciences in search of an explanation. They began to question the validity of established values and, in particular to reflect upon the whole nature of their relationship with their multi-

¹² See J. H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain 1469-1716* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 285–320.

cultural past. Was the basic philosophy of society, founded on the supremacy of the Old Christian, the orthodoxy of his faith and his dedication to the Catholic cause, which, according to official propaganda, had raised Spain to such greatness, still relevant in such changing times? (139)

Isidro is linked to the Gothic history of Spain; as a ‘Moçarabe godo’ (114b) he bears connotations of the Old Christian that run against the flow of the reforming and progressive current. Lope appears, as with the Franciscan model, to take a reactionary stand. Márquez Villanueva like many others, however, sees Lope as not only a mouthpiece of popular opinion, the ‘mero resonador de un “pueblo”’ (131), but also the spokesperson of the establishment in support of ‘una España monolítica’ (130).¹³ He writes: ‘sus persuasiones ideológicas son la del sector oficial de una villa y Corte nacida al calor de las mismas’ (134). This view appears to negate the complexity of the circumstances which Rawlings and other historians describe. It is these complexities that give access to a wider set of readings of what Lope may have been attempting to achieve. It is my contention that, in presenting alternative views rather than in supporting an official one, he plays on the tensions that existed within society by dramatizing their voices. It is the drama of the situation more than either religious zeal or political ideology that interests him and in achieving his dramatic purpose he needs to appeal to as many sensibilities as possible without damaging the coherence of his overall project.

Rawlings describes how the central and symbolic issue for the reforming movement was ‘limpieza de sangre’, explained as the purity of blood possessed by Old Christians and associated with Spain’s historic greatness and religious supremacy. Legal statutes enshrined discrimination against New Christians many of whom held office in government or the Church. She points out that 1599 was a key year in the debate attempting to reconcile Old and New Christians (139–41). By choosing to take on the cause of Isidro, Lope positions himself against the reforming movement and a significant sector of the aristocracy who possessed dubious lineage as a result of Spain’s multi-cultural past. New Christian readers faced two choices: either to reject Isidro and with him the popular appeal of a campaign for a patron saint, or to accept the work on the

¹³ See José Antonio Maravall, *Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1990), p. 13; and, José María Díez Borque, *Sociedad y teatro en la España de Lope de Vega* (Barcelona: Antoni Bosch, 1978), p. 4.

basis that it was not an attack on either them or their position, rather it should be taken at face value as an historically factual account of a saintly life. In writing *Isidro*, as Márquez Villanueva also suggests, Lope may have genuinely and naively been driven by ‘una espontaneidad sincera y sin segundas intenciones’ (134) connected with the romantic idealism of a ‘misteriosa comunión’ (132) with Isidro and the Spanish people; certainly courting official reproval is not an obvious approach to attain his goals of self-promotion which are evidenced by the frustration in his failure to achieve royal patronage or any other official appointment during the course of his career (Castro and Rennert 251–52). However, Lope cannot have been unaware of the potential controversy. The question remains as to why he was prepared to attach himself so publicly not only to a particular religious image, but to link that religious image with such a potentially controversial issue as purity of blood. Uncertainty of motivation and ambivalent interpretations recur in much of his religious poetry and drama and echo the subversive vein highlighted in his political works by Melveena McKendrick, a subject to be addressed in later chapters. The contentiousness of the issues in which *Isidro* is embroiled suggests that it was stimulated more by the dramatic potential of the ambiguity and tensions produced than any ideological or religious motivation. On the one hand, his unashamed self-promotion as Isidro’s chronicler goes against the virtue of humility so firmly associated with his hero and, on the other hand, his thinly veiled challenge to a particular section of society is incompatible with the unifying purpose the work as whole manifests. He perhaps, therefore, draws on the dramatic and affective potential of the uneasy tensions within contemporary life rather than attempting, even naïvely, to resolve them.

These tensions are represented through the relationship between Isidro and his *amo*, Iván de Vargas who, the narrator stresses, is also of noble Christian blood: ‘Con el Moro exercitado’ (21b). Despite their social difference they develop a friendship: ‘Recibiale su dueño, / Y no con amor pequeño’ (24a). Incited by the devil his fellow workers complain to Iván that Isidro is not undertaking his duties properly. They see him as ‘vn hombre perezoso’ (49b) who spends more time in his devotion than working in the fields. Their complaints are summarized as follows:

Porque dezir que oracion

Le leuanta con la aurora,
Es industria con que dora
Su engaño, y la perdicion
Del campo que labra agora. (51a)

Worldly and divine responsibilities are set against each other and shown to be contradictory; the 'industria' of prayer leads to 'la perdicion / Del campo'. This situation is resolved in the first miracle by Angels summoned to work Isidro's fields while he prays (53). Iván, awed by Isidro's miraculous powers, defers to him. The relationship is defined as a form of role reversal. Overwhelmed by his first miracle Iván tells him:

Perdona, si te ofendi,
Y labra mi hazienda assi
que yo se, sieruo de Dios,
La ventura de los dos,
Tu por Dios, y yo por ti. (66b)

Isidro proceeds to cement this relationship with further demonstrations of his divine favour in miracles, two of which directly affect his master: the cure of Ivan's lame horse and the discovery of a source of water in an arid summer. Further, echoing Christ's miracles, he produces food for the needy. In the context of the severe economic hardship which the country faced these scenes take on a different resonance. They point to the importance of recourse to divine intervention to resolve privation and highlight the inability of the Church to provide practical support for the basic necessities of the people. The predicament has a potentially satirical undertone which exposes how those in authority are unable to address the situation and must now rely on a miracle to resolve their plight. The implication is that Isidro is an exemplary historical model but also a potential engine of change in the present. It is a suggestion reinforced by the way Lope likens his birth to the nativity and signals Isidro's role as a new Christ, born to the Spanish people:

Nacio en Madrid finalmente,
Nuestro Labrador diuino,
Y aunque aca villano vino,
Boluio ilustre, y excelente,

Al trono del Vno y Trino. (12b)

Lope's Arcadian vision of the landscape of Madrid provides a rustic, pure, and untainted backdrop as an ideal basis for a model education:

Que á donde libros, y ciencia
No enseñauan sus primores
Con Retoricos colores,
Despertaun su inocencia
Los campos, aguas y flores. (15b)

As Márquez Villanueva points out, the simplicity of this vision is in direct contrast to the picaresque urban literature popular at the time (67). The symbolism of rural purity versus the tainted life of the city was a commonplace in the literature of the period.¹⁴ While at face value this utopian model cannot be considered controversial, for many readers it must have evoked a wry comparison with the reality of a nation in the throes of 'desengaño'. There are three ways to read this work, none of which are mutually exclusive: a simple hagiographical account for a deeply religiously motivated society in need of spiritual rejuvenation, an escapist fantasy, or a satirical allegory of the troubles facing the country without any clear message or solution. Márquez Villanueva's reading assumes the first position and situates Lope alongside the so-called establishment. He dismisses its religious qualities as hollow: 'aquel poema tan ostentosamente religioso y a la vez tan poco espiritual' (59). He sees it as a product of Lope's 'genio propagandista' (133) offering political support to a troubled monarchy (60). Melveena McKendrick highlights the subtle approaches Lope adopts to open his work to alternative readings. She herself rejects Márquez Villanueva's position: (he) 'underestimates both the complexity of Lope's personality and the crucial relevance between his work and its context' (201). This poem is also available to other interpretations; its ultimate meaning is encoded, in a manner of 'decir sin decir'.¹⁵ By uniting his subject with simple Christian

¹⁴ This is illustrated by Fray Antonio de Guevara's 1539 work *Menosprecio del corte y alabanza de aldea*. See Carmen R. Rabell, 'Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea: ¿Crítica lascasiana, propaganda imperialista o 'best-seller'?', *AIH*, XI, (1992), 245–53.

¹⁵ Francisco Bances Candamo, as quoted by Alexander A. Parker, *The Mind and Art of Calderón* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 246. See also McKendrick, p. 31.

virtues Lope ensures his poem cannot be attacked. It is an intrinsic property of religious language that it can only be questioned by heretics. Alexandre Leupin writes: ‘Even though it is universal, Christian truth is addressed not to all but to only those that admit its possibility’.¹⁶ This is a difficulty that faces all approaches to religious literature. By not straying from a defensible Christian position or argument Lope can appropriate the religious medium to apply the same subtle ambiguities found in his secular work.

Popular appeal

The relationship between Isidro and Iván does not challenge societal expectations. As with plays such as *Fuenteovejuna* and *Peribañez*, in which the hierarchical relationship is only broken through an abuse of power, harmony is preserved. Mutual respect demonstrates their bond; on his deathbed, Isidro, in an act of humility and respect, considers whether he should seek pardon from Iván for the negligence of his duties:

No se detiene en pensar,
Si podra restituir,
O perdon a Iban pedir
De su negligente arar,
Y perezoso seruir. (241b)

God, rather than natural justice, brings about a form of role reversal; for no reason other than recognition of piety, Iván gifts Isidro all his land and income:

Desde oy mi hazienda, y mi renta
Te doy, Isidro, sin cuenta,
Que no dara mal la agena
Quien la da de si tan buena,
Que el mundo sus gracias cuenta. (66a)

There is an element of escapist fantasy about this inversion and reversal, the world upside down, as the labourer takes on the trappings of the master. The empowerment of Isidro within the master servant relationship is typical of several of Lope’s dramatic works.

¹⁶ Alexandre Leupin, *Fiction and Incarnation: Rhetoric, Theology and Literature in the Middle Ages*, trans. by David Laatsch (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 51.

Peribañez and Casilda, facing summary execution at the hands of the King are, contrary to all realistic expectations, instead bestowed with wealth and status beyond their imagination.¹⁷ If we accept that *Isidro* was a reflection of popular culture such social utopianism has an obvious appeal. There were seven editions of the book printed in Lope's lifetime (Márquez Villanueva 29). The combination of heroic piety, humble birth, awe, mystery, and miracles amounted to a formula of what Castro y Rennert describe as 'lo fantastico y extraordinario' (133). The poem has a dramatic and visual quality that heightens its emotional power. Pfandl comments on how the Spaniard linked his faith to legends and miracles:

Y era porque toda la nación, colectivamente, con una rara unanimidad, estaba preparada por una ruda e intensificada experiencia de siglos y por su historia medieval, tan rica en batallas, aventuras guerreras y sucesos maravillosos, para sentir la cálida irradiación de lo maravilloso, y con cierta propensión a adornar los acontecimientos religiosos con el canto poético de populares tradiciones, con que había entretejido la historia de las hazañas de los héroes medievales. (154)

All these qualities, firmly embedded in the nation's history and tradition, are found in *Isidro*. The final verses of Canto VII respond to this sense of the epic and marvellous:

Bosques, aues, arboledas,
Flores, y fuentes hazian,
Y las aguas contrahazian,
De suerte que estando quedas
Parece que se mouian.

Esta labor nos quedó
Desta historia, que otra no,
Y della alguna pintura
quatrocientos años dura
Adonde la he visto yo.

Los milagros que pintados
De tiempo antiguo se ven,
O por tradicion, es bien
que tengan credito, honrados

¹⁷ See Lope de Vega, *Peribañez y el comendador de Ocaña* (Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1988), ll. 3000–3130.

Como la historia tambien.

Es del linaje la gloria,
De la guerra la vitoria
Por las armas conocida,
La pintura recibida
Ya tiene fuerça de historia.

En las puertas de ciudades
Armas y letras se hallan,
que en piedras el caso entallan,
Diziendonos las verdades,
que a vezes los libros callan. (176b–77a)

Here ‘tradicion’, ‘la gloria’, and ‘la guerra’, references to the conquest of the Moors described in the opening Canto, together with ‘milagros’, are all drawn together into ‘fuerça de historia’. It is easy to imagine how Isidro’s story, containing all these elements would have captured the public’s imagination. Rawlings notes: ‘In the closing decades of the sixteenth century, saintly devotions and cults took on a new importance in peoples’ lives as they became victims of the acute economic crisis that paralysed the kingdom of Castile’ (92–93). Isidro provided them with a patron saint at a time of insecurity and fear alongside a focus for patriotism and national celebration. Isidro represented a way back to a glorious past that stretched into the mythic time of the Visigoths. *Isidro*, however, was also a vehicle for Lope’s art and he was aware of the ‘gloria’ of a newly canonised saint would bring to his own ‘fama’ (256a).

Isidro provides an example of the model religious practices in early modern Spain.¹⁸

The narrator explains the labourer’s customary routine:

Mas no por andar prissa,
Algún dia perdio Missa,
Ni dexó sus deuociones,
Sus ayunos, y oraciones,
Con igual contento y risa. (34b)

¹⁸ See Rawlings, pp. 79–89, for the applications and requirements of the Council of Trent.

The comment on his disposition, ‘con igual contento y risa’, while carrying out these rituals intimates they were not always conducted by others in good humour. The depiction of an exemplary lifestyle is supported by a lack of religious knowledge. He was taught the rudiments of how to pray and conduct himself:

En su infancia, le ensenauan
A amar á Dios y apartauan
Del pecado con ejemplo. (17a)

But admits to a lack of religious precepts:

Que como soy tan grossero,
De todo punto lo ignoro.
[.....]
No lo pregunto porque
Se atribuya a presuncion,
Que sabe en esta ocasion
Del mas rustico la Fe,
Que el mas Sabio Ciceron.
Ni pienso que he de entender
Aquel increado ser,
Que es Dios Omnipotente
Es mas santa y reverente
Cosa creer que saber. (67b–68a)

The angels sent to teach him provide a basic knowledge. They begin with a caveat that underlines an assumption of incomprehension:

Dezir el conocimiento
De su essencia inaccesible,
Isidro, sera imposible
Al mas alto entendimiento,
Como cosa incomprehensible. (68b)

They then proceed to recount the necessary principles which explain the virgin birth and of the birth and death of Christ and end:

Carne que habitó en el mundo
La Palabra se vistio,
En que se manifestó,

Cuyo misterio profundo
Puedes creer, y entender no.
Y aquella union soberana,
en que divina y humana
naturaleza se vieron
en una persona, hicieron
las tres de quien todo emana (83b)

The simplicity of this instruction confirms the anti-intellectual approach that is the central tenet of *Isidro*. The ‘misterio’ is to be left as a faith which takes precedent over any requirement for understanding. Much of the poem confirms Isidro’s pious devotional life but without promoting additional exemplarity by elucidating, for example, his ‘caridad’ (114b). This absence evinces an air of perfunctoriness that suggests Lope does not want to enter into anything other than broad concepts of Christian doctrine, nor does he expect more from Isidro.

The plot of Isidro’s story touches on two sensitive areas. The first is the matrimonial state. In an obvious parallel to the situation of Joseph and Mary well meaning colleagues are responsible for Isidro’s marriage, an arrangement in which he has no say:

Los labradores atentos
A la bondad singular,
Donde se solian juntar,
Tratauanle casamientos
De lo mejor del lugar. (24b)

The marriage of such a saintly person is justified by relating it to a long line of high profile Biblical matrimones:

Que no hauer pecado Adan,
Por el estado le dan
En que el mas honrado fue,
Casado fue el gran Noe,
Sem, Iaphet, Loth y Abrahan. (27b)

The second is procreation and the subject of the immaculate conception. Here, again, there is a sense of awkwardness. The birth of Isidro’s child is deliberately likened to that

of Christ, 'De Iesus, Maria, y su esposo / Eran vna estampa hermosa'. This reference is supported by a parenthetical apology from the narrator, '(Maria, perdonad vos; / Iose, tambien perdonad)' (89b), a suggestion the poet was determined to use the conceit despite the possible negative reaction of some readers. The conception of Isidro's child is portrayed as a lapse of divinely gifted virginity which 'en nuestros dos faltó', but was conducted in an appropriate manner: 'Mas no falto la temblanza, que esto alcanza merito en el matrimonio' sin pecado' (89b). There is a precision in this qualification which suggests Lope adopts a different treatment between the social and theological issues. The latter he approaches with less ambiguity as he attempts to avoid the possibility of secondary interpretations.

Prurient itch

Isidro's faith in the fidelity of his wife, María, is tested by suspicions provoked by rumours. The treatment is curiously out of proportion and irrelevant to the plot and the miracle that draws the story to a conclusion. The devil's dissemination of the supposed facts of María's adultery occupies more than a chapter (Canto VI and VII) out of the ten that comprise the book. The miracle that proves her chastity sees her cross the Rio Jarama on her cloak. It is preceded by a long section which is designed to accentuate the tensions leading up to the miracle itself which then acts as a form of closure to the Canto, without any moralistic import. The poet appears to exploit the popular subject of 'honour' and relish the poetic scope offered by the inflamed passions generated by male jealousy and its absence from the innocent Isidro. The devil taunts him with the words, 'Y no digas que el honor / Del mundo a ti no te toca', and suggests that the supposed infidelity is his own responsibility, 'Y haze la ofensa mayor, / Quien tu descuido prouoca' (162b). Isidro is almost convinced:

Con aquesta confusion,
Puesto que dudoso estaua,
A Xarama endereçaua
Sus passos, y su passion
que a cada passo aumentaua.

Quantos topaua reñian

Por zelos, todos dezian,
que auian de herir y matar,
Porque era infamia callar
Los que sin honra viuian. (167b)

The dramatization is designed to engage the emotions of the reader, mixing divine with profane; a point reflected by the narrator as he irrupts into the text.

Amor, quien te truxo aqui?
Quando mas lexos, tirano,
Estaua mi pluma, y mano,
De mezclar aqui por ti
Lo diuino a lo profano.

Si en este templo guardado,
Huyendo de tu cuydado,
Me acogi de tu rigor,
Porque no me vale, amor,
La inmunidad del sagrado? (154b)

He comments on the lack of decorum in the generic hybridity of his medium and simultaneously introduces subtle allusions to autobiography. This is an attempt by the imaginary author to escape love's tyranny and an acknowledgment that religion does not render him immune. His worldly experience cannot reconcile human with divine love and the 'sagrado' is unable to protect him from the 'profano', both in the form of his own love and in his writing, his 'pluma y mano'. The profane in this context involves an enthusiastic amount of lasciviousness: 'Salga del infierno amor / Lasciuo, infame, y grossero' (143b). Its inclusion is justified by classical and Biblical precedents of lust and false rumours, one of which is of Susana in the garden (159), an example invoked again to even greater impact in *Pastores de Belén*. Together with the section on Maria's fidelity, the overall effect is of titillation, belied but nevertheless implicated.

It is perhaps this that Castro and Rennert refer to when they remark 'en todo caso parece cierto que lo menos importante en el poema es aquello que aparentemente es lo esencial: la santidad del héroe. [...] La figura del héroe está tocada de la vulgar

religiosidad de la época' (137).¹⁹ Márquez Villanueva, however, focuses his criticism on Lope's appropriation of his sources: 'Y claro que todo esto era algo más y algo menos que piedad desquiciada, porque el Fénix hacía al mismo tiempo una política personal de lo más desvergonzada'(103). The reference is to what he perceives as Lope's construction of San Isidro (125): 'Lope quiere dotar a España de un mito que a fin de cuentas no es más que proyección ideal de sí mismo' (135). In this view, *Isidro* is a usurpation of a religious subject for personal ends; the desired 'design' of the poem is to see Isidro canonized and Lope himself eternally associated with a saint who he could consider his creation. But Isidro is far from being created in Lope's image. His natural chastity, simplicity and innocence are distant to the sophisticated and conflicted figure contained in his letters and the lustful amorous poet outlined in works such as *El peregrino en su patria* or *Rimas*.

Isidro is a narrative that can be read at different levels. Ostensibly, it is a hagiographical account of simple Christian virtues, an example for the religious benefit of the Spanish people promoting a common value with which to unite the nation. This is Aaron's view. However there is too much obvious conscious self-promotion to wholly support such an undemanding view. The idea of the text as the author's "play-space" provokes further readings. Whilst the Franciscan qualities of uncomplicated devotion and lifestyle appear to reflect what Lope sees as the appropriate model for the nation, they are also tied to the projection of himself as narrator and author. The religion displayed is visual and public; Isidro is seen to pray but the contents of his prayers are not conveyed. The lack of didacticism contrasts with the exemplary nature of the work as a whole. It is an exhibition of a model religious life. The visual essence is reinforced at the conclusion of the poem with a 'retrato' of Isidro:

Era Isidro alto, y dispuesto,
Bien hecho, humilde y modesto,
Nariz mediana, ojos claros,
En ver y en verguença raros,
De andar suspenso y compuesto.

¹⁹ See John Crosbie, *'A lo divino' Poetry: An alternative view* (Durham: University of Durham Press, 1989), p. 62. Crosbie quotes Otis Green about the variation in practice and standards of decency in the Golden Age.

El cabello, Nazareño,
Bien puestas la barba, y boca,
Ni en grande exceso, ni poca,
El rostro, alegre y sereno,
Que la risa siempre es loca. (254b–55b)

The ‘Nazareño’ hair indicates this is a portrait of Christ, an endorsement of the idea that Isidro should serve as a Christological model for the Spanish people. But it is also a projection of an ideal everyman figure, perhaps even a self-portrait of Lope himself. Composure and balance are essential to this image. His nose is ‘mediana’ and his beard neither ‘exceso’ nor ‘poca’. Excess is avoided. His expression is happy and serene but not laughing, an indication of loss of control. He is ‘bien hecho’, a term that describes an indefinable correctness representative of a model figure. But above all the portrait conveys a pose, an artificiality which confirms the importance of outward appearance.

Makings of the repentant sinner

Interestingly, it is only in the prayers on his death bed, contained in the last Canto, that the reader is given access to Isidro’s inner world as the poem begins to interiorize its focus. The reader is drawn into the final confession in which Isidro addresses God in a style similar to that of *Rimas sacras*:

Que dezir que no ha pecado
El hombre, es camino errado;
Assi se acusa el que viue
Iusto, y bendicion recibe
De vuestra mano premiado.

Y pues ay tanta distancia
De nuestra flaca virtud,
A vuestra gran rectitud,
No mireis a mi ignorancia,
Error de mi juuentud.

Conozco, que os ofendi,
Mi error esta contra mi,
Porque a vos jamas se esconde,
Ni pregunto a quien responde

Las maldades que ay en mi. (239a)

The ‘distancia’ between the ‘flaca virtud’ of man and the ‘rectitud’ of God is stressed and the confession of his ‘ignorancia’ and ‘error’ of his ‘juuentud’ comes in stark contrast with the purity of his early years specifically described in Canto I:

No anduuo en juegos ningunos
Con muchachos importunos,
Ni juro, como lo hazen,
Casi primero que nacen,
El nombre de Dios algunos. (13a)

The ‘ignorancia’ he refers to could be the lack of his ‘ciencia’; but this was earlier seen as virtue (9a). The ‘error’ of his youth therefore sits oddly in this context in contrast with his exemplary life and is, perhaps, an autobiographical allusion. But these verses have a formulaic appearance, as if Lope had extracted them as a standard wording from a book of prayer. He dramatizes this confession by presenting it as a soliloquy in the form of an open address and thereby gives the reader, for the first time in the poem, direct access to the protagonist, creating the unusual effect of intimacy within a structure of a public performance, a technique we will see he uses to great effect in *Rimas sacras* for which this section may well have been a prototype.²⁰

Aaron views this project as driven by Lope’s faith, ‘el amor que siente por alguien que nació, padeció y murió conforme al destino humano’ in an effort to ‘estimular la devoción’ (28). Sánchez Jiménez has shown the innate artfulness with which Lope approached his own self-fashioning and creation of religious personae. Lope himself acknowledges the power of rhetoric in the prologue to *Isidro*:

que espero en Dios aumentaran la deuocion en muchos, que ser en verso, parece que mueuen con mayor eficacia (¶¶ 4)[.....] justa cosa es y conueniente, loar a Dios, a su madre, y a los santos, en versos. (¶¶ 6)

²⁰ Notably he also uses the excuse of his youthful transgressions in the Introduction and eight of the sonnets of *Rimas sacras*: Intro l. 55; II l. 4.; V l. 6; XVII l. 10; XXI l. 1; XXIV l. 2; XXVI l. 5; XXIX l. 3; XLV l. 10.

The endorsement of verse as a vehicle to move and stimulate emotions appears entirely appropriate to the stated aim of increasing devotion. However, *Isidro* also demonstrates Lope's willingness to combine religious, patriotic, social, political, and personal themes within a hybrid poem, which, while ostensibly hagiographical and moralizing, ends as 'inclasificable' (Márquez Villanueva 31). The adoption of *Isidro* as a literary "play-space" demonstrates Lope's readiness to harness these agendas at the expense of theological elucidation and to blur the boundaries between the secular and the religious realms. The advancement of his own authority as a poet and the appropriation of the campaign for Isidro's sainthood confuses devotion with self-promotion. It exposes the conflict between the cause of God and the cause of the author and thereby highlights the ambivalence inherent in the written word and its subversive potential both in the hands of poet and reader, what Leupin refers to as 'rhetoric's inherent satanism'(56). Lope's construction of both Isidro and his own literary persona within the text is generated in a world of manipulation and artistic creation that tests the line dividing art and religion. His readiness to unite the religious message of the work with artistic and personal agendas of his own provides grounds for seeing his devotional works as fundamentally ambivalent. In the next chapter we will examine how Lope viewed the role of the poet and the relationship between religious truth and language.

Chapter II

Pastores de Belén: The Role of the Poet

Sánchez Jiménez has observed how Lope's adoption of religious poetry as a palinode of his secular love poetry reflects an adaptation of the classical poetic hierarchy of 'Virgil's wheel'. In its Christian form, epic poetry, seen by Virgil as the most prestigious of poetic styles, is replaced by religious poetry as the pinnacle of literary achievement. He writes:

Para establecer la nueva clasificación, el Fénix se dedica febrilmente en obras como las *Rimas sacras* a subrayar la importancia de la inspiración divina en este género de poesía, y a resaltar con insistencia la dignidad de la literatura sacra. (167)

However, Lope's declared intention to sublimate the worldly for a new found divinity in his life and poetry can also be explained within the Augustinian, Neo-Platonic model, referred to by O'Connell as a 'curve of spiritualization' (12), an 'ascensional aesthetic' which devalues the 'sense-world' and encourages the rejection of the "mendacious" image [...] for a higher world where alone "true" beauty dwells' (22). This paradigm, though, is paradoxical. The 'mendacious image' lies at the centre of two contradictions. The first is that the attempt to capture and record this 'true beauty' through words is logically flawed because it is based in the 'sense-world'. Burke explains: 'the supernatural is by definition the realm of the "ineffable". And language by definition is not suited to the expression of the "ineffable"',¹ 'words are necessarily borrowed from the realm of everyday experience' (7). He proceeds:

¹ Kenneth Burke, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 15. See also p. 1: 'The Biblical avowal that *man* is made in *God's image* has made us wary of the reversed anthropomorphic tendency to conceive of God in *man's image*'.

Since God by definition transcends all symbol-systems, we must begin, like theology, by noting that language is intrinsically unfitted to discuss the “supernatural” literally. For language is empirically confined to terms referring to physical nature, terms referring to socio-political relationships and terms describing language itself. (15)

The second contradiction lies in the rhetorical power of words. The *Confessions* reveal Augustine to be fully conscious of the deceptive nature of language. He writes: ‘I used to teach the art of rhetoric. Overcome by greed myself, I used to sell the eloquence that would overcome an opponent’.² O’Connell recognizes the ‘paradox’ Augustine presents to Platonists: ‘how could so great a literary artist, in his passion for truth, become the very same man whose theory of art amounts, at times, to the banishment of art?’ (2). Lope, like Augustine, uses words to deceive. His creation of literary personae deliberately blurs the distinction between fiction and autobiography in a mechanism that, as Ife observes, was well worn in Golden-Age literature: ‘the poet’s formal device of changing from third-person narrative to first person’.³ Lope’s characterization of his religious persona is thereby seen to conform to a poetic model in which the poet’s ‘protective mask of conscious artistry and controlling authority is drawn aside to reveal the impassioned features of what by contrast appears to be real life’ (Ife 30). At a conceptual level, Lope’s employment of literary means to achieve his salvific purpose implies a possible deceit which belies the poetic purity he espouses in attempting his communion with God. Lope, like all artists, ‘is out to dupe his audience, to pass off the copy as the real thing’ (Ife 37). Ife points out how this compromises Platonic theories on both ‘moral’ and ‘metaphysical’ grounds. The moral argument is that it encourages the ‘sympathetic indulgence through art in emotions’ (31) and a ‘vicarious indulgence of feelings’ (36). The metaphysical, which essentially is the one expounded by Burke, relates to Plato’s theory of archetypes according to which ‘poetic imitation can scarcely be taken seriously, since the poet can only imitate appearances never reality itself’, which, put simply, means that words will never do justice to the ‘real’ thing.⁴ ‘The poet’,

² Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 53.

³ B. W. Ife, *Reading and fiction in Golden-Age Spain: A Platonist critique and some picaresque replies* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1985), p. 30.

⁴ Arthur Terry, *Seventeenth-century Spanish poetry: the power of artifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 38.

says Terry, ‘is always two steps away from reality and condemned by the very nature of his art to remain there’ (37).

Pastores de Belén sets out to match the sublimity of its religious subject with an equivalent poetry. In the introduction, Lope’s narrator asks:

¿cómo podrá mi voz cantar el día
que vió la tierra tu mortal vestido
de las puras entrañas de María?⁵

The work appears, therefore, to be Lope’s attempt to answer this question and represents his idea of how poetry met this challenge. This chapter will examine *Pastores de Belén* in the context of the Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian critical literary theories, which Terry sees as lying at the core of sixteenth-century Spanish poetry (37). It has the aim of identifying how Lope understood the role of poetry and its application within the religious sphere. Furthermore it will examine the ways in which the work can be seen to compromise the aesthetic goals that he espouses.

Establishing a cause

Pastores de Belén, prosas y versos divinos, as its title suggests, is a work comprised of both prose and poetry. Lope refers to it in a letter dated by Amezúa to October 1611 as ‘vn libro’ (*Epistolario* III, 70) rather than classifying it by genre. Similarly, a letter dated September 1605 refers to his *Rimas* as ‘escritos’ which he included in ‘vn libro’. The same letter mentions ‘esse librito de las Fiestas de Toledo’ which contains ‘versos’ and *Jerusalén conquistada*, a work of epic poetry noted merely as ‘Mí *Jerusalén*’ (*Epistolario* III, 5–6). Such references imply he viewed each of these as an individual publication rather than considering it necessary to distinguish their constituent forms, something that supports my use of the term ‘poet’ in its wider context as writer, rather than, specifically, as a composer of verse.

Terry observes how the Renaissance critic’s evaluation of poetry rested on the poem’s ‘cause’ and the ‘poet’s intention in writing it’. Such factors, he writes, impose conditions against which the poet’s ‘artistic skill’ (39) can be measured. The artist’s ability to

⁵ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Pastores de Belén*, ed. by Antonio Carreño (Barcelona: PPU, 1991), p. 86. All further references will be to this edition unless otherwise indicated.

express his 'cause' in an 'appropriate' (42) manner, he explains, was the key to its effect. The term 'appropriate' here refers to the notion of 'decorum' which applies a particular 'style' to the subject of the poem.⁶ The measurement of the effect and in particular the 'truthfulness' of the poet and subject was not achieved by way of the author's experience as a measure of making it true, but by how convincing it was in relation to the subject or author's intent. The clear establishment of the 'cause' or intent of a poetic work was, therefore, of key importance. Terry explains how the main criteria for Renaissance literature was to follow the Horatian maxim of *prodesse et delectare*. Terry writes:

For any Renaissance poet, the short answer to the question 'what is poetry for?', as we have seen, lay in Horace's phrase *prodesse et delectare*: poetry should give both profit and pleasure, or, as C.H. Sisson paraphrases it, 'the poet should not only give pleasure but say something sensible'. (38)

He stresses that 'profit' and 'pleasure' in the Renaissance context were not the two mutually exclusive concepts that we might consider them today, 'teaching or delighting'; instead they rested on the 'understanding that intelligent men delight to be taught' (39), thereby suggesting an accepted co-existence between didacticism and entertainment. The relationship between the 'cause' of *Pastores* and its effects of 'profit' and 'pleasure' will be crucial to our analysis of the work.

Pastores is structured into five books. It follows the shepherds from the Annunciation to the flight of Mary and Joseph to Egypt and recounts not only the nativity, but also a large number of Bible stories, together with 'digresiones y referencias de la más variada índole' (Castro and Rennert 195). It is an eclectic work described by Carreño as 'un variado palimpsesto no sólo en cuanto a referencias (clásicas, bíblicas, renacentistas) sino también por la variedad de formas métricas y personajes' (*Pastores* 45). The Nativity story conveys an Edenic quality and a sense of harmony that forms an ideal scenario for a reworking of the format of the eclogue and the pastoral themes presented in the *Arcadia* which, as I will show, it seeks to supersede and revise. The Nativity and the Bible stories in *Pastores* are told by the shepherds. As a descriptive work it allows little scope for inward reflection. It has a striking visual and theatrical quality which helps to recreate the

⁶ See quotation from Paul Julian Smith previously cited on p. 12.

experience for the reader, an effect referred to by the narrator: ‘¡Ay Dios, quién hubiera sido alguno de ellos!’ (448).

The allusion to an imaginary author in *Pastores* is less prominent and revealed in more subtle ways than in *Isidro*. Whereas at the beginning of *Isidro* the narrator proudly identifies himself with his subject by proclaiming ‘Oyd a Isidro y a mí’ (3), in the introduction to *Pastores* he adopts a humbler tone; eschewing his earlier ‘bárbara arrogancia’ (88) he meekly presents his work as a votive offering:

Escucha, pues, en esta humilde cueva
el canto de mis rústicos pastores,
del voto y del amor honesta prueba.

Los reyes te darán cosas mayores:
que yo sólo te puedo dar, Rey mío,
frutas del alma y del ingenio flores,
que por manos tan rústicas te envío. (92)

The narration is delegated to the shepherds, but the use of the possessive adjective, ‘mis’, does not mask the narrator’s ‘pastores’ as creations of the author. The narrative voice is only unveiled as that of the ‘author’ in the final paragraph headed ‘Belardo a la Zampoña’. The reference to Belardo, a favoured pseudonym of Lope (Castro and Rennert 32; Sánchez Jiménez 33), refers intertextually to the *Arcadia*, which ends with the same device (*OE* II 1186b) and appears deliberately inserted to imply that it is Lope, under the disguise of Belardo, who is the unidentified third party omniscient narrator who has guided the narrative throughout and authored the introduction. Direct references to Lope as the author, so evident in *Isidro*, are otherwise noticeably muted. As Carreño notes: ‘el autor tan sólo asoma en breves fragmentos donde comenta sobre un hecho narrado o avisa sobre un verso cantado’ (36–37).⁷ There is a suggestion that the senior shepherd and main protagonist in the story, Aminadab, is modeled on Lope; he is ‘estudioso de la lección del Torach, cinco libros del capitán de Israel [...] curioso [...] de humanas historias’ (94); his learned disposition and inclination to ‘humanas historias’ resonates

⁷ See p. 11 where he writes of this device being a ‘una rica tradición. Pasó a ser, como sabemos una señalado constante en la literatura de los siglos XVI y XVII’.

with the previously cited letter to Sessa in which he envisages the work as ‘tan copioso de la historia humana’ (*Epistolario* III, 70).

The notion of the work as a votive offering is extended within the metaphor of gift-giving, a feature in *Isidro* and seen again as a theme of *Rimas sacras*. The quotation above describes the nature of the gift as ‘frutas del alma y del ingenio flores’, contrasting this unfavourably with the gifts of the kings: ‘que yo sólo te puedo dar’. The humility of the act, ‘amor honesta prueba’, is reflected by the rusticity of the shepherds through whose hands the gift is given ‘por manos [...] rústicas’. Rusticity here implies the opposite of social pretension. The lack of the vessel’s sophistication, however, stands in marked contrast to the complexity of the imagery, versification, use of metonym, metaphor and the encyclopaedic knowledge of religious histories demonstrated in the book. The potential irony of this mock humility is underlined in the analogy between his gift and those of ‘los reyes’ of the Nativity story whose ‘rudos presentes’ of ‘mirra, incienso, y oro’ (91) are compared to his. Like the gifts of the kings they do not incur obligation or imply repayment or gratitude. Whereas, in Lope’s penitential poetry, the gift appears to be a repayment of an already existing debt created by both the sins of the author and the ‘fall’ of mankind, in this context it is presented as a simple courtesy, a recognition of deference.⁸ The last paragraph contains the word ‘lisonja’ twice and refers to ‘justas alabanzas’ (589); the motive of the gift is to incur favour and grace one which, by association, he attributes also to the ‘three kings’. Alison Weber notes how early modern society viewed ingratitude as ‘the most grievous of social sins, a profoundly antisocial act that weakened the bonds of community’ (416). Lope’s gift appears to conform to the maintenance of a hierarchical structure in which the evidence of deference was required to support the status quo and in which religious and social homage were considered analogous. The nature of this deference is at odds with the qualities of the gift itself. The gift given to him is the one he now returns; this takes the form of his ‘talento’ now utilized in the pursuit of a more dignified subject: ‘para que cante sus alabanzas’ (589). The possession of such a talent alludes to the Platonic theory of ‘el furor poético’ or divine frenzy according to which the poet not only had a natural inclination to be

⁸ See Burke, where he notes ‘in Christian theology the Holy Spirit is pre-eminently associated with a gift’, p. 158, and O’Connell who notes the repayment of the debt mankind owes ‘on account of the fall’, p. 88.

trained in his art, ‘un habilidad artística’, but also possessed a ‘misteriosa cualidad’ (Sánchez Jiménez 85) which supposed ‘que el cuerpo del recitante se impregna de una entidad superior, lo posee - lo ‘aliena’, pues introduce en él algo ajeno - mientras dura la experiencia poética’ (Sánchez Jiménez 86).⁹ Rennesslauer Lee explains this as the ‘inner perceptive faculty of the artist which enables him to behold in his own mind the emanation of the supreme idea of beauty which is in God, and to discern in this emanation the standard of perfect art’.¹⁰ Lope refers to ‘poetic fury’ in the text: ‘aquella antigua máxima de que alguna deidad asiste al furor de los poetas que Platón llamó *Manía*’ (513). The reference indicates an awareness of this concept; the possession of his ‘gift’ not only qualifies, but obliges him to apply his ‘ruda lengua inculta’ (85) to religious purposes. The concept of spiritual possession was widely accepted in the Golden Age, and was given a scientific explication which associated it with the theory of humours (Sánchez Jiménez 86).¹¹ The possession of such powers also incurred a responsibility for the poet to apply his talents to divine subjects.¹² Sánchez Jiménez cites several examples of how Lope used the tradition of poetic furor as the basis for developing the notion of his own poetic genius, thereby enhancing his authority and reputation as a poet (87). Whilst the references to his talent in *Pastores de Belén* appear to be restrained they can be interpreted in a similar manner. Moreover, if taken as anything other than as a poetic conceit, the suggestion of spiritual possession and the relationship with what appears to be a classical, even pagan, concept, albeit tempered by the Middle Age science of bodily humours, endowed the poet with a status to rival and even threaten that of the priesthood. Such an attempt by a divinely inspired poet to replace institutional doctrine with revelation could have verged on the sacrilegious. Lope, however, downplays the suggestion of his divine talents with humility and excludes any direct reference that might imply that he, personally, is divinely gifted. The introduction to the work begins:

⁹ See Terry, p. 18: ‘divine frenzy or inspiration of the poet which overrules all consideration of art’.

¹⁰ Rennesslauer W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting* (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 13 n. 48.

¹¹ See also Sanford Shepard, *El Pinciano y las teorías del siglo de oro* (Madrid: Gredos, 1962), p. 31.

¹² See also Diehl, p. 157, where he explains the connection between the roles of poets and priests as a ‘mediator’ between heaven and earth.

Si labios de un profeta purifica
 un serafín con una brasa ardiente,
 que del altar en presto vuelo aplica;
 para cantar tu soberano oriente
 toque, Señor, mi ruda lengua inculta
 un rayo de tu sol resplandeciente;
 pero ahora el darle dificulta
 que el inclemente velo de esta fría
 noche tu fuego inextinguible oculta, (85)

The narrator is likened to the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6. 6) selected to prophesy the coming of Christ (Isaiah 7. 14). The word ‘toque’ suggests an obligation on behalf of the writer created by a force outside his control. The implication of the words ‘mi ruda lengua’, again echoing Garcilaso’s ‘baja lira’ (Garcilaso 93), is that his talents are not sufficient for the scale and responsibility of the task. This is followed later in the introduction with further references to his ‘ruda lengua’, his humility in the face of God, ‘admite mi humildad, pues tu grandeza’, and the impudence of his venture, ‘entre las tuyas hoy mi voz levanto, / atrevimiento fue’ (91); all of which reinforce an apparent sense of humility, a modesty that appears consistent with the term *aporia* described by Diehl as ‘the rhetorical gesture that praises by stating no praise can do justice to its object’ (186) and ‘the closely related *inadequacy* topos’ which stresses the ‘deficiencies of the poet’ (188). Diehl’s definition of the ‘*inadequacy topos*’ appears to describe the rhetorical device of *meiosis* which functions as a ‘figure of belittlement’ or understatement. He notes both of these formulas have a basis in the medieval religious and poetic traditions and had the effect of giving special importance to the poem and the subject (189). Lope’s application of this mechanism is therefore based in established literary practice and conformed to the expected levels of *decorum*.¹³ The use of this formula has been identified in *El Isidro* where, similarly, the adoption of phrases such as ‘mi ruda mano’ (122b) and ‘ronco instrumento’ (2a) as terms of self-depreciation do not adequately disguise the self-promotion intended within the endeavour as a whole. The application of *aporia* and *meiosis* as purely stylistic devices can therefore allow an interpretation in which Lope seeks to exploit the irony of a situation in which, by highlighting his lack of qualification,

¹³ Carreño quoting Curtius, *Literatura europea y Edad Media Latina* (pp. 582–89) refers to this as ‘fórmulas de humildad’, p. 85 n. 2.

he is actually offering his reader the possibility of the opposite. The act of feigned humility leads to the suggestion that the author believes himself more than capable of fulfilling his task; it enhances his authority. In raising the issue, he invites the reader to make their own assessment on the success of his objective and the scale of his talents. By assuming the task, the poet implicitly acknowledges his own talent is in judgment and is aware of the reader who, in the very act of reading, endorses his sufficiency. There is a hint of theatricality in the way the narrator as protagonist within his own work includes the reader in the conceit and thereby plays on the inherent ambiguity and complexity of his words. Addressing his 'zampoña' he writes:

Yo os confieso que aquí ha sido mayor vuestro atrevimiento por la excelencia del sujeto, más digno de las criaturas intelectuales y puras que de los mortales ingenios, de los cuales ninguno más rudo y divertido que el mío. (589)

The deficiency of his 'ingenio' contrasts with the fertility of the 'frutas del alma' and 'flores' of the Introduction (see above). Lope courts opprobrium on two grounds: addressing such subject matter in the first place implies a certain self-confidence which mock humility serves only to underline and secondly, if the reader identifies the irony, for trivializing the issue. This is a cause of unease in the appraisal of Lope's religious work; the invocation of *aporia* and *meiosis* is a standard literary device which interferes with the concept of authenticity.

Ife points out that according to classical tradition the moral character of the author was an important adjunct to his authority as a poet and the validity of his work. He quotes Strabo: 'the excellence of a poet is inseparably associated with the excellence of the man himself, and it is impossible for one to be a good poet unless he has previously become a good man' (27). Whilst such qualification would seem a requisite for any poet to have been endowed with the status associated with 'furor poético', it may also have been an influence in the development of Lope's religious persona: before he could be taken seriously as a religious poet he would need to be taken seriously as a religious man. A person with such an infamous reputation would have had to demonstrate a distinct reformation of character before his credentials as a devotional poet could be acknowledged; this may have been a factor in the public act of repentance that, as we

shall see, is central to *Rimas sacras*. Ife notes how Renaissance critics used the morality of the subject and the good character of the poet to overcome the Neo-Platonist objection to poetry. ‘For the one thing they could not accept about Plato’s banishment of the poets was that, with the exception made in the case of ceremonial poetry, in praise of gods and of good men, the ban was total and unconditional’ (26). This implies that the critical process measuring the ‘decorum’ and ‘truthfulness’ of a work included the author and narrator as integral parts of the judgment of both verisimilitude and decorum.

Veracity or verisimilitude

Pastores begins with an introduction to ‘el pastor Aminadab’ who is the protagonist of the book and whose speech functions as a secondary narrative voice. He is a representative of a long biblical line, ‘descendiente del tribu y casa de Jacob y deudo del santísimo José’ (93). His heritage provides him with authority as the principal narrator of the story and as the source of the knowledge revealed in the biblical accounts and other anecdotes which embellish the narrative. He bears the same name as Aminadab, the father of Nahshon recorded in Numbers 1. 7 and again in Matthew 1. 4, and part of the same lineal descent as Joseph, but is, nevertheless, fictional in relation to the Nativity. Carreño notes Lope’s main source as the Latin Vulgate and suggests amongst others *La Leyenda áurea* (*Pastores* 26–27). However, parts of the story of the Nativity in *Pastores* bear a striking similarity to the ‘Gospel of James’ the first part of the *Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*, apocryphal Gospels, which were later combined and extended in the *Gospel according to the Pseudo-Matthew* and the *Story of the Birth of Mary* in the eighth or ninth centuries.¹⁴ The two relevant chapters of *La Leyenda áurea*, ‘The Advent of the Lord’ and ‘The purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary’, however, do not appear to have been used;¹⁵ neither does Alfonso de Villegas’s *Flos sanctorum* which Victor Dixon suggests was a source for much of Lope’s religious work.¹⁶ Ronald Hock, in his edition of the *Infancy Gospels*, notes that a Frenchman, Guillaume Postel, made a translation of

¹⁴ Marina Warner, *Alone of all her sex: the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Picador, 1976), p. 30.

¹⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend, Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1, p. 13 and p. 143.

¹⁶ Victor Dixon, ‘Lope’s Knowledge’, in *A Companion to Lope de Vega*, ed. by Alexander Samson and Jonathan Thacker (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2008), pp. 15–28 (p. 19).

the original Greek version obtained in Byzantium and ‘re-introduced this document in Latin dress to the West in 1552’. This particular edition, therefore, may well have been Lope’s source.¹⁷ He appears to have based his Nativity story on Matthew and Luke and supplemented it with the account contained in the *Gospel of James* in the places which do not contradict the Vulgate versions and then added considerable poetic and fictional embellishment to both sources. He includes several details that can only have come from the apocryphal documents. He refers to the bright light in the cave on Jesus’ birth, ‘del cual salió luego luz tan inefable y resplandor tan divino (350). This compares with *James*, Chapter 19: ‘An intense light appeared’ (*Infancy Gospels* 67). Lope also notes how Joseph left because he did not want to attend the birth: ‘salió fuera, que no le pareció justo asistir personalmente a tan divino sacramento’ (349); ‘The Gospel of James’ notes how he went to look for a Hebrew midwife (Cap. 18, *Infancy Gospels* 65). The Villegas *Flos sanctorum*, in contrast, specifically contradicts this when it records ‘no se halló presente al Nacimiento de Cristo persona humana, sino fue la Virgen su Madre, y el Santo Joseph’, something that, perhaps, offended contemporary culture.¹⁸ Another example is the explanation that Mary hid Christ to avoid capture by Herod. Lope writes ‘su Virgen esposa con el Niño envuelto de manera en una faja que según le ocultaba [...] tan codiciosa de esconderle’ (577). This only appears in Chapter 22 of the ‘Gospel of James’ (*Infancy Gospels* 73) and not in the extended *Pseudo-Matthew* version which repeats much of the same material; nor is it in either the Villegas or Ribadeneira *Flos sanctorum*.¹⁹ Likewise the accounts of Mary’s birth and early life only appear in the apocryphal documents and seem to have come directly from the more succinct original version of *James* and not *Pseudo-Matthew*. Whilst this is clearly an example of Biblical

¹⁷ Ronald F. Hock, ed., *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas* (Santa Rosa, California: Polebridge, 1995), p. 4. See also ‘The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew’, *The Apocryphal Gospels*, ed. by B. Harris Cowper (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), p. 27–83, which is an extended version of the *Gospel of James* and contains additional material relating to events prior and subsequent to the Nativity.

¹⁸ Alfonso de Villegas, *Flos sanctorum, y historia general de la vida y hechos de Jesu Christo, Dios y Señor Nuestro, y de todos los Santos* (Barcelona: Thomas Pilferrer, 1775), p. 61. I also inspected another version in the BL which was the 1578 version printed by Ayala in Toledo. It is clear Villegas was not used because the text is much too dense, detailed and interspersed with dogma for Lope to have extracted the detail which is easily identifiable in the James Gospel. Nor does Villegas refer to the details of Mary sewing or the escape from Bethlehem.

¹⁹ Pedro de Ribadeneira in his *Flos sanctorum o libro de los santos* (Barcelona: Sebastian de Cormellas, 1643) does not include any detail about the birth.

exposition rather than exegesis and therefore not obviously controversial, the use of apocryphal sources as a basis for scriptural narration outside the canon of the Vulgate indicates a surprising ambivalence in the wake of Trent. The fact that Lope used sources outside the two standard versions of the *Flos sanctorum* suggests he was looking for material that would distinguish his work from other accounts. The personification of the shepherds and the embellishment of the sources indicate the clear poetic and fictional nature of the exercise, rather than a strictly biblical and, therefore, factual one. By fusing so-called biblical fact with fiction it fits the mantle of ‘profit and pleasure’. However, by not restricting his subject matter to the safety of standard doctrinal material, Lope may have taken liberties that tested the norms of acceptability.

Aminadab is projected as a sage of his cultural history:

Iba el pastor dichoso revolviendo en aquellas antiguas historias de la creación del mundo, tapices por que por la ancianidad del tiempo intentaban los años cubrir de olvido, contando, pues, desde el primer padre de las gentes hasta el segundo, que pasada ya mayor tempestad vió su nueva regeneración y principio. (93)

He has connections to both past and present. The arrival of such a learned man amongst the shepherds is ‘cobrar [...] obligaciones debidas a sus padres’ (94); the addition of such detail adds plausibility and verisimilitude to the story. The characterization establishes him as a reliable narrator and adds authority to ‘su amorosa historia’ (108). Aminadab’s descriptions are supported by first-hand experience of the events. He explains to the shepherds ‘allí he visto a la serenísima Virgen visitar a Elisabet’ (112). The effect is to add an immediacy that enables those assembled to participate in the proceedings and acquaint themselves with the people involved: Elifila, one of the shepherdesses, referring to the Virgin Mary, explains ‘no deseamos otra cosa que verla y servirla, si fuésemos tan dichosas de conocerla’ (113). The narrative thereby appears intended as a metatheatrical dramatization in which Aminadab recounts his story to a dual audience, both the shepherds, gathered as primary spectators within the text, and the reader, his secondary audience, outside it. The emphasis lies in the verisimilitude of the behaviour of the shepherds, making the events of the nativity both ‘real’ and accessible.

A tainted mirror

Pastores relies on its biblical source and its religious subject matter for its own legitimacy. Belardo's closing address rejects the 'fábulas vanas, inútiles, copiosas de mentiras y lisonjas'. Instead Lope turns his attention away from falsehood to the 'divina historia' (589), which as Pacheco observes was the basis of reality and truth, 'algunas historias sagradas acerca de la verdad'.²⁰ We have noted how the rejection of his previous secular work and its replacement by a religious text reflects Plato's 'ascensional aesthetic'; there would appear no higher point in the 'spiritual curve' than a re-telling of the Bible representing the source of the 'Logos' and therefore 'ultimate truth'.²¹ At a conceptual level use of the Bible as a subject for poetry would appear a contradiction in terms; its intrinsic truthfulness is merely compromised by the implicit untruthfulness of poetry as defined by Pinciano: 'cosa que arte enseña a imitar con la lengua o lenguaje'.²² Shepard concludes that Pinciano's criteria of creative literature was 'fingir plausiblemente' (28). *Pastores* offers a rich source for an evaluation of how Lope approached this apparent contradiction. Ife notes:

if the trouble with fiction is that it is false, the value of truth is that it is true. Christian emphasis on the example of the Bible as the archetype of the truthful narrative enabled critics to press on the reading public the value of their own kinds of literature and place greater emphasis not just on the truthfulness of biblical stories but also on their value as sources of wonder and excitement. (40)

This suggests an acceptance of the popular exploitation of bible stories within the limits of 'profit' and 'pleasure'. Lope chose the Bible as a figurative frame in which to combine rhetoric, in its purely poetic capacity and simple story-telling to encourage 'wonder and excitement'. In doing so he also offers a discourse on the equivocal role language plays as both translucent bearer of meaning and as mediation in the process of understanding.

The nativity and the bible stories in *Pastores* are told by the shepherds. As a descriptive work, it allows little scope for inward reflection. Rather, the poet's main function lies in recreating the experience of the nativity for the reader. Whereas in *Isidro*

²⁰ Francisco Pacheco, *Arte de la pintura*, ed. by Bonaventura Bassegoda i Hugas (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), p. 249, Cap. XI.

²¹ See Burke, p. 11 as an example.

²² As quoted by Shepard, p. 48.

Lope's role was that of the 'coronista' (79b), in *Pastores*, it becomes that of a vessel through which his reader is introduced to the Nativity in literary form.²³ Aminadab contemplates the task:

siendo el entendimiento como internuncio del alma, conviene que sea clarísimo y muy semejante a ella, porque de la suerte que un cristalino espejo, mientras está más limpio, mejor recibe las imágenes de las cosas, así nuestro espíritu, mientras más sutil, más elegantes vuelve nuestras operaciones; la memoria, digo, la fantasía y el entendimiento, la sangre y el espíritu, mas claros y sutiles están en el cuerpo templado; porque el demasiado calor le oscurece abrasándole, la humedad le condensa. Consta pues en todas nuestras obras más claras salen, y con mayor hermosura, del cerebro templado que del contrario, donde vemos cómo exceden unas a otras. (171–72)

He refers to 'understanding' and 'memory', understood in medieval theology as two of the three faculties of the soul, the other being 'will'.²⁴ In the words 'cuerpo templado' a parallel is drawn between the act of writing and the balance of bodily humours on whose equilibrium 'nuestras obras más claras' depended. Whilst this appears to be a reference to 'poetic frenzy' which, as discussed earlier, as a divine gift, provided the poet with innate perception, there is also, in 'del cerebro templado', the suggestion of a state of mind arrived by the poet, equivalent to a spiritual trance. The allusion is to Neo-Platonic mysticism and self-reflection in which the medieval theology of the three faculties were also applied. The mirror is a much used metaphor in the context of Lope's drama; in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* he refers to the *comedia* as an 'espejo / De las costumbres, y una viva imagen / De la verdad'.²⁵ The analogy between the mirror and the poet implies that the poet's role rests in the ability to transmit images of reality, 'las imágenes de las cosas', without artifice, a process in which the poet acts as the 'cristalino espejo' which has to be clean to reproduce the purest images.²⁶ The clarity of the reproduction depends on the cleanliness of the mirror which is likened to the poet's perceptive capacity which should be in an appropriately receptive state. Aminadab repeats this idea in his

²³ Carreño notes that the Bible was only available in Latin in the Vulgate version p. 26.

²⁴ See Arantza Mayo, pp. 29–31, for explication of the mystical sources for this and its application within Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*.

²⁵ Lope de Vega Carpio, *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* in *Obras poéticas*, ed. by José Manuel Blecua (Madrid: Planeta, 1983), p. 259, ll. 123–35.

²⁶ See Carreño p. 172 n. 143.

discussions with the shepherds: ‘Decía bien un sabio – dijo Aminadab entonces – que los escritos eran los espejos de los ingenios, y que quién no había dado a luz sus obras no había visto la cara de su entendimiento’ (162).

The analogy of poet and mirror is extended to an analogy between his role and that of Mary. Imbued with the divine purity and clarity of a poet, he gives birth to the story of Christ. The correspondence between poet and poetic act is conveyed in the image of Aminadab preparing his instrument for a song. The ‘villancico’ he sings contains the refrain ‘que Cristo es sol, y da en él / por el cristal de María’ (139); the imagery of glass and the conceit of the word play between Christ as ‘sol’ and María as ‘cristal’ is repeated throughout the book. Mary’s principal and most prolific image is glass and in particular a glass vessel in which Christ is gestated: ‘y por los honestísimos cristales / del limpio claustro, estrella Tramontona, / pasó del Sol el rayo luminoso’ (133). This representation attributes her with an ethereal and divine quality. She is depicted as the vessel through which Christ is delivered: ‘que Cristo es Sol, y da en él / por el cristal de María’ (139). Christ’s conception occurs through the sun’s rays, ‘como por cristales puros / los rayos divinos pasan’ (108), ‘se comunican los rayos a los vidrios’ (239).²⁷ She gives birth ‘én un instante’ leaving ‘los cristales púrisimos de su claustro inofensivos del suave paso del claro sol de justicia’ (350). The ‘suave paso’ of Jesus’ birth, like his conception, is achieved without any corporality and she remains untainted.²⁸ The imagery underlines the purity and chastity that are integral to the religious ideal of Mary and implicitly attributed to the poet, not just in the notion of virtue and immaculateness, but also in the responsibility of nurturing and delivering the story. It is his ‘voz’ that sings of the fruits of the ‘puras entrañas de María’ (86). Whilst the Bible shows how Mary was chosen by God, Lope never makes the direct connection between his personal role as author and the responsibility of his task; instead the allusion is directed at the poetic act itself rather than himself as an individual. However, by allowing the suggestion of authorial involvement, something noted consistently in *Isidro* and also found in *Rimas sacras*, he must surely

²⁷ Marina Warner refers to a popular thirteenth-century hymn that uses glass imagery; its existence suggests the image had some contemporary appeal: ‘Just as the sun enters and passes back through a windowpane without piercing it, so were you *virgo intacta* when God, who came down from the heavens made you his mother and lady’, p. 44.

²⁸ For the idea of the soul being stained by birth see Voragine, I, p. 144: ‘since the soul is stained by the infusion in the body’.

have been aware of the significance of his conceit and the potential controversy it may have invited. Whilst the passivity of the poet as a mere conduit offers a form of defence, it also implies additional interpretations: the poet is either divine by nature or is chosen and is therefore divine. The implication he and Mary share an analogous role, again appears to test the bounds of propriety. The ingenuity of the witticism on which this simile is based appears designed to produce delight in his reader. However, to understand the conceit, the reader must also acknowledge that it strays towards blasphemy. The reader's reception is the key issue here. The invocation of the analogy tests the line between artistry that reinforces wonder and language that overruns the bounds of decorum.

Crossing the line

Judith Dundas observes how 'wit' is associated with 'levity' and has a tenuous relationship with religion. She writes: 'Critics and poets with a narrower understanding were, [.....] inclined to see wit as not only a breach of decorum in religious poetry but as a sign of lack of faith'.²⁹ She suggests that, according to the alternative view, the proper employment of wit in a religious context had to be accompanied with an obvious didactic purpose. Used in the appropriate manner, it had a valid religious function as a 'means of conversion': 'wit becomes a net in which to catch sinners, making poets the fishers of men' (126). The issue is whether the conceit of the poet as glass vessel trespasses on religious terminology in a way that far from clarifying is implicated in dangerous ambiguity. Instead of being a 'fisher' bent on converting his reader the narrator employs *prosopopeia* and *meiosis*, themselves considered forms of 'wit' (128), to draw attention to the characterization of the poet's persona and away from the religious objective. Dundas suggests the validity and decorum of such conceits rely upon the reader's trust in the purity of the writer's motives. Writing about Donne and Herbert, she notes the ambiguity their witticisms generate, but sees a clear purpose in their work that rescues them from the danger of misinterpretation in the hands of the wrong audience:

²⁹ Judith Dundas, ' "All things are bigge with jest". Wit as a means of grace', in *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric*, ed. by John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1993), pp. 124–42 (p. 124).

It is to this overarching criterion that these poems are answerable as religious works of art. Their purpose renders their ambiguity, irony, indirection, playfulness – whatever terms we like to use – subordinate features, contingent on the poet's faith. (126)

The text's tendency to draw attention to the narrator's function distracts and increases the ambiguity of his use of wit, drawing attention to the poet's skill rather than aiding his subject. It invites an assessment of the author's 'faith' and an interpretation of his motives that lie on the other side of the thin line between *res* and the ambiguity of language. To the postmodern reader there is a sense that the poet is seeking, above all, 'to win the admiration of these listeners' (*New Perspectives* 136) rather than to cast his net to convert souls. The Neo-Platonic 'ascensional aesthetic' is associated with a sublimity of language. Dundas notes the relation of 'literary excellence' and 'a certain kind of cleverness' (135) implicit in such literature. This is clearly evident in the writing of the period.³⁰ For her the heart of the issue lies in the application of the literary sphere to religious purpose. She writes: 'how religious poets could turn this aesthetic category or artistic goal to a means of grace is worth exploring, especially in light of the frequent denunciations of wit' (135). Her commentary identifies the use by Donne and Herbert of daring and striking metaphors which threaten the boundaries of decorum but have the essential 'effect of shocking the reader into a new awareness of the mystery of the incarnation' (140). She recognizes the need to seek new metaphors as part of a religious purpose which also includes the illumination of the universal correspondences that were seen to be an example of God's creation. This allows for metaphors to disturb rather than merely please, but, ultimately, they had to be reconciled with decorum through a prescribed meaning. It is in this context that 'wit' in the form of metaphor has its place in religious poetry and it is a measure which needs to be applied to our analysis of how Lope's religious poetry balances 'grace' with its 'artistic' goals.

The effect of the imagery of glass and mirrors in *Pastores de Belén* is to project the poet as an artless imitator of 'nature' and art as a seamless reflection of life with no need for embellishment or recourse to the notion of verisimilitude. This position destroys art

³⁰ See, for example, Smith, p.19–22.

because, as Terry writes, ‘nature is by definition “artless” and art “unnatural”’ (41). However, the poet traduces his own argument; the attempt to describe and write cannot be artless. Lope refers to the relationship between art and nature, but does not extend the subject into a comprehensive premise. Instead, he acknowledges the issue merely as a vehicle for aphorisms. Commenting on the owner of a greyhound awarded as a prize in a poetry competition, Aminadab says:

Muchos se le envidiaron, y comprábansele muchos, mas él no despreció el precio, ni se osó deshacer de él, por ser ganado con el sudor del ingenio. Y como conviene que el arte imite a la naturaleza, en que todas las cosas que haga sean por el fin, lo que por la fama se hizo cuando deshaciendo el premio no dejara testigos para tenerla, al arte y a la Naturaleza contradice, pues no la estima, ni pretende. (271–72)

Art serves to explain the hidden truths of nature and therefore the two share a common end; but the poetic act contains an inherent contradiction, it can never do justice to its subject, ‘pues no la estima’. This reference appears to be a quip which adds a sense of erudition without import or relevance to its context. It is a theme that Lope otherwise ignores within the work.

Simple narration

The distinct imagery, immediacy of the story-telling, and uncomplicated narration confer a visual quality to the book; the newly born Jesus is described as follows:

Estaba el glorioso Infante desnudo en la tierra, tan hermoso, limpio y blanco como los copos de la nieve sobre las alturas de los montes o las cándidas azucenas en los cogollos de sus verdes hojas. Luego que vió la Virgen, juntó sus manos, inclinó su cabeza, y con grande honestidad y reverencia le adoró. (350)

The description contains vivid images which make the scene easy to comprehend: the whiteness of the naked Jesus is accentuated through imagery of snow, connoting purity, and the lily, traditionally associated with the annunciation. In other instances the narrative is similar to stage instructions:

Interrumpió a este tiempo el sabroso discurso del pastor de las montañas un coro de tres pastoras, Cloris, Antandra y Lesbia, y el famoso Pireno, que, guiando sus ovejas a los seguros rediles de sus cabañas, iban a cuatro voces suspendiendo las selvas con estos versos: (140)

The theatricality adds to the visual quality of the book. The representation of the shepherds as named characters, ordinary country people, going about their everyday lives as they guide their sheep, recreates the ‘natural’ world as it represents itself to the prime measure of human senses, sight. Through the imagery of glass and mirrors the poet mediates between the visual world and the written word: ‘para los autores de ese período, como para los antiguos (Platón, Aristóteles, Horacio), la vista es el sentido más noble; el más dotado de divinidad’ (Carreño 546 n.22). Portús Pérez, referring to the ‘eficacia cognoscitiva del ojo’ confirms its pre-eminent status when he quotes Lorenzo van der Hamen: ‘quanto es la vista más excelente que los de más sentidos, como aquella que con admirable presteza en un instante percibe innumerables cosas, que los otros sentidos refieren parte por parte con gran tardanza en que es semejante al entendimiento’.³¹ In an obvious truism, sight is immediate; it can therefore be considered the purest and truest of the senses. However, there is a distinct difference between ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’. The mirror itself does nothing but focus the eye on one particular aspect of visual reality, with uncontrollable consequential effect. Appreciation requires the faculty of understanding.³² The artist, whether poet or painter, relies either on ‘understanding’ to be evident in his subject through its inherent lifelike beauty or through his own artfulness. The distinction lies along Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist lines. The former assumes beauty in nature in an ordered and divinely inspired world which speaks for itself; and the latter, whilst basically against the mediation of art, recognizes the need to channel understanding towards the recognition of true and eternal beauty.³³

The idea of the poet as an artless ‘portrayer’ of images expected to speak directly to the reader has a relationship with the idea of painting in the Renaissance period and the ‘Horatian tag’ (Terry 45) *ut pictura poesis*, an expression that provoked the explanation

³¹ Javier Portús Pérez, *Pintura y pensamiento en la España de Lope de Vega* (Hondarrabia: Nerea, 1999), p. 39.

³² This appears to have a parallel with the Augustinian and Loyolan model involving ‘memory’ construed as sight and ‘understanding’ construed as the ability to process and appreciate.

³³ See O’Connell for commentary on Plotinian thought on the purpose of art, pp. 42–43.

of poetry as a ‘speaking picture’ and painting as ‘silent poetry’.³⁴ Referring to imitative art as mere plagiarism, Pinciano notes an important difference. He writes:

el autor que remeda a la naturaleza, es como retratador, y el que remeda al que remedó a la naturaleza, es simple pintor. Assí que el poema que inmediatamente remeda a la naturaleza y arte, es como retrato, y el que remedó al retrato, es como simple pintor. (as quoted by Shepard 49)

Shepard understands this to mean a poet actually creates something in a manner similar to the productive forces within nature, whereas the painter merely copies what he sees (49). This interpretation recognizes the distinction between the creative and imitative aspects of art.

Several scenes in *Pastores* are represented as though they were canvasses. Carreño notes one example in which Lope portrays the ‘three kings’, a depiction he suggests was modeled on the various versions of the *Adoration* that circulated at the time: ‘suponemos que Lope pudo visualizar, al describir esta adoración, bien las formas comunes en presentarla en pintura, o algún cuadro en concreto’ (498 n. 86). Aminadab describes what he sees in minute detail:

yo vi un viejo venerable con una túnica de púrpura bordada de oro y alfojár por los extremos.[...] Al lado de éste vi entonces que, como arrebatado de éxtasis, miraba al Niño, el Rey segundo, la barba negra peinada. [...] Los medio desnudos brazos y garganta ceñían algunos corales entre unas gruesas perlas de no vista grandeza. (497–98)

This is unmistakably an attempt to represent a Biblical tableau. The language, unimbellished with metaphor, is unpoetic. However it is still an interpretation. The ‘arrebatado de éxtasis’ is a judgment of the artist’s intention. Further he draws a moral from it; at the end of the description Aminadab compares the riches of the kings with that of the baby Jesus and Mary to reveal what he considers to be the painting’s message:

Estos eran sus trajes y éstos los reyes. Bien sé, pastores, que no os parecerán soberbios pues ya sabeis con la grandeza que los Persas, Árabes y Sabeos se visten

³⁴ This expression is attributed to Simónides de Cos (Terry, p. 45).

mas no puedo dejar de deciros que, en poniendo los ojos en la Virgen, en el Niño y en José, tanto más rica y preciosa era aquella pobreza cuanta diferencia hacen al resplandor del oro el Sol y las colores del sereno Cielo a las de las piedras y telas. (498–99)

There is no ambiguity in this account which bears the obvious didactic message that spiritual wealth has more value than its physical materialization. This particular type of didactic moralizing is conspicuously absent from the main body of Lope's religious writing. Its presence here underlines its absence elsewhere in his work. A further example illustrates the same point. In a rare intervention of the first person narrator in the text, he challenges himself to recreate in words the scene depicted on a wood panel: 'no acertará mi pluma a pintarla, por la cortedad de mi ingenio y la falta de colores retóricos que eran tan necesarios para los divinos suyos'. There is an aesthetic imperative to establish a correspondence between the divinity of the tableau's visual colours and the rhetorically coloured language that substitutes for it, in effect to provide adequate 'decorum'. The scene depicted on the panel is of Jesus and John as babies with their respective parents described in the unadorned style of the previous quote:

Baste decir que la Virgen estaba mirando a Jesús, que se levantaba de una cuna a abrazar al niño Juan, haciéndole con la mano derecha cosquillas en la garganta, de que Jesús se alegraba, y Juan se reía, si bien se mostraba algún sentimiento.

Despite his reservations, he proceeds to describe the same scene justifying his purpose by using the analogy of *ut pictura poesis*.

Mas ¿para qué me canso en pintarla, pudiendo mejor con los versos, pues es sin duda que la poesía es pintura de los oídos, como la pintura poesía de los ojos? (546)

The poetic account reads:

En este lienzo el Verbo soberano,
que al suelo descendió desde las sillas
del cielo, de la cuna y las mantillas
se levanta a abrazar su primo hermano.
Sintiendo el Niño la sabrosa mano,

encoge la garganta las cosquillas,
admirando tan altas maravillas
María e Isabel y el santo anciano.
[.....]
Sufridlas, Juan, pues con destreza tanta
os pone ahora Cristo las señales
por donde os corten la cabeza santa. (547)

The verse version is immediate and dramatic. The reader is engaged by the present tense in ‘se levanta’ and ‘encoge’, and is prompted to experience the moment by the sensations of ‘sintiendo’ and ‘admirando’, all of which are absent from the prose, which ends with the bland acknowledgement of ‘algún sentimiento’. The imperative, ‘Sufridlas’, adds further force. But this exhortation also functions as a colloquy which encourages the reader to treat the mirth and happiness of the scene as a presage for the more disturbing events to come: ‘corten la cabeza santa’. Here Lope draws attention to a message that is not evident in the original description. The irony contained in the comparison between the comfort of the present and the horror of the future has an obvious dramatic effect. The moralizing message lies in the encouragement to look beyond the circumstances of the moment. The religious significance is not clear, but it hints at a theological didacticism unusual in Lope’s religious writing.

De Armas and Portús Pérez have noted Lope’s knowledge of the art of painting and close connections with the painting fraternity.³⁵ His commentary on the wood panel, noted above, contains a technical analysis which, by implication, he intended to emulate in the structure of his poetic version: ‘que el diligente pastor había sacado de su devota imaginación, y aunque tan pequeño espacio, la simetría de las figuras, la perspectiva del edificio, y por una ventana alguna parte en lejos de los países de los campos’ (547). This refers to a deliberate structural artistry which the painter applies to ‘imitate’ the natural symmetry of the scene depicted. Commenting on the poetic version, he writes, ‘yo pienso que de esta manera habré pintado mejor el lienzo, y por dicha expreso el concepto del pintor con las palabras que no haya dado la hermosura de los colores’ (547). In an apparent contradiction of his overall premise which positions the poet as an artless

³⁵ Frederick A. de Armas, ‘Lope de Vega and Titian’, *CL*, 30 (1978), 338–52 (p. 340). Portús Pérez, p. 13.

portrayer of nature he recognizes the reflective understanding and religious knowledge, 'el concepto', implicit in his task.

The visual quality of the writing, 'el sentido pictórico', conveys the immediacy of vision and attempts to minimize the gap between the visual experience of reality within its meaning as 'naturaleza' and the reader.³⁶ As we will see later, the painting becomes a hieroglyphic that needs to be deciphered, the meaning has to be extracted and understood. This is something more than imitation; it suggests that there is a mystery and significance in nature which can only be revealed through art. The Nativity story, of course, lends itself to the representation of tableaux. It would have been recreated in countless Biblical images giving the scenes an iconic status and making *Pastores* an ideal vehicle for Lope's particularly visual style which fuses drama, painting and poetry.

Aminadab also lectures on music as a divine force created by the movement of the heavens and thereby provides a commentary on what O'Connell notes as the other paramount sense, hearing (15):

Dijo de las dos maneras de música, la una divina y la otra humana: la primera, que incluye en sí la elemental, y la segunda, la instrumental, probándolo con que es imposible que la maquina velocísima de los Cielos y elementos tuviese(n) sus vueltas y movimientos en silencio, y que un movimiento veloz y ordenado era imposible que pudiese ser hecho sin sonido armónico. (515–16)

Human music is associated with the divine sound of the spheres: 'aneja a la del Cielo como de principio de quien de deriva' (517). Music and the musician are afforded their elevated position in the hierarchy of art and artistry not only for their ability to move the listener but also because the musical scale reveals the mathematical and harmonious essence of the universe. Whilst the wonder of nature is evident in the symmetry and proportions recorded in paintings, the musical scale is the mathematical proof of these dimensions: 'Lo que hay de un punto a otro se llama *distancia*: de los griegos se han deducido estas cosas; pero infaliblemente tiene más alto principio' (511). The divine consonance reveals the mysteries of the universe and even the tonic sol-fa becomes a code to be deciphered, as the following refrain illustrates:

³⁶ See Armas, *CL*, p. 338, where he refers to various critics who have discussed Lope's 'pictoric sense'. Also Castro and Rennert, p. 387: 'la visualidad y lo pictórico'.

“Hoy la música del cielo
en dos puntos se cifró:
Sol y la que parió.”

La consonancia divina,
un son de igual perfección,
que es una y tres puntos son,
que cante determina
un dúo de eterna union; (511–12)

The ‘sol’ y ‘la’ represent Christ and the Virgen respectively and the third ‘punto’ is the Holy Spirit which is symbolized by music itself, ‘así las llama la música’ (514), from which all harmony in the universe is derived. Both paintings and music are ciphers revealing a deeper cosmic meaning. The artist’s involvement is a co-operation ‘with nature to reveal truths which are already implied’ (Terry 41).

Alien voices

Nature includes both ‘human behaviour’ and the ‘workings of the universe itself’ (Terry 41). The narrative in *Pastores de Belén* conforms to this definition; it follows the shepherds as ordinary folk as they attempt to decipher the encoded truths of their external reality. Their world is one of ‘maravillas y obras sobrenaturales’ (531) in which they look for signs as indications of authenticity: ‘pidiendo señal al Ángel que le certificase de su promesa’ (136). The shepherds demonstrate an innate curiosity and exhibit a desire to comprehend. Mahol enquires ‘¿qué has oído en tu montaña de estos misterios?’ (193). Looking at a painting, Aminadab asks ‘¿Qué significa [...] ese jeroglífico’ (189). The correct answer lies in an understanding of the Bible: the painting reveals the story of Genesis and establishes Adam as ‘el más científico de los nacidos’ (192). The Old Testament is not only recognized as the source of all knowledge, the Word and words become a direct mediation with the divine. This goes beyond a desire to experience the encounter in a form of affective or epiphanic moment; they need to rationalize, to understand the mystery. The idea of free-thinking and questioning exhibited by the shepherds may seem liberal in the context of the spirit of what Rawlings describes as ‘the rigid intellectual climate of the Counter-Reformation, the conservative, authoritarian

tendency within the Spanish Church' (49) which sought to impose ready-made biblical exegesis and Christian solutions. But Lope's narrative has its basis in a pre-Christian world and relies on verisimilitude to add authenticity to his account, rather than doctrine. His shepherds behave as Lope believes they may have done in a period which anticipated Christianity, not necessarily as they would have done after it. This realism enhances the dramatic quality of the work. However, Aminadab's explanation of 'nuestra hebrea lengua' (326) appears to go beyond realism; it conveys the impression of a thorough understanding of the Hebrew language and the Judaic methods of textual analysis. The shepherds await the rectification of the sins of Adam through the arrival of Christ, 'de quien estamos esperando el dichoso nacimiento de nuestro remedio' (326). They anticipate Christ will restore the letters missing, as a result of the Fall, from the *Toldot*, the rabbinical legend associated with Jesus (Carreño p. 326 n. 223):

sois estudiosos de las divinas letras, en el capítulo segundo del *Génesis*, en las cuales el mundo nuevamente criado y el hombre hasta entonces perfecto se halla escrito. Pero después de la caída del Protoplasto, tan miserable y costosa para nosotros, quitóse la una de aquellas letras, que en el segundo y quinto lugar se ponía. De suerte que en cualquiera de los que hay en las divinas letras, que se hallare esta voz *Toldoth*, hallaréis quitada la letra que llamamos *Vau*, que tiene como sabéis todos, fuerza de conjunción copulativa; [.....] para que el haber quitado esta letra, en la cual no pocos sacramentos tienen las antiguas letras escondidos, abiertamente mostrase Dios en el mundo perfecto con tales números ser acabado y hecho. (326–27)³⁷

The sign contained in His name is more than an allegory: 'Pónese, pues, esta letra *He* en el fin de su santísimo nombre para significar la Humanidad' (341); it takes on an almost mystical significance as the 'oculto misterio' (341) whose identification is the key to the system of belief: 'así veréis que cuando Jesús en las sagradas letras se ponía por Cristo, de otra manera se escribía' (327). All words are imbued with religious meaning: 'en nuestra lengua hebréa, pues no hay alguno que no tenga su significación, ora sea de ciudad, de monte, de rio o de persona' (544). Everything takes on a mystical significance

³⁷ According to Carreño this refers to the Tetragram, the Hebrew name for God in which the letters YHWH (the letters Jod, He Vau and He) stand for Jehovah, p. 332 n. 232.

which borders on the magical. Mary is depicted by the letter ‘O’ and the cross by the letter ‘T’:

Bien pudiera decir O
por su madre tan entera ,
que entrando Dios en su esfera
como se estaba quedó;
¿o por qué no dice T ,
pues cruz esperando está ? (368)

Mary is ‘El Ave que de Eva / quitó la culpa’ (558). The shepherds’ language shows how the use of acrostics, word-play and enigmas have been adapted into their everyday lives.

Simon Vosters notes Lope’s use of acrostics in *La Dragontea*; he explains that the origins of acrostics lay in the Greco-Roman traditions of prophecy and were subsequently developed in the medieval period.³⁸ He believes that in this, as in other issues, Lope was following medieval traditions rather than contemporary sources. He concludes ‘la manera de pensar de Lope era más medieval que la de fray Luis’ (165). Carreño associates the interpretation of enigmas and hieroglyphics with ‘una rica tradición cabalística’:

Se centra tal tradición en el intento de descifrar los nombres divinos, o algún aspecto de la divinidad (*Sefirot*), al relacionarlos con frecuencia con las “ideas” platónicas, esferas celestiales, ángeles, hombre, toda la creación en general. (28)

Catherine Swietlicki explains that the Cabala was associated with ‘the Florentine Neoplatonists’ zealous attempt to synthesize the ancient religious and philosophical traditions with Christianity’.³⁹ She continues, ‘scholars came into contact with Cabala through the enthusiastic study of original biblical sources and varied Hebrew texts in the pre-reformation era’. This is the context of *Pastores*; it is a study of a biblical text. Because of the shepherd’s recourse to cabalistic techniques and cosmic references within the traditional Nativity story it supports a view of Spanish religion in transition between semi-pagan, superstitious forces and Tridentine Christianity which uses the Jewish cabala as a common link. Swietlicki notes ‘the borderline between the mystico-theosophical and

³⁸ Simon Vosters, *Lope de Vega y la tradición occidental*, 2 vols (Valencia: Castalia, 1977), I, p. 178.

³⁹ Catherine Swietlicki, *Spanish Christian Cabala* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), p. 1.

the magical was hard to define' (3). It is on that borderline that *Pastores* and the religious message it contains appears to lie. From one viewpoint it complies with the requisites of Catholic Reformation doctrine, whilst, from another, it does not stress or explain the allegorical message of Christ's birth.⁴⁰ It reflects the Nativity as a miracle that demonstrates the power of God without any explanation as to its message. The shepherds endorse Judaic methods as a route to further deciphering of the mystery. This appears to fit with Swietlicki's comments, 'through Christian apologetic arguments – many of which employed Cabala – many Jews came to see their conversion not as an adoption of a new set of moral practices, but as the fulfillment of the Mosaic law in spiritual form' (3). *Pastores* incorporates aspects of Jewish culture and mediates between the Toldot and the Bible. Its message then appears to be an inclusive one, drawing in both Old and New Christians. The simple version of Christianity demonstrated by the shepherds has a non-intellectual and therefore wide popular appeal. Given the absence of a strong homogenizing religious force in Spain, illustrated by the need for the Inquisition, the representation of religion contained in *Pastores* may have had a beneficial, didactic effect. Nevertheless, the text's attempt to incorporate Hebraic practices realistically into the nativity story is heterodox in its religious syncretism.

Popular culture

The three art forms of music, painting and poetry are used as a means to reflect and interpret the universe: "God's Book"- a vast and complex system of relationships which man must learn to 'read' correctly' (Terry 48) and in which everything has significance. Terry notes how this world of 'correspondences' is the basis for poetic wit and metaphor: 'the poet does not so much invent metaphors as discover them' (Terry 48–49). *Pastores* appears to be as much dramatic as poetic. The historical emphasis is on the recreation of the contemporary world in which the shepherds lived by using the biblical accounts and numerous didactic digressions that punctuate the narrative. The main feature of these digressions is to add a sense of scholarship and knowledge making it, in Carreño's words, the 'építome de erudición bíblica' (25) and a 'mosaico de erudición' (39). They function

⁴⁰ See Pierre Janelle, *The Catholic Reformation* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1971), pp. 137–82.

as opportunities for the author to display his own erudition. Whilst it is primarily Aminadab who is the source of the biblical knowledge, all the shepherds play their part. Their involvement in the word games, enigmas and poetic jousts offer an incongruous contrast to the depiction of the rural simplicity of the shepherds at the beginning of the book and undermine the verisimilitude of the quotidian details. Pireno, in Book I, dismisses Adminadab's highbrow speeches with the question '¿para qué nosotros, rústicos pastores de estos campos, nos entramos en materias tan distintas de nuestra profesión?' (173). But, in Book III he marvels at the wisdom of the ancients, '¿De qué cosas [...] han sido inventores los Filósofos antiguos que no les han pasado por el pensamiento?' (436). The *romerías* and general entertainment provide the context for much of the digression, such as the scene in which they propose a party to celebrate the birth of Christ:

las fiestas serán estas. Primeramente habrá premios para el que trajere mejor danza de cuatro, o de seis, o de mas personas; para el que sacare mejor invención; para el que pusiere mejor jeroglífico, o preguntare mejor enigma; (249)

The lack of continuity created by the digressions also serves to add respite by breaking the narrative. Together with the word games, poetry competitions, and the detailed biblical knowledge contained within the book they amplify the impression the work is designed purely as an anthology of popular entertainment. It is generically heterogenous, light-hearted and joyful, in keeping with its subject both in the pastoral setting as "play-space" and Nativity story. The absence of the Neo-platonic mysticism and inner reflection that Rennesslauer Lee notes as characteristic of the late Renaissance invites us to interpret it as an outward rather than inward expression of art and religion. The ideal of beauty is exteriorizing. The mirror is turned on his reader. Márquez Villanueva notes how 'Lope se convierte entonces muy pronto en hilo de Ariadna o instrumento de diagnóstico profundo acerca del vivir español de su tiempo' (Márquez Villanueva 11). The work's perception as popular entertainment invites us to interpret it as a reflection of its reader's ideas and expectations, a reflection of contemporary society.

The context of the shepherds and terms used would have been easily identifiable to Golden Age readers who, who in a burgeoning 'land of agro-towns' were never far from

their rural heritage:⁴¹ ‘Las ovejuelas alrededor del fuego balaban ateridas, y juntándose unas con otras de los rediles pasaban las frías noches’ (346). Mary is portrayed performing domestic activities: ‘Ocupábase algunos ratos esta divina doncella en coser, en hilar y en labrar velos al templo’ (126). There is informality, too; in the depiction of Mary’s visit to Elizabeth in which the pair are described meeting each other ‘al salir y entrar en los aposentos’ (241).⁴² This particular passage includes a remarkable image of John and Jesus talking to each other whilst in their mothers’ wombs, a scene which somehow confuses maternal naturalness with the metaphorical symbolism of glass used throughout the book:

con otras cosas que de la gracia del hijo redundaban en la Madre, como de la luz encerrada vemos que se comunican los rayos a los vidrios. [...] Yo dejo a vuestra consideración los coloquios que los dos benditos niños tendrían entre sí, las reverencias que Juan haría a su primo todas las veces que Isabel y Maria se encontrasen. (239–41)⁴³

The light-heartedness of the scene is underlined by the introduction of a ‘villancico’:

¡Qué mucho que dance
Juan tan alegre,
si el maestro más primo
le toca enfrente!
Danza de alegría,
Isabel, en vos,
tocándole Dios
dentro de María.
¡Que dulce armonía
de un agudo y grave,
Juan andar no sabe
y a danzar aprende!
‘Tal maestro y tal primo
le toca enfrente’. (242)

⁴¹ James Casey, *Early Modern Spain: A Social History* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 111.

⁴² See Marina Warner, p. 27. This image seems to have come almost word for word from the Book of James. Lope’s portrayal of Mary when she is with child is much more formal.

⁴³ The source of the image is unknown but is probably a painting.

The song comprises a series of intricate images and puns which centre on musical and familial metaphors. Juan is at once the cousin and the instrument which accompanies the dance whilst Jesus, the teacher, is also the composer. The idea that, whilst he has not yet learnt to walk, Juan can dance is a witticism indicative of the joyful spirit of the book. It recounts a popular subject in a popular manner and portrays religion as accessible to the reader facilitated by the inclusion of identifiable points of reference. Mention of Israel as a Roman colony (347) would have induced some acknowledgment of their common heritage. The extensive biblical accounts which include lists of lineages also have the effect of producing an association with the events. The narrator makes this relationship clear when he says the stars that guided the kings were visible in Spain:

En nuestra España parecieron tres soles, que juntándose en uno poco a poco hacia la parte del nacimiento del Sol dieron a entender al mundo que la noticia de Tres personas y un Dios sería en breve manifiesta a los hombres. (533)⁴⁴

Whilst the allegorical significance provides Spain with the justification for its religion it also creates a link with the common cause of Christianity and allows an identification directly with the birth of Christ and the Old Testament.

Taking liberties

The book, though, takes care to pay respect to the established images of the Nativity. The reverence afforded to Mary is accentuated by a sense of distance. As we have seen with many scenes in the work the narrator portrays her as if she were in a painting:

hincándose de rodillas, hizo oración, las espaldas al pesebre y el rostro levantado al Cielo hacia la parte del Oriente, altas las divinas manos y los honestísimos ojos al cielo atentos. Estaba como en éxtasis, suspensa y transformada en aquella altísima contemplación, bañando su alma de divina dulzura. (350)

⁴⁴ Frederick de Armas refers to ‘celestial events’ in Spain between in 1603 and 1605, ‘The Politics of Astrology in Cervantes’ *La Gitanilla* and *La española inglesa*’, in *Symbolic and Material Circulation between England and Spain 1554–1604*, ed. by Anne J. Cruz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 89–100, (p. 89).

The imagery enhances the purity and chastity that are integral to the religious ideal of Mary. But the text is not always consistent in her depiction, as for example when applying herself to domestic chores; immediately after the birth she is pictured with the baby Jesus in a very intimate and maternal pose: ‘tomándole entonces entre sus brazos, le llegó a su pecho, y, poniendo su rostro con el suyo, le calentó y abrigó con indecible alegría y compasión materna’ (351). Lope seems to struggle with her characterization, perhaps trying to balance it with his more familiar ideas of feminine beauty. In a *villancico* ‘por alegrar a los pastores’ she is transformed into a peasant girl, ‘la aldeana graciosa’ (527). The division between the reverential and familiar reflects the traditional difficulty in representations of Mary and the relatively little space she occupies within Lope’s account perhaps reflects the scant importance the Bible affords her and the Tridentine move towards Christological devotion.⁴⁵

The same *villancico* introduces a populist theme. It is sung by the shepherds in celebration of how the three kings are not given chairs to sit on when they come to visit. The refrain, sung four times, is ‘visitándola reyes, / no les da silla’. The humility of the nativity scene is compared to the riches of the kings:

Reyes que, cubiertos
de oro de Tíbar,
arrastran brocados
que el mundo estima.
Sillas le han faltado
nadie las pida
adonde los cielos
ven de rodillas.
Y aunque las promete
para otro día,
visitándola reyes,
no les da silla. (528)

The insistence of the refrain appears to rejoice more in the purposeful humiliation of the kings and the idea of role reversal than the simple Christian message of humility. Curiously, the words ‘y aunque las promete / para otro día’ temper the tone by suggesting

⁴⁵ Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, ‘The Evolution of Marian Devotionalism within Christianity and the Ibero-Mediterranean Polity’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 37 (1998), 50–73 (p. 64).

the unreality of a permanent *status quo*, a compromise that mitigates the implicit challenge to established authority. However the insertion of such popular references indicate that Lope enjoyed the destabilizing effect that the idea of social leveling may have created with some of his readership. As with *Isidro*, *Pastores* returns to populist themes whenever it can.

Instances in which it accentuates the human aspects of its subject test the boundaries of decorum. Joseph demonstrates the emotions of doubt and shame when he learns of Maria's pregnancy:

Afligido está José
de ver su Esposa preñada,
porque de tan gran misterio
no puede entender la causa
[.....]
El llora y la Virgen llora,
pero no le dice nada
aunque sus ojos divinos
lo que duda declaran
[.....]
Mira José su hermosura
y vergüenza sacrosanta,
y admirado y pensativo
se determina dejarla. (108)

The account is taken from the 'Gospel of James' in which the suggestion of Mary's infidelity is defended at length as part of the Gospel's function as an apologia for the immaculate conception. By highlighting the acute dilemma which confronts Joseph and exposing the ambiguity between Mary's human and divine role Lope, once again, appears to exploit the dramatic potential of a scene which, because of its doctrinal difficulties, he could either have omitted or dealt with in more straightforwardly didactic manner. He also introduces three bible stories that show human frailties of a similar kind, namely David and Bathsheba (147–61), Tamar and Amnon (162–71), and Susanna and Daniel (177–85).⁴⁶ The stories involve sexuality, lust and jealousy and, because of their lascivious and sexually titillating characteristics, appear out of keeping with the rest of

⁴⁶ II Samuel 11; II Samuel 13; and Daniel 13.

the book. Castro and Rennert interpret their inclusion as indicative of Lope's 'prurito erótico' (196) and extraneous to the theme of the work. They note Barrera's observation that the work was censored because of these passages: 'Su éxito fue considerable, pero son rarísimas los ejemplares de la edición príncipe, a causa de la severa expurgación que hizo en este libro el Tribunal del Santo Oficio' (194). However Carreño believes Barrera was working from a copy that had these sections excised due to a 'severa lectura individual' (Carreño *Pastores* 23 and Barrera 179). The 1612 Pamplona edition I inspected contained them intact.⁴⁷ The dates of the excision in Barrera's text are unknown but the passages obviously provoked some controversy. The first of the stories concludes with a commentary on human passions:

Todo el hombre es sujeto a las pasiones propias, mayormente a las concupiscibles, que turban de tal manera la claridad del entendimiento humano que le dividen y apartan de la principal senda a que la razón aspira, y le precipitan y llevan a los mayores desatinos que los libres pueden ser imaginados, y ellos después conocen, aunque tarde, y algunas veces sin fruto lloran y sienten. (155)

The following story about Tamar and Amnon is described as being in the 'misma tela, aunque con tan diferente estilo' (162). Both these commentaries function as a vindication of the inclusion of the passages, intimating that, having found his way into these accounts, Lope wants to take advantage of them. However it is the story of Susanna that exhibits the greatest enthusiasm in the enrichment of the original:

Sucedió, pues, que como esperasen el día en que pudiesen hallarse sola, el que mayor calor aquel verano hizo, entró al jardín con sus criadas para bañarse a solas; ellos, que entre los árboles estaban ocultos, codiciaban que lo estuviese para poner en ejecución su intento, y haciendo celosías las ramas, la contemplan cerca. Mandó Susana, inocente de los áspides que entre la hierba estaban, que le trajesen algunos olorosos ungüentos y le cerrasen la puerta. Hicieronlo así, y dejándola sola y desnuda, entró en la fuente, donde acabó de quitarse del vestido lo que por honestidad de sus propias mujeres había dejado. (180)

The imagery is deliberately sexually charged. This passage includes notions of privacy: 'sola'; voyeurism: 'contemplan'; danger: 'áspides'; secrecy: 'ocultos'; heat: 'calor'; and

⁴⁷ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Pastores de Belén* (Pamplona: Nicolas de Assiayn, a costa de Juan de Bonilla, 1612).

sensuality: ‘ungüentos’. The moral applied to the story is inconsistent with its obviously sexual nature: ‘Quedó Susana en mayor reputación, y Daniel en la estima que merecía, porque quien ejercita la verdad hace una cosa semejante a Dios, el cual no desempara jamás las causas inocentes’ (185). The indeterminant direction leaves the reader in a state of ambivalence between titillation and a search for religious meaning.

The inclusion of these passages and many more anecdotes of a less controversial nature adds to the eclectic quality of the book and demonstrate how Lope was prepared to abdicate an overt and consistent religious ideology within the work for the opportunity to entertain. Each anomaly, each ambiguity whether it be the chastity of Mary or the conceits implicit within his references to poetic fury or his role as the divine conduit for the Nativity add an additional nuance and level of interpretation that divert the declared objective of matching language and divine sublimity. Inevitably, each opportunity for dramatic *imitatio* implies danger straying, as we have seen, from the orthodox interpretation; each works to unsettle the reader or audience. Ife refers to this effect when he writes:

the poet or dramatist is interested in arousing the emotions rather than checking them, strengthening and stimulating the inferior part of the soul in order to undermine the reason. The essence of human life is that it is never lived with an entirely undivided mind. Man is always subject to internal conflict which sets him at odds with himself and Plato recognises that this fretful temper gives much more scope for diversity in dramatic representation than does the calm, wise and constant character, whose steadfastness is not so attractive not so easy to represent. ‘Artists are interested in what is base and complex, not in what is simple and good’. (31)

Here lies the dilemma: such art works against the ‘ascensional aesthetic’. By inflaming passions the text does not serve to ‘discipline aesthetic pleasure’.⁴⁸ The image of Susanna naked in the garden is not determined by a patent moral point. The diversions and digressions of the shepherd’s word games and anecdotes do not improve the didactic integrity of the work; instead they add to the impression of a jumbled compendium of biblical anecdotes and contemporary topoi to entertain the reader through its apparent erudition, an abundant and copious rhetorical exercise. It therefore achieves the criteria of

⁴⁸ Mark Edmundson, *Literature against philosophy, Plato to Derrida* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 99.

profit and delight, not through any form of symmetry of construction or theme but by repeating commonplaces. The extent of the poetic licence either granted to or taken by Lope reflects a remarkable ambivalence in the contemporary period. The poet seems to work within the idea of a 'unified theory of poetry, centering on the relations between art and nature and deriving its terms of analysis from existing rhetorical tradition.' (Terry 38); but, by bringing literature and religion together, he blurs the distinction between the religious and secular spheres and tests the boundary which contains aesthetic ideals and religious truth.

Chapter III

Rimas sacras: Lope's Dramatic Confession

Both *Isidro* and *Pastores* deliberately blur the borderline between author and narrator. The self-proclaimed 'coronista' of *Isidro* becomes the donor of *Pastores de Belén*. In *Rimas sacras*, however, this device becomes a theme of the work itself. Sánchez Jiménez sees it as 'el principal espacio de auto-representación dentro de la lírica religiosa del Fénix' (173), 'donde el autor asienta una imagen de sí mismo' (137), an image which depicts him as 'el pecador arrepentido' (133). Lope achieves this by inviting the reader to interpret the book as autobiography, 'dando la ilusión de narrar una biografía poética' (137). This chapter sets out to examine the authenticity of this persona and identify literary precedents on which the structure of the work may have been based. In doing so, it argues that *Rimas sacras*, far from its ostensible object as a public act of contrition, serves as a vehicle for dramatic and poetic purpose and, because of the literary traditions on which it is based, invites alternative readings which diverge from the work's apparent religious motivation.

Sánchez Jiménez notes how the introductory poem 'ofrece la clave interpretativa de la obra' (140). It establishes the presence of the narrator who is portrayed as a repentant sinner who, having experienced a process of conversion, has renounced his past ways:

Aunque breve y corta suma
para tan largos engaños,
sobre tantos desengaños
bien será tomar la pluma.

Pero ¿quien podrá igualar
el llorar al ofender,

aunque pudiese exceder
todas las aguas del mar? (RS 124 vv.1–8)

His remorse takes the form of tears, ‘llorar’, the symbolic expression of repentance, the cleansing of sins and, in this case, also a metaphor for the poetic act itself in which the tears become the poetry. The book is thereby revealed to be an act of repentance. Despite its acknowledged brevity it attempts to equal the scale of the narrator’s sins. By suggesting that repentance can never match the magnitude of, and thereby offset, his transgression the poet, again, uses *meiosis* as a means to support his work and emphasize his challenge. In a direct reference to Psalm 137 the narrator is depicted on the banks of the rivers of Babylon contemplating his task:

Sentado sobre los ríos
de Babilonia, Señor,
quiere mi pasado error
llorar los engaños míos;

aunque en ya por su piedad
a Jerusalén volví,
y en su templo me vestí
las ropas de libertad.

Que ya el nuevo Adán me visto
después que ha dejado el viejo,
pues por lo que Cristo dejo,
renuevo en el mismo Cristo.

De esclavo, que hierros tales
me sujetan a su ley,
ya soy sacerdote y rey,
ya tengo insignias reales,

que en la materia que toco
tanto he venido a subir
que “ángel” pudiera decir
y aun ellos dirán que es poco. (vv. 53–72)

His figurative tears recount and thereby confess his sins, ‘llorar los engaños’. Babylon is a metonym for his state of exile which is elided with his return to God, described as the promised land of Jerusalem and a new found freedom manifested in the clothes of his

new, now repentant, condition and the ‘insignias reales’ of the priesthood. Lope returns to the metaphor of music and musical instrument to describe his poetry, ‘El instrumento del canto’ (v. 9), one he now plays at a higher, heavenly, level. The notion of repentance is reinforced at the end of the poem:

Si hace el arrepentimiento
eco al golpe del error,
oye que tengo, Señor,
en este rudo instrumento. (vv. 129–31)

The beat of the music is likened to the blows suffered by the penitent.¹ From the outset the narrator is portrayed as a repentant sinner and the work as a penitential offering. The introduction also establishes a clear autobiographical association between author and narrator. The frequent use of the first person defines the narrative voice. The reference to his recent ordination, ‘ya soy sacerdote y rey’, directs the reader back to the frontispiece of the book which contains the inscription ‘Lope de Vega Carpio, clerigo presbytero’ (Sánchez Jiménez 107) and to the preface which includes a dedication to his confessor, signed by Lope as ‘su humilde hijo y capellán’ (116). There is also, probably, in ‘De esclavo’, a reference to the Congregación de Esclavos which Lope joined in 1609 and remained a member during the period in which the poems of the *Rimas sacras* were written. The collection comprises several poems that carry existential and circumstantial references to known personages.² One such example is the poem ‘Respuesta al Señor Don Sancho de Ávila, obispo de Jaén, habiéndole enviado su libro de la veneración de la reliquias’ which refers to an event recorded in a letter dated December 1611. Such references would not only have lent verisimilitude to the work but also have been intended to enhance Lope’s own social esteem. The collection also includes the poem ‘A la muerte de Carlos Felix’ (455) written on the death of Lope’s son (probably in the summer of 1612).³ There seems little doubt, therefore, that Lope models the narrator on

¹ Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco defines ‘golpes del pecho’ as a ‘señal de penitencia’. In this example, they also allude to the blows of the flagellant, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, 2nd edn (Madrid: Castalia, 1995), p. 595.

² Sánchez Jiménez, p. 141, Novo, p. 246.

³ Castro and Rennert, p. 201; Barrera, p. 139a.

himself and intends the reader to interpret the poems in relation to the figure of the poet himself.

An empty confession

The notion of repentance involves confession. John Rosenberg in his book, *The Circular Pilgrimage*, categorizes confession as a subset of autobiography and describes Saint Augustine's *Confessions* as the 'prototype' of confessional literature whose basis is in 'the concepts of fall from Paradise, exile, and redemption [...] cultural values that go beyond Christian etiology and occupy the more general categories of universal archetypes' (Rosenberg, 2, 12 and 18–19). *Rimas sacras* follows this classic pattern: the narrator, having fallen into the exile of his sinful youth, is reunited with God and seeks redemption as a rehabilitated character. The references in the introduction to 'mi pasado error', 'volví', 'renuevo' and 'nuevo Adán' emphasize the notion of reformation and spiritual rebirth that are present throughout.

The reference to Saint Augustine is apt. The collection incorporates poems which recount the situations of sinners who repented their sins and were subsequently canonized as saints; paradigmatic amongst them is Augustine. The inclusion of this group suggests a deliberate correlation between them and the narrator. The resultant analogy points to a pride in their company dissonant with the humility normally associated with repentance. The poems, however, only contain two overt references to the Saint. In one of them, 'Agustino a Dios' (515), he is depicted in confession to God. Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note how the poem alludes to Chapter 12 of Book VIII of the *Confessions* in which Augustine requests more time to respond to God's call (516 n. vv. 4–6). Lope writes:

“¿Hasta cuándo, Señor”—dice llorando —,
“diré “mañana voy” pues no te sigo?”, (vv. 4–5)
and
“Siempre, Señor, te digo “Espera un poco”
y pasan tantos pocos cada día (vv. 7–8)

But it appears also that the Chapter's orientation around the analogy of drowsiness and the time taken to awaken from sleep, are replicated in the words 'Despiértame, Señor, de

tanto olvido' (v. 16). This notion of delay in the response to God's call is adopted by Lope throughout the collection, as is the metaphor that reflects his writing as a service to the Church:

Cumpliéronse de entrambos los deseos
pues ella dio mil glorias a Agustino;
y él a alumbrar con su pluma vino. (40–43)

But while the overall work appears to follow the model of Saint Augustine and seems to have adopted certain motifs from it, there are no clear indications that Lope either fashioned his religious persona around the saint or used the *Confessions* in his conception of *Rimas sacras*. Nevertheless the book, as the paradigm of confessional literature, serves as a comparison of particular aspects of the two works and helps to illustrate some notable features of Lope's poems.

Sánchez Jiménez writes:

Incitados de esta manera a la lectura *biographico modo* de las *Rimas sacras*, los lectores del volumen debieron de identificar las frecuentísimas alusiones a la alocada o 'verde' juventud o 'primavera' del narrador con los escandalosos años mozos de Lope, relatados en sus romances tempranos, en las *Rimas* y en los cotilleos que corrían por la Corte'. (141)

Sonnet XVII (155) returns to the imagery of tears as penitence for his past sins:

Si lágrimas, si voces pueden tanto,
quien llora sus pasados desatinos
da al Cielo gloria y al Infierno espanto. (vv. 9–12)

The 'pasados desatinos' are an obvious allusion to the events of those 'años mozos', but the sense of foolishness they convey does not have the weight of reprobation that would require the volume of penitential tears invoked in the introduction, 'todas las aguas del mar'. The allusions to the narrator's transgressions remain merely intimations throughout, carrying no substantiation; they are no more than references to a former life and a former self. It is a striking feature that there are no unambiguous confessions to accompany the narrator's professed spiritual reformation. The closest the text gets to specific sin are several references to appetite: 'desbocado apetito' (166); 'apetito repugnante' (142); and

‘apetito intenso’ (136). Likewise his past is described through metaphor: ‘profundo sueño’ (148); ‘una loca república alterada’ (135); ‘ceguedad’ (137); and ‘mis locos pensamientos’ (138). In contrast, the early chapters of Augustine’s *Confessions* which, whilst clearly not written in the poetic mode nor subject to the constraints of decorum imposed by Golden Age society, contain some particularly intimate and personal details. In Book III Chapter vi he writes: ‘She seduced me; for she found me living outside myself, seeing only with the eye of the flesh, and chewing over in myself such food as I had devoured by means of that eye’ (43). The point is that, despite the invitation to read the text as autobiography, Lope does not attempt to reveal anything about himself that would constitute an example of contrition normally expected from a confessant (Rosenburg 19).

The Introduction indicates that the narrator’s spiritual rebirth is integrated with and finds its expression in a new style of writing, ‘la materia que toco’. This is a theme developed in the Sonnets. Sonnet XIX begins:

Aquí cuelgo la lira que desamo,
con que canté la verde primavera
de mis floridos años, y quisiera
romperla al tronco, y no colgarlo en ramo.

Culpo mi error, la ocasión infamo
por quien canté lo que llorar debiera,
que el vano estudio vano premio espera:
ladrón del tiempo con disfraz le llamo. (158 vv. 1–8)

Here the lyre and the songs of his youth, ‘la verde primavera’, appear to be a reference to his earlier secular verse replaced by a more dignified religious poetry and now set on a divine path. The artifice implicit in the use of metaphor contrasts with the inherent transparency of the autobiographical revelation. It is, perhaps, this aspect that leads Pedraza Jiménez to a conclusion that appears to contradict that of Sánchez Jiménez: ‘Hay que señalar que en las *Rimas sacras* han desaparecido las concretas alusiones autobiográficas que eran tan frecuentes en 1602’ (142). The same reason may have led him to write:

La sinceridad, la inmediatez de su voz lírica está siempre muy trabajada, muy elaborada. Sabía que el poeta es un fingidor muy sincero su misión es la misma que la del dramaturgo y la del actor:

Los soliloquios pinte de manera
Que se transforme todo el recitante
Y con mudarse a sí, mude al oyente (Arte Nuevo)

La sinceridad del poeta no está tanto en expresar sus auténticos sentimientos – que vaya usted a saber cuales son – cuanto en ofrecer un cauce vivo, conmovedor, a los sentimientos de sus oyentes. (126)

These comments highlight the self-conscious nature of the text and imply its autobiographical structure is merely a theatrical device.

Rosenberg writes: ‘autobiography is unique in literature, however, for its claims to authenticity. While reception of traditional fiction requires Coleridge’s “willing suspension of disbelief,” autobiography boasts openly of its supposed believability’ (2). Seen in this way, confessional autobiography creates a paradox: autobiography uses its believability as its authority whereas confessions or declarations of repentance start from a point of weakness, they expose an untruth and by their very nature ask to be believed. Augustine highlights this uncertainty:

And when they hear me talking about myself, how can they know if I am telling the truth, when no one knows what is going on in a person except the human spirit which is within? (Book X iii)

The ambiguity stimulates the reader’s natural inquisitiveness. Augustine continues:

So as I make my confession they wish to learn about my inner self, where they cannot penetrate with eye or ear or mind. Yet although they wish to do that and are ready to believe me, they cannot really have certain knowledge. (Book X iii)

There is a hint of voyeurism in this curiosity. Rosenberg writes: ‘Confessants in any medium impose on themselves the humiliating obligation of revealing their inadequacies’ (19). The act of exposing one’s self in public invites an interest in the plight of the confessant and lends itself to the idea of drama and spectacle. The confessant exposes his inherent fallibility to a God who, as the ultimate truth is both omnipotent and omniscient. Leupin notes that making confession in such circumstances is ‘superfluous’, ‘writing,

making public, only has meaning and necessity when humans address other humans' (52). The purpose of the literary confession is to affect the reader who becomes the sole judge of the confessant's credibility. For Augustine, it is God's love that determines his believability. He writes: 'The love which makes them good people tells them that I am not lying in confessing about myself and the love in them believes me' (Book X iii).⁴ *Rimas sacras* witnesses the narrator in an act of confession with God; it is a scenario filled with dramatic irony and metatheatrical effect. The reader, restrained by his own impotence and lacking knowledge of the absolute truth, can sense the danger as the narrator faces an omniscient and omnipotent God. The allusions to his notorious past both draw attention to his former baseness and reveal the extent of his current reformation. The two resultant images of sinner and saint are only reconciled by the word of the narrator. The poet's challenge is to convince his reader. The circumstance is similar to that of Ginés in *Lo fingido verdadero*, to be discussed in the last chapter, and is filled with a dramatic irony in which the absolute truth is only known by the narrator and God. Poetry which relies on persuasion sits uneasily with religion. Augustine acknowledges that belief in his confession should rest ultimately on the reader's Christian love, not his rhetoric.

Rosenberg notes 'the reasons for laying bare one's ego to an unknown and distant public vary as widely as the authors themselves' (4). Augustine is transparent about his reader and self-conscious about the process by which he attempts to achieve his goal. He continually questions his own motives and their effect: 'But what edification do they hope to gain by this?' (Book X Chapter iv), and, 'why then should I be concerned for human readers to hear my confession?' (Book X Chapter iii). He provides part of his answer in Book XIII Chapter x: 'I wish that human disputants would reflect upon the triad within their own selves'. His purpose is, therefore, both didactic and altruistic. The narrator of *Rimas sacras*, however, has no such declared purpose. His appears to be entirely a quest for personal salvation. In Sonnet XII he asks:

¿adónde voy con paso diligente?

⁴ See O'Connell, p. 99, where, he describes Augustine's confession to God: 'confessing to his fellow man is different [...] he must use sounding words that leave them in no doubt whether what he speaks truly what he knows "interiorly". Only their love for him will prompt them to believe him'.

¿qué intento?, ¿que pretendo?, ¿qué procuro?
¿sobre qué privilegios aseguro
esto que ha de vivir eternamente? (Sonnet XII vv. 5–9)

The repetition of the first person pronoun emphasizes the personal nature of his quest to understand his relationship with his world. Rosenberg notes how the traditional confessional autobiography is written from an historical perspective, once ‘we have distanced ourselves from the psychological or moral state that we are revealing’ (8).⁵ It is perceived, therefore, as reflective and historical. As the question ‘¿adónde voy’ indicates, the narrator is captured in *medias res*, mostly in a celebration of his reunion with God, but, as Sonnet LXXXV suggests, also at times still fearful of re-offending:

No porque de mi parte mis intentos
seguridad alguna me prometen
para que mi flaqueza no sujeten,
ligera más que los mudables vientos, (vv. 5–9)

The unresolved nature of the scene enhances the idea that the reader is entangled in a private drama created around the spectacle of man facing his God and that one of Lope’s primary inspirations was the scene’s theatrical potential.

Sánchez Jiménez has demonstrated how Lope used the invitation to read the text in the autobiographic mode in order to enhance the authority of both the author and the narrator and to cement an image of himself as repentant sinner. The absence of the intimacy and credible biographic detail normally associated with confession and penitence suggests the narrator is a fictitious character and points to alternative models with which to interpret the work.

A change in literary direction

The recantation and repudiation declared by the ‘nuevo ser’ of the narrator in *Rimas sacras* suggests a singular and abrupt reformation which marks a definitive moment of change in which the style and content of Lope’s poetry turns from the secular to the religious. Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez concur (*RS* 35–37) with the several critics who have pointed to the extensive body of his religious poetry written before this date as an

⁵ See also *Confessions* Book X iv: ‘When I am confessing not what I was but what I am now’.

example of how *Rimas sacras* does not represent a sudden change in his work; neither do they subscribe to the notion that a religious crisis was necessarily a motivating factor of the collection (33). However, they do not offer an alternative explication of this abrupt and very public proclamation of spiritual reformation. The poems, for them, continue to be ‘un ejemplo de persistente auto-inscripción y configuración de Lope dentro de su propia obra’ (45). They seemingly do not consider it necessary to relate his deliberate self-fashioning with the religious ideals he promotes in the work.

The notions of repentance and spiritual rebirth pervasive in the collection function as a palinode which rejects and rectifies not only the narrator’s former behaviour but also his writing.⁶ It is this aspect that distinguishes the *Rimas sacras* and makes it similar to *Pastores de Belén* (1611), the other major religious book emanating from the years of his so-called spiritual crisis. *Pastores* similarly incorporates a rejection of his past work, ‘los errados pensamientos de mis primeros años’ and ‘aquellas fábulas vanas, inútiles, copiosas de mentiras y lisonjas, halagadoras de hermosuras que en tan breve tiempo feas han sido luz de mis engaños’. Lope represents *Pastores* as an attempt to rectify his past errors with his, now, ‘honestos pensamientos, dirigidos a las justas alabanzas de aquella hermosa virgen’ (*Pastores* 588–89). He refers to this process in a letter dated October 1611 in which he writes: ‘Hartas vezes he pensado cuán mal empleé mis escritos, mis servicios y mis años en el dueño de aquellos pensamientos del *Arcadia*’ (*Epistolario* III 70). The letter’s reference to the *Arcadia* is echoed in *Pastores*. The epilogues of both bear a resemblance; both are narrated by Belardo, a favoured pseudonym of Lope (Castro and Rennert 32; Sánchez Jiménez 33), and addressed ‘a la zampoña’ (*Arcadia*, *OE* 1186b–1187). By deliberately linking the two works, he is able to highlight the difference in his approach in each, a difference primarily characterized by the change of theme from ‘vanos amores y contiendas’ of the *Arcadia* to the ‘cosas tan altas’ (*Pastores* 588) of *Pastores*. Carreño notes how ‘el presente discurso (*Pastores*) se celebra como contrafactum de otro previo. [...] Sobre un texto se asienta otro; la lectura de uno (norma: *La Arcadia*) se establece en *Pastores* en relación intrínseca con el precedente (diferencia)’ (*Pastores* 10).

⁶ For definition and explanation of the palinode see David Garrison, ‘Lope de Vega’s Transformation of the Palinode Tradition in *Rimas sacras*: Sonnets I, VII, and XX’, *Calíope*, 2 (1996), pp. 30–50.

Whilst there is no similar epistolary evidence to support it, it appears that Lope engages in a similar process in *Rimas sacras* which supersedes and displaces the secular *Rimas*. Patricia Grieve has drawn several parallels between the two works leading to her conclusion ‘that *Rimas sacras* functions as a collective repudiation or revision of *Rimas*’.⁷ Both the opening and closing poems of *Rimas sacras* trace an affiliation with *Rimas*. The ‘pasos esparcidos vanamente’ of Sonnet II (v. 9) resonate with the opening lines of *Rimas*, ‘versos de amor, concetos esparcidos’.⁸ Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez also note the correlation between the last sonnet of *Rimas sacras*, ‘El alma a su Dios’, and that of *Rimas*, ‘Alfa y Omega Jehová’; they share Grieve’s observation of how the deliberate rhyme and use of consonants at the end of each verse points to an intended reference to the earlier work and conclude:

De hecho, los cien primeros sonetos de las *Rimas sacras* se podrían considerar como los doscientos de las *Rimas [humanas]*, como la primera parte de la obra. En ambas la segunda parte combina una gran variedad de formas métricas, prescindiendo de los sonetos. (263, n.104)

The repeated allusions to the earlier work have the effect of drawing attention to it rather than reflecting some form of ideological rejection both of it and its content. Grieve does not address the inconsistency of this position when she comments ‘if *Rimas* openly praises the poet’s originality and creativity, *Rimas sacras* grounds itself firmly in the belief of divinely-inspired poetry, in which the focus is not on the poet’s own creativity’ (420). This suggests that the legitimacy of *Rimas sacras* lies in the divinity of its subject and not ‘the poet’s originality and creativity’. However, she later writes ‘Lope clearly intends to dazzle his reader not just overtly, by his variety of forms and topics, but discreetly, by the intricate linking network’ (431). In these seemingly contradictory views she positions the poet as a passive vessel on one hand and an active and conscious artist on the other. She, like others, is either unable or finds it unnecessary to reconcile Lope’s creative and religious voices.

⁷ Patricia E. Grieve, ‘Point and counterpoint in Lope de Vega’s *Rimas* and *Rimas sacras*’, *HR*, 60 (1992), 413–34 (p. 420). She draws attention to the parallels within the numerical positioning of the collection which ‘reflect a careful design’, p. 430.

⁸ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Obras poéticas*, ed. by José Manuel Blecua (Barcelona: Planeta, 1983), p. 23.

The palinode applied by Lope conforms to what Terry explains as a ‘poetic tendency one meets throughout the sixteenth century [.....] of composing religious verse on the basis of existing secular poems’ (5). It is a style that, according to Grieve, becomes a motif of the period:

Just as imitation and transformation motivated much creative activity among Renaissance and Baroque poets, and gave their efforts structural direction, conversion, repentance and penance were prevalent thematic concerns. (415)

The terms *contrafacta* and *a lo divino* cover several of the features of this so-called ‘tendency’ and can be applied to the ‘conversion, repentance and penance’ evidenced in *Rimas sacras*. John Crosbie provides a definition: ‘An *a lo divino* poem or *contrafactum* is, then, a religious poem which to a lesser or greater extent is the reworded version of a pre-existing secular poem’ (11). He also notes that his strict definition of *a lo divino* poetry differs from general usage which has grown to encompass ‘any religious poetry’. Even within this circumscribed definition of the term, *Rimas sacras* is a *contrafactum* of Lope’s own secular work and therefore needs to be read within the context of *a lo divino* poetry. Crosbie traces its history from popular songs and the oral tradition to its flowering as a literary genre in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, after the publication of Sebastian de Córdoba’s *Garcilaso a lo divino* in 1575 (64).⁹ He attributes this rise to the appreciation of ‘visible artifice’, ‘wit’ and ‘ingenuity’ (65) demonstrated through the transformation of secular verse models *a lo divino*. This facility for witty inversion and creative imitation was later evidenced in *culterano* and *conceptista* poetry which, in turn, looked to value originality rather than reliance on traditional models that were too sophisticated and therefore unsuitable for further elaboration, a factor that heralded the decline of *a lo divino* in the first quarter of the seventeenth century:

nor can there be much doubt about the unsuitability of secular *conceptista* verse for conversion to religious *contrafacta*. Secular *conceptista* poems were themselves, generally speaking, already too closely woven, too metaphorical, to lend themselves to further elaboration into religious *contrafacta*. (Crosbie 79)

⁹ See also Dámaso Alonso, *Poesía española* (Madrid: Gredos, 1971), pp. 256–63 for commentary on the effect of *Garcilaso a lo divino* on the work of San Juan de la Cruz.

This alludes to a literary rather than religious motivation that contributed as much to the genre's initial popularity as to its decline. Additionally, Crosbie notes how the distinctly moralistic purpose traditionally attributed to *a lo divino* poetry is undermined by the fact that in many cases the verse drew attention to and invited the reader to read the original as a means of judging the 'wit' of the *contrafacta* and in doing so had the opposite effect to the supposed intention of expunging and replacing the secular original (55–63). The palinode implied in *Rimas sacras* can be seen in this context: *Rimas* was expanded and reprinted in 1609 with further known editions in 1611, 1612, 1613 and 1623.¹⁰ This might suggest that a commercial intention underlay the creation of a *contrafacta* of his own work, a situation also evidenced with the *Arcadia*, which was republished in several new editions subsequent to the publication of *Pastores de Belén*.¹¹ *Rimas sacras* and *Pastores*, the two works generally regarded as expressions of the poet's spiritual crisis, can be categorized within a specific literary tradition and ascribed obviously literary motivations. The exhibition of the poet's wit is evident from the opening sonnet of the *Rimas sacras* which, as several critics have noted, is a *contrafacta* of Garcilaso's first sonnet, 'Cuando me paro a contemplar mi 'stado / y a ver los pasos por dó me ha traído' (Garcilaso, *Poesías castellanas*, 37).¹² The first stanza of each is almost identical. Such a deliberate fusion of the literary and religious sphere marks a forceful statement of the literary nature of Lope's endeavour and invites a reading based on the secular tradition.

The 'courtly love' tradition

The most obvious frame of reference for *Rimas sacras* is the secular love poetry which it seeks to replace. Terry observes how 'the religious poetry of the period shares a considerable area of sensibility and expression with the poetry of secular love':

Such possibilities for interplay depend, of course, on a close awareness of the central tradition of sixteenth-century love poetry which, although [...] associated above all with Italianate verse, derives partly from the *cancionero* poetry of the

¹⁰ Blecua in Lope de Vega, *Obras poéticas*, p. 5.

¹¹ 1612, 1613, 1615, 1617 and 1620, *OE* II, p. 1050.

¹² For example *RS*, p. 131.

previous century. This poetry in its turn goes back to the work of the Provençal troubadours, and presents a peculiarly concentrated version of what has come to be known as ‘courtly love’. (18)

In his definition of ‘Courtly Love’, Parker distinguishes between ‘courtly’ and ‘chivalresque’:

‘courtly’ is the impossible love for an unattainable woman, in which there is an enforced continence that causes suffering. In ‘chivalresque’ there is no impossible love; continence is temporary and a service to be rendered in order to merit fulfillment. (*Philosophy of Love*, 15)

He explains how the distinction between the two defines and divides the interpretation of ‘courtly love’ as an idealized form of human love, later interpreted as ‘quasi-Platonic’, or ‘whether at bottom it is inherently sensual’ (13). The tension provoked by this ambiguity is evident in much of Lope’s secular and religious verse. Parker traces the origins of ‘courtly love’ to ‘religious, even mystical traditions’ (11) and observes how Christian culture, based in interpretations of the Bible, adopted the ‘concept and language of human love to express divine love’ (86). The Song of Solomon is a special example. The poem in *Rimas sacras* which begins with the refrain ‘Cantad, ruiseñores, / al alborada’ (545), follows, in many respects, the Song of Solomon (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez, *RS*, p.545, n.157); it exemplifies how the contrafacta in Lope’s *a lo divino* poetry elided the two sides of the ‘Courtly Love’ tradition. Whilst the source of the refrain has not been identified, its ‘sabor popular’ (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez, *RS*, p.545, n.157), considered together with the insistence of its repetition, point to a recognized secular origin, making it an *a lo divino* text. A distinct correlation in the imagery exists between the stanza:

Los cabellos de oro
parecen plata
del puro rocío
de la mañana (vv. 41–44)

and the Song of Solomon 1.11: ‘Murenulas aureas faciemus tibi, vermiculatas argento’; and 5.2: ‘quia caput meum plenum est rore, & cincinni mei guttis noctium’. There is also a resonance, again noted by Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez, between:

De paloma tiene
junto a las aguas
los ojos hermosas
que roban almas.

Sus labios de lirio
vierten al alba
la preciosa mirra
de sus palabras. (vv. 57–64)

and:

Oculi eius sicut columbae super rivulos aquarum, [.....]. Labia eius lilia distillantia myrrham primam. (5.12–13)

These images in another context could have a significantly different meaning. They are associated with the language of sensuality found in love poetry; hair, eyes, lips all suggest the anatomization of the beloved in the hierarchy of bodily parts. They also point to consummation, thereby suggesting an ‘attainable’ rather than ‘unattainable’ love, the ‘chivalresque’ rather than the ‘courtly’ according to Parker’s distinction. This is a feature of much of *Rimas sacras*. Lope not only stresses sensuality through word choice, but also in the creation of dramatic scenes. In the same poem, in an echo of San Juan de la Cruz, he employs the topos of the ‘ronda de galán’ to describe how Christ takes possession of the soul of the ‘Esposa’:

Y, pues conoceís
aquella serrana
que le trae perdido
para ganarla,
decid que por verla
su luz disfrazá,
y toda la noche
ronda su casa. (vv. 13–20)

The characterization and plot produce dramatic effect. The Biblical notion of lost sheep has been seen (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez *RS* 546, n. 157), but, in ‘perdido’ and ‘ganarla’, there is also a notion of helplessness intensified by a sense of danger in the disguise and darkness which envelops the lover as he circles her house in the dead of night.¹³ This representation therefore treads a thin and suggestive line between the portrayal of the ‘Esposo’ as protective guardian and sexual predator. The sexual tension is heightened through voyeurism as the lover spies on the Esposa ‘por los cancelos / que hay en su casa’ (vv. 81–82). Cuevas notes the increasing number of references to the Song of Solomon in the period:

Por una parte, el Renacimiento ha desarrollado plenamente la sensibilidad ante los atractivos de la naturaleza y el goce de los sentidos, lo que permite interpretar estos textos desde una perspectiva más fiel a su erotismo originario, alejándose de esas alegorías secas e intelectuales que tantas reminiscencias medievales nos traen. Por otra, la práctica de los predicadores ha ido convirtiendo este pasaje en lugar de referencia obligada cuando se trata del tema de la vuelta del hombre a Dios.¹⁴

He points to the ambiguous relationship between the figure of the ‘galán’ and eroticism and indicates the contemporary reader would have been aware of the alternative connotations of the language. Whilst Lope clearly strives to accentuate the sensuality and sexual *frisson* of the poem he also counterbalances it with strong religious imagery. He relies primarily on the allusion to the Song of Solomon to provide a context in which the poem can be understood. He employs devices such as naming Christ ‘amoroso Cristo’ and the description of the ‘ruiseñores’ as ‘aves sagradas’ (v. 34). He also dresses the figure of the ‘Esposo’ in white, the colour of the *hostia* (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez *RS* 547 n.157 v. 22–24). Further, capital letters are used to distinguish the religious and secular connotation of words and eliminate ambiguity, for instance ‘Esposo’ from ‘esposo’ and ‘Cielo’ from ‘cielo’. However, as a stylistic procedure, due to the vagaries

¹³ This bears a similarity with San Juan de la Cruz, see next chapter for discussion.

¹⁴ Cristóbal Cuevas, ‘El tema sacro de ‘la ronda de galán’ (¿Fray Luis fuente de Lope?)’, *Academia Literaria Renacentista I Fray Luis de León* ed. by Victor G. de la Concha (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1981), p. 150–51.

of the printing process, this mechanism is haphazard and subject to mistakes.¹⁵ Parker observes how it was medieval Church tradition that interpreted the lovers in the Song of Solomon ‘as God and the soul’ (86). The *Rimas sacras* play on the ambiguity this tradition invites, but at the same time allow a defensible explanation against possible misinterpretation. However, as the example of the Song of Solomon demonstrates, paradoxically, the religious meaning can only be understood through the sensuality and language of human love. In further echoes of San Juan de la Cruz the poem continues:

Hace sus cabellos
blanca toalla;
mientras más los limpia,
más se los baña.
En dulces requiebros
la noche pasan,
¡dichosa la prenda
que Dios regala! (550, vv. 97–104)

There is a dual seduction, firstly that of the ‘galán’ and his ‘Esposa’ and then of Mary Magdalene’s hair which makes love to Christ’s feet. The *a lo divino* interpretation of the seduction, ‘dulces requiebros’,¹⁶ can only be understood through the conventional language of secular love and courtship. It only has significance as divine love if its secular meaning is comprehended. The whole poem, therefore, like the analogy of the Song of Solomon, must have its basis in sensual and therefore worldly knowledge. Even within an obvious biblical context the interpretation of the language of love is interchangeable; it always functions on two levels. Parker notes how, while the nature of this language creates ‘a problem’ for literary critics, ‘believing Christians’ have no such dilemma (87). There is a form of sublimation and effort needed in the process in which it is first read in a secular context and then reinterpreted as divine, a process Lope makes no attempt to simplify. The tension created by the ambiguity enhances the dramatic effect.

¹⁵ Inspection of the original copy of the 1614 Alonso Pérez edition shows this and several other ‘romancero’ poems with substantial capitalization which has not been used by Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez. Instead they have made adjustment for instance to ‘Vela Mayor’ when there are no capitals in the original, whereas the original has a capital letter for Ruiseñores. This raises issue for further study. But it would suggest that poems which carried an ambiguous style had capital letters placed on words that were themselves potentially ambiguous.

¹⁶ Not capitalized in the 1614 original, p. 179.

The suggestion of intertextuality with other works of Lope promotes that challenge. The ‘aquella serrana’¹⁷ resonates with the ‘serrana’ disclosed as Lucinda or Micaela Luján in the poem contained in *El peregrino en su patria* which begins ‘Serrana hermosa, que de la nieve helada’ and features prominently throughout *Rimas*.¹⁸ By stressing the sensual ahead of the religious, he appears to tease his readership in an attempt to force them to overcome their own sensuality in order to read the poems within their ‘correct’ interpretative frame. Without the obvious context of a Platonic objective or the application of an ‘ascensional aesthetic’ to guide the reader the process lacks an obvious didactic purpose. Lope’s *a lo divino* poetry functions as a palinode, but dwells too much on the pleasures of the ‘sense world’ to make the sublimation easy. Terry suggests the early modern reader would have seen it differently; writing of postmodern interpretations, he states ‘what has been lost, of course, is a habit of mind to which everything is potentially religious and most things in practice are symbolic’ (14). However, if all poetry was regarded, like the Song of Solomon, as inherently religious there would have been no need for a religious gloss in the form of *a lo divino* and no scope for development of the genre. The fact that Lope wrote a direct palinode of his secular rhymes suggests that there was a readership that sought out *contrafacta* poetry to appreciate its ambivalence and ambiguities. Lope may have relied on the nomenclature attached to the work to justify the meaning. By labelling it ‘Sacred Rhymes’ and by adopting a structure in which the narrator and protagonist recanted his past ways, Lope provides a framework with which he could defend himself from hostile reactions to both his language and his endeavour. Aguirre takes the view that *contrafacta* poetry could only have a valid religious significance if it could demonstrate some form of analogy between the original and reworked poems and if it carried some form of symbolic or allegorical message. He exemplifies this point with a *contrafacta* poem written by Lope of a Quevedo original: ‘si consideramos el contenido de la composición profana, la

¹⁷ The 1614 version has capital letters for ‘Aquella Serrana’, p. 178. Bleuca in Lope de Vega Carpio, *Obras poéticas*, p. 6, notes that there are twenty-nine poems that refer to her in ‘Rimas’.

¹⁸ Lope de Vega, *El peregrino en su patria*, ed. by Juan Bautista Avallé-Arce (Madrid: Castalia, 1973), p. 262.

piadosa resulta irreverente en sumo grado'.¹⁹ He notes how Lope turns the original, 'Ya está guardado en la trena / tu querido Escarramán', into 'Ya está metido en prisiones, / alma, Jesús, tu galán'. By associating Jesús with Escarramán he turns an apparently innocuous poem into potential blasphemy.²⁰ This highlights the uncertainty associated with the interpretation of *a lo divino* poetry, a risk Lope played upon.

Each of these poems takes sensual and therefore human love and turns it into divine love. The Platonic idealism inherent in this challenge is reflected clearly in Sonnet XXXI:

Yo me muero de amor, que no sabía,
aunque diestro en amar cosas del suelo,
que no pensaba yo que amor del Cielo
con tal rigor las almas encendía.

Si llama la mortal filosofía
"deseo de hermosura" a amor, recelo
que con mayor ansias me desvelo
cuanto es más alta la belleza mía. (vv.1-8)

Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note Lope's frequent use of the Platonic definition of love as a desire of beauty (*RS* 174, n.35). In this sonnet the sublimation of worldly love into a divine sphere is reflected as a higher form of beauty: 'más alta la belleza mía'. He compares his own experiences as a lover, 'cosas del suelo', with the passion his newly found divine love now creates. This process is embodied within the spirit of the collection on a literary and human level as both poet and repentant sinner strive for purity of thought. In doing so it appears to follow the precedent of courtly love poetry in which the religious frame operated as a form of sublimation. The *a lo divino* tradition merely followed on from this: as a gloss of secular poetry it became a simplified version of the process of sublimation. Perhaps, though, by maintaining the suggestiveness and prurient connotations of its language and references to the secular original, *a lo divino* poetry maintained a more direct and ambivalent relationship with its secular roots, allowing each

¹⁹ J.M. Aguirre in the introduction to José de Valdivielso, *Romancero espiritual*, ed. by J.M. Aguirre (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1984), pp. XXII-XXIII.

²⁰ I have been unable to trace the original of either of these poems or the identity of Escarramán.

to thrive off each other. Seen in this context, the personal and public conversion witnessed in the *Rimas sacras* would not only appear to have its roots in established literary traditions, but also be open to ambivalent readings. Sonnet XXXII provides a further example:

¿Quién no se muere de tu amor si mira²¹
con la piedad que escuchas y respondeís?
¿cómo es posible que las puertas rondes
de un alma que te trata con mentira?

Mas eres Dios, Señor, ¿de qué me admira
el mirar que ofendido, no te escondes,
a quien te quiere y ama correspondes,
y con quien te ofendió templas la ira?

Cuando consideré mi desvarío
temblaba yo tus iras y desdenes,
y hallé tu pecho fácil, tierno y pío.

¡Qué condición tan generosa tienes!
¿quién es ingrato con tu amor, Dios mío,
pues apenas te llaman cuando vienes?

As with the previous sonnet Lope refers to the suffering of love as equivalent to death. Parker notes how this concept has its origin in the courtly love tradition:

Ostensibly and for the most part this is based not on the physical and the sensuous, but on love as the faithful service of a lady who never rewards her servant, a love from which there is no escape and which therefore produces a suffering akin to death; but this suffering is not only accepted, it is actually desired and found pleasurable. The lover is condemned to love faithfully, without hope of happiness; yet better this living death than not to love at all. (*Philosophy of Love* 16)

In Lope's poem, we see the equation of love, suffering, and death, 'no se muere de tu amor', and we see again the figure of the 'ronda del galán' pursuing his damsel; but there is also a perception of attainability which is more obviously associated with the 'chivalresque', a sense that not only is there the potential of a reward but also

²¹ Notably the 'amor' of this poem does not carry a capital letter in the 1614 original, p. 12.

consummation. The approachability of the lover is seen in the words ‘vienes’, ‘escuchas’ and ‘respondeís’ and fulfillment in ‘hallé’. There is also an inversion of the traditional interpretation of the soul in the Song of Solomon as feminine and God or Christ as the masculine ‘Esposo’. Parker explains how the forms of address used in the Latin Vulgate for each of the lovers is the same, the lovers of the Song of Solomon ‘though originally conceived only as human beings’ were interpreted by Church tradition as ‘God and the soul, or as Christ and the Church’ (*Philosophy of Love* 86). The description of Christ’s ‘pecho tierno y pío’ and the irrational jealousy conveyed by ‘iras y desdenes’ is identified with the maternal and feminine. The switch of gender from the implied masculinity of the *galan* who stalks his door to the suggestion of womanly tenderness is unsettling. It is only the references to ‘Dios’ and ‘Señor’ and ‘piedad’ that distinguish God from his female lover and therefore identify the religious significance of the poem. Parker recounts how San Juan de la Cruz was gripped in a religious trance after having heard the first verse of an ostensibly secular poem (*Philosophy of Love* 19). He writes:

This language of human love means that St John’s poetry can be read as the love of a man and a woman for each other, and presumably the majority of his readers in modern times have read the poems in this way. Distinguished and sensitive literary critics have maintained that it is in fact, impossible to read them in any other way. (*Philosophy of Love* 87)

These comments highlight the fragility of the readings and suggest that, provided the context is consistent, the interpretation is determined by the expectations of the reader as much as by the intention of the author. This opens the texts to alternative constructions, a point Parker himself makes about the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz:

Put into the social context of the *Cancionero de Palacio*²² they would have meant something quite different and might well have been given a specifically sexual connotation, since nothing is easier than to find *double entendres* of this kind if one has a mind to. The point is that one cannot really appreciate the poetry of the pre-Renaissance if one asserts that the Courtly Love tradition is *inherently* sensual and

²² See Parker p.18, where he explains the significance of the *Cancionero de Palacio* (1440) as a verse anthology.

if one ignores the essential ambiguity or ambivalence of the tradition whereby sacred and profane spoke the same poetic language. (*Philosophy of Love* 20)

Whinnom is a significant proponent of the view of idealized love depicted in courtly love poetry as a form of veiled sensuality (Parker *Philosophy of Love* 17). He sees the contemporary readers of late medieval Spanish poetry seeking out the sexual connotation: 'la picante ambigüedad la buscan conscientemente'.²³ As we have seen, Parker acknowledges the inherent sensuality of much of the courtly love tradition; however, he distinguishes between sexual pleasure and desire which he further classifies between 'aspiration' and 'achievement' (18), a categorization that parallels his distinction between 'chivalresque' and 'courtly'. He suggests that love poetry which reflected a desire which remained an unfulfilled aspiration signified a form of chastity sublimated into a religious sense and it was this notion of the absence of consummation that reinforced the religious interpretation of much of the secular love poetry. This supports the idea of such poetry already having a solid religious context. However it does not explain the development of *a lo divino* poetry which, Crosbie argues, was modeled not from the sexually explicit verse which he observes 'formed a fairly considerable portion of the sixteenth century's literary diet, clerics included' (62), but from the corpus of less ambiguous verse. Lope's poetic recantation *a lo divino* of his previous life and work in *Rimas sacras* is done in the awareness that sensuality not only shared the same language as religious poetry, but was read alongside it. The ambivalence and variety of critics' readings suggest that there was no general orthodoxy or specific construction to be applied to these texts. Alison Weber goes much further than this in her assertion that *Rimas sacras* is in fact a coded defence addressed to the Duke of Sessa who is characterized as the 'galán' and deity in his role as Lope's patron. I will return to her argument in the next chapter, but her premise challenges the traditional view of Lope's religious poetry:

But my wider aim has been to question the critical indifference to religious writing by men in early modern Spain (Saint John of the Cross counts as a notable

²³ Keith Whinnom, *La poesía amatoria de la época de los Reyes Católicos* (Kendal: University of Durham, 1981), p. 46. Parker, however, in disagreement with this view, points to the difference between the poetry of 'sexual *pleasure*' as opposed to desire which he feels is always displayed as unfulfilled, 'an *aspiration* rather than an *achievement*' (18).

exception), an indifference I attribute to the mistaken notion that male religious discourse is primarily an effect of identification with a repressive politico-religious ideology. It is ironic that scholars have explored the possibility that female religious expression could be subversive, whereas male religious writing is seen almost exclusively in terms of conformity. [.....] The discourse of early modern religion was - for men as well as for women - more heterogeneous, fractured and available for contestation than is often recognized. (Weber 417)

It is within the context of the wider reading that Weber invites that I contend it is the tension and ambiguity of the relationship between the human and divine and the secular and profane that informs much of Lope's religious verse and is its prime motivation. The ultimate challenge for him and his art was to express human rather than divine experience within the limits of probity.

Otis Green writes of the 'spirit of truancy', 'an awareness of transgression and this effort to make amends' that is found in courtly love poetry²⁴ in which the 'sinner was expected to recognize his sin as sin and the deification of his lady as a truancy'.²⁵ This suggests that the literary culture that fed into early seventeenth-century writing accepted and even anticipated the idea of transgression followed by recantation:

The tradition of a strictly *illicit* love was strong enough to give a special character to the love poetry of the *cancioneros*. This special character appears in the constant awareness, on the part of the poet, that his amorous delights constitute a truancy from which, like the prodigal son, he must return, and in the inclusion among a given poet's work of a recantation or palinode. (248)

The confession and repentance reflected in *Rimas sacras* conform to the 'pattern of fall – redemption – reunification' (Rosenberg 18) which, as we have noted, are referred to as 'universal archetypes' (Rosenburg 19). Lope's 'truancy' at both a personal and professional level again appears to follow a literary tradition. The development of *a lo divino* poetry implies a process that draws from the secular and assimilates it with the divine. However, our analysis of 'courtly love' reveals a more confused picture in which the two sides have historically drawn from each other in a circular rather than linear

²⁴ Otis H. Green, *Spain and the Western Tradition: The Castilian Mind in Literature from 'El Cid' to Calderón*, 4 vols (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), I, p. 265.

²⁵ Otis H Green, 'Courtly Love in the Spanish Cancioneros', *PMLA*, 64, (1949), 247–301 (p. 274).

movement. Crosbie says there is no evidence to suggest that the Church encouraged *a lo divino* poetry (61); the growth of *contrafacta* poetry was a literary rather than ideological exercise. Terry, on the other hand, suggests the Church did encourage religious poetry (Terry 149). Aaron sees Lope's significant contribution to religious poetry as the humanization of Christ, of bringing religion to the people, an undertaking that reflects 'una tendencia que el popularismo religioso manifiesta a humanizar lo divino, y familiarizar las realidades sacras' (68). This implies a movement from divine to secular that reverses that of *a lo divino* poetry.²⁶ The opposing views presented by these critics make an evaluation of *Rimas sacras* more difficult. The ambivalence of the language, the dramatic conception of the central theme, the artificiality of its central autobiographical premise and its homage to traditional literary genres work together to render it receptive to readings from a variety of incommensurable perspectives.

The Magdalen, an equivocal model

An example of multivalency is found in 'Las lágrimas de la Magdalena' (265–302), a poem seen as representative of the book as a whole (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez *RS* 265n.105). Here the drama of transgression and rectification which informs *Rimas sacras* takes on a different form. The poem marks a shift in tone from the meditative self-reflection of the sonnets to the active penitence symbolized by the tears of the Magdalene.²⁷ Its inclusion in *Rimas sacras* is notable being the longest poem in the collection. The narrative follows Mary Magdalene through the Biblical scenes leading from the bathing of Jesus' feet to the resurrection. The poem's professed intention is to celebrate the redemption of Mary from sinner to Saint:

aquel metamorfóseos soberano
de un alma oscura a un ángel cristalino,
hoy deseo cantar, si puede el canto
en números poner tan tierno llanto. (vv. 5–8)

²⁶ See Terry, pp. 11–12, and Crosbie, pp. 57–58, for commentary on the effect of Catholic Reformation on poetry.

²⁷ See Aaron p. 79–80: 'el tema de la salvación vaya en Lope encadenado a otro tema lírico, el de las lágrimas [...] son lágrimas humanas de arrepentimiento,' and pp. 172–75.

The figure of Mary has obvious significance as a metaphor for the narrator; she, too, is a repentant sinner exalted through her love for Jesus to an esteemed position within the religious hierarchy. The metamorphosis, however, is not displayed, an absence that is replaced by recounting her story. The desire to sing refers back to the act of writing. The challenge of recreating the ‘tierno llanto’ resorts to a technical essence, a science, conveyed in the words ‘números’. The narrator thereby sets up a juxtaposition between the artistry of his writing and the sensual, dramatic, and visual portrayal of his subject. The poem is a sensitive account of Mary’s love for Jesus, a love the narrator advises at the end will be ultimately rewarded with entrance into heaven:

presto veréis qué gloria, qué alegría
coge quien siembra lágrimas, Maria. (vv. 791–92)

She is proclaimed ‘un alma arrepentida’ (v. 795) without any form of process other than the declarations of love which she exhibits ‘con fe divina y amoroso llanto’ (v. 674). Her faith and lamentation appear inspired more by human than divine love and are expressed through recognition of an outward and physical beauty driven by a ‘loco deseo / de ver, mi Dios, vuestra hermosura humana’ (v. 242–43). Long sections of the poem are a dramatized soliloquy of her thoughts. Divine beauty is expressed in vividly physical and erotic terms. Here she describes Jesus:

“Miré los ojos bellos celestiales,
que, como soles infundiendo vidas,
debajo de esos arcos orientales
penetraban las almas escondidas;
de la divina boca los corales,
como suelen estar recién nacidas,
con las perlas del alba matizadas,
a medio abrir, las rosas encarnadas.

“La garganta, Señor, también miraba,
que el más cándido mármol excedía,
y la mano bellísima, que daba
con cualquier movimiento luz al día;
mas como del cabello me preciaba,
pensaba yo que hermoso le tenía;

en él puse mejor los tiernos ojos,
y allá se me quedaron por despojos. (vv. 249–64)

The language of praise for female beauty with its overtly sensual and sexual connotations is used in the religious context. He uses the verb ‘penetraban’ and describes the mouth, eyes, neck, hands, and hair with a barely disguised eroticism. The words ‘escondidas’ and ‘medio abrir’ convey a sense of withholding and secrecy, an ‘otherness’ consistent with sexual desire. ‘Corales’ was in common usage in the love poetry of the period and the description of Jesus’ mouth using the imagery of pearls and roses follows the Petrarchan tradition (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez *RS* 278 v. 253). Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note the inherent sexuality of the *Rimas sacras* described as ‘un canto lírico, eróticamente sublimado a lo divino’ (28). When read in this way all such imagery has a double significance, its suggestiveness a challenge to the reader. As the poetry invites the reader to question the truthfulness of the narrator’s confession, it also defies the reader to repress eroticism and sublimate their thoughts in divine contemplation. The tears of Magdalene are both human and metaphorical and the sensuality and emotion of the poetry makes the religious alternative more difficult to accept. Christ is, for her, an ‘Hombre mas galán’ (v. 473); it is his physical presence that she misses after the crucifixion. As she questions the figure of Christ, who she believes is the gardener, in a scene filled with dramatic irony, ‘dime, hortelano, ¿dónde está mi Esposo?’ (v. 745), it is his corporeal presence she misses and wants to find: ‘Él me privas’(v. 750) and ‘aquel divino cuerpo restituya’ (v. 752). This is repeated in her rhetorical question:

si sabes qué es amor, dame piadoso
mi bien, mi luz, mi amor, mi Dios , mi Esposo. (vv. 759–60)

With the suggestion that ‘true’ love is always sensual the poetry challenges the reader to make the correct interpretation, to see physical beauty as a metonymic substitute for spiritual perfection. The poem ends with Mary Magdalene remembering Christ’s mortal rather than spiritual beauty:

Vio aquella blanca frente y ojos bellos,

y a los hombros en partes dilatados
los nazareños rayos, o cabellos,
de los que el sol adorman envidiados; (vv. 777–80)

The enduring impression, therefore, is one of a failure to fulfill a mortal relationship rather than the beginning of a spiritual one. Gary Kuchar, writing about Southwell's poem, *Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears*, explains it is precisely the acceptance of the physical absence which is one of the central significances of the Magdalene story: 'through the transition from letter to spirit, from body to word, we are presented with the devotional and rhetorical forms that produce the ideally pious recusant subject'.²⁸ In Lope's version, her complaint on Christ's death, 'no es justo que se tenga ya por tierra' (v. 611), does not invite nor does it receive appropriate doctrinal explanation. It is met with the words 'pues la convierte en Cielo favor tanto' (v. 612), suggesting that her loss is heaven's gain, a response which attaches envy. As with several examples in the following chapter the emphasis is on the human drama which is served by the biblical case rather than the other way round. The poem closes, as it started, with Mary Magdalene kneeling before the cross and the narrator addressing 'Fílida', an enigmatic, unexplained character.²⁹ It is an image that frames the poem and adds a sense of self-consciousness to its structure in the manner of a metatheatrical device.

Perry Powers argues that the use of poetic imagery, Lope's 'concept of metaphor', is a feature which distinguishes his approach to the Magdalene poem, treating the subject 'in a manner quite his own'.³⁰ The most notable imagery is the poet's reference to hair which appears on thirteen occasions within the first four hundred lines.³¹ However, it is not the frequency of usage of the imagery but its intricacy that is most noteworthy. The prominent metaphor is that according to which Mary's hair acts as a net to entrap Christ's feet:

Y como el Cielo por los pies tenía,

²⁸ Gary Kuchar, *Divine Subjection: The Rhetoric of Sacramental Devotion in Early Modern England* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 2005), p. 61.

²⁹ Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note this may be an allusion to a known personage, p. 267 v. 10.

³⁰ Perry J. Powers, 'Lope de Vega and *Las lágrimas de la Madalena*', *CL*, VIII (1956), 273–290 (p. 290).

³¹ For further examples see: vv. 45–48, 53, 60, 73, 50, 99, 227, 265–66, 270, 273–75, 279, 327, 374 and 790.

asirle pretendió con los cabellos,
que entre las plantas del Cordero santo
hicieron ondas por el mar del llanto. (vv. 45–48)

Feet and hair are visualized as the roots of a tree and associated with Christ, symbolized as the tree of life:

María, pues, con sus cabellos de oro
parece que le puso las raíces
al árbol santo cuyo fruto adoro
en una rama, aunque de dos matices. (vv. 73–76)

The ‘dos matices’, seen by Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez as the the body and blood of the Eucharist (*RS* 271), also convey an ambivalence which points to the multivalency of the language and its interpretation. Hair becomes its roots, ‘raíces’, and branches, ‘rama’. The tree not only produces fruit, the trunk itself produces the ‘vara santa’ of Aaron (vv. 66–67). From there the metaphor develops to ‘nudos de amor’ (v. 83), and the ‘hiedra’ (v. 91) and ‘brazos’ (v. 92) which facilitate the ascent to heaven. Powers notes the religious significance of the images and suggests they form the ‘meaning of the poem’ (283), the emulation of Christ’s spiritual perfection and the didacticism implicit in the interpretation of the allegory contained within the imagery. But the extent of their repetition creates a sense of poetic excess which, at times, overwhelms their underlying message. The religious impact is lost within the task of deciphering, made more difficult by the complexity of the language which gives prominence to the poetry rather than any underlying discourse. The overall effect imparts a poetic cleverness that provides an unsettling contrast with the narrative. Metaphorically charged language is interposed with descriptive text. The eyes as ‘fuentes’ of tears searching for Christ, their ‘viva Fuente’ (v. 112), are juxtaposed in the following line with unadorned storytelling: ‘La casa toda el nardo aromatiza, / los convidados sienten la fragancia, (vv. 113–14). Powers writes: ‘the transformation of the objects is rapid and follows the “logic” of metaphorical meaning in the manner of Góngora and addresses itself to the mind that grasps meaning rather than to the eyes that perceive objects’ (281). A poetic intent to go beyond traditional interpretations of the subject distinguishes his treatment; the poetry functions, at times, on a purely poetic level.

The poem belongs to the convention of ‘the popular theme of Mary Magdalene’s repentance’ (Powers 273) which served as ‘raw material for the baroque drama of sin and repentance’ (Powers 277). There were several poems on the tears of the Magdalene that may have been Lope’s inspiration, but none appear to have much in common poetically or stylistically. The translation of Erasmo da Valvasone’s *Lagrime di Santa Maria Maddalena* was, perhaps, the most popular of the versions in circulation (Powers 287) and it is this version that may have served as his model.³² The ‘duality’ (Powers 279) inherent in the contrast between human and divine love is evident in the relationship between Christ and Mary and the uncertainty with which Valvasone’s work was received has also been identified: ‘though the purpose of the writer is undoubtedly a devout one, he sacrifices so much to the decadent tastes of the period that he turns to little advantage the possibilities here open for pious lyricism’ (Janelle 144). Kuchar refers to Mary’s importance as a religious symbol in the art of the period (55–56), but he also notes the degree of ambivalence that the tradition generated. Commenting on Southwell’s poem he writes:

For the homiletic structure is designed to show how the reader should respond to Mary, it can only do so by repressing, rather than resolving, the various complications that inhere in deciding whether an object of excessive passion is religious or narcissistic. (69)

This is exactly the problem inherent in the sensuality of Lope’s religious poetry; its framing blurs religious and egocentric passions both thematically and linguistically. These features are present in Valvasone’s original:

There is little in it that tells of the inward life of the soul; the expression of feeling is outward not intimate. [.....] More generally in the *Lagrime*, only the external aspect of things is insisted on. [.....] Add to this the easy, good-humored, irreverent familiarity with which he handles the theme of Mary Magdalen’s conversion at Jesus’ feet; and the equally untimely display of punning wit. All this shows how much slack had to be taken up by the Catholic reformation before bringing Christian poetry to the chastened simplicity and intimacy which were to make it worthy of its object. (146)

³² See also Janelle: ‘A similar swarming of translations, adaptations, and imitations following the appearance of Valvasone’s poem on Mary Magdalen’, p. 144.

The dramatic and poetic potential the subject afforded was clearly an attraction for the poets of the period. José de Valdivielso also included a poem about Mary Magdalene in his *Romancero espiritual*. Valdivielso's 'Romance a la conversión de la Magdalena', comprises only one hundred lines compared to the eight hundred lines of Lope's version which begins by drawing attention to her as an object of sexual desire:

Los bellos ojos y el desdén tirano
en gracia y hermosura peregrino,
que mataron mejor de amor humano
y lloraron mejor de amor divino. (vv. 1–4)

The eyes denote beauty and power; they simultaneously kill with their attraction and cry with emotion. The notion of sexual predator is conveyed in this image in which Christ becomes the pursued thereby inverting his traditional role of lover pursuing his damsel, the metaphorical soul. Her hair becomes a weapon: 'porque con los cabellos la cogía' (53), and: 'propuse yo con mis cabellos / enamoraros por los pies' (vv. 265–66). Valdivielso on the other hand invokes the metaphor of the hunt:

Dolorosa Magdalena,
que era un ave de rapiña,
a los pies del caçador
cayó turbada y herida.
Salió el Dios de amor a caça,
y viola volar altiva,
y disparó la escopeta
de su palabra divina.³³

In Valdivielso's version the imagery is violent; she is shot by the divine word. In Lope's poem it is an act of seduction, and her intimacy with Christ is the subject of envy for the heavens:

Si en los cabellos se volvió el unguento,
llevó de más el precio que tenía;
de que tuviera envidia del Cielo atento,
viendo los pies del Sol en sus cabellos,
pues hizo paralelos de ellos. (vv. 60–64)

³³ José de Valdivielso, *Romancero espiritual*, ed. by J.M. Aguirre (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1984), p. 100.

Whilst Lope uses a visual metaphor rather than analogy at the outset, both close with doctrine. Valdivielso's is homiletic:

Porque lágrimas de un alma,
con dolor y amor vertidas,
tienen cierta omnipotencia
con que vencen la divina. (102, vv. 73–76)

Lope's final stanza addresses and seeks to unite all repentant sinners as his narrator implores them to weep, appealing to their affective piety through the drama of the situation:

Resta que tú, que yo, que las piadosas,
o las que el ciego error convierte en hielo,
con su ejemplo santísimo, lloremos
no haber llorado, y que llorar debemos. (vv. 797–800)

These lines work as a colloquy, a simple and unequivocal call to follow the path of penitence. However, its doctrinal summation is a brief epilogue and functions as a device to formally close the poem not to mitigate the central ambivalence of the Magdalene's reasons for her tears, reasons we are expected to comprehend by imitating her saintly example.

Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez see the ambivalence of the language of *Rimas sacras* as implicit in the religiosity of the period:

Lope da forma y sustancia lírica a una clave fundamental del Renacimiento cristiano y del arte barroco. Esto es, el amor humano se diferencia del divino tan sólo en la mención del objeto, pero utiliza en su expresión recursos retóricos semejantes. (RS 28)

This again raises the question of the poet's intention and the intentionality of his language. In, for example, Mary Magdalene's soliloquy describing Christ's physical beauty Lope dramatizes precisely the tension that runs along the line that divides religion and sensuality, divine and human love. He therefore appears to deliberately play with the

ambivalence and to test both his own artistry and the reader's capacity to interpret according to a preconceived religious significance. When Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez write of the work as 'el producto de una voz narrativa escindida como poeta, teólogo, hombre arrepentido y amante enzarzado en variadas aventuras amorosos' (31) they represent the work as an instinctive poetic outpouring, less controlled and deliberate than I suggest is the case. *Rimas sacras* follows literary precedents which involve a spirit of 'truancy' uniting them with 'universal archetypes' of regeneration involving confession and recantation, leading from 'courtly love' to *a lo divino* poetry, an implicit sublimation of sexual human love into the divine. Far from being an intimate and spontaneous confession inspired by religious conviction, the poems dramatize the paradoxes and tensions that the combining of these forces presents.

The narrative voice and religious persona in *Rimas sacras* is constructed around the dramatic potential of the scene of repentance and responds to literary traditions whose language facilitates a variety of connotations and ambivalences. Its poetic motivation is independent of the dramatic conception of the work. The poetic function is explored through the scope for metaphor afforded by biblical references, an environment Terry describes as 'inevitably committed to the production of ingenious conceits' evolved through 'centuries of biblical exegesis' (14):

This habit of seeing images and events of the Gospels as symbolically anticipated in those of the Old Testament - of associating the tree in the Garden of Eden with the Cross, or of drawing parallels between Noah and Christ - is inevitably committed to the production of ingenious conceits. (14)

This tendency developed into popular fashion which sought 'a kind of wit which relies on the disparity between religious language and the secular context on which it builds' (Terry 12). 'Such homely images appear constantly in late sixteenth-century devotional writing, and often give rise to a type of extended metaphor calculated to appeal to popular taste' (Terry 13). He thereby describes how religious literature provided contemporary writers with a fertile source for the exercise and creation of literary conceits constructed around metaphor, a process we have already witnessed in the interpretation of courtly love poetry and highlighted in Lope's Magdalen poem.

Isidro, Pastores de Belén and *Rimas sacras* reveal Lope as a manipulator of religious texts for a variety of purposes including his own self-fashioning as a poet and as a religious figure. However, unlike the previous two works, *Rimas sacras* is a collection of poetry around which Lope has shaped a narrative. As an anthology, its eclectic nature creates a diverse interpretative challenge and evades simple construal. The next chapter offers a more detailed exegesis of the *Rimas sacras* and responds both to the multiplicity of potential readings embedded within its traditional sources of *a lo divino* and ‘courtly love’ and Weber’s suggestion that religious poetry is less orthodox than conventionally acknowledged.

Chapter IV

***Rimas sacras*: A ‘Curious Frame’**

In the previous chapter we examined how Lope invites his reader to interpret *Rimas sacras* as an autobiographical confession and constructs a religious persona around the image of a repentant sinner. The text deliberately elides author and narrator and creates a fiction in which his religious conversion is the basis for a repudiation of his secular poetry, announcing a change to devotional lyric, a substitution that conforms to the Platonic ‘ascensional’ model. This conversion is imbued with an idealism that sees a universal application as a reaffirmation of Christian dogma in personal experience which it represents as a form of ‘guiding truth’ (Edmundson 19).

We have seen how many critics have resorted to appeals to Lope’s sincerity as a means of approaching the collection. In doing so they responded to Lope’s own invitation to search for ‘truth’ in his self-fashioned persona.¹ The accumulation of all these features creates a problem for modern readers conditioned to readings on a spectrum from ‘Derridean deconstruction’ (Edmundson 115) to New Historicism. The need to know ‘the nature of the creator’ (Edmundson 186) is the Romantic response to the need to contextualize and work from an awareness of past cultures and values necessary to a ‘real comprehension’ (Edmundson 16) of the text on its own terms, a process frustrated by the fictional nature of *Rimas sacras*. Religion itself also becomes an obstacle. Helen Wilcox, in an attempt to identify seventeenth-century English devotional poetry as a genre, observes the paradoxical nature of devotional literature; she refers to it as a ‘curious frame’ which ‘must be broken in order for the soul to gain liberation from the unwanted

¹ Amongst others see Sánchez Jiménez: ‘trata la poesía lopesca como una fuente de datos sobre la vida del autor y, por tanto, supone implícitamente que la poesía retrata con veracidad los sentimientos y vivencias del poeta’, p. 4.

restrictions of human systems, such as words, forms, and emblems, some of the central focuses of the seventeenth-century religious lyric' which she goes on to note is 'defined by spiritual as well as literary factors'.² In writing this, she acknowledges the status of religious lyric outside normal literary rules. Edmundson notes how the modern critic has been brought up in a world without the authority of religious faith:

If there are no centers and no generally agreed truths to undergird experience, then interpretation becomes the name of the game: in a world without God or god substitutes we compare readings rather than warring over creeds. (19)

The absence of such authority makes the task of contextualization more complex because the critic starts from the disadvantage of an agnostic point of view which creates a further separation from the age in which the text was written. The critic also sets out with the purpose of identifying 'real meaning' behind the perceived ideology conveyed in the words of the author and thereby runs the danger of inadvertently imposing their own ideology, merely replacing one for another. However, this agnosticism can also be an advantage because it removes a prejudice which, because of its own fundamental authority, limits any wider interpretation than that presented in the text, which as we have seen, in the case of the *Rimas sacras*, leads to the simplistic confirmation of the work as a sincere outpouring of the 'real' inner self and a vindication of the theocentric aspirations of Golden Age Spain. The New Historicist starting position is one of conformity to shared cultural values, but it is a form of orthodoxy arrived at by diverse expression. Edmundson writes:

New Historicists like Greenblatt understand that while a culture may tend toward total cohesion, the actual situation is always a dynamic one in which numberless discourses energies and desires circulate, ceaselessly inflecting and reinflecting each other. [.....] Literary works continually reveal the existing structures of coercion, and in fact challenge those structures with liberating alternatives. But the challenge is inevitably reabsorbed into the larger disciplinary patterns that are then culturally active. (187)

² Helen Wilcox, "Curious frame": The Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric as Genre', in *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric*, ed. by John R. Roberts (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), pp. 9–27 (p. 27).

It is within the framework of a diversity of views that, in this chapter, I intend to undertake a reading of *Rimas sacras* that attempts to arrive at a less orthodox understanding. This is a daunting task for a work which Pedraza Jiménez described as ‘inabarcable’; but within the ‘incitaciones contradictorias desde los acentos más íntimas e incluso desgarrados’ (150) that make up the book I hope to identify some of the tensions that Foucault sees in society at large and Greenblatt discerns in literature as a whole when he writes:

The subversive voices are produced by and within the affirmations of order; they are powerfully registered, but they do not undermine that order. Indeed [.....] the order is neither possible nor fully convincing without both the presence and perception of betrayal. (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* 52)

Structuring an approach

Rimas sacras is, as Pedraza Jiménez observes, an eclectic mix of poems, a ‘compendio de un compendio’ (150). Yolanda Novo refers to it as a work of ‘carácter híbrido’, ‘estimulante para todo tipo de lectores’ (309). This is the essential difficulty with determining an approach to the work. Beyond the essential structure of the narrative voice, discussed in the previous chapter, its hybrid nature complicates a simple coherent approach.

The book is dedicated to his Confessor, Padre Fray Martín de San Cirilo:

Frutos son estos pensamientos del campo que vuestra paternidad ha labrado, y así es justo que le ofrezcan, si bien es verdad que no corresponde a la labor el fruto. Pero no culparán los que vieren al beneficio, sino la estéril tierra. Vuestra paternidad los reciba como a hijos vistiéndolos de su protección, aunque descalzo al mundo. Nuestro Señor guarde a vuestra paternidad como yo os deseo. (116)

This preface, again, demonstrates Lope’s proclivity to the use of *aporia* and *meiosis* through which he flatters his subject and evinces a false modesty over his creation: ‘el fruto’. If the work falls short of his reader’s expectation, he states, it is the barrenness of the author, ‘el estéril tierra’, rather than the efforts, ‘labor’, of the Padre that should be blamed. He thereby both praises his confessor and invites an assessment of the quality of

his work. Lope leaves the measurement of success ambiguously undefined with no clue whether the 'beneficio' is to be derived in religious or literary terms. The agricultural function as pastor is joined with the paternal role implied in his title 'Padre' to suggest an ongoing responsibility for the work. This goes beyond flattery; the word 'protección' establishes a duty to protect the 'hijos', a metonym for his poems, and suggests an obligation to safeguard the poet himself; both become fruits of the 'father'. As a literary device, this dedication establishes an intimacy between the Padre and poet that distances and excludes the reader and thereby creates a sense of voyeurism in the witnessing of the poet's secret confession and reformation. However the existence of the relationship and the refraction of responsibility away from the author also creates a defence mechanism, the seal of approval from an expert, against any misinterpretation over the nature of the book; something the very suggestion of the need for protection itself appears to anticipate. A ludic quality is again evident in the subsequent dedication, made to the reader by an Antonio Flores, a favorite pseudonym of Lope (*RS* 117 n.18), in which Flores assumes responsibility for both the selection of the poems and publication of the book. The poet's use of wit in this dedication intimates a frivolity which is not obviously supported by the book itself. Together with the conceits contained in the preface they suggest a lack of decorum and provide an overall sense that all is not as it seems, factors that possibly led Pedraza Jiménez to comment, 'toda indica que éste prólogo a los lectores es una de las inocentes supercherías a que tan aficionado era Lope' (135). The modern reader will also associate the tone of this preface with Lope's remarks made about his confessor in his personal letters to the Duke of Sessa which refer to the refusal to pronounce absolution because of his continued function as secretary to the Duke: 'no quisieron el san Juan absoluerme si no daua la palabra de dexar a hazerlo' (*Epistolario* III 152). Whilst it is not clear whether he is referring to Fray Martín in this instance, these and further remarks contained in his letters suggest an impious lack of seriousness about his relationship with the priest involved in his ordination in the period immediately prior to the publication of the *Rimas sacras* in the summer of 1614. Whilst Lope's contemporary readers would not have had access to these private details, the spiritual reformation of such a notorious character may have surprised many of them.

Nevertheless, as early as the preface, the reader is alerted to the author's playfulness and primed to the possibility of accusations of his hypocrisy.

Rimas sacras begins with an introduction which is followed by one hundred religious sonnets; a long poem, 'Las lágrimas de la Madalena', previously referred to; eleven glosas; nineteen romances, which recount the story of the passion; eleven 'canciones' and elegies; thirteen additional romances; and then completed by twelve miscellaneous poems. Even though the precise number of sonnets implies a design, the book lacks an obvious structure. Despite their patent religious identity the diversity of styles and subjects disorientates the modern reader. Until the recent edition of *Rimas sacras* by Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez the only significant body of criticism dedicated to this work has come from Yolanda Novo. Her's remains the most extensive critical examination of *Rimas sacras* to date. Yolanda Novo's approach to the *Rimas sacras* is structuralist. The objectivity claimed by her for her study lies in the fact that it is an 'interpretación estilística' (Sánchez Jiménez 6) which deliberately avoids the subjectivity of the author. It was the search for design within the work's apparent disunity that forced Yolanda Novo into a methodological and systematic analysis in which, in her words, she addresses the 'general orientación filológica' of the work in order to 'explicar su funcionalidad y sentido, a través de una combinatoria del enfoques analíticos y sintéticos' (Novo 315). The lack of precision in her methodology suggests she has wrestled with an approach to the book. She undertakes an exhaustive analysis of the sonnets and identifies several themes which she sees as formed into a pattern of sequences. These are listed as follows: 'conciencia de la inanidad existencial del yo'; 'autoexamen y conciencia de error concreto cometido. Visión del caos espiritual. Palinodia del estado reiterado de pecado en el pasado'; 'llanto de atrición expresivo del dolor de corazón'; 'promesa de renunciar ascéticamente al mundo y prisas en alcanzar la conversión'; 'el amor platónico a Dios potencia la *caritas* y la *pulchritudo* inherentes a la divinidad'; 'promesa de renunciar ascéticamente al mundo y oscilaciones entre el bien y el mal'; 'paréntesis o digresiones que amplifican e ilustran la 'res' y 'causa' de la meditación'; 'vanitas universal'; 'esperanza en la ayuda de la gracia divina en el camino hacia la redención personal'; 'balance el proceso'; 'el sujeto de la meditación se detiene para puntualizar las actitudes presentes, pasadas, y futuras de su viaje hacia el autoconocimiento; y progreso

ascendente hacia la virtud' (75–78). She attributes the sequencing of the sonnets to an intricate design in which the themes are introduced and developed from various patterns initiated within the first nine sonnets (75): 'he aquí la confirmación de que la distribución de los microtextos no es irrelevante' (78). Whilst I believe her work accurately reflects the subject matter and ideas of the sonnets, the resultant conclusion indicates an intention in the author which is both inconsistent with his traditional image as 'descuidado y poco artificioso',³ and too complex for his reader to have appreciated. Any attempt to find a microstructure within the work seems problematic and instead I propose a less systematic approach based around what I perceive to be the poetic aim, which is to recreate a series of 'moods' reflecting the narrator's emotional states which, whilst corresponding to the themes identified by Novo, are interposed and contrasted one against another to provide poetic balance. The overall effect is to provide a series of contrasting poses and articulate tensions in his relationship to an omnipotent authority represented in the figure of God.

Alison Weber goes further to read the work as a coded account of Lope's relationship with the Duke of Sessa. In her interpretation Lope's newly found relationship with God represents an escape from the demands and control of the Duke. Seen in this way, the instability of the religious persona revealed in the narrator reflects the erratic and complicated interdependence of the pair; the protection of a real Divinity is therefore tacitly compared with the protection afforded by the patronage of the Duke to whom the work thereby becomes an overt challenge. She refers to a section in 'A la muerte de Carlos Félix' (RS 455–67), a poem written on the death of Lope's son in 1612 (Castro and Rennert 201; Barrera 139a), and one I will return to in greater depth in the next chapter in the context of death and disillusion, to support this interpretation:

¿Qué me importara a mí que os viera puesto
a la sombra de un príncipe de la tierra,
pues Dios maldice a quien en ellos fía,
ni aun ser el mismo príncipe, compuesto
de aquel metal del sol, del mundo guerra,
que tantas vidas consumir porfía?

³ Antonio Sánchez Jiménez, 'Baltasar Gracián y las Rimas Sacras (1614) de Lope de Vega: como modelo del conceptisimo sacro en la *Agudeza y arte de Ingenio*', *Calliope*, 12 (2006), 7–24, (p. 9).

La breve tiranía,
la mortal hermosura,
la ambición de los hombres
con títulos y nombres,
que la lisonja idolatrar procura,
al expirar la vida, ¿en qué se vuelven,
si al fin en el principio se resuelven? (vv. 144–56)

In this allegorical and autobiographical reading the ‘príncipe de la tierra’ is taken to mean the Duke who Lope looked to as both protector and patron. The material values that the ‘prince’ represents have failed Carlos; he, like so many others, has been consumed by the price of gold and martial belligerence. Against the adulation of power and ancestor worship associated with the nobility the poem counterposes a neo-stoic idea of death. In Weber’s reading, this represents a direct challenge to the Duke and reflects an impatience and resentment of his worldly powers and the authority the Duke commands over the poet. The crisis of conscience and conversion portrayed in many of the poems is linked to an attempt to extricate himself from his relationship with worldly power, a situation that has a parallel with Ginés in *Lo fingido verdadero*.

As Weber points out, Lope’s letters support the idea of the internal conflict his continued involvement with the Duke’s secretarial duties produced (408). She notes the evidence of the first mention of the conflict in letters dated February and May 1612, shortly before Carlos’s death. In the first of these letters he complains about the Duke’s treatment of him:

No es justo que Vex.^a, Señor, me trate tan asperamente, sabiendo el alma con que le adoro, estimo y reberençio, que osaria deçir que es linage de yngratitud, a no ser Vex.^a quien es. No es justo que Esta negra casa, ya por mis pecados, el cuerpo mismo con que cubre el alma que Dios fue seruido de ynfundirme, me obliga a ocupaçiones ajenas de mi natural condiçión; pero naçimos algunos hombres con el estrella que la misma cuna nos siruio de galera, y desde entonzes vamos forçados en la vida. (*Epistolario* III 92)

He rationalizes his subjugation, evidenced in the enigmatically phrased and sinister sounding ‘ocupaçiones ajenas de mi natural condiçión’, by way of his inherited position as a servant and as the cost of his sins. The second comments on the displeasure his secretarial duties produce in his confessors: ‘Señor, para deçir verdad a Vex.^a, no me

dexan escriuir estos papeles los que nos riñen cada ocho dias' (*Epistolario* III 104). However the evidence of significant emotional disturbance over the issue does not surface until two years later in 1614 at a time Lope had already been ordained (*Epistolario* III 156). Whilst it is reasonable to see how, in *Rimas sacras*, Lope may have been articulating the conflicts that his relationship with Sessa produced, the situation was clearly not significant enough to prevent him from continuing his responsibilities. In fact in the letter dated March 1614 in which he announces his ordination he refers to the extension of his duties to that of the Duke's chaplain: 'para que Vex.^a sepa que ya me voy açercando a capellan suyo'. The same letter is signed 'Capellan de Vex.^a' (*Epistolario* III 138). This is followed a month later by a comment that he will use his ordination for the benefit of the Duke: 'y a encargarme en siendo saçerdote de pagar la deuda en mis sacrificios' (*Epistolario* III 145). The first letter after his ordination to reveal the conflict with his confessor is the previously cited letter dated by Amezúa to June 1614 (156) in which Lope indicates that had he known the consequences of his ordination he would have put his obviously salacious secretarial functions before his office as priest.

These letters indicate that the internal conflict between his religious and professional obligations would have reached a peak at a time he must have been preparing for the publication of *Rimas sacras*⁴ in September and far from representing a refuge from Sessa's control his new relationship with God produced guilt and uncertainty over the reconciliation of his two responsibilities, for which he did not blame Sessa. This, I believe, undermines any suggestion that *Rimas sacras* was specifically directed at Sessa. The idea that the poem written on the death of Carlos represented a veiled challenge seems too obvious and dangerous to be taken seriously. However the parallels between the two relationships, worldly and divine authority, are clear and the agony of self-doubt witnessed in the Sonnets may have been modeled on his feelings over the contradictions implicit in his divided and contradictory responsibilities; both are based around a struggle for self-determination against subjection. As Alison Weber's reading suggests, behind the predominant sense of affective piety that pervades *Rimas sacras*, the book can be seen as

⁴ The first license for publication was given on 2nd August 1614, *RS*, p. 109.

an expression of the narrator's shifting attitude to authority, a mediation of his state of subjection whether to the tyranny of conscience and guilt or earthly obligations.

The Introduction (124–30) establishes the narrative voice of the book and acts as an invitation to read the work as autobiography. As a recapitulation of his delusions and disappointment it implies a state of calm and confidence which allows the writing of the book. The arrival at this tranquility is presented as an epic homecoming of classical proportions:

Que no se puede igualar
el gusto y gloria que encierra
contar un hombre en la tierra
los peligros del mar,

mayormente si ha llegado
a Tierra de Promisión,
y la puerta del perdón
de tu divino costado. (vv. 36–44)

Combining biblical and maritime images, the narrator is seen to have crossed the dangers of the sea, frequently used by Lope to signify life itself (126 vv. 29–32) and, in the 'gusto y gloria' of a man who has arrived at the Promised Land, in a pun on the word 'costa', the security of Christ's side, his 'costado'.⁵ He does not express any doubt or anticipation over final rejection at the gates of heaven, 'la puerta del perdón'. The richness and complexity of the imagery confer a sense of control in the narrator which adds a perception of confidence to the tenor of the poem. The notion that the potential danger has passed is conveyed by the frequent use of the adverb 'ya' to indicate a changed circumstance. Together with the previously cited incidences, 'aunque ya por su piedad a Jerusalén volví' (v. 57), 'ya el nuevo Adán me visto' (v. 61), and 'ya soy sacerdote y rey, / ya tengo insignias reales' (vv. 67–68), he uses the word several other times: 'ya me has sentado a tu mesa' (v. 100), 'Estando ya en paz los dos' (v. 121), 'ya tengo poder' (v. 143), and then in the last stanza:

Y ya, mi Dios, no pretendo
excusarme vez ninguna,

⁵ See also sonnet XXXVI v. 14 where he uses the same metaphor: 'a las aguas del mar de su costado'.

porque me subas alguna
de cuantas yo te desciendo. (vv. 145–48)

Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note an empowerment associated with his ordination: ‘siendo Lope sacerdote tiene poder para bajar a Dios del cielo en la consagración’ (130 v. 143). His new position provides authority to communicate directly with God and to spread God’s word by bringing it down to his readers. The most striking of all these references are the proclamations that he is now ‘sacerdote y rey’, in possession of ‘insignias reales’, and is invited to eat at God’s table, ‘tu mesa’. Whilst indicating his arrival at a position of privilege and, perhaps in conjunction with his promotion to the priesthood, an elevation removing him from the ordinariness implicit in being ‘un hombre en la tierra’, these words indicate a surprising absence of humility. The lines ‘pues no cesan las mercedes, / no cesen las alabanzas’ (vv. 51–52) indicate a curious transaction in which thanks and praise are balanced in phrases that mirror each other. The central ambiguity in this introductory poem rests on whether the real prize gained is his new status in communion with Christ or the more earthly benefits resulting from his ordination. In the line ‘y en su templo me vestí / las ropas de libertad’ (vv. 59–60) his clerical robes signal a variety of possible freedoms: liberty of ecclesiastical privilege; release from the figurative prison of spiritual darkness; passage to heaven; and freedom to promote God’s word through his position as the ‘nuevo Adán’. However, paradoxically, it is a freedom signalled by enslavement to a new divine master: ‘De esclavo, que hierros tales / me sujetan a su ley’ (vv. 65–66). Lope makes no effort to reconcile or explain the ambivalence.

Setting the mood

In the early sonnets, this sense of confidence fluctuates and the shifting moods articulate a tension between despair and hope. ‘Soneto Primero’ (131), previously referred to in the context of a *contrafacta* of Garcilaso’s original thereby establishing a literary motivation, reveals how the narrator has stopped to undertake a self-examination, ‘Cuando me paro a contemplar mi estado’ and discovered ‘su error’ (v. 4), echoing the ‘errores vanos’ of the Introduction. The final stanza indicates a process of emergence and recovery:

Mas, de tu luz mi oscuridad vencida,
el monstruo muerto de mi ciego engaño,
vuelve a la patria la razón perdida. (vv. 12–14)

Reason, lost through either madness or a lapse of self-control, has returned to him. Having slain the monster, the conquering hero returns to his homeland, an image which adds a sense of empowerment consistent with the tone of the Introduction. The second sonnet whilst reinforcing the idea of recovery also refers to the need for further effort:

Mas, ya es hecho, que volvaís os pido:
que quien de lo perdido se arrepiente
aún no puede decir que lo ha perdido. (vv. 12–14)

The word ‘hecho’ contrasts with the plea for a change of course suggested in ‘volvaís’, addressed to the ‘Pasos de mi primera edad’ (v. 1). The sonnet conveys the implication of temporality in which repentance and return remain possible. The notion of absence is created in the word, ‘perdido’. The following sonnets lead the reader into the internal turmoil of the narrator, ‘una especie de viaje interior’ (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez 134), thereby breaking the overall tone of the sequence thus far and suggestive of an extreme swing. Sonnet III extends the conceit of self-division through the metaphor of civil war, ‘una loca república alterada’ (v. 3) and a ‘fuerza armada’ (v. 4) which is needed to bring the soul back to its ‘verdadero centro’ (v. 5); but ends by extolling the power of the will:

Muera el ardor del apetito intenso
porque la voluntad al centro vuela
capaz potencia de su bien inmenso. (vv. 12–14)

Despite the brutality of the fight, which implies self-mortification, ‘que el cuerpo en el castigo se desvele’ (v. 11), the subject remains in control of his own destiny through the ‘capaz potencia’ of ‘la voluntad’. The suggestion of mortification recalls Montalban’s image of Lope as a blood stained flagellant. The following sonnet, IV, provides the comparative calmness of further introspection which progresses to tranquility under the protection of God. Here the apparent objective is to seek reassurance and respite after the internal upheaval:

Era su esfera Dios para quietarse
y, como fuera de Él lo pretendía,
no pudo hasta tenerle sosegarse. (vv.12–14)

The fluctuation of mood between turmoil and tranquility and intimacy with and distance from God is a feature of the sonnets. The series of Sonnets from V to VIII reflect self-examination. Sonnet V (137–38) begins with the question: ‘¿Qué ceguedad me trajo a tantos daños? / ¿por donde me llevaron desvaríos?’ (vv. 1–2). The mood is of apprehension: ‘que no temer el fin no es valentía’. In Sonnet VI (138–39) the word ‘espera’ (v. 5) indicates a more hopeful tone. The direct communication with God, ‘Y Tú, que sabes ya mi ardiente celo’ (v. 12), establishes an intimacy which suggests a positive outcome. The next sonnet (139–41) shows that introspection has past; he implies he has seen the light, ‘que no viera la Luz’ (v. 2), and the error of his ways: ‘con tanto tiempo en tanto error perdido?’ (v. 8). ‘Templara’ (v. 13) conveys balance and composure soothed by the music of Sion’s lyre (v. 10). Sonnet VIII (142) returns to anxiety and the present with the line ‘¿qué repugnancia es ésta que te oprime?’ (v. 2) and a call for action expressed in his address to his ‘Ánimo’ (v. 9). Sonnet IX continues with urgency and harshness. In the first obvious characterization in the sonnets the narrator forms an analogy between himself and Adam, the original sinner and rebel:

y yo, que tener la razón fuera,
a sus preceptos, ¡oh rigor terrible!,
rebelde estoy como la vez primera. (vv. 12–14)

By describing himself as a rebel he appears to fashion himself in opposition to authority, a position of non-conformity he justifies by Biblical precedent. The sense of rebellion as a symptom of internal unease, as I will note later, becomes a theme within the work. With no previous indication of such a change in temper, the sins of his youth take on a more serious and irredeemable perspective. He uses the words ‘omnipotencia’ (v. 2) and ‘obediencia’ (v. 3) in connection with God. The following Sonnet, X, refers to ‘la flaqueza extrema del sujeto’ (v. 4) in contrast to the authority of God described as ‘el Jüez’:

¿Querrá el Jüez entonces ser piadoso?,

¿admitirá la apelación, si tiene
tan justas quejas y es tan poderoso?

¡Oh vida!, no aguardeís que el curso enfrene
el paso de la muerte riguroso,
que no es consejo el que tan tarde viene. (vv. 9–14)

The image of God as judge is the first finite depiction of divinity in the collection. The notion of justice provides a sense of punishment, but, the question ‘¿admitirá?’ introduces a sense of unpredictability. Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez observe how the following Sonnet, XI, compares the narrator to the biblical figure of Jonah and contains ‘interrogaciones retóricas expresando la omnipotencia divina y la imposibilidad de escapar al castigo de Dios’ (145). The sonnet recreates the plea made by Jonah from the belly of the whale (Jonah 2. 3–10). The opening stanza exemplifies the similarities:

¿En qué bárbara tierra me guardara,
intrincada de peñas y maleza;
o qué abismo formó naturaleza
adonde el rayo de tu luz no entrara? (vv. 1–4)

This resonates with Jonah, 2. 6–7:

*Abyssus vallavit me, pelagus operuit caput meum. Ad extrema montium descendi:
terrae vectes concluserunt me in aeternum: & sublevabis de corruptione vitam
meam, Domine Deus meus.*

Jonah’s continued disobedience of God is reflected in the stanza:

Si le tragó la foca al que querría
huir de Tí, más loco fue mi intento,
mayor mi atrevimiento y rebeldía. (vv. 9–11)

Lope bases his conceit on the association of the narrator’s rebelliousness with that of Jonah whose imprisonment in the belly of the whale is compared with the darkness of the narrator’s condition created by the absence of God’s illumination: ‘rayo de tu luz’. ‘Rayo’, however, in the context of the biblical story might also allude to the sun’s rays that weakened Jonah to the point of death (Jonah 4. 6–8). Incarceration also, therefore,

functions as a protection from God's wrath, an essential irony of the Jonah story and something that Lope appears to miss in his poem which, with the words, 'más loco fue mi intento', treats the swallowing of Jonah as a punishment. Bloom notes it was a story traditionally regarded as humorous and ironic, its central theme compares God's treatment of Jonah with Jonah's attitude to the Ninevites.⁶ The adoption of Jonah as a model, as we will also see later in the case of Job, provides a distinct idea of the author's relationship with God and shapes a concrete persona from the Bible for the narrator. The narrator identifies himself with the character of the rebel, exemplified by Jonah, and in doing so reinforces the central theme of 'truancy', confession, and repentance, discussed earlier. However Jonah's story is not one of contrition or repentance. Lope applies the imagery afforded by the story of Jonah to great effect but does not extract its full didactic potential. The final tercet of the sonnet promises a return to penitence in order to renew a union with God:

Más ya vuelvo a buscarte, y tan contento
que me dan, para hallarte noche y día,
mis ojos mar, y mis suspiros viento. (vv. 12–14)

It is an outcome that is not at all clear in the biblical story which ends with Jonah's defiant response, 'Bene irascor ego usque ad mortem (Jonah 4. 9), and God's veiled admonishment 'Et ego non parcam Nineve' (Jonah 4. 11). Lope appears to have used the traditional idea of Job as a symbol reflecting God's omnipotence without elucidation of the moral of his story which calls for compassion and altruism.

Neo-stoic thought re-emerges in Sonnets XII and XIII:

y en un instante al riguroso y duro
golpe tengo de ver la vida ausente. (XII vv. 3–4)

and:

La muerte, al fin de cuanto vive dueño,
está dos imágenes compuesta:
el tiempo antes de nacer y el sueño. (XIII vv. 12–14)

⁶ See Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to the Present* (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 22–24.

These sonnets clearly fall into Novo's category of 'vanitas universal', based on the meaninglessness of worldly existence. They preclude any value placed on love or sensuality. This temper is reversed in the subsequent sonnet, XIV, which returns to the idea of Christ as pastor caring for his sheep:

Oye pastor pues por amores mueres:
no te espante el rigor de mis pecados,
pues tan amigo de rendidos eres. (vv. 12–14)

Christ is presented as a friend, rather than enemy, of the 'rendidos' and whose 'dulces silbos' and 'pies hermosos' (v. 8) provide a gentle, reassuring and harmonious presence. Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez explain the meaning of 'rendidos' as those 'vencidos por el pecado' (*RS* 149), a reading that evokes the idea of the unrequited courtly lover vanquished by beauty and shows God as a supporter of the lovelorn. However, to encourage repentance rather than support transgression, it should be interpreted as those who have surrendered to Christ from their sinful state rather than those in it. The ambivalence of the language does not lead to a clear moral.

These opening sonnets reflect an unpredictable pattern of changing moods and display a range of emotions from security in God's love to fear of retribution. Each of the successive emotional states dramatizes the spiritual turmoil of the narrator. The resultant sense of unpredictability enhances the dramatic impact of the work as a whole. It is undoubtedly the narrator's instability figured as a 'loca república alterada' in Sonnet III, together with the author's invitation to read the text as autobiography, that has led to the fomentation of the popular notion that the work was a product of the religious crisis suffered by the author. The insistent repetition of the themes of autobiography and agonized self-reflection enhances the impression of piety and sincerity that several critics have seen both in these sonnets and the book as a whole.

The perception of spiritual progress at the beginning of the sequence of sonnets is attenuated by the reiteration of the same emotional states. However, suggestions of design continue to emerge. The subject matter of the second fifty of exactly one hundred sonnets change from the specifically autobiographical to be dominated by homiles and

hagiographical eulogies of sinning saints who provide precedents for the narrator's own situation and offer a contrast to the personal contemplation of the first fifty sonnets.⁷

A guide to devotion

After the ten *glosas*, and a long poem addressed to Padre Fray Vicente Pellicer (324–34) the book proceeds to the first cycle of Romances.⁸ As with the sonnets and ‘Las lágrimas de la Magdalena’, the Romances constitute a substantial and homogeneously identifiable part of the collection. They ostensibly follow the Passion of Christ, each poem representing a station of the cross. Each of these Romances conforms to a pattern in which there is a description of a scene within the *via crucis* followed by a call to the soul to contemplate a particular aspect or carry out a certain action. Yolanda Novo refers to this as ‘la retórica de la meditación’ which, she adds, was ‘común a la poesía religiosa del siglo XVII europeo’ (312). Louis Martz explains that Saint Bonaventura’s *Meditations on the Life of Christ* provided the ‘prototype of the imaginative meditation cultivated by the Jesuits in which:

every detail of the story must be dramatized as if one were present.[...] We must imagine the facial expressions, the gestures. [....] Not only are we to compose the scene but we are to move onto the stage ourselves. [...] In these medieval meditations the pious affections and “good motions” thus arise directly from a vivid apprehension of the physical scene. When theology is present it is given in simple abstractions, never explored or elaborated: the understanding does not here intervene to make “discourses” on the theological significance of the scene.⁹

Presence and drama are central to this religious poetry particularly the Romances. The requirement to ‘compose the scene’ plays straight to Lope’s artistry as both poet and dramatist. It provides the opportunity for creating a sense of presence and immediacy. Martz explains, though, that this ‘purely affective meditation’ had important differences with meditative processes developed by the Jesuits and Fray Luis de Granada. For them

⁷ The acceptability of the Sonnet as a religious form is reflected by Donne’s *Holy Sonnets*. See Martz, pp. 43–56, and Novo, p. 86.

⁸ Fray Vicente Pellicer is thought by Barrera to be a son of Lope conceived in Valencia in 1599, *RS*, p. 324.

⁹ Louis L. Martz, *The poetry of meditation, a study in English religious literature of the seventeenth century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), pp. 73–75.

this “composition of place” (Martz 30) was only the first step which ‘coalesced, and developed by, intricate intellectual analysis [.....] drives home the central Paradox of the God made man’ (Martz 76–77). Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez (16–22), Novo (222–23), and Arantza Mayo, together with several other critics, have identified the affinity between the *Rimas sacras* and Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*.¹⁰ The most striking similarity is the importance of the ‘composition of place’ which is central to each of the exercises:

it will be profitable to pass the five senses of the imagination over the first and second contemplations in the following manner:

The first point is to see the persons with the imaginative sense of sight, meditating and contemplating their circumstances in detail and to draw some profit from the sight.

The second point. To hear with the sense of hearing what they say or might say, and to reflect in oneself and to draw some profit from this.

The third point. To smell and to taste with the senses of smell and taste the infinite gentleness and sweetness of the divinity, and of the soul and of its virtues, and of everything else, according to whoever the person contemplated may be; and to reflect within oneself and draw profit from this.

The fourth Point. To touch with the sense of touch, for example embracing and kissing the places where these persons tread and sit, always seeking to draw profit from this.¹¹

These instructions provide a rationale and framework for the ‘dramatization’ Martz refers to. The exerciser is encouraged to participate in a scene he must recreate through ‘memory’ of biblical events and his ‘imagination’. The invitation to participate in the drama of his verse is the essence of Lope’s poetry; his use of characters, dialogue and realistic detail all attach a vivid quality that is consistent with Loyola’s requirements. Arantza Mayo notes:

Aunque Ignacio es parco en descripciones coloristas, sus concisas indicaciones pueden tomarse como motivadoras de una larga serie de intensas descripciones en la literatura espiritual aurisecular e incluso en el mismo arte de la época. (59)

¹⁰ Mayo, p. 37; Pedraza Jiménez, *El universo poético de Lope de Vega*, p. 140; Eberhard Müller-Bochat, ‘Lope, poeta sacro’, *La Torre*, 41 (1963), 65–85 (p. 80); and Laurie Kaplis-Hohwald ‘La lírica sacrada de Lope de Vega y John Donne’, *Anuario Lope de Vega*, 1, 1995, pp. 61–74 (p. 63).

¹¹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. by Michael Ivens (London: Gracewing, 2004), pp. 37–38.

The introspection and self-examination evidenced in the sonnets is also noted as a fundamental aspect of the exercises: ‘the term ‘spiritual exercises’ denotes every way of examining one’s conscience, of meditating, contemplating, of praying vocally and mentally’ (Loyola 1), as is the requirement ‘to know my sins and reject them’ (17). Likewise the theme of ‘inanimidad’ noted by Novo has a resonance with what Loyola refers to as ‘diminishing myself’ and the humbling process of understanding what ‘creation amounts to in comparison with God’ (22). Confession, too, is regarded as integral to the process (18).

They are divided into four weeks: ‘the consideration and contemplation of sins’; ‘the life of Christ our Lord up to and including Palm Sunday’; ‘the Passion of Christ our Lord’; and, finally, ‘the Resurrection and Ascension, together with three ways of praying’ (2). The order of *Rimas sacras* appears to follow this structure; the sonnets represent the contemplative section and the Romances that of the third and fourth weeks as they follow the events up to the Resurrection. Certainly the inclusion of the hagiographical poems within the sonnets, which otherwise lends an unstructured balance, could be viewed as consistent with Loyola’s advice that ‘it will be very helpful to read from time to time from the *Imitation of Christ*, or from the Gospels or the lives of the saints’ (33). These correlations have led Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez, whilst accepting it is ‘imposible encontrar paralelos exactos para la disposición de todos y cada uno de los textos’, to conclude ‘él orden completo de las *Rimas sacras* sigue, a grandes rasgos, el de los ejercicios de Loyola’ (RS 17). Arantza Mayo goes further to see ‘los principios analíticos’ of Loyola’s work ‘como herramienta metodológica’ for *Rimas sacras* (38) and to suggest the work itself could have been used as a spiritual guide:

Es evidente que la esencia de estos textos es devocional, pero su estudio ha revelado su intrínseca flexibilidad funcional: su lectora es capaz de satisfacer tanto a devotos en busca de guía espiritual como a quienes sencillamente desean leer textos líricos inteligentemente contruidos. (108)

Such a view leads to an interpretation of the book as a didactic tool, strictly observant of both the doctrines of the Council of Trent and the religious expectations of the time. However, there are several notable points of divergence between Loyola’s exercises and

Rimas sacras which suggest a more ambivalent relationship. The first is something Arantza Mayo refers to:

En contraste con la extensa dedicación otorgada a la composición de lugar, Lope parece menos interesado en la aplicación del entendimiento a las situaciones recreadas y el equivalente de lo que sería el cuerpo central de un ejercicio de meditación tiene un papel cuantativo reducido en los romances lopescos. (61)

She is clearly referring to the previously illustrated tendency of Lope to favour the affective components of his writing over its didactic message. Their declared purpose is for the participant to ‘seek and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one’s life for the salvation of the soul’ (1); further it is to ‘ask God our Lord for what I wish for and desire’ (19). There is no specific guidance as to what that specific ‘desire’ might be. The most obvious message is a requirement to be immersed in religious feeling; to ask for ‘grief, tears and great suffering with Christ suffering’ (19); to exhibit ‘contrition, sorrow, (and) tears over their sins’ (3); and ‘to ask for mourning and intense sorrow, and tears for my sins’ (22). However, there is an underlying assumption in the *Exercises* that the participant knows what it is required beyond straightforward emotional involvement: that he is equipped with an understanding which has only to be reinforced by the tutor for whom the guide was intended as a ‘handbook’ (Loyola viii). There is a persistent instruction to ‘draw some spiritual profit’ (36) that underpins the exercises and is the preliminary activity towards a practical purpose which becomes more evident as the exercises progress. On the fourth day of the second week there is a shift towards guidance to moral and social outcomes. In the call for ‘election’ (49) and the ‘meditation on the two standards’ (41) there are such questions as ‘what size of house and staff to have’ (55); ‘how to teach it by word and example’; and, ‘how much should be given to the poor and to other good works’. There is also a call for adherence to the ‘commandments’ and ‘to do better in the future’ (70). This suggests an underlying intellectual and didactic purpose which is beyond the self-absorbing ‘contrition’, ‘sorrow’, and ‘grief’ that affective piety tends to promote, a call towards what we have termed the ‘ascensional aesthetic’, in which we adopt ‘the attitudes we need to acquire in order to reach perfection in whatever state of life God our Lord may grant us to choose’ (41). Luis de Granada’s *Libro de la oración y meditación*, the foremost devotional guide of the period,

provides a useful comparison which helps to determine the religious expectations of contemporary readers. The work stresses a similar sense of ‘inanidad’, a prostration in recognition of God’s omnipotence, and penitential asceticism as found in both Lope’s poems and the *Exercises*:

Pues consideradas todas estas cosas susodichas, siente de ti lo mas baxamente que sea possible. Piensa que no eras mas que una cañavera, que se muda á todas vientos sin peso, sin virtud, sin firmeza, sin estabilidad y sin ninguna manera de ser. [.....] Da voces á Dios, y dile: Señor, nada tengo, nada valgo, nada soy, y nada puedo hacer sin ti.¹²

It refers to ‘la penitencia’ (Cap. I. 5, p. 4) and ‘grandes estimulos para mover nuestro corazon al amor, y temor de Dios’ (Cap. III. 2, p. 21). The image he presents of the *Ecce Homo* carries the same affect:

A ti mismo te ponen en lugar del que padece, y mira lo que sentirias, si en una parte tan sensible, y como es la cabeza te hincassen muchas, y muy agudas espinas, que penetrassen hasta los huessos, que digo espinas? (Cap. XXIII. 8, p. 341)

But it also contains a more overtly charitable and therefore recognizably Christian message in which the care of others comes before self: ‘Si assi has de consolar á los que por tí padecen, bienaventuradas, y dichosas sus passiones, pues assi han de ser remuneradas (Cap. XXVI. 17, p. 420), and ‘despues de haver pedido para nuestros proximos, pidamos luego para nosotros (Cap II. 26, p. 19). The meditations proposed in Granada’s book have a more patently didactic aim than Loyola’s guide:

considera tambien en este mismo passo, por una parte aquella tan grande agonía, y vigiliias de Christo, y por otra el sueño tan profundo de los Discipulos, y verás aqui representado un grande Mysterio. (Cap. XXI. 13, p. 304)

In accordance with his different purpose, Loyola assumes the user, the Jesuit priest for whom the guide was a training manual, is qualified to approach the meditation with an adequate understanding. Granada, in contrast, helps his reader by offering specific

¹² Fray Luis de Granada, *Oración y meditación* (Barcelona: Joseph Galt, a costa de Juan Pilferrer, [n.d]), Cap.V. 9, p. 29.

instruction for popular devotion, an altogether more controversial enterprise for which his work was censored by the Inquisition.

Via Crucis

The first poem in the series, ‘A la despedida de Cristo Nuestro Bien de su Madre Santísima’ (334–38), in which Christ is depicted with Mary before the Passion, is a curious starting point for Lope because the scene does not form part of the traditional *via crucis*. Both Novo and Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note that the source for this may have been again the apochryphal gospels (Novo 189, *RS* 335 v. 117). In a fusion of sexual and familial love the first stanza describes the couple as ‘dulces esposos’, ‘tiernos amantes’, and ‘Madre y Hijo’. In an apparent attempt to justify the combination of his descriptions, Lope adds ‘porque son Cristo y su madre’ (vv. 1–4). The explanation functions as an apology and stresses how the relationship should be read. Lope wants the reader to construe it in terms of human love according to the customary interpretation of the courtly love tradition, and thereby underlines the necessary sublimation of any inherent eroticism. Mary is pictured as she attempts to justify the imminent crucifixion; it is an explanation that would hardly seem necessary given the divine status of the two:

>> A morir vais, Hijo mio,
por el hombre que criasteis:
que ofensas hechas a Dios
sólo Dios las satisface

>> No se dirá por el hombre
“quien tal hace, que tal pague”,¹³
pues que Vos pagáis por él
el precio de vuestra sangre. (vv. 13–20)

Mary challenges the way the circumstances have unfolded:

>>Para llevaros a Egipto

¹³ This is the same refrain that appears in Tirso’s play, *El burlador de Sevilla*, Tirso de Molina, *El Burlador de Sevilla* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2002), ll. 2897. The fact that this appears here sixteen years before the date ascribed to the play (p. 130) suggests either a popular use of the refrain or points to an earlier source for the play. The reference also draws attention to the Molinist controversies over Grace, freewill and predetermination.

hubo quien me acompañase,
mas para quedar sin Vos,
¿quién dejais que me acompañe?

>> Aunque un 'angel me dejeis,
no es posible consolarme,
que ausencia de un hijo Dios
no puede suplirla un ángel. (vv. 25–32)

The portrayal underlines the way in which divine machinations work in opposition to human sensibilities. However, Christ's final response reinforces the appropriate doctrinal message by emphasizing authority and obedience rather than reason:

>>Madre, yo voy a morir,
porque ya mi eterno Padre
tiene dada esta sentencia
contra mí, que soy su imagen.

>>Por el más errado esclavo
que ha visto el mundo, ni sabe,
quiere que muera su Hijo:
obedecerle es amarle. (vv. 57–64)

Here he brings the drama to an unsatisfactory close with the advice to obey and not question because love itself is obedience. Clearly Lope wants to create, in a discursive way, a scene in which human figures are seen to cope with religious contradictions; but the irony is that, by making a success of the dramatization of the paradoxes of the human condition, it risks provoking the very doubts the doctrine intends to quell. The poem ends with the invocation of the soul to first contemplate the scene and then to approach and comfort Mary; it does nothing to resolve the dilemma:

Contempla a Cristo y María,
alma, en tantas soledades,
que Ella se queda sin Hijo,
y que Él sin Madre se parte.

Llega y dile: << Virgen pura,
¿queréis que yo os acompañe?>>
Que si te quedas con Ella,

el cielo puede envidiarte. (vv. 73–80)

The fourth Romance, ‘A la oración del huerto’ (343–7), provides a further example of how Lope constructs vivid and moving scenes; it depicts Christ in the garden at Gethsemane kneeling before God:

Al Padre vuelve la espalda,
para que en sus hombros tiernos
den rayos de su ira,
no al suelo que está cubriendo.

En fin volviendo la cara
de su mismo Padre espejo,
movió el cielo con la voz
a lástima y a silencio:

*Pase este cáliz de mi
si es posible, Padre Eterno,
mas no se haga la mía:
tu voluntad obedezco.* (vv. 37–48)

Here Christ protects the world from God’s wrath by using his ‘hombros tiernos’ as a shield. The poetry recreates the pathos of the scene which ends with the narrator imploring Mary to wipe the blood from Christ’s eyes so that he can see his mother for the last time. The delicacy of the words and imagery moves the reader to empathize with the subject to such an extent that the next step, the invitation for the soul to participate becomes, almost, unnecessary:

Limpialde, Virgen piadosa,
la sangre con los cabellos;
y pues le deja su Padre,
vea su Madre a lo menos.

Id vos con Ella, alma mía,
entrad también en el huerto,
no sospechen que os quedaís
con el que viene a prenderlo.

Decilde: <<Dulce Jesús,

aquí estoy al lado vuestro
para padecer con vos,
no para negaros luego.

>>Vámonos presos los dos,
pues vaís por mis deudas preso;
cinco mil son los azotes;
muchos son, partir podemos.>> (vv. 69–84)

The use of hair to clean the blood of Jesus recalls the images of Mary Magdalen in ‘Las lágrimas de la Magdalena’.¹⁴ The dramatic qualities of the poem are enhanced by the use of dialogue designed to engage the emotions of the reader more than the intellect. Again, in the word ‘obedezco’, the poem dwells on obedience as the key element of the dogma of the poem. The attempt to rationalize Christ’s apparent fear of death sits rather oddly with the tenor of the scene:

Que para verificarse
que era hombre verdadero,
fue menester que su carne
tuviese a la muerte miedo. (vv. 21–24)

This humanization of Christ, an ‘hombre verdadero’ who fears death and turns his back on God to protect humanity, projects a relationship between God portrayed as irascible and Christ as mediator and intercessor on behalf of mankind.

Each of the Romances ends with a colloquy in which the soul is entreated to reflect on the events described. They act more as a further exhortation to absorb the emotion of the scene. The Romance ‘A la muerte de Cristo Nuestro Señor’ (399–402) focuses on the personal drama of the scene between Mary and her son moments before His death. She is shown addressing Christ on the cross and the reader is asked to experience her emotions as she witnesses her son forsaken by God:

¿qué sentiría su Madre
cuando tal palabra oyó,
viendo que su Hijo dice

¹⁴ For example see p. 279 ll. 274–80, where she wishes she had used her hair to hold the soldier back from bloodying Christ’s face.

que Dios le desamparó? (vv. 17–20)

This dramatic representation has its basis in the composition of place of the Loyolan *Exercises*; but the religious significance of the entreaty to consider the salvation of mankind implicit in the question is somehow relegated by the lines that follow which draw the reader away from the spiritual import back to the sentimentality of the situation:

No lloreís, Virgen piadosa,
que aunque se va vuestro amor,
antes que pasen tres días
volverá a verse con Vos. (vv. 21–24)

The triteness of the consolation of seeing him in three days undermines the tragedy and emotion of the scene. The spiritual implication, which goes beyond the mortal to contemplate the salvation of mankind, is lost. Nature and religion are shown to be in opposition when Lope compares the role Mary played in the gestation of Christ with the injustice of the penalty now applied to her:

¿Pero cómo las entrañas
que nueve meses vivió
verán que corta la muerte
fruto de tal bendición? (vv. 25–28)

In the final lines of the poem she expresses her exasperation through a rhetorical and seemingly impertinent question:

>> ¿De qué me sirvió guardaros
de aquel Rey que os persiguió,
si al fin os quitan la vida
vuestros enemigos hoy?>> (vv. 41–44)

The poem accentuates her incomprehension of the illogicality of the situation from a human perspective and, in doing so, questions the Divine order. Her call to God for an explanation goes unanswered. In accordance with the *Spiritual Exercises* the dramatization of the events lead to the application of the intellect in order to interpret and draw spiritual profit from the scene and the Romance ends appropriately with a brief colloquy addressed to the narrator's own soul:

alma, si no eres de piedra
llora, pues la culpa soy. (vv. 47–48)

However, the brevity of the colloquy does not respond to the contents of the narrative that precedes it. The narrator acknowledges his blame and calls for his soul, and indirectly that of the reader, to experience the universal guilt of mankind and weep tears of repentance. The recreation of events places Mary in opposition to God. If we are to feel empathy with her, as the poet asks us to do, the focus of responsibility is directed, not back to ourselves as sinners, but to the impenetrable actions of God. The identification with Mary is a cipher for exploring doubt which has the effect of destabilizing religious faith and whose only justification is a subsequent reaffirmation of the mystery of God's workings. Such an affirmation, however, is absent. Application of the intellect through the colloquy is not possible; the drama described is visceral and quotidian, without obvious theological or doctrinal reference. Emilio Orozco Díaz notes that the colloquy was used as a dramatic device to draw the reader in to the scene: 'es hacemos participar en la escena, ser testigos' (105). Here it fails on both measures, neither strong enough to enhance the drama of the situation or support a spiritual re-evaluation of the narrative. Rather, it functions as a formal device to close the poem. As Mary's final question is left hanging in a dramatic parenthesis, without appropriate interpretation, here, as on many occasions, the medium, in Lope's hands, appears too strong for the message.

A lack of didacticism is the hallmark of this religious poetry. The nature of the intellectual 'profit' to be derived is never made explicit and is left radically uncertain. Whilst it may appear to follow both the structure and essence of contemporary spiritual guidebooks, it neither refers to them nor is acknowledged as a possible poetic accompaniment to them. It is unclear whether the contemporary reader would have interpreted them as literary or devotional, or indeed whether they were so radical as to transcend both genres.

Both Novo (199) and Hernández Alonso have noted the parallels between Lope's recently discovered work, *Los cinco misterios dolorosos*, thought to have been written in

1582, and the Romances.¹⁵ A comparison of the two works reveal not only a change in style but also a different application of the colloquies. Both recount the events of the Passion. Hernández Alonso notes an abundance of pagan imagery in *Los cinco misterios dolorosos* (6) not present in *Rimas sacras*:

Llamando a Phorco, Tetis y Nereo,
y al padre Océano con senblante atento
les dixo: “Dioses, ¿qué es esto que beo? (98)

The epic and declamatory style of the earlier work is replaced with the more popular ballad form. The crown of thorns is described in *Los cinco misterios dolorosos* as an anti-type of regal crown:

No adorna la corona algún carbunco,
amatista, jaçinto o esmeralda
porque buscaron el marino junco
e marítimas islas por la falda
y en los riscos de un áspero espelunco
buscaron çarças para la guinalda;
estas ponen y puntas penetrantes
en lugar de caffi, rubí, diamantes. (53)

The same imagery is used in *Rimas sacras*, but the style becomes more economic:

Coronado está el Esposo
no de perlas ni zafiros
no de claveles y flores
sino de juncos y espinos. (356 vv. 1–4)

The structural format, however, remains the same: ‘cada bloque unitario de ellas se suele rematar con un acto de contrición u oración’ (Novo 200). Each of these functions as a colloquy in a manner similar to *Rimas sacras*, but they appear more obviously

¹⁵ Lope de Vega, *Los cinco misterios dolorosos de la pasión y muerte de nuestro Señor Jesucristo con su resurrección*, ed. by César Hernández Alonso (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Madrileños, 1987), p. 7, n. 9. This work, unknown until this publication, was thought to have been written in 1582 when Lope, then twenty years of age, was under the patronage of Don Jerónimo Manrique de Lara, later the Bishop of Avila but at that time on the council of the Inquisition. See introduction, pp. 1–5.

meditational and intellectual in their content. Whereas the ‘A los azotes’ of *Rimas sacras* ends with a simple direction to the soul:

Alma, llorad y tened
lástima de ver que azotan
por los esclavos al Rey. (356 vv. 82–84)

the description of the same event in *Los cinco misterios* ends with a more complete religious objective:

Contempla (sic), o alma mía, al rei sagrado
qual baxa por la ropa mansa mente
después que cruda mente fue açotado,
y el dolor que en bestilla pasa y siente;
aquel cuerpo contempla lastimado
de la pebersa y más que inicua jente,
siente su pena y tenla en la memoria
porque sientas el gozo de su gloria. (51)

The reader is directed at what to contemplate and instructed not only to apply memory but also on the specific ‘profit’ they should derive. The key word here is ‘porque’; it has an obvious didactic intent. This style is more in keeping with the model of devotional poetry that Loyola and Granada prescribe. Another example from the end of the first mystery demonstrates the consistency with which this is applied in the earlier work:

Contempla, o alma triste, entristezida
este misterio y mira de qué suerte
ba el buen Jesús por darte eterna vida
padesçiendo como hombre infausta muerte.
Mira la suma potestad venida
a sujetarse a género tan fuerte
de contumelias y de afrenta duras
de tan biles y soezes criaturas. (41)

Throughout, the address to the soul is prefaced by the words ‘contempla, o alma’ which adds a sense of repetition that suggests a more formally pedagogical approach in the earlier work than that found in *Rimas sacras* in which the frequent colloquies are not

prefaced in any obvious or consistent manner. The colloquy in ‘A la oración del huerto’ begins ‘Id vos con Ella, alma mía, / entrad también en el huerto’ (347 vv. 73–74); in ‘A la corona’ it begins ‘Llorad alma’ (359 v. 73); and in the two subsequent romances, ‘Al Ecce Homo’ and ‘A la cruz auestas’, it begins ‘alma con tristes suspiros / decid a su Eterno padre’ (364 vv. 74–75) and ‘mejor es, alma, que vos /con vuestra cruz le sigáis’ (368 vv. 77–78). The change to an informal, varied, and indirect style suggests a more confident and less orthodox approach than that in his early writing. Given he was only twenty years old in 1582 and that don Jerónimo Manrique, to whom the work was dedicated (Alonso 23), may have been responsible for his tutelage (Castro y Rennert 25), *Cinco misterios* may reflect the influence of his early religious education. Notably the work was written at a time when Lope was considering a career in the priesthood (Alonso 5). Certainly it serves as a clear example of his involvement with religious poetry many years before his so-called religious period. Alberto Blecua ascribes the source for the ending of *Los cinco misterios dolorosos*, in which Lope describes Christ’s descent into limbo, to Granada’s *Libro de la oración y meditación* which he appears to have adapted very closely.¹⁶ This indicates that a familiarity with Granada’s work may have been one of the foundations of Lope’s religious education and his biblical erudition displayed in works such as *Pastores de Belén*, a suggestion that makes divergences in the doctrinal approach of the two writers more significant.¹⁷

Meditation on Hell, a subject which forms a significant part of the first week of Loyola’s ‘exercises’ (24) and two chapters, XIII and XIV, in Granada’s book is avoided altogether in the *Rimas sacras*. It is a curious omission given the poetic and dramatic potential such a subject would have provided, as the language of Loyola’s description itself indicates:

to look with the eyes of the imagination at the great flames and at the souls as though in bodies of fire [...] to hear with one’s ears the wailings, howlings and cries, blasphemies against Christ our Lord and against all the saints [...] to smell with the sense of smell smoke, sulphur, filth and putrefaction. (25)

¹⁶ Alberto Blecua, ‘De Granada a Lope. Sobre una fuente de *Los cinco misterios dolorosos*’, *Anuario de Lope de Vega*, I (Lleida: UAB, 1995), 9–17 (p. 15).

¹⁷ Blecua notes that Granada’s *Libro de la oración y meditación* was one of the few available biblical sources in the vernacular, p. 11.

The limbo described in *Los cinco misterios* has these qualities:

Las tres gargantas gruñen reziamente,
resuena el son de grillos estrupendo
el ediondo coçito la corriente
atrás bolbió del resplandor huyendo.
Las hijas de la noche tristemente
pararon e Yxión paró atendiendo
el águila paró aquel exerçicio
que da tormenta al miserable triçio. (118)

There are sounds, smells, chains and fearsome pagan Gods to offend any Christian saint. *Rimas sacras*, in contrast, contains no such descriptions. By avoiding the fusion of pagan and Christian symbolism in the later work, and by adopting a more popular form of rhyme, Lope appears to signal a move away from classical imagery to a more obviously formal Christian representation, whilst at the same time adopting a more liberal style in his approach to what seems an attempt to reproduce the Loyolan ‘exercises’. Janelle observes how the Catholic Reformation had a troubled relationship with what it saw as the ‘pagan Renaissance’: ‘Antiquity will remain the model to be imitated *par excellence*, but in its outward form only, not in its inward spirit of sensuousness’ (138). Paradoxically, as I have noted, sensuality is both the hallmark of Lope’s poetry and the basis for the ‘composition of place’. It is, perhaps, because of such potential conflict that Lope avoids recourse to classical references in *Rimas sacras*.

A compendium

Rimas sacras contains several poems which, while relating to religious subjects, appear extraneous to the theme of the book. The *cançión*, ‘A la muerte de la Reina Nuestra Señora’ (448) is addressed to Phillip III in consolation for the death of his wife; it is a eulogy to both the monarch and the queen, in which the adulation of God is replaced with a clichéd praise of the monarchs who are imbued with a divine aura. Religion is mentioned only twice; first in the context of the Queen’s immortality:

¡oh Reina!, que muriendo en todos vives;

ni mueres, pues recibes
vida inmortal, (vv. 87–89)

Then second as a fleeting remark: ‘Llore la Religión su muerto amparo’ (v. 162). The sense of religiosity in this and the earlier ‘glosa’, also named ‘A la muerte de la Reina Nuestra Señora’ (322), stand out from the rest of the collection as having a different tenor and are remarkable for the obvious decorum required when addressing issues involving the monarchy. The other eulogies in the collection have at least a tenuous religious connection. The elegy, ‘A la muerte del Padre Gregorio de Valmaseda’ (504), in which Lope writes about an unknown priest whose goodness obviously impressed him, ends with an allusion to the fulfillment of a promise to intercede for the poet from paradise:

Y no te espante que nos cause enojos
la soledad, que nuestras almas viste,
y pues lo debes a mis tristes ojos,
cúmpleme la palabra que me diste. (vv. 217–20)

Another notable example is the poem ‘Respuesta al Señor Don Sancho de Ávila, Obispo de Jaen, habiéndole enviado su libro de la veneración de las reliquias’ (486), whose provenance we know because it is the poem referred to in the letter to the Duke of Sessa dated December 1611 and in which he writes about the relics referred to in the Bishop’s book in a playful but erudite manner (*Epistolario* III 84):

Esta Suma, en que Dios su poder suma,
y vos cuanto al humano ingenio toca,
cífrela un ángel, dele Dios la pluma. (vv. 274–76)

The poem is a poetic summary of the book which is itself a summary of God’s workings. The poet is compared to an angel, divinely gifted. The use of tercets accentuate the insistence of the rhymes and provide a sense of repetition within the poem which imbues it with a ludic quality. The same playfulness is present in the villanesca, ‘Al Santísimo

Sacramento' (530–35), which consists of word-plays on the Congregación de Esclavos del Santísimo Sacramento known as the Caballero de Gracia.¹⁸

En el Caballero de Gracia
os he visto cada mes
hacer más gracias que el Papa,
y más perdones que el Rey.
Unos que llaman esclavos,
vos hacen allí poner,
aunque quien come con vos,
más es que conde y marqués. (vv. 61–64)

There is a play on the name 'Gracia' and a comparison between the King and Pope. The direct reference to the congregation in the context of slaves and their confessions, 'perdones', impregnates the poem with a parodic quality. Far from being slaves the counts and marquesses of the congregation represent the elite of Madrid society, accustomed to audiences with the King. The poem draws a comparison between their behaviour in front of the King and God and thereby alludes to hypocrisy. The inclusion of these and other incidental poems within the collection make it an eclectic and, at times, incongruous miscellany. It ranges from the intimate confessions of an autobiographical narrator to the vivid descriptions of the *via crucis* and unsettling humour.

A sense of presence

The immediate sense of the work is one of affective piety and the production of religious emotion. It avoids any form of doctrinal debate or theological argument of the type promoted by writers such as Fray Luis de Granada. The work's focus on human figures is reflected by a stark visual quality consistent with the extreme realism that Spanish artists of the period aspired to. Xavier Bray writes: 'hyper-real sculptures [...] made the sacred truly palpable. To approach [this] sculpture was to feel one was truly in the presence of the dead Christ'.¹⁹ The artistic recreation of reality clearly has its association with the Loyolan 'composition of place', but, as witnessed by the religious

¹⁸ See Castro and Rennert, p. 186; and *Epistolario*, III, p. 74.

¹⁹ Xavier Bray, *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600–1700* (London: National Gallery, 2009), p. 17.

paintings and sculptures of the period, also became a measure of the plastic arts. Lope's propensity to such realism is undoubtedly a reflection of this movement. His answer lies both in vivid poetic detail and in the world of drama, an idea confirmed by the reader's awareness of the narrator who functions as a protagonist. Lope applies his craft by manipulating human emotions in his descriptions of religious subjects. As Yolanda Novo says: 'El resultado es que todo el volumen se ofrece al lector como un gran macrotexto-devocionario que dentro de su variedad, consiga fundamentalmente "mover" a devoción' (315). Lope encourages them to devotion of a kind that is both his own and suits his purpose, but behind which, lacking full explanation, does not fulfill a complete a religious objective of promoting affective piety together with doctrine. Lope's attempt at such hyper-realism falters because his excess, whether it be his vision of the author, kneeling before God or the words put into the mouth of Mary, lack the quintessential element of decorum that separates the religious from the profane. It is, perhaps, the lack of didactic purpose behind the work that prompts E. Allison Peers to conclude:

It suggests the repetition of words one has heard and read rather than the taking of the ideas they represent into one's own experience [...] but there is no indication for the author, these experiences held any real meaning [...] his religious verse [...] is entirely conventional [...] sincerely devout [...] but as nothing more.²⁰

Religious writing is, by definition, constrained within the bounds of its own dogma. However, Lope never loses his individuality despite the orthodoxy of the subject. Despite the fictional nature of the autobiographical narrator, the implied presence of the author behind the narrator is constant throughout the book. Lope is constantly aware of his reader and makes his reader aware of him as author. Everything he describes is a visual reflection of an outer world. The limit of his inner contemplation is in fact a promotion of himself as the protagonist of his own drama. There is no movement towards the negation of self that characterizes mysticism and union with God, a self-abrogation key to overall spiritual progression and the Neo-Platonic ideal the poetry purportedly set out to follow. Instead, his idea is to provide an experiential sense of religiosity. It is a work of

²⁰ E. Allison Peers, 'Mysticism in the Poetry of Lope de Vega', in *Estudios dedicados a Menéndez Pidal*, I (Madrid: CSIC, 1950), 349–58 (pp. 356–58).

‘indudable carácter concreto y sensorial’ (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez 20). Its visual and theatrical qualities function as metatheatre on at least two levels. The first is the framing technique whereby the reader is invited to witness a private communion with God. The second is the subject of that communion: the visual and immediate accounts of biblical stories that form the major part of the book. There is an implied self-apostrophe in the scenario in which the reader assumes the role of the narrator as he addresses an imagined deity.²¹ Diehl explains how, in ‘contemplative poetry’, it is more common for the words of the speaker to be ‘used as a model for own response. The normal emptiness of the poem’s “I” allows any believer to make the poem and its sentiments his own’ (158). However, in these poems, the strong characterization of the narrator invites empathy, whilst the reader is constantly reminded that this figure is independent of their own feelings, necessarily the subject of moral judgement. The sense of privilege and confidence revealed in the Introduction (124–30) by the possession of ‘insignias reales’ (v. 68) and the invitation to eat at God’s ‘mesa’ (v. 100), together with what appears to be brazen name-dropping of distinguished personages, creates a distance between reader and speaker which detracts from any intended use as a spiritual guide. Instead, the relationship formed is similar to that of the actor and his audience which can produce emotion and identification but never a total substitution. A further apostrophe is formed around the presence of an invisible God substituted in the Romances by iconic images of Christ and the Passion. Lope creates a plausible structure and presents his subject in a realistic manner, lending to the concrete and tangible quality of the work as a whole, a sense of presence. When Paul Julian Smith writes of *enargeia*, which he sees as a common feature of Golden Age literature, in which things were placed ‘before the eyes’ (45), he notes the rhetorical devices used to achieve this sense of presence including the use of ‘shifters’ which as ‘personal pronouns and adverbs of time and place [.....] produce a sense of immediacy in the reader, of experiential intimacy’ (43–44). A good example of these shifters is Sonnet XXXII (174) which uses personal pronouns sixteen times within fourteen lines:

¿Quién no se muera de tu amor si mira

²¹ See Smith, p. 59.

con la piedad que escuchas y respondes?;
¿cómo es posible que las puertas rondes
de un alma que te trata con mentira? (vv. 1–4)

The pronouns imply the direct presence of both the narrator and addressee and thereby add immediacy. It is clearly a deliberate feature within the *Rimas sacras* as a whole: the poet wants to create a sense of visual drama. We have seen how this effect lends itself to the particular form of religious devotion promoted during this period. But Paul Julian Smith suggests it was also used for purely literary purposes. Referred to as ‘the rhetoric of presence’ (46) it marks an attempt to unite ‘language and concept’, to ‘transcend both terms and embody a primal linguistic plenitude’ (46), a sublimation of words into a visual essence. The attempt to transform poetry into a form of ‘reality’ in this sense renders Lope’s religious poetic endeavour analogous to the notion of Neo-Platonic ‘ascensional aesthetic’ implicitly embraced in the rejection and substitution of his secular poetry. Paul Julian Smith suggests that lyric poetry has its origins in traditional rhetoric whose purpose was to communicate, to transmit ‘the object of imitation [...] through the medium of language’ (44). The recreation of the religious experience as an artistic undertaking runs into a paradox; the stronger the image recreated the less obvious both the artifice involved in its creation and the ‘message’ to be communicated: ‘When the efficacy lies in the object alone, then communication is immediate, and the critic has nothing to do’ (Smith 48). The temptation is to get behind this image to seek the ‘authentic utterance’ (Smith 43), to measure ‘the immediate expression of authentic emotion which is taken to be the validating principle of all poetry’ (Smith 57). Once again, with Lope, we find ourselves on the fault line between language and an authentic ideal beyond it, accessible only as a visual cipher that makes it present but whose essence is frustratingly elusive. The only consistent clues point to a tendency to the dramatic and visual qualities of religion, a proclivity which whilst responding to the Catholic Reformation endorsement of ceremony and the Baroque aesthetics of appearance, challenges the weight of modern literary criticism which, according to Edmundson, is inherently antvisual and confirms the ‘power of abstraction’ (90): ‘like Freud and Derrida (and the Mosaic code that influenced them) they’, [the modern theorists],

‘mistrust the attractions of the visual and affirm the value of word against image’ (91).

Such critics:

share a tendency to split experience into two opposing registers, verbal and visual, and to put forward scenarios in which a more enlightened word intervenes on a scene of visually generated error. (92)

This ‘polemic against presence’ (75) seems not only to oppose the ‘rhetoric of presence’ that was an essential quality of Golden Age literature, but, in particular, it directly opposes the iconic nature of Christianity which perhaps was itself formed in response to Judaism’s inherent iconoclasm.²² The polemic is essentially between verbal and visual representation, which when reduced down to its simplest terms suggests words require an interpretative process which is less immediate than visual communication. David Daiches explains:

It seems to me that literature differs from music and from abstract visual art in that it does not present us with pure form, to which we respond with aesthetic pleasure [...] but brings form to bear on a communication which, while not adequately and sometimes not at all paraphraseable in other terms, is nevertheless a communication.²³

Words must add something to a visual image to fulfill the potential of their medium. This is one of the problems with the visual nature of Christian religiosity when it becomes an object for poetry; another is the inherent sense of ritual. Edmundson, referring to Barthes’ essay “The World of Wrestling”, writes:

Wrestling grants the spectator the satisfaction of one perfectly legible tableau after another. Every physical gesture is fully comprehended, every dramatic signifier fully invested by an unambiguous sense. Wrestling “imposes the total knowledge of a passion which arises erect and alone.” (69)

²² See Edmundson 88 and 90, and 97 where he quotes Paglia: ‘Hebrew word-worship versus pagan imagism, the great unseen versus the glorified thing’. Also Leupin: ‘On the one hand, because the God-man necessarily presupposes a relation to the human imaginary, ancient Jewish iconoclasm needs to be overcome’ p. xix.

²³ David Daiches, *God and the Poets* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 209.

Edmundson notes the parallels with religious ritual and drama. The dangers that Barthes sees in the way such pageants turn the ‘audience into a crowd’ and exercise the power of influence (70) are of course exactly the values of religious spectacle; both take the form of ‘costumed pageant’ (68). *Rimas sacras* like most religious literature contains this ritual quality; it conforms to both the standard pattern of the devotional exercises and the liturgical expectations of its reader. As such, the reader does not anticipate ambiguity, nor do they expect any requirement for interpretation. Edmundson writes: ‘Once you have certain knowledge of someone or something, you can stop interpreting and indulge yourself in the pleasures of unqualified, passionate response’ (69). *Rimas sacras*, at least at one level, is an indulgence in such religious experience. Ritual allows very little scope for the poet to impose himself, his task principally is confined to ekphrasis, rendering a ‘visual experience in verbal terms’ (Edmundson 103); he needs to make this his own, to render it an ‘authentic utterance’, reflecting genuine experience.²⁴ The question is whether the experience makes the art or whether the art makes the experience. This is a subject which is central to the characterization of Ginés in *El fingido verdadero* and something addressed in the last chapter. As we have seen the *Rimas sacras* attempts to do more than recreate a static tableau, Lope attempts a kinetic quality, to bring it alive through drama. He recreates a physical rather than a mental experience and thereby makes the image paramount. The vivid, visceral dramatic qualities of *Rimas sacras* together with their lack of didacticism can be best explored by comparison to the writing of two other religious poets of the period, San Juan de la Cruz and José de Valdivielso.

Light and dark

The first lines of the introductory commentary to San Juan’s poem, *Noche oscura*, signal a notable contrast to Lope’s poetry:

Canciones del alma, que se goza de haber llegado al alto estado de la perfección, que es la unión con Dios, por el camino de la negación espiritual.²⁵

²⁴ Psalms and songs of praise are essentially communal acts which follow a ritual pattern. See Bloom *Anxiety of Influence*, p. 70 and Daiches, p. 69.

²⁵ San Juan de la Cruz, *Poesía completa y comentarios en prosa*, ed. by Raquel Asún (Madrid: Planeta, 1986), p. 3

The reader is alerted to mystical experience achieved through a process of negation, an emptying of the soul. The poem continues:

A oscuras y segura,
por la secreta escala disfrazada,
[.....]
en secreto que nadie me veía ,
ni yo miraba cosa,
sin otra luz y guía
sino la que en el corazón ardía.
Aquesta me guiaba
más cierto que la luz del mediodía,
a donde me esperaba
quien yo bien me sabía,
en parte donde nadie parecía. (3)

The meeting is inspired in a darkness that protects the secrecy and intimacy of the occasion. The use of a first person narrator adds to the privacy of the experience. The scene is set without objects and light, creating a space in which the senses are immobilized: 'y todo mis sentidos suspendía' (4). This 'estado de perfección' which, as Juan de la Cruz explains in his commentary, represents 'la alta y dichosa unión con Dios' and 'la dicha perfección de amor', is arrived at at the final stage of the spiritual exercises: 'ya habiendo pasado por los estrechos trabajos y aprietos' (47). This, then, is the state in which the appreciation of love and beauty in the form of the divine can be experienced and in which the true communion with God can be achieved. But it is also more than that. From a literary perspective it represents a moment of vision when love and beauty fuse to provide a space for artistic creation, the description of beauty itself.²⁶ Dámaso Alonso captures the essence of the euphoria of the moment when he says: 'La gloria de la poesía [...] consiste en ser la única articulación de la lengua humana que puede aproximarse algo a los misterios de la Divinidad'.²⁷ This mystical state is an area which Lope alludes to but never attempts to reach in his poetry. The closest he gets is a condition of forced self-

²⁶ For neo-Platonic ideals of beauty, see Asún's introduction to Juan de la Cruz, *Poesía completa*, p. XXXVI.

²⁷ Dámaso Alonso, *La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz (Desde esta ladera)* (Madrid: Aguilar, 1966), pp. 163–64.

reflection which simulates the preparatory stages of the exercises in readiness for the state of meditation. When, in Sonnet III, he enters into himself ‘para verme’ (v. 1) he finds ‘una loca república alterada’ (v. 3) and not the serenity of a cleansed soul; the object of the exercise is to guide his soul ‘al verdadero centro’ (v. 8), a desired union with God, but it is an act that concentrates on the physical control of the passion and baser instincts of his ‘apetito’ (v. 12), rather than an examination of aesthetic beauty. Sonnet XX touches on Lope’s understanding of beauty; ‘la lengua del amor’ takes the form of ‘música suave’ which is used to seduce his ‘amante’. Language becomes an instrument ‘de los conceptos’ (v.12) and is itself the measurement of beauty, one which the poetry demonstrates full control. In contrast San Juan’s poem, ‘Coplas del mismo hechas sobre un éxtasis de alta contemplación’, begins:

Entréme donde no supe,
y quedéme no sabiendo,
toda ciencia trasciendo.
Yo no supe dónde entraba,
pero cuando allí me ví,
sin saber dónde me estaba,
grandes cosas entendí;
no diré lo que sentí,
que me quedé no sabiendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo.
De paz y de piedad
era la ciencia perfecta,
en profunda soledad,
entendida vía recta;
era cosa tan secreta,
que me quedé balbuciendo,
toda ciencia trascendiendo. (18)

In this heightened state, the poet struggles with language and expression. He finds peace within himself in a profound loneliness, something so personal, ‘tan secreta’ to him he cannot find a form of expression. His search appears to be for a transcendence through and in his language. Dámaso Alonso refers to this as ‘la lucha con la expresión humana’, a ‘divino balbucear’ (172). The poet’s secret and the mystical union remain ineffable:

este saber no sabiendo
es de tan alto poder,
que los sabios arguyendo
jamás le pueden vencer
que no llega su saber
a no entender entendiendo, (19)

The paradox of not being able to understand through understanding, ‘saber no sabiendo’, epitomizes the ineffability of the challenge. The ‘balbuco más imperfecto’ is seen by Dámaso Alonso as being the essence of San Juan’s poetry. The descriptions appear to be of the senses not the sense’s description of the world, “‘paisajes mentales’ [.....] capaz de sugerir el estado interior’ (Asún XV). The negation of the visual provides an opacity that makes it difficult to come to terms with the work. The opening lines of ‘Cántico espiritual’ demonstrate this disorientating influence:

¿Adonde te escondiste,
Amado, y me dejaste con gemido?
Como el ciervo huiste;
habiéndome herido;
salí tras ti clamando, y eras ido.

The words convey absence and evasion. The normal interpretative faculties become corrupted and the scene seems surreal. The deer, a symbol of God the ‘Amado’ in the Song of Solomon, has inflicted the wound rather than the other way round and is now escaping. This induces the reader to look for meaning through the symbols and allegory which Dámaso Alonso sees as ‘patente’ (150) throughout the work and which San Juan himself sought to explain in his commentaries.

In contrast, Lope’s contemplation leaves very little to the imagination. Unlike the uncertainty expressed by San Juan, the Introduction shows Lope to be comfortable in God’s house:

Si valer al reo es ley
la casa de embajador,
¿cómo puedo estar mejor
que en el palacio del Rey? (128 vv. 85–88)

The allegory here is entirely straightforward, the sinner finds himself in the Church, his ultimate place of refuge. The sonnets address an invisible but implicitly present God in whom the narrator exhibits a confidence, both in terms of his relationship and the efficacy of his language. Sonnet XXIX reads:

cantaré vuestro nombre soberano,
que a la hermosura vuestra eternamente
consagro pluma y voz , ingenio y mano. (170 vv. 12–14)

Rather than evading the poet, this God pursues his friendship and spends nights waiting at his door:

¿Qué tengo yo, que mi amistad procuras?
¿Qué interés se te sigue, Jesús mío,
que a mi puerta cubierto de rocío
pasas las noches del invierno oscuras? (156 vv. 1–4)

Lope's religious sonnets function on several levels: confessions of guilt; exhibitions of humility and piety; and, professions of faith and repentance. All are exemplified in Sonnet XIV:

Pastor que con tus silbos amorosos
me despertaste del profundo sueño,
Tú, que hiciste cayado de ese leño,
en que tiendes los brazos poderosos,
vuelve los ojos a mi fe piadosos,
pero te confieso por mi amor y dueño,
y la palabra de seguirte empeño
tus dulces silbos y tus pies hermosos.
Oye, pastor, pues por amores mueres,
no te espante el rigor de mis pecados,
pues tan amigo de enemigos eres. (148 vv. 1–11)

The narrator is portrayed as a lost sheep awakened from both the sleep of spiritual darkness and dream of worldly *vanitas*. He has now confessed his sins, his 'pecados', and on the profession of continued faith, 'te confieso por mi amor y dueño', expects to be welcomed back to the flock. The shepherd of pastoral romance, but also Christ, exercises

a duty of care for his flock which is totally dependent on their master; his crook is also a crucifix. Christ extends his arms both on the cross and out to his flock. Word play is evident in the correlation between ‘amigo’ and ‘enemigo’. The metaphors and metonyms are based around physical objects and stock images. The poetry does not attempt to articulate a sense of mystery, it expects the objects to do that themselves by virtue of their traditional significance. The language never progresses beyond words and images to capture the ineffable ‘essence’ that San Juan strives for. With San Juan, the soul seeks out God, whereas here Lope is courted by God. His God is describable as Sonnet XLVI evidences:

No sabe qué es amor quien no te ama,
celestial hermosura, esposo bello;
tu cabeza es de oro, y tu cabello
como el cogollo que la palma enrama;
tu boca, como lirio que derrama
licor al alba; de marfil tu cuello (192 vv. 1–6)

In an echo of the Song of Solomon His head is of gold, His hair like the heart of a palm sprouting new shoots, His mouth like the lily of the valley, His neck ivory and His hands like a lathe. By contrast San Juan never depicts God nor makes a direct reference to Christ, instead his poem works in the realm of allegory:²⁸

Mi Amado, las montañas,
los valles solitarios nemorosos,
las ínsulas extrañas,
los ríos sonorosos,
el silbo de los aires amorosos
la noche sosegada
en par de los levantes del aurora,
la música callada,
la soledad sonora,
la cena que recrea y enamora. (13)

²⁸ The only exception is an indirect reference in *Otro del mismo que va por “Super Flumina Balilonis”* p. 35 ll. 61

Here God and Christ are revealed as the essence of the natural world. Each reference is qualified by an adjective denoting a sensation or experience. The ‘valles’ are ‘solitarios’; the ‘insulas extrañas’; and the ‘aires amorosos. The allegory culminates in an invocation of the Last Supper that both revitalizes and creates love.

This, then, is the essential difference between the two poets: the visible and the invisible; light and dark. In contrast to San Juan’s ‘*gemidos inefables*’ (158) Lope exerts apparent control in the visible world around him. Despite San Juan’s excruciating personal experiences, his poetry is about the loss of individuality and identity whereas Lope’s never loses either control or ceases to impose his presence. E. Alison Peers, writing about the religiosity of Lope’s poetry, refers to ‘the intensity and the yearnings after intimacy with God which accompany them [which] give them a semi-mystical quality’ (353); but, she concludes ‘he was about as unmystical a religious poet as his age produced’ (358). By using religion as a literary subject both poets had to apply a straight jacket of established form, content and language. San Juan de la Cruz may have tested the boundaries of what was acceptable and strayed into the antvisual ‘abstraction’ valued by the modern critic. Raquel Asún writes: ‘por el carácter irracional de sus versos, se convertía en adelantado de una intuición de modernidad tan incomprensible como evidente’ (XIV). In comparison Lope’s religious poetry is more accessible: San Juan intends to explore an idea through language, Lope to create a visual scene. It is the idea of the visual conception of reality and thereby the sense of ‘presence’ in Lope’s poetry that is stressed, his poems are verbal pictures driven by *ut pictura poesis*.

The presence of the narrator

Arantza Mayo, in her study, *La lírica sacra de Lope de Vega y José de Valdivielso*, has identified how both Lope and Valdivielso’s religious lyric evolved from a common religious framework which included Loyola’s spiritual exercises (147). Her approach traces their shared roots and in doing so suggests that the religious poetry of the two poets is similar; but there are fundamental differences as well. The clear distinguishing feature is the absence of didacticism in Lope’s poetry, a factor highlighted through his use of the narrator and approach to allegory. José de Valdivielso and Lope were not only colleagues (Valdivielso XVII), but Valdivielso also wrote a eulogy included in Lope’s *Obras*

póstumas and was a member of the same confraternity, the Congregación de los Esclavos.²⁹ He compiled and published a selection of poetry, *Romancero espiritual*, at about the time Lope may have been working on the publication of his own religious poems.³⁰ The same title was used by Lope for the re-publication of the romances contained in *Rimas sacras* in a separate volume in 1621. Aguirre notes the scant biographical details available concerning Valdivielso's life (Valdivielso XI); but what is known is that he was associated with the cathedral of Toledo and his religious posts included the chaplaincy of the Cardenal Fernando de Sandoval y Rojas, a significant religious figure (Valdivielso XIII). Aguirre also notes Valdivielso only wrote religious literature (Valdivielso XXXVIII) a fact which, when added to Mayo's observation that he was not known to have been involved in any scandals (10), suggests his religious writing was in keeping with an obviously devout character and supported by a legitimacy that was not available to Lope because of his reputation and notoriety as a playwright and lover.

The first point of divergence between the *Romancero espiritual* and *Rimas sacras* is the declared purposes of the two books. Lope alluded to his work as a personal gift for services rendered, while Valdivielso set out more distinct parameters for his reader's interpretation:

No puedo dexar de conformarme con los que se disculpan de sacar a luz los partos de sus ingenios, como si hiziessen algún deservicio a Dios [.....] supuesto que todos pretenden en sus versos o aprovechar enseñando, o entretener diviertiendo. (8)

In confronting and then dismissing the polemic of imaginative literature's role in promoting religion he acknowledges the existence of the view that such an endeavour might be seen as sacrilegious, 'algún deservicio a Dios'. He defends the application of the Horatian principles of 'enseñando' and 'diviertiendo' within the field of religious literature. The *Romancero espiritual* is a tool of salvation:

²⁹ See the approbation to *Romancero espiritual*, p. 3

³⁰ The *tasa* was dated March 1612. The work of other notable religious poet's such as Luis de Leon and San Juan were not published in their lifetime.

porque muchos siervos de nuestro Señor, assí religiosos, ecclesiásticos y seculares, me han venido a dar gracias [.....] alentando mi desgana con hazerme seguro que, en confissiones y fuera dellas, saben que he tomado por instrumento algunos de estos versos para conversión de algunas almas envejecidas en culpas; persuadiéndome que, leyéndolos muchos, se podrían reducir algunos. (8–9)

The didactic simplicity here contrasts with the literary tone of Lope's hyperbolic apologies and use of *meiosis* and *aporia*. Even if the reader construes 'los partos de sus ingenios' to be those of the author the potential profit is for the souls of others not his own; his primary emphasis is instruction.

The narrative voice is formulated in a fundamentally different manner to that of Lope's in the *Rimas sacras* which are specifically about his own salvation. Whilst employing the same techniques of *enargeia* to create a sense of presence, instead of the repentant sinner and God, the scenario is set from the beginning as that between the preacher and his congregation. A different sense of presence governs the Valdivielso collection from the start. A differentiation in the relationship between author, narrator and reader is conveyed within the title of the opening poem, 'Romance a la conversión de un pecador'. The definite article 'un' and noun 'pecador' universalizes and impersonalizes, distancing the narrator, whereas the *Rimas sacras* immediately involves the plight of the narrator, and addresses the reader directly. Valdivielso's poem begins with a description of a soul in torment: 'Vitoriosa buelve el alma de la más civil guerra' (15); but there is no reference to whose soul it is. The only first person pronoun is a rhetorical 'yo' referring to the impersonal soul which is the subject of the poem. The stanza proceeds:

“¿Quién, sino yo” dize el alma
“de vuestra casa se fuera?,
¿Quién sino vos me buscara
y quién sino yo se huyera? (16)

In the second poem, 'Romance a las lágrimas de un pecador' the narrator addresses his own eyes as they shed tears as if they were detached, inanimate objects, unconnected to him:

Bien podeís, ojos, llorar
no lo dexéis de vergüença,
y si la avéys de tener

de no llorar culpas sea. (17)

It is only in line 31 that any mention is made of possession: '¡ay, ojos míos, / llorad por todas ellas' (19). This is a feature that Lope also employs when, for instance in Sonnet VIII, he addresses his heart:

¡Oh, corazón más duro que diamante!
¿qué repugnancia es ésta que te oprime? (vv. 1-2)

However, in this case the whole work is framed by the imposing presence of a narrator. The opening romances of Valdivielso's collection establish a directness that tends to reduce the importance of the narrator, a factor that then governs the work as a whole. This feature is referred to by Diehl in relation to traditions of medieval religious lyric in which the author maintains his anonymity:

the author one senses behind the text remains fundamentally anonymous and without personality whether or not he names himself. Moreover, as I have already argued, he is more like a translator, that is a craftsman-middleman given over to the service of his audience and a text not his own than a poet. (16)

As a 'translator' the religious poet allows the subject matter to take over; he is there as teacher and guide. Without the mediation of a narrator the reader is more directly in touch with the subject of the poetry. This is the effect of Valdivielso's collection. The work becomes a universal property: the reader can stand in the place of the narrator in a way they are prevented from doing in *Rimas sacras* by the obstacle created by the presence of the narrator. The form and shape provided by narrator and persona accentuates the novelty of Lope's approach.

The opening poems of Valdivielso's book establish a very different mood to that of Lope. The sinner of his first poem, having overcome his internal turmoil, his 'civil guerra', does not return to it; but Lope dwells on the drama of this private strife, the effort to resolve his 'republica alterada' (*RS* 137 v. 3). The detachment of Valdivielso's narrator reduces the potential emotional power of the situation.

Poems about the sacrament of the Eucharist dominate Valdivielso's collection; Aguirre notes how they account for twenty-eight out of the total one hundred and fifteen poems of

the original edition followed in significance by twenty penitential and nineteen Marian poems (LXXX). The title of Valdivielso's book, 'Primera parte del Romancero Espiritual, en gracia de los esclavos del santissimo Sacramento: para cantar quando se muestra descubierto' (1), links it directly to the festivities of Corpus Christi and therefore associates it with public performance, the opposite of Lope's book which is structured around an act of private contrition.³¹ What is also clear from the title and becomes evident in several of the poems is that they were intended to be sung at a public gathering rather than read privately. As an example chosen from many, the Romance which begins 'El enamorado rey' (104) contains an abbreviated refrain, 'Galán reboçado &c' (v. 33), which might suggest its use within a song sheet. Similarly the poem 'Letra al Santísimo Sacramento para las quatro voces' (130), sets out the singing voices that should be used. It is therefore quite probable that the dialogue included in such poems as 'Ensaladilla de la esposa y [el] esposo al Santísimo Sacramento' (116) was intended for different singing parts. *Rimas sacras* also contains a few poems that may have been set to music. These include the 'Canción' (RS 545):

Cantad ruseñores,
al alborada,
porque viene el Esposo
de ver el alma. (vv. 1–4)

It follows the form of the traditional courtly love ballad and therefore could appropriately be accompanied by music. The 'romance' 'El alma a Cristo nuestro Señor en la cruz' (402) and the 'canción' 'Al Santísimo Sacramento' (406) provide other examples. The 'villanesca' also entitled 'Al Santísimo Sacramento' (530), referred to earlier with the same previously cited stanza, would likewise appear intended for music:

En el Caballero Gracia
os he visto cada mes
hacer más gracias que el papa
y más perdones que el rey. (vv. 61–64)

³¹ See Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez, *RS*, p. 541 n. 156 where they explain: 'el sacramento de la Eucaristía directamente emparentado con las difundidas fiestas del Corpus que celebran, en ceremoniosas procesiones la presencia divina en la hostia'.

Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez note that ‘villanesca’ was a term for popular songs and suggest this one may have been used at a celebration (*RS* 530). However, its implicit satire reflects a lack of decorum which makes it potentially controversial for a congregation. Use of the third person or a reflexive verb such as ‘hacerse’, rather than the first person, ‘yo he visto’, would render the poem more suitable for public performance. It is therefore unlikely to have been intended to be sung by the confraternity, but may have circulated amongst its members as a humorous ditty. The remaining so-called ‘canciones’ and the remainder of the other poems in the collection do not suggest they were intended for singing; rather they were compiled to be read, something which distinguishes them from Valdivielso’s book which had an additional function within church congregations. The respective uses are consistent with the contemplative, introspective character of *Rimas sacras* and public tone of *Romancero espiritual*.

Allegory, didacticism and poetic conceit

The association between the Eucharist and the notion of festivity is evident in Valdivielso’s poems. The host is frequently linked with feasts and celebrations. The ‘Romance al Santísimo Sacramento, mientras la comunión’ (102) describes how, at a communion, the shepherds greet the host: ‘De fiesta han salido todos / por recibirle con gracia’ (vv. 5–6). They prepare to eat at the Lord’s table in a state of happiness:

Lléganse todos alegres,
y, con sus manos lavadas,
a la mesa de su dueño
comieron como unos papas. (vv. 33–36)

The sentiment of wellbeing conveyed in this scene pervades the whole work; it provides very little scope for introspection. The evident lightheartedness belies the didactic nature of the book in which the relationship between narrator and reader takes the form of preacher and congregation. The ‘Romance de un desengaño’ (40) promotes neo-stoic values over worldly delights using the experience of the narrator in the first person as an example to instruct the reader who is assumed to be in need of guidance:

Los que a mesa del mundo

comeís los gustos de asiento,
oýd a un cuchillado
a quien desengaña el tiempo. (vv. 1–4)

The focus is on the soul of the reader in the concluding lines of the poem:

De espejo quiero serviros:
miraos en aqueste espejo,
ved que os representa al vivo,
pues os representa muertos.
En la escala de mi vida
al postrer escalón llevo,
y es propio al subir al palo
hazer un sermon al pueblo.
Por descargo de mi alma
os doy aquestos consejos
advertid que son verdades
para el passo en que me veo. (vv. 69–80)

The principal image is of a mirror to be used both as an example and as a device for self-reflection. The narrator seeks to ‘hazer un sermon al pueblo’, but admits his purpose is not totally altruistic: he acknowledges a personal benefit to be derived from the unburdening of his own soul, ‘Por descargo de mi alma’. However, the motivation is unambiguously religious and derives from obligation, ‘proprio’. His warning is salutary:

Miradme en aquesta cama,
de temor elado el cuerpo,
ya en los braços de la muerte,
la voz turbia y ronco el pecho. (vv. 61–64)

The instruction to consider the scene is implicitly connected to the ‘consejos’ to assess the reader’s own situation.

Aguirre observes ‘el *Romancero espiritual* es una colección de poemas fundamentalmente alegóricos’ (LVIII). He explains:

La alegoría es, por supuesto, un tecnicismo que lleva a la realidad concreta. No es una manera de pensar, sino un instrumento para expresar los hallazgos del pensamiento; poco hay de misterioso en ella, aunque lo pueda hacer en la cosa expresada; en este sentido, la alegoría es una manera de “mitificar”, de poner lo abstracto y lo misterioso al alcance de la mente humana. (LXVI)

He notes the large number of poems based on various types of biblical analogy, particularly those derived from the courtly love tradition around the lovers of the Song of Solomon (LXV). However, it is the predominance of poems dedicated to the Eucharist that provide the most striking examples. The subject lends itself to Aguirre's explanation of how allegory functions through the 'abstract' and 'mysterious' significance of the host revealed by analogy with everyday experience. Its inherent power is both poetic and didactic:

el poder evocador de la alegoría es "inexhaustible": la alegoría posee una indiscutible función poética, no sólo didáctica, aunque sea su didacticismo la mejor prueba de su existencia como tal alegoría.

In this he recognizes the intrinsically instructive capacity of allegory, an 'arma de moralidad y enseñanza' (LVIII), a characteristic Valdivielso exploits and which infuses his collection with an inherently instructional tone. In contrast, Lope applies this technique on very few occasions and, when he does, the emphasis tends to be poetic rather than doctrinal.

A brief analysis of a few poems from each of the works will illustrate these differences and underline how when Lope does use allegory it is primarily poetic. In contrast to the twenty-eight poems dedicated to the Eucharist in Valdivielso's collection, Lope only refers to it in seven poems which include a *glosa* and a sonnet.³² Valdivielso's poem 'Romance al Santísimo Sacramento' (59) begins:

Viendo la falta del pan
el Governador del Orbe,
y que va más de la tassa
por pecados de los hombres,
en la sala de su acuerdo
con los alcaldes de corte,
ha ordenado que aya pan
y que baxe por los pobres.
Abre el cielo sus troxes
y el pan embía que en su mesa come. (vv. 1–10)

³² See: Sonnet LIII, p. 200; Glosa, p. 305; p. 338; p. 406; p. 530; p. 541; and p.551.

The absence of first person pronouns universalizes the subject and prepares the reader for the lesson that follows. The analogy of ‘pan’ is intended to symbolize the body and presence of Christ, but no specific explication is provided; the reader is expected to exercise his own understanding of the origins of the sacrament, explained through a barely disguised account of the life of Christ:

Moliéronle en una cruz,
y, cernido con dolores
sus salvados son del cielo,
su harina de hostias y amores.
Salió vivo el grano muerto
más hermoso que mil soles
y en el homo de su amor
cocido se da a los hombres. (vv. 29–36)

The allegory is easy to understand. There is obvious ‘wit’ associated with the conceptualization of the underlying analogy of bread, flour, oven, and host; but the lack of emphasis on any part of the poem provides a balance that suggests that it is the message and not the cleverness of the conceit that the poet wishes to represent. In contrast, the poem of the same title in *Rimas sacras* (338–40) demonstrates a deliberate complexity:

Hoy por esclavo me escribo,
dulce Pan, en tu prisión,
porque me dice la fe
que eres Dios y Pan de amor.
Ya no podrá, dulces clavos,
todo mi pasado error
borrarme aquellas señales
que dicen que soy de Dios.
Ya no saldré de tu cárcel,
donde fue, por su valor,
sangre de un manso Cordero
la cadena que me ató. (vv. 1–12)

The use of the first person concentrates the attention of the reader on the narrator. Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez point out that the poem ‘sintetiza el dogma de la Eucarista’. They suggest the central conceit is the description of both God and the

narrator imprisoned as slaves: God through transubstantiation and the narrator his devotion (338 v. 118). However the basic premise of the metaphors are not explained and the primary effect of the poem is to call on the reader to delight in and decode the analogy. The poetic conceits contained in the connection between the imagery of ‘clavos’ and ‘esclavos’ and between ‘cárcel’, ‘cadenas’, and ‘prisión’ competes with the underlying message that he will remain the eternal prisoner of God’s love.

Valdivielso, similarly, uses elaborate and ingenious analogies within his allegories. Of particular note is another ‘Romance al Santísimo Sacramento’ (121) which is analysed by Aguirre in some detail (LXVI-LXXII). The poem creates an analogy between the host and the ‘el Rey Nuestro Señor’ in the two capacities of monarch and Christ. It describes the royal carriage as it leaves the palace. Its white curtains obscure the sight of the King:

Las cortinas que le cubren
todas son de tela blanca,
porque es su dama la Fe
y es el color de su dama. (vv. 1–8)

The colour of the host is the same as the ‘faith’ that accompanies it. The poem is obviously instructional and attempts to explain the significance of the Eucharist: it informs the reader of the necessity of relying on faith in order to accept the existence of something they are unable to verify visually:

La hermosa Fe, que por verle
hizo los ojos ventanas
jura que el Rey viene allí,
aunque no le ve la cara. (vv. 25–28)

The inventiveness of the conceits, amongst which curtains are contrasted with windows and beauty with invisibility, complement and improve the delivery of the poem’s central message. Despite the ingenuity of the allegorical analogy the poem’s message remains paramount; it is hermeneutic, exploring its own terms, and shows the significance of the Eucharist. Lope’s glosa ‘Al Santísimo Sacramento’ (RS 305) uses the metaphor of a joust to explain the Eucharist, a metaphor also used by San Juan de la Cruz and López de Úbeda (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez RS 305). The notion is that the soul enters into combat with Christ in the form of the host:

Hoy para tan alta empresa,
el Príncipe celestial,
a su mismo Padre igual,
en la tela de una mesa
hace una justa real;
y para entrar en la justa
en blancas armas se ajusta,
donde se queda la vista
que cuanto el alma conquista
tanto de las fiestas gusta. (vv. 5–15)

The ‘tela de una mesa’ refers both to the altar table and the boards that separate the podiums of the two combatants (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez 305 v. 8). The colour of the sheet that covers them is the white of the host, the ‘blancas armas’ that are the weapons of the duel. The simplicity of the conceit contrasts with the sophistication of the imagery. It is one of the few poems in *Rimas sacras* that does not involve personification of any kind and therefore lends itself to direct comparison with Valdivielso’s book. The final stanza highlights the significance of the host, the ‘cifra’, as the message of God:

Todo su inmenso poder,
cuanto es Dios y cuanto tiene,
sólo en esta cifra viene,
ni puede Dios mantener
mejor que ahora mantiene;
alma, no llegues injusta
a la justa en que Dios justa,
llega en gracia, y te darán
del Pan, que en forma de Pan.
viene el Príncipe a la justa. (vv. 35–44)

However, the emphasis on the wordplay and rhymes, coupled with the manner in which each line of the initial aphorism ends each stanza, demonstrates self-conscious wit that draws attention away from its religious significance towards poetic form. ‘Cuanto’ is repeated; the immensity of God’s power is contrasted with the smallness of the host: ‘sólo en esta cifra viene’. Use is made of the similar sounds of ‘Mantiene’ and ‘mantener’; the ending ‘justa’ is emphasized four times: ‘justa’, ‘justa’, ‘ajusta’, and ‘injusta’, in each respective meanings of joust, justice and adjustment; and finally ‘Pan’ and ‘Pan’ are repeated. None of this enhances the poem’s purported intent, it, again,

conveys a notion of wit for the sake of poetry and not didacticism. Here the poetic effect is overriding.

Aguirre observes how Gracián measured his appreciation of poetic works by how they linked moral value with a sense of subtlety: ‘exige la función didáctica de la obra de arte, pero, según el, la misma ha de ejercerse con disimulo, con el disfraz que proporciona el concepto’ (LVIII). Sánchez Jiménez notes the considerable number of references to *Rimas sacras* made by Gracián in his *Agudeza y arte de ingenio* and points to how the work must have been appreciated in its time for its religious content: ‘el buen poeta debe unir la agudeza verbal con una enseñanza moral, frecuentemente de naturaleza abiertamente religiosa’ (*Calíope* 16). But he also sees in Gracián’s attention a recognition of an unconventional vein in *Rimas sacras* that breaks with the view of Lope as a traditional poet, a view that ‘todavía tiende a considerar al Fénix como poeta poco innovador’ (*Calíope* 7) and leads him to the conclusion Lope was, for many of his contemporaries, ‘una paradigma de innovación literaria y un modelo retórico y moral a imitar’ (*Calíope* 19). It is, perhaps, this innovatory impetus that lies at the heart of the poetic and dramatic excess of the *Rimas sacras* and a cause of the unease created by Lope’s religious poetry, an impression the poet is seeking a satisfaction inconsistent with both his declared devotion and the vehicle of its expression. His self-conscious artistry tests the decorum of the subject.

Amongst many citations, Gracián highlights two poems which serve as illustrations of this difficulty. Sonnet LXX ‘A San Martín’ depicts the meeting between San Martín, a fourth-century french saint (224, n.74) who tore his cloak in half and presented it to a beggar, whom he subsequently dreamt was Christ, and Joseph of the Old Testament who, in Genesis 39. 7–20, abandoned his famous coat when the wife of Potifar attempted to seduce him. Lope addresses the subject by way of a riddle:

¿Cuál será de estas dos la más preciosa?
Pero la de Martín será la más bella,
aunque es la de José casta y hermosa,
porque cubre al mismo Dios con ella,
ya es capa de los cielos milagrosa,
y la mayor, pues se encierra en ella. (225 vv. 9–14)

Gracián notes this as an example of the courage of authors to use their imagination to invent situations: ‘valentía de algunos ingenios, que llegan a discurrir lo que no es’. He, therefore, recognizes a poetic licence and a ‘valentía de concepto’ which he commends.³³ El Greco portrayed the scene of San Martín and the Beggar in a famous painting of the same name (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez *RS* 224). But the choice of Joseph’s cloak and in particular the deliberate association with sexual temptation is an incongruous association. Gracián continues: ‘acontece algunas veces no estar ajustada del todo la correspondencia y conformidad entre el sujeto comparado y el término con quien se compara’ (163). In writing this he chooses to ignore the potentially salacious implications of the analogy and makes a virtue out of an incongruous association.

‘San Martín’ is one of two sonnets cited by Gracián that, according to Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez, may have had their inspiration in El Greco paintings. The other is ‘A San José con Jesús Dormido en los Brazos’ (261) based on *San José y el Niño Jesús*. This poem, which merits its mention by Gracián for its ‘exageración’ and ‘ingenioso encarecimiento’ (218), depicts Joseph as he holds the baby Jesus. Presumably, the ‘encarecimiento’ lies in the inverted relationship between the two, the power and might of Jesus compared to the insignificance of his physical presence. But it is the approach to this contrast that is surprising in Lope’s poem. The first three stanzas read:

José, ¿cómo podrá tener gobierno
el tiempo de quien Padre y lumbre ha sido,
si en los brazos teneís al Sol dormido,
pues tiene vida por curso eterno?
Aunque sois cuna de su cuerpo tierno,
del Alba virginal recién nacido,
despertadle, José, si tanto olvido
no le disculpa vuestro amor paterno.
Mirad que hasta los ángeles espanta
ver que se duerma el Sol resplandeciente
en la misma sazón que se levanta.

³³ Baltasar Gracián, *Agudeza y arte de ingenio*, ed. by Evaristo Correa Calderón, 2 vols (Madrid: Castalia, 2001), I, p. 163–64.

The poet addresses the paternal responsibility of Joseph and plays on the dilemma he faces between the human responsibility of parental governance and its insignificance in the context of the eternal. The final stanza asks Joseph to resign himself to destiny:

Dejad, José, que su carrera intente,
porque desde el pesebre a la Cruz santa
es ir desde el oriente al occidente.

Joseph cannot detain time's inevitable movement, the setting and rising of the sun, and birth and death of the Saviour. His paternal love is subordinated to the interests of the world. The focus on Joseph humanizes the subject to the extent that it again invokes a familiar family relationship of father and son but contrasts the difference between mortal and divine which underlines a disillusion associated with powerlessness and loss. This use of familial image is employed throughout *Rimas sacras* in invocations of the relationships between Jesus and his mother and between Jesus and Mary Magdalene and we shall see later most poignantly in Lope's own emotions on the death of his son.

Signs of unease

These examples demonstrate a pattern of shying away from moral and religious instruction to concentrate on emotional arousal, the word as a tool for poetic art and the dramatic potential of the relationship between the Divine and human. However, alongside this and the promotion of affective piety lie other discourses. The graphic and visceral quality clearly responds to the fashion of hyper-realism in religious art. Two poems in particular exemplify this. In 'Revelaciones de algunas cosas muy dignas de ser notadas en la pasión de Cristo' (324–34) the poet indicates his intention to recount the torment suffered by Christ in the passion:

en su Pasión sufrió tormentos tales
que no fuera posible ser contados,
a no haber sido, ¡oh prendas celestiales!,
a sus santas esposas revelados;
fueron de aquellas manos desleales
—bien pudiera decir “de mis pecados”
ciento y dos espantos bofetadas
en su rostro divino señaladas.

Y fueron ¡ay de mí, qué duro exceso! (vv. 25–33)

The form chosen, the octave, is associated with epic, and used in other poems such as *Los cinco misterios dolorosos* and *Jerusalén conquistada*. The ejaculations of ‘oh’ and ‘ay de mí’ add immediacy and the reference to the precise number of blows received by Christ is an indication of the ‘duro exceso’ that the poem intends to recreate. From the beginning, there is a hyperbole which reflects the heightened nature of the subject. The poem recounts the wounds inflicted on Christ in graphic and precise numeric detail:

De la cabeza fueron las mayores
llagas setenta y dos, que la corona
mil heridas le dio con mil dolores
al Cordero que sufre y que perdona;
las que tuvo el Amor de los amores
en toda su santísima persona,
mil y ciento y noventa y una fueron,
y setenta y tres veces le escupieron. (vv. 169–76)

The enumeration of each wound enhances the sense of excess and cruelty while the reader powerlessly awaits the next number. Reading itself becomes a form of penance; there is a physical pain to be shared with Christ. Graphic descriptions are interspersed at intervals within the poem. The lines above are followed by a description of the ravaged body:

¡Oh duro jaspe el alma que, mirando
desde la planta hasta el cabello herido
un hombre tan hermoso y tierno, (177–79)

Such breaks provide moments of respite from the flagellation, perhaps suggesting the reading of the poem supported an act of mortification. Such practice was encouraged by Loyola but clearly not to the extent exemplified in the poem. The prescribed form of penance was:

to chastise the body, that is, to inflict sensible pain on it. This is done by wearing hair cloth, cords or iron chains next to the skin; by whipping or inflicting wounds on oneself, and by other kinds of austerities.

Note. The most practical and safest principle in regards to penance seems to be that pain should be felt in the flesh and not penetrate to the bone, so that the result is pain and not illness. (*Spiritual exercises* 29)

This is very explicit and indicates that such penitential practice was ordinary and expected. The romance ‘A los azotes’ (352–56) provides another example of Lope’s treatment of the subject. In this poem the reader is forced to witness the sight of Christ tied to a column:

Mira que vuelve el Cordero
la piedra en jaspe después,
que con cinco mil azotes
le desollaron la piel;
y que, enternecido, el mármol
cera se quisiera hacer
y, pues es más duro el hombre,
ataran a Dios en él. (vv. 13–20)

The description is less graphic than the previous quotation, but still conveys a sense of horror accentuated by the contrasting images between hard and soft. Christ’s body, the marble column, wax, and the seams in the jasper reflecting the wounds of the flesh, when put together, have a powerful impact despite the economy of its description. *Los cinco misterios dolorosos* uses almost exactly the same imagery:

¡O coluna dichosa que en ti atado
tienes al rei de la çeleste esfera!
Con ser tu corazón mármol labrado
paresçe que te ablandas como çera,
pues si una piedra dura se a ablandado
de ber al buen Jesús d[e]esta manera,
más es que piedra el corazón del hombre,
pues de demonio cruel resçive nonbre. (46)

Only the jasper has been added to the *Rimas sacras* poem. As signalled by the instruction ‘mira’, the scene becomes a tableau with an iconic motionless quality, like a painting. The earlier poem, in keeping with its epic structure, has a dramatic feel to it, acheived by the direct address of the column, Jesus and the implied reader, ‘del hombre’, all included in a live drama. Both, though, create a clearly recognizable image. Kaplis-Hohwald notes

‘el realismo sangriento’, and a ‘crueldad gratuita’ in *Rimas sacras* which these and several other examples demonstrate. Going one step further, she quotes Müller-Bochat, who sees them as ‘casi “una aberración sádica”’ (Kaplís-Hohwald 63).

Heightened visceral suffering and violence was an aspect of contemporary devotion. Christ’s suffering was a critical subject for the art of the period; however, the accentuation of the sadism in the first example above is surprising to modern readers who may tend to read fragmentation and blood psychoanalytically as symptoms of repressed sexuality. Kuchar identifies the relationship between ‘the element of excess in sacramental rhetoric’ and the ‘transgressive force of hyperbole’ ‘which by its very nature bears with it the potential of something ideologically and psychologically dangerous’ (223). Such post-modern critics allow for the possibility of alternative approaches to devotional literature. Eugene Cunnar, writing about the English Catholic, Crashaw, notes the common usage of grotesque imagery in seventeenth-century religious lyric.³⁴ Whilst he explains the theological significance of wounds as ‘portals or liminal passageways through which the worshipper is invited to enter in order to see Christ’s heart sacrificed for the sinner’, he also recognizes the ‘disjunctive’ nature of such images in which ‘the relationship between imagery and concept is not clear’ (238). He sees the ‘ore(c)tic’ and gender reversing qualities of ‘vulnerability and passivity’ normally regarded as ‘as positive female attributes’ in the figure of the tortured Christ (244). The image of Christ in the Passion is understood as a destabilizing force which, when linked with the powerful effect of ritual, can have subversive potential. Cunnar suggests that Crashaw used the images of Christ’s suffering in a sociopolitical context to establish his ‘concern for the shared religious values of the disenfranchised’. Referring to Summers’ essay in the same book, he notes how religious lyric, at least that of English poets, was often ‘involved in the religiopolitics surrounding an author and audiences’ (238). Clearly the heterodox circumstances of seventeenth-century England, immersed in the repression of Catholicism and the turmoil associated with opposing political and religious factions, were not the same as those of a more orthodox and politically stable Spain; but what it does point to is that, beneath the overt aim of achieving ‘heightened spirituality’, readers

³⁴ See Diehl, p. 210, for further commentary on the use of ‘grotesque metaphor’ in the late Middle Ages.

may well have been aware of the possible existence of subtexts reflecting the nonspiritual world around them.³⁵

The physical and graphic violence reflected in these examples is consistent with the idea of a subjection to Divine authority which finds an uneasy expression behind the sense of affective piety that is their obvious explanation. These tensions are illustrated by the thwarting of the human relationships between Mary Magdalen and the Virgin Mary and Christ, Lope's own bond with his son and within the model of Jonah. The sense of rebellion implicit in this subjection underlies the image of civil war, the 'república alterada', that is represented in the book as the submission of the body and sensuality to domination, and a control of the emotions through ritual and violence. In dramatizing this predicament Lope does not search for a resolution through any process of reasoning or intellectual argument. Instead, the poetry is a vehicle reflecting the emotions of everyday paradoxes and inconsistencies, gleaned from both personal and vicarious experience, centred around the dichotomy and frustrations between the interests of the individual and the omnipotence of an impersonal authority. In addition to laying the ground for these issues, what I have attempted to highlight in this chapter is that within the dramatic intent there is a purely poetic inclination: the work becomes a platform from which to exhibit artistry in the creation of religious metaphor and imagery. At times, though, such artistry seems to be for its own sake and, in this too, Lope appears to lose touch with the decorum of his subject and promote his own artistic 'satisfaction in achieving perfect expression' removed from any didactic religious purpose.

³⁵ Claude J. Summers, 'Herrick, Vaughn, and the poetry of Anglican Survivalism, in *New Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century English Religious Lyric* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1993), 46–74 (p.46).

Chapter V

Los soliloquios: Death and Disillusion

Commenting on Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, Stephen Greenblatt notes how the 'death's-head' featured in the painting suggests 'a powerful countercurrent to the forces of harmony, reconciliation, and confident intellectual achievement' which characterize the Renaissance period. Seen in these terms death acts as an omnipresent symbol, neutralizing the newly found abilities of man to 'map, mirror or represent the world' (18). As it looms over him, it acts as a foil to man's endeavours, an unknown vacuum. The Christian religion seeks to control and explain that void, to protect against the uncertainty surrounding death; as Fernando Martínez Gil says, 'dar respuesta al "sin sentido" de la muerte'.¹ Its fundamental principle is to save souls from eternal damnation. Death is thereby the culmination of a journey that prepares your soul for the next, more important, life. Although representing only one moment in that journey, it is something that Renaissance society was expected to anticipate. Martínez Gil writes:

Morir no es ya cuestión de unos instantes, sino de toda una vida entendida como preparación, como continuo acercamiento a la muerte, como una progresiva familiarización con ella que la hará, cuando llegue la hora, más tolerable y aceptable. (640)

One's attitude to death is therefore equivalent to an 'attitude to life' and accordingly, in an apparent paradox, any study of Lope's religious personae must investigate what his

¹ Fernando Martínez Gil, *Muerte y sociedad en la España de los Austrias* (Madrid: SigloXXI, 1993), p. 637.

writing reveals about his ideas on death and how those ideas correlate to the society around him.²

The established canon of Spanish history depicts Golden Age Spain as a monolith of Catholic uniformity. More recent revisionist historians have exposed it as a less homogenous society adapting itself to a wide range of faiths, beliefs, customs and rituals. Helen Rawlings notes:

Traditional scholarship has vigorously promoted Spain's championship of Catholicism in the early modern period. Modern historians have identified inherent weaknesses in this image, in particular where the practice of the faith is concerned. (xvii)

Such historians have made use of detailed information at local church and census levels to recreate a more diverse view of Spain's religious practices (Rawlings xvi) and this alternative vision invites an objective reassessment of Lope's religious personae through a review of his relationship with death as reflected in his writing. This section draws from the work of several of these 'revisionist' social historians and in particular Sarah Nalle's book, *God in La Mancha*, and Carlos Eire's *From Madrid to Purgatory*. Eire wrote: 'no single instant in one's life was as important as the hour of one's death, for without a "good death" one could not hope to gain heaven'.³ He notes how:

attitudes towards death and the afterlife are indeed a barometer of faith and piety, and a unique manifestation of the interrelationship between belief and behavior, between the abstract world of theology and the practical world of deeds and gestures. For death is not only a universal phenomenon common to all human beings; it is also that crucial moment when the here and the hereafter supposedly intersect for every human being. (5)

Death for Lope would have signified the moment of 'truth', the revelation of the ultimate reality around which his values were based. Eire describes *Ars Moriendi* literature as:

² Martínez Gil writes: 'La muerte es cambio, es un término dotado de historicidad y por ello de enorme valor explicativo para comprender mejor el hombre que vive en sociedad', p. 641.

³ Carlos M.N. Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory: The Art and craft of dying in sixteenth-century Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 76.

a genre of practical, devotional literature aimed at the laity [.....] whose purpose was to allow the dying to escape hell or even purgatory, by helping them to repent as deeply and thoroughly as possible. (24–25)

He notes how such literature was transformed during the Renaissance into *Ars Vivendi* with which the laity were instructed how to live ‘a good Christian life’ (25) in preparation for death.⁴ Such texts promoted social and religious customs around the act of dying whose primary function was to die ‘well’. This involved not only to have experienced a good life, but also the formal ritual of death which involved confession, repentance, provision for the distribution of assets, arrangements for the disposal of the body, and stipulation for masses to be said for the safe passage of the soul into the afterlife, all of which was encapsulated in the will, a document whose legal and religious functions were intertwined to the extent that it had a ‘quasi-sacramental quality’ (Eire 22). This chapter investigates contemporary thoughts on death and the ritual of dying as well as reviewing Lope’s wills and then addresses his representation of these issues through his religious poetry first in *Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* and then in the poem *A la muerte de Carlos* in the *Rimas sacras*. It concludes by identifying and linking the underlying sense of disillusion in Lope’s ascetic literature to the general sentiment of *desengaño* noted by social historians of early seventeenth century Spain and suggests that Lope’s religious poetry reflects a societal unease that principally arose out of an emerging sense of selfhood in opposition to the overwhelming authority of Church and state, a discourse with implicitly subversive potential.

Lope’s wills

The afterlife consisted of hell, heaven and purgatory, which the majority expected to pass through (Eire 15, Nalle 182). Death was an overwhelming and immediate subject for Spaniards. Eire notes: ‘Purgatory loomed large and near in the mentality of early modern Spain’ (15) and, in explaining the Spaniard’s ‘sensibilidad obsesiva de la muerte’, Camacho Guizado writes:

⁴ Eire comments how two key books influenced the theme: *De preparatione ad mortem* by Erasmus (1534) and: *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte* by Alejo de Vanegas (1537), pp. 24–27. Also Sarah Nalle, p. 181. See Martínez Gil on the *Agonía del tránsito de la muerte*, p. 37. For influence of Erasmus on the subject see Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y España: estudios sobre la historia espiritual del siglo xvi* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 1995), pp. 563–72.

El hombre español del siglo XVII, los poetas, sienten el paso del tiempo, la proximidad de la muerte con mayor intensidad tal vez que en ninguna otra época.⁵

Sarah Nalle plots the growing influence of Catholic Reformation theology in Cuenca and measures it with the huge rise in the number of masses said for souls in purgatory and concludes ‘after generations of investing in salvation, the city had become a vast monument to the dead’ (204). Orations and funeral processions became the most visible aspect of the death rituals which were even more pronounced in Spain than in other European nations (Eire 529). Social historians therefore paint a comprehensive and formidable picture of how early modern Spain was preoccupied with death.

Lope’s work has been termed ‘la dramatización de España entera’.⁶ More than any other Spanish dramatist he has been attributed with capturing the essence of the society around him (Morrison 22). We have seen how he represents himself in his writing. Dámaso Alonso observes how, of all contemporary poets, Lope brings his own life into his work:

Todos, todos los poetas, y cualquier época, trasmudan su experiencia vital en su poesía. [.....] Pero la torrentera de Lope es totalmente distinta. (420–21)

His religious personae take the form of protagonists playing out an intimate drama involving the conflict between body and soul. This struggle has its natural culmination in death which takes the form of a drama of its own in which the forces of good and evil fight over the right to the soul. Martínez Gil writes:

La batalla de las fuerzas del bien y del mal en torno al lecho del moribundo y la sentencia de un inmediato juicio particular que dependía del resultado de aquella otorgaban a ese instante trascendental un dramatismo sin precedentes. (37)

It is ironic that Lope should miss the opportunity to record the final scene of the personal drama he himself developed over the greater part of his life.

⁵ Eduardo Camacho Guizado, *La elegía funeral en la poesía española* (Madrid: Gredos, 1969), p. 69.

⁶ Joaquin de Entrambasaguas as quoted by Morrison, p. 22.

Eire states the writing of the will became ‘a spiritual exercise that was not only a sober meditation on death but also on the whole of man’s life and on one’s hopes for the hereafter’ (23), and that if written ‘in good health’ (22) and ‘immediately after confession’(23) could speed the progress through purgatory. Lope wrote at least two wills, one on 4th February 1627 in which he states he is in good health and the second from his death bed on 26th August 1635 (Castro and Rennert 396–99). Eire notes the increase of healthy testators from the 1590s, at that time representing more than fifty per cent (64), an indication that more testators were willing to prepare for a good death while still in possession of good health. The first will appears to have been such a case. Whilst the second makes reference to previous wills, the first makes no such mention. The 1627 will therefore appears to have been his first and, even if he conducted revisions up to 1635, for which there is no evidence, such reviews would only have been limited to that period and not throughout his life as Eire suggests would have been the appropriate procedure and regarded as a highly meritorious form of devotion (23). The first records him as ‘receloso que mis días no pueden ser muchos respecto de los que han pasado’, but does not indicate any particular reason for the writing of the will at this time. Both wills contain the appropriate profession of faith, instructions for burial and the distribution of the estate, all dictated by the guidelines (Eire 35). The formulaic structure devalues the notion that the wills had an intended spiritual purpose. The earlier will makes provision for a simple burial, ‘sin honor alguno de los que el mundo suele dar en tales actos’ and ‘se le haga el entierro que a un pobre sacerdote’. The humility this suggests is consistent with the self-deprecating signature ‘yo Lope de Vega, Clerigo Presbitero aunque indigno’ (Castro and Rennert 396). Despite the fact that Eire suggests there was scope for individuality there is no indication of the intensity of religious feeling witnessed in his published poetry. Lope provides for one hundred masses to be said on behalf of Don Jerónimo Manrique and for five hundred to be said for his own soul.⁷ The scale of these masses is modest in comparison with the examples that Eire provides in which he records an average of seven hundred and seventy-seven masses per person in Madrid in 1590 (178). Such a lack of ostentation may have been consistent with the ‘pobre sacerdote’ he

⁷ Don Manrique was his first tutor and mentor. See earlier section on *Los cinco misterios dolorosos*. p. 149.

described himself as and the constant requests in his letters to Sessa for funds,⁸ but it certainly contrasts to his status as a famous poet, ultimately recognized by the grandiose arrangements for his actual funeral (Castro and Rennert 329 and below). The deliberately subdued content of the early will contrasts with the generalized instructions of the second in which the funeral proceedings are left to the testators:

El día de mi muerte, si fuere ora, y si no otro siguiente, se diga por mi alma misa cantada de cuerpo presente, en la forma que se acostumbra con los demas relixiosos. Y en quanto al acompañamiento de mi entierro, onrras, novenario y demas osequias y misas de alma y rreçadas que por mi alma se han de dezir, lo dexo al parecer de mis albaceas o de la persona que ligitimamente le tocare esta disposicion. (Castro and Rennert 398)

In the second, the request for masses for Manrique are omitted together with the bequest of personal objects to specific individuals. These are replaced by formal, even legalistic, language relating to the fulfillment of the financial obligations of the dowry for his daughter Feliciana. The religious part of confession and supplication is notably brief.

Eire describes how, ‘at the moment of death, which was believed to be the instant when the soul was decisively sundered from the body, the soul of the *moriens* was taken by his or her guardian angel to the hereafter’ (33–34). Given the significance of this moment the second of Lope’s wills seems remarkably subdued. The call for intercession, which Eire suggests (68) is an important but, notably, not ‘crucial’ (71) part is absent here. The lack of any personal touch in the latter document, perhaps, suggests Lope’s influence was minimal in its preparation and gives the impression it was prepared more in anticipation of what the testators thought he would have wanted than being deliberately created in compliance with the minimum requirements. The references to Feliciana as a beneficiary seem deliberately precise as if they were inserted to ensure there was no misunderstanding about the distribution of the estate: ‘Mando se les paguen los dichos cinco mil ducados’ (398). Eire notes the need for caution in the interpretation of these wills;⁹ the former may well have been written with the flourish of religious exuberance and the latter drafted by his testators as a practical process in which Lope may have had no meaningful influence. The only account of his death, ‘aquel preciso y tremendo

⁸ For commentary on Lope’s financial situation see Borque, pp. 93–117.

⁹ He describes them as ‘mirrors’ which give an element of distortion, p. 41.

trance', appears in Montalbán's *La fama póstuma* (OE II 1548b) in which there is a description of a final act of contrition and prayer which, although more comprehensive than the details of the final testament, may be a reference to its preparation. He does, however, refer to Lope's first will as if it were definitive: 'con tanto descuidado de su vida y con tanto cuidado de su muerte, que parece la deseaba o la suponía muy cerca, porque con mucho tiempo hizo su testamento' (OE II 1546a).¹⁰ The content of the two wills stand in marked contrast to the pomp, 'tanta grandeza' (OE II 1548b), that surrounded his burial and three funeral services, a flamboyance that prompted the coining of the phrase 'es de Lope' as a term of excellence (OE II 1548b).

Eire notes the paradox between the privacy of the act of dying and the spectacle that the provision for masses and orations necessitated (114). The passing of the invisible soul was displayed in terms of the living world and the leveling that death implied was confounded by the extolling of earthly achievements.¹¹ The eulogies given at Lope's funerals were no exception. The overwhelming impression is that the path to immortality is through fame rather than through personal salvation, as these lines by Don Jusepe Antonio Gonzales de Sales show:

A la inmortalidad de Lope de Vega
no pues Lope murió, si aquella historia
que el mismo fue, la vida le apercibe,
exenta del olvido su memoria.¹²

Mention of the afterlife and transcendence is absent; his value is measured by his own mortal history whose memory will live on eternally in this world.

Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios

Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios, was published in 1626, and contained the earlier *Cuatro soliloquios*, written in 1612. The collective work spans the period

¹⁰ There is a discrepancy over the dates of his death and length of his final illness. Castro and Rennert (p. 328) refer to Monday 27th August as the date of his death but note his will is dated 26th August. This is consistent with the Montalbán's description of his final prayers but he refers to the Friday before being 18th August (OE II, 1547a).

¹¹ See Camacho Guizado, p. 171.

¹² Jusepe Antonio Gonzales de Salas in Lope de Vega, *Colección de las obras sueltas assi en prosa, como en verso de D. Frey Lope de Vega Carpio, Del habito de San Juan* Tomo XIX (Madrid: Don Antonio de Sancha, 1777), p. 110.

between his so-called religious crisis and later years. Also, consisting of both prose and verse, they offer an opportunity to investigate whether there are any any characteristics peculiar only to his poetic treatment of devotional literature. *Los soliloquios* were published under the name of Gabriel Padecopeco, an anagram of Lope de Vega Carpio. They include three soliloquies and seven prose ‘comentarios’ which are additional to the earlier version.¹³ They also contain one hundred short prayers, ‘Cien jaculatorias’, and the lament, ‘El llanto de la Virgen’. Despite the date of publication Guillermo Serés offers evidence of style and references within Lope’s *Epistolario* to postulate that they were in fact written contemporaneously with the *Rimas sacras* in the period leading to 1614.¹⁴ The date of their composition is important because, if correct, separates the book from Lope’s later body of work, a time when, as the preparation of the 1627 will demonstrates, he had thought about his death, and places it in a period of prolific religious writing.¹⁵ By doing so it significantly reduces the quantity of religious poetry attributed to his latter years and may suggest that religious writing carried less importance to him towards the end of his life, a circumstance that would appear unusual. Serés alerts us to the caveat provoked by the absence of a means to identify any changes he may have made subsequent to the original composition and prior to publication in 1626 (210); but, by recreating a structure under a pseudonym and representing it as new, he clearly revisited the work at this later period of his life.

The framing device by which the work purports to be a translation of poetry written in Latin by his pseudonym associates it with the ludic quality characteristic of his other, more famous, pseudonym, Tomé de Burguillos (Sánchez Jiménez 187). This deceit adds a less formal, perhaps even frivolous tone to the book’s contents which belies the seriousness of its subject. It has the effect of both distancing the author from the work and inviting curiosity over his identity. The prologue, which was not part of the 1612

¹³ As we have seen within the work of St. Juan de la Cruz (see previous chapter) the glosa or commentary was an established literary medium.

¹⁴ Guillermo Serés, ‘Temas y composición de los *Soliloquios* de Lope’, *Anuario Lope de Vega*, 1 (Lleida: UAB, 1995). Serés uses the letter dated by Amezúa October 1611, p. 68, to suggest that the Romances for the *Rimas sacras* and the *Cuatro soliloquios* were written and maintained together, pp. 209–27 (p. 210 n. 6).

¹⁵ Serés notes the lack of clarity relating to the first editions, p. 209. He notes the Barcelona edition was printed in 1626 but the Madrid edition, used here, was printed in 1627, Gabriel Padecopeco, *Los soliloquios amorosos de un alma a Dios* (La viuda de Luis Sanchez a costa de Alonso Pérez, 1627, privilegio June 1626). All references are to this edition and given in the text.

version, has the air of a chivalric novel: ‘Assi perdió Gabriel la gracia de aquel Principe: pero no la de vna hermosa dama’ (¶¶ 7). Padecopeo himself carries a hint of Lope’s alter ego: ‘Aqui pues llegó, desengañado de las cortes y de sus tres enemigos, seruir, amar y pretender’ (¶¶ 6). Gabriel ‘se despidio del mundo’ and wrote the poems as a ‘soldado de Christo antes de tomar el habito’ (¶¶ 8). However it is not only the prologue that encodes aspects of his autobiography; as Serés asserts, the work as a whole is constructed from the ‘retazos de su autobiografía’ (211). The religious persona created around the role of repentant sinner revealed in *Rimas sacras* is present from the beginning of the soliloquies and is visible through the double disguise of author and translator. The tone and religious content is similar to *Rimas sacras* and is primarily evident in the asceticism and *contemptus mundi* vocabulary that pervade the work. Similarly the book encompasses a spectrum of emotions ranging from the complacent to the fearful. Lope’s return to the theme of repentant sinner in 1626 after his well-known relationship with Marta de Nevaes and so many years after his sacred vows to a Christian life publicized in *Rimas sacras* would, perhaps, have caused surprise in his reader. These arguments support the view that it was indeed written much earlier and that Lope was in fact taking advantage of the literary deceit to provide a vehicle through which to return to the religious genre. The book is dedicated ‘A la Exma Sra. doña Ynes de Zuñiga Condesa de Olivares, y Duquesa de Sanlucar’ to whom *Triunfos divinos* was also dedicated in 1625; there may, therefore, have been an opportunistic motivation behind the project, part of a campaign to attract political patronage.

An excess of metaphor

The book begins:

Por tan estraños caminos
van mis passos derramados,
que por mis graues pecados
tiemblo los ojos divinos.
La razon, a quien solia
boluer mi engaño la cara,
viendo en lo que todo para,
oy al remedio me guía. (Fol.1)

These opening verses resonate with the first Sonnet of *Rimas sacras* in which the narrator similarly contemplates ‘los pasos por donde he venido’ and professes a return to a state of righteousness: ‘vuelve a la patria la razón perdida’ (RS 316).¹⁶ Here, as we have seen at several points in the study of *Rimas sacras*, Lope exhibits a sense of confidence in his relationship with God. He has seen both reason and the correct path which is now guiding him to his redemption in atonement for his ‘graves pecados’. He implies the only challenge is to dominate his will: ‘ya la voluntad es mia / solo rendilla me falta’. Thereafter, he can look forward to the pardon he expects:

Y assi espero, Christo santo,
tener el perdon que os pido,
quando os acordeis, que he sido
el que os ha costado tanto. (2)

These words ascribe him with a sense of self-importance; they suggest God would not have taken so much trouble with him, ‘costado tanto’, if there were not an offer of pardon. The use of the word ‘espero’ here confirms his expectations for a positive outcome. His insistence is repeated in the second soliloquy:

No mireis mis desconciertos,
que ya no podeis negarme,
que quereis los braços darne,
pues que los que teneis abiertos. (19)

Here he introduces the image of the jilted lover finally welcomed with ‘braços’ ‘abiertos’. There is no hint of arrogance, rather the image underlines his optimism for imminent consummation. His reliance on God’s charity to reintroduce him into his flock is reaffirmed in his reference to the Prodigal son whose return is awaited at a banquet prepared by angels:

Pero que razon os pido
estando la mesa puesta,
hagan los Angeles fiesta

¹⁶ See Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez in *RS*, p. 132.v. 14, where they compare this to ‘un nuevo Ulises de regreso a una Ítaca alegórica: el estado natural en que domina la divina razón’.

al Prodigio que ha venido. (19)

These words are contrite but not ascetic. The image of tears is replicated constantly; the words ‘dexadme llorar’ are reiterated so often they take on the significance of a refrain (for examples 19, 35, 67).¹⁷ In Soliloquio VI, which begins ‘Ojos ciegos y turbados’ (79), they become the subject of the poem in which he associates tears with a cleansing of the eyes, a process essential to a clarity of religious vision:

No se que sienta de vos,
que despues que aueis llorado,
tan claros aueis quedado
que osastes mirar a Dios.
En la Cruz deuio de ser,
donde su costado aplica
el agua que clarifica
los ojos que le han de ver. (79–80)

Eyes, purified by tears, dare to face God and can see and understand the image of Christ on the Cross. The water produced by the tears washes Christ’s wounds and the continued process of cleansing ensures a safe passage to heaven.¹⁸

O gloria de mi esperança
como fue tal mi rudeza?
que dexasse la firmeza,
y buscasse la mudança.
Mas yo lloraré de suerte
mis pecados, Christo mío,
que mi vida, buelta en rio,
corra hasta el mar de la muerte. (81–82)

In the verb ‘lloraré’ he promises his tears will grow into a river that will run into ‘el mar de la muerte’. It is presented as a natural and predictable process. The poems of *Los soliloquios* convey this sense of assuredness.

Lope refers to love as death: ‘Muerome de puro amor’ (4). The metaphor is used to express a state of divine love heightened beyond madness to the extent it causes death:

¹⁷ See also Serés on this point, p. 221.

¹⁸ Water together with wine was also produced from Christ’s wounds, John 19. 34.

Causais amor tan profundo
muerto de amores, mi Dios,
que embidio los que por vos
parecen locos al mundo. (66)

Here it describes the irony of Christ's death for the love of his followers who are now at the point of dying for him. In Soliloquy VII he returns to death's traditional 'a lo divino' application in romance poetry:

Oy, para rōdar la puerta
de vuestro santo costado,
Señor un alma ha llegado
de amores de un muerto muerta. (91)

The idea is the same; the soul, dead from love, circles the door of Christ. But the repetition of the references throughout the soliloquy labour its use to the point of excess:

el amor que viue despierto,
que no es el amor el muerto,
Vos sois el muerto de amor.
[.....]
el coraçon pudo herir,
no pudo el amor morir, (92)

Martínez Gil describes the metaphor of love and death as a literary topos 'muy del gusto de la literatura barroca' (331). Such images thereby take on the form of commonplaces. There is even what seems to be a pun in the line 'os enamore deseo' (92). Such an application suggests an intended witticism that goes beyond the religious significance. As rhetorical and poetic devices, they undermine the underlying devotional tone of the work and counteract the affective piety that the book appears to promote. Religion is relegated to secondary importance behind the desire to create poetry. These references to death do not take on the sombre and foreboding context suggested by the historical commentators. Salvation may not have been achieved, but it is under control. There is no hint of fear of the outcome for his final judgment:

Dulcissima vida mía,
en quien la inmortal está,
por quien viuo, y por quien ya

morir mil veces querría. (64)

The Christian path is one of sweetness and immortality. Death is therefore welcomed, 'mil veces querría'.

Verse versus prose

The prose commentaries provide a pronounced contrast to the verse. Their wordiness creates a sense of breathlessness consistent with their catechistic and confessional style. They contain long sentences: the opening sentence of the first commentary contains ninety-two words and the sentence that constitutes the whole of the fourth paragraph of the second commentary contains two hundred and fifty-three words. This verbosity provides the impression of direct contact with the author, a sensation of automatic writing, lacking artifice. Serés observes this as 'el "habla desconcertada" que cuadra muy bien con la aparente improvisación y espontaneidad que impregna las glosas' (212). This form has a more forceful tone than the verse; it imparts an urgency and an insecurity which, at times, appears as pleading, almost wailing. This is exemplified in the exclamations of the third commentary:

O, quanto me ha consolado [.....] O, si bastessen las mias [.....] Ay de mi muchas vezes [.....] O ciega aficion [.....] O santos Angeles [.....] Ay mal conocida piedad. (37-42)

The swings in mood are more obvious in the glosses than they are in the poems. The commentary to Soliloquio V follows the life of Christ from the nativity to his crucifixion. The verse stanza:

No ay amor, no ay voluntad
en quantos el mundo admira
porque todos son mentira,
y solo amaros verdad. (66)

becomes in the prose:

Todas las cosas de la tierra son vanidad y afliccion de espiritu, todas las confianças del hombre, maldiciones vuestras, todas las promessas engaño, todos los deseos

viento, y todas las voluntades, mentira, solo amaros, seruiros, deseáros y agradaros es verdad, premio, vida, gloria, eternidad y descanso. (76)

The prose contains more emotional force than the verse counterpart. This passage has a sermonic, lecturing quality, something the lyric version cannot achieve. The elaboration of the metaphors offers scope for the author to explain their meaning and enables the rationalization and exposition of his thoughts in a way that is more suited to prose than poetry.

Thoughts about death, alluded to obliquely through metaphor and metonym in the verse, are more fully elucidated in the prose. The words of Soliloquio VI:

O gloria de mi esperança,
como fue tal mi rudeza?
que dexasse la firmeza,
y buscasse la mudança. (81)

are expanded in the gloss to read:

pero llegados a tocar con las manos son vanas sombras sueños fantasticos, oro de alquimia, cometas breues, flores fimeras, que al alua salen, a medio dia se estienden y a la noche estan marchitos; y eso mismo es el hombre: todo la vida es vn dia: amanece en la niñez, resplandece en la juuentud, y en la vejez cierra las hojas de su flor; por esso se daba prissa al perdon aquel inmortal ejemplo de paciencia, porque temia, que si os tardauades en buscarle, por ventura no le hallariades. (89)

The passage again contains a message of admonishment warning against worldly *vanitas*, a strong ascetic vein employing a range of *contemptus mundi* imagery in which the world is viewed as wasting and temporary.¹⁹ The life of man is compared both to the withering of the flower and a dream. This asceticism leads directly to contemplation of mortality.²⁰

el hombre deue pensar, o su mortalidad o su inmortalidad, y nada de esto pensaua yo, lo mortal, porque ninguna cosa estaba más lexos de mi memoria que la muerte; lo inmortal, porque ninguna me daua menos pena que el alma. (54–55)

¹⁹ Camacho Guizado explains the various common metaphors employed by Golden Age writers and poets, pp. 184–203.

²⁰ Martínez Gil: ‘Toda actitud ante la muerte supone o una negación radical que lleva al nihilismo, o por el contrario, un sistema de adaptación, un intento de integrar lo desconocido, lo incomprensible, en lo racional y controlable’, p. 635.

However, having considered his mortality the narrator proclaims himself 'resucitado', a 'nuevo ser' (54). His ideas of the afterlife appear to hinge on the finding of God before death. Time and time again he reverts to this: he sees himself as saved from eternal death by his new relationship with God:

Bendito sea vuestro nombre, piadoso Hijo de Dios, que de tales peligros me sacastes, y que como a otro Lazaro de la sepultura de mi eterna muerte, me dixisteis: Ven fuera, miserable, a la luz de la eterna vida. (40)

He describes Christ's cross as a life raft for those shipwrecked at sea, the support that will make the difference between death and life, 'una tabla entre la vida y la muerte' (36). Heaven and hell are expressed as eternalized forms of life and death. Eternal death is represented as a living hell and analogous with his mortal state before he found God: 'vn retrato del infierno, en confusion, en escuridad' (43). His former ways are reflected as a shroud, 'la mortaja de las costumbres que me cercauan todos' (40). He thereby professes to know what hell is like and displays a confidence about his new prospects: 'bastaua el ver segura mi vida en vuestra muerte' (42). The commentaries accentuate a perception of drama and volatility in the work; they also reveal the storms, 'tempestades' and 'mar furioso', of his mood and character: the 'costumbres' of his urge to sin. The confidence exuded by the calmness of the 'dvlcissima vida de la que viuo' (67) evaporates and turns into insecurity. There is desperation in the words 'Señor pequé, Dios mío, pequé; conozco que os ofendí; confieso que sois mi Dios, con mis pecados tiemblo, con vuestra misericordia me animo' (79). Similarly there are occasional interjections that provide the sense that his safe passage is not entirely secure; some of these carry a hint of pleading: 'No muera yo, Señor mio, viua, si Vos quereis' (106). There are also promises of a permanent amendment of his ways in 'yo quedaré mas que la nieue' (43), and bargaining: 'para que cuente vuestras obras, para que alabe vuestro nombre santo, para que diga que me castigastes, y que no me entregastes a la muerte' (106). This last reference introduces a sense of ambiguity. His continued life could be either in the earthly world or in the afterlife; the 'death' he wants to avoid could be either hell or a literal death. Nevertheless, either interpretation involves a justification of his worth; in this case he is worth more 'alive' than 'dead', a point he makes one further time:

mirad mi vida, que acerca de Vos está la propiciacion: yo no se de que os seruirá mi cuerpo hecho ceniza, y mi alma en la eterna condenacion; pues, vltimo fin de mis deseos, aora es tiempo de estender los braços a la miseria mia, que no se el preciso tiempo de mi fin, aunque se que está ya estatuido y que es infalible. (60)

The reference to 'muerte' in the first quotation above is replaced by 'eterna condenacion' in the second, thus making it evident he is referring to hell. Without specific commentary over the process of judgment it could be inferred he is preoccupied with the continuation of his earthly life. The 'miseria' that he seeks an end to is the uncertainty he faces in this world. Direct comments on death and the afterlife are scarce; most are achieved by allusion and thereby play on this ambiguity. As an example, he recognizes Christ's wounds as the 'la puerta principal del cielo' (100). This metaphor projects the image that the doors of heaven are open to all those that follow Christianity; and in doing so creates the idea that Christianity is synonymous with heaven. All references to Christ, the cross and the Church, therefore, have the potential to be understood as the eternal afterlife in heaven. Thus, the journey to Christ's cross, 'asido voy a vuestra cruz, Norte diuino caminando a vos' (107), can be construed as a journey to the afterlife, and 'la puerta de vuestra Iglesia' (52) as the door to heaven. The metaphors multiply the number of images. References to death, judgment and the afterlife are restricted to metaphor and not referred to directly. The commentary to Solioquio VII includes the lines 'mientras voy por esse mar, quiero cantaros el Himno de los navegantes mortales, trasladando la voz con que la Iglesia os llama, para que lleguen al puerto que desean' (108). The 'puerto que desean' could be interpreted equally as heaven or of the protection from death provided by Christ's church on earth. In the same commentary he asks 'qué ha de ser de mí?', but follows this with 'temerosos son del fin cierto e incierto: cierto, porque ha de ser, y incierto, porque no se sabe cuándo ha de ser' (104). This shows the need for constant readiness for the moment of death, but does not refer to fear of judgment. Eire notes how Madrileños conceived of the afterlife 'as a reflection of earthly life' (525). The imagery is consistent with contemporary expectations. Heaven is governed by a tribunal; God is the 'juez' who presides over the sentencing of executions:

No escondais la cara de vuestra humanidad santissima, Iuez soberano, supremo y justo; miradme como Rey en el camino de la muerte, que esso solo basta para que viva, a pesar de los que ya piensan está dada la sentencia y que caminan conmigo a la ejecución. (56)

This is compatible with Eire's understanding of 'belief in death as a moment of judgment, and, of heaven as a "court"' (68). The word 'juez' is repeated so often that it becomes a motif within the work. Eire observes that unpaid penalties were collected in purgatory (174). Lope employs the language of debt and payments: 'y todos piensen que os deue, ya que no pueden pagaros, aunque bien pueden los hombres pagaros con lo que vos quereis' (51). But the context is of gratitude for a 'debt' created by the 'beneficio' of 'el cuydado de vn Dios' (50), a tribute to be paid by devotion: 'a estos llaman los mayores ingratos y estos deuen de ser los que secan las fuentes de la piedad' (51). There is no direct suggestion this devotion is taken into account at judgment by the 'Juez de muertos y vivos'; instead the narrator is concerned for his sins:

y más si pongo los ojos en el libro de mis maldades, donde a la pluma del Fiscal riguroso no se le ha de olvidar un atomo. Ay Dios, tantas obras feás, tantas palabras locas, tantos pensamientos vanos, que será de mi? (55)

However, there is no sense of fear in these words; he returns immediately to thoughts of a favorable outcome: 'Pero amor mío dulcissimo, no mireis a lo que aora soy, sino lo que puedo ser' (55). His emphasis is on living. When he writes 'para que diga que me castigastes que no me entregastes a la muerte' (106) he may be requesting to be punished now rather than in purgatory. But that is not what he says; he wants to avoid death.

Job as a model

The model of Job adds to the impression that it is the angst and suffering of his earthly experience that is being addressed not the afterlife. He is referred to twice, once in the gloss to Soliloquy IV: 'Y si Job deseaua que le amparase de Vos el infierno, pareciéndole que en su oscuridad aún no estaua seguro de vuestra ira: yo Señor en Vos mismo quiero hallar mi amparo' (57). The narrator compares himself to Job who actively sought death to end his misery (Job 6. 9); he, on the other hand, seeks refuge in God. The second mention comes in the final commentary in an address to God which, again, creates an

analogy between Job and the narrator: ‘Vos preguntastes a Job si sabía antes de ser lo que hauia de ser, o tuvo entonces conocimiento del número de sus dias’. The reference confirms God’s omnipotence as the sole determiner of life, ‘que Vos, Redentor mío sabíais los terminos de su vida’ (104). As Barbara Sargent-Baur explains, Job was a figure commonly used in the late Middle Ages to represent fortitude in suffering;²¹ however, his reward comes in mortal terms, with peace and longevity: ‘Dominus autem benedixit nouissimis Job magis quam principio eius’ (Job 42. 12). The extension of Job’s life and his reconciliation with God is the central theme of the Biblical book: ‘Vixit autem Job post haec, centrum quadraginta annis, & vidit filios suos, & filios filiorum suorum usque ad quartam generationem, & mortuus est senex, & plenus dierum’ (Job 42. 16). By drawing parallels with Job, the narrator appears to shift the significance back to the mortal world in which he seeks protection from earthly suffering rather than that of the next; it seems it is the misery of his own mortality he wants to resolve. But as David Daiches notes, Job’s biblical portrayal is enigmatic and contradictory (25). The traditional view that human suffering is a punishment for wrongdoing is undermined by Job’s story; he is patently blameless: ‘Job here is not the patient Job of the fairy-tale. Far from it: he is angry to the point of blasphemy and repeatedly demands an explanation from God’ (4). The reasonableness of Job’s requests is demonstrated in his plea:

Quis mihi tribuat auditorem, ut desiderium meum audiat Omnipotens: & librum scribat ipse qui iudicat. Ut in humero meo portem illum, & circundem illum quasi coronam mihi? Per singulos gradus meos pronuntiabo illum, & quasi principi offeram eum. (Job 31. 35–36)

The lack of rational justification of God’s treatment of Job supports the Book’s interpretation as allegory, a process that requires careful biblical exegesis. Lope, however, avoids any such explanation; he uses Job’s story as a figurative and poetic symbol to show how God is the sole arbiter of worldly existence. His God must be pleaded with to ensure a favourable outcome: ‘No muera yo, Señor mío, viua si vos quereís’ (106), an action Job never conducts. Lope employs the traditional figure of Job to project an image of the narrator as God’s hostage without fully reconciling the basis of

²¹ Barbara Nelson Sargent-Baur, *Brothers of Dragons: ‘Job Dolens’ and François Villon* (New York: Garland, 1990), p. 56.

the analogy between the two. The resultant uncertainty allows the idea that the narrator's interest rests in this world rather than the next.

Fearless of death

The doctrine of purgatory is mentioned only once in the work and then in the context of the Trinity and the sacraments of mass:

Dadme, Padre mio, esse Pan verdadero, esse Pan supersustancial, [.....] que assi son tres partes en la diuision de la Hostia, pero solo vn Christo: o por los tres estados de la Iglesia Militante, Triunfante y los que estan penando en el Purgatorio: o por los tres estados en que vos estuistes, mortal, muerto y inmortal: (29)

He refers here to the tripartite nature of the afterlife, but it is notable that, with so much allusion to the final judgment within the work, he does not elaborate on its function. We have noted that Eire considers most people would have anticipated to have ended in purgatory without progression to either heaven or hell. Camacho Guizado comments how the Christian faith works against fear of death and turns it into 'un tránsito amable a mejor vida' (169). When Eire writes that a belief in purgatory sets 'in motion a dialectic between terror and confidence' (520), he refers to the function of purgatory as both 'a place of torment' and 'a place of gradual cleansing' (521). Like life itself, purgatory was viewed as the preparatory stage for the final journey. The *Soliloquios* make no mention of this process;²² the afterlife is explained more simplistically. The term 'tránsito', which was synonymous with death (Eire 521) and suggested a journey through purgatory, is never mentioned in the book.

The problem, of course, with the interpretations of metonyms and metaphors in this context is that, as Burke points out, the words used to describe the divine are borrowed from the 'realm of our everyday experience' (8); whilst this provides a flexibility in their significance it also has a destabilizing effect on readings of the text and frustrates any cohesive understanding of his religious objective. The overall sense however is that the narrator is inherently convinced that he will end amongst the 'triumfante' and not those 'penando en purgatorio'. Martínez Gil notes how:

²² See Eire: 'only the souls of the holiest men and women [...] could hope to enter heaven directly. For most people – elites and non elites alike [...] the journey was from Madrid to purgatory', p. 15.

La salvación era factible para aquel, cumpliendo los deberes que le exigía su condición de privilegio, se plegaba a morir conforme al modelo eclesiástico. No había que abandonar el mundo y convertirse en religioso para salvarse; bastaba morir bien. (638)

Lope may have anticipated that his role as an ordained priest would confer privileges on admission to heaven; however, there is no specific indication of that in the text. Lope's ordination occurred after the original work and many years before the book was produced in its final form and that may account for any lack of reference to the priesthood. His confidence would also have been inspired by the attitudes of his period. Whilst fear of death may have pervaded Spain's Golden Age there is also evidence their society believed their system had the process under control, especially the rich who could pay for chantry masses. Sarah Nalle recounts:

In the seventeenth century individuals no longer doubted the final destination of their souls or worried about the degree of glory they could achieve in heaven. Hell had receded into the background, and purgatory could be compassed in prayer. (205)

Such views undermine the notion that life was dominated by the fear of death and the consequences of the afterlife. *Los soliloquios* reflect the full spectrum between anxiety over death at one end and confidence on the other; but seen as a whole they fall on the side of confidence.²³

The work is concluded by the 'Cien jaculatorias a Cristo Nuestro Señor', one hundred catechistic exclamations and then by a poem, 'El llanto de la Virgen'. The final lines of the 'jaculatorias' summarize the sense of the book: 'Christo mio, generalmente desean los hombres viuir; pero solo aciertan los que os buscan a vos, que sois vida eterna' (126). Despite the continual allusions to death that appear throughout the soliloquies the narrator does not include specific reference to preparations for his own demise. The implicit autobiographic references in the work may have made the subject seem either too

²³ For further examples of ambivalence to the subject of death see Henry Kamen, *The Phoenix and the Flame: Catalonia and the Counter Reformation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 11 and p. 128.

personal or inappropriate to be shared with the reader; alternatively the reality of death was too remote. His plea for the intercession from the Virgin Mary, which comes in the 'Oracion' at the end of 'El llanto de la virgen', is the only call for external help and this comes in a conventional prayer form: 'Ruegote, Señor que interceda por mi ahora, y en la hora de mi muerte, la bienaventurada Virgen Madre tuya' (129). We have noted how Christian doctrine leads to a positive view of death and this book appears to conform to that principle. It reveals human truths and the inability to relate them to the power and uncertainty of God: 'su incertidumbre me atormenta' (60). The narrator professes to know about life on this earth: 'yo se lo que es el hombre por mi, por los ejemplos, por los muertos [...] el hombre es ejemplo de inbecilidad' (61), but not the workings of God: 'vos, finalmente, infinito, no segun la cantidad dimensiva, que esta no lo ay en Dios, sino la virtual que está en Vos' (104). His personal turmoil is depicted as a battle for his own soul as it struggles between the doubt and agony of eternal confusion and serenity within God's protection:

fu en razón del engaño; pero con verme a la orilla, bien sabeís que aun aora es mas necesario vuestro fauor, porque podria alguna ola de las mal sossegadas tempestades de mis costumbres boluerme al mar furioso de donde he salido, y por eso os pido, dulce Señor, la mano. (20)

The narrator represents himself as a Christian who vacillates between composure and desperation. It reflects not only an insistent profession of faith but a prostration in front of God. His words appear repetitive and by rote. Sarah Nalle sees this as typical of the religiosity of the period:

Church officials much preferred the laity to supplicate the Lord and acknowledge his divine power by using set formulae that could be repeated over and over (verbal prayer). Constant repetition of the Lord's prayer, the Creed, the Hail Mary, and the Salve Regina strengthened a Christian's bond to his God, even if one did not pause to consider the meaning of each word and phrase. (105)

Such a collection of readymade words makes Lope's contribution seem superfluous. There were clearly an adequate number of alternative devotional and confessional books available specifically intended for the pious reader as a source of catechism and prayer. This makes the use of *Los Soliloquios* as an accompaniment to penitence inappropriate,

an act of vicarious indulgence. It was, however, an act that did not trouble the Condesa de Olivares to whom the book was dedicated.

Lope's is not an intellectual argument, it reflects a human sensibility as it recounts the battle between the divine nature of the soul and the grossness of the human condition. The paradox between death caused by original sin and the restoration of eternal life through the mortal death of Christ underlies the drama but remains unexplained, thereby detracting from any didactic purpose. The immensity and incomprehensibility of God becomes, for Lope, a human emotion and, it is the prose commentaries that better impart the emotional essence of the book, a confirmation that theology and doctrine are better suited to prose than verse. Lacking obvious artifice, the catechistic, breathless outpouring of words contained in the commentaries give a better dramatic indication of the state of mind of the narrator. Whilst it pretends to convey the subject on a higher plane, the effort to convey the angst of the narrator in the verse is compromised on two grounds: the mediation of the artistic process itself removes authenticity and it is constantly undermined by both its language and imagery. In this work Lope provides an interesting combination of the two mediums and it is in the prose commentaries that the modern reader gets closest in his search for 'authentic utterance' and 'the intimate communion' with the author's 'inner being' (Smith 43).

Death of a son

We have seen how the allusion to autobiography within *Rimas sacras* lacks evidential support. However, a notable exception is the *canción*, 'A la muerte de Carlos Félix' (*RS* 455–67), to which I now return. Aaron refers to Vossler when she observes the general absence in Spanish literature of poems that refer to the family, 'la ausencia, señalada con frecuencia, de la unidad de la familia en la literatura española, especialmente de la madre'. She sees this as a convention which afforded privacy to the family, 'un muro que guarda la sagrada recinto de la vida familiar' (188), and one that Lope, in his 'necesidad [.....] de "literalizar" su vida' (189), breaks. Unlike any other in *Rimas sacras*, this poem articulates an experience of personal grief directly linked to a specific biographic event. The frequent references to Carlos in the letters to Sessa signal the fondness with which he

was held by his father.²⁴ They also demonstrate Sessa's direct involvement in Lope's personal family circumstances, and provide support for Weber's suggestion that the relationship between Sessa and Lope underlay the poem's discourse.

In the poem, Lope sets his relationship with God against his relationship with his son. Aaron comments 'nos discernimos con mayor claridad la transición entre los sentimientos religiosos y los familiares' (192). Quoting Montesinos, Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez write 'lo más admirable son las palabras con las que habla el hombre Lope, no el Católico Lope' (455 n. 145). These critics have seen the poem as a sincere reflection of Lope's inner life. Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez read it as an elegy to Carlos in which 'el Fénix consuela su dolor ante la pérdida del hijo mediante su fe en el Creador'; they note how the poem is divided into two parts, 'la resignación ante la muerte y la consolación por el nuevo estado divino del niño' (175). However, it opens itself up to more ambivalent interpretations and in many ways serves as a summary of the themes and tone of Lope's religious poetry as a whole. The poem begins:

Este de mis entrañas dulce fruto,
con vuestra bendición, ¡oh Rey eterno!,
ofrezco humildemente a vuestras aras;
que si es de todos el mejor tributo
un puro corazón humilde y tierno,
y el más precioso de las prendas caras, (vv. 1–6)

Covarubbias defines 'tributo' as 'el pecho que pagaban los 2. tribus, que era el pueblo romano'.²⁵ The association with Roman practices adds to the notion of pagan sacrifice contained in the references to 'entrañas', and 'aras'. The narrator is described as offering up the very best of such sacrifices, 'el más precioso de las prendas caras', which, through the word 'entrañas', suggests the horror of his own disembowelment, an image which clashes with the idea of 'bendición' and the sweetness of the 'fruto'. The exaggeration of the dissonance almost opens it to an ironic interpretation. He continues:

Direís, Señor, que en daros lo que es vuestro
ninguna cosa, os doy, y querría

²⁴ For example see the letter dated July 1611: 'Carlos anda con calzones; dize que dessea que Vex.^{añ}', *Epistolario* III, p. 45. See also other examples on pages 26, 28, 36, 37 and 38.

²⁵ Covarrubias, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, p. 936.

hacer virtud necesidad tan fuerte,
y que no es lo que siento que nuestro,
pues anima su cuerpo el alma mía
y se divide entre los dos la muerte. (vv. 14–19)

There is acknowledgement that Carlos belonged to God and not Lope in the line ‘direís Señor, que en daros lo que es vuestro / ninguna cosa, os doy’ (vv. 14–15). The words ‘no es lo que siento que nuestro’ support the notion of a divided self. The notion of the division of body and soul conveys several ideas. According to Platonic theory, lovers shared their souls; here Lope returns the part of his soul which was Carlos’ (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez 318 v. 15 and 455 vv. 18–19). Additionally, the division of body and soul describes both the figurative partition of the narrator’s being and the physical separation of father and son; it also, however signals a distance between narrator and God, the death of Carlos divides the two. He expresses the need to make a virtue out of necessity: ‘hacer virtud necesidad tan fuerte’. The inference of barely tacit acquiescence pervades the poem. The immense power of God forces an unwelcome submission, represented by a declaration of annihilation and prostration in the face of overwhelming force: ‘póstrase nuestra vil naturaleza / a vuestra voluntad, imperio sumo’ (vv. 26–27). Once again, the pagan connotation surfaces in the word ‘imperio’. The scale of the gap between man and God, is explained as the reason for the pointlessness of exhibiting resistance: ‘porque donde es inmensa la distancia, / como no hay proporción, no hay repugnancia’ (vv. 38–39). The rejection of the notion of rebellion in the word ‘repugnancia’ suggests its possibility, something that can be inferred from the lines that follow:

Quiera yo lo que Vos, pues no es posible
no ser lo que quereís, que no queriendo
saco mi daño a vuestra ofensa junto;
justísimo sois Vos; es imposible
dejar de ser error lo que pretendo,
pues es mi nada indivisible punto. (vv. 40–45)

The omnipotence of God, the ‘Autor de nuestro límite’ (v. 29), is contrasted with the impotence of Lope. He is reduced to a nothingness so small, an ‘indivisible punto’, it cannot be divided further (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez 458 v. 45). The imperative, ‘Quiera yo’, stresses his wish to follow God’s will, and the inability to relate his own

wishes to virtue: 'es imposible / dejar de ser error lo que pretendo'. This gives rise to the confusion and frustration of not fully understanding what God wants him to do; the repetition of the verb 'querer' underlines the notion of wilfulness. The dilemma is reconciled by the submission conveyed in the words 'justísimo sois Vos', a neo-stoicism Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez recognize in the poem as a whole (455 n. 145).

Despite the obvious parallels with Job, Lope turns to another biblical figure, Abraham, 'aquel Padre de las gentes' (v. 79), as a model for his predicament. In doing so he attaches a pride and importance to his role as the one chosen to offer up his son, a position, he suggests, attracts envy:

¡Oh, cómo justo fue que os ofreciese
este cordero yo para obligaros,
sin ser Abel, aunque envidiosos tengo! (vv. 69–71)

Lope's choice of Abraham as an example of paternal sacrifice also draws attention to the important difference between the two cases. God intervened to spare the sacrifice of Isaac, a distinction that makes Lope either more or less special because He did not intercede in the case of Carlos, a point Lope avoids. He ends the passage with a wish he could have taken the place of Carlos as the sacrificial lamb:

muriera el ángel y trocando estilo,
en mis entrañas comenzara el filo. (vv. 90–91)

The requirement that the angel should have died is enigmatic. He appears to suggest that the angel should not have intervened to substitute the lamb for Isaac and thereby allowed Lope to take his place. He uses the same idea again in Soliloquy V of *Los soliloquios*:

que a vezes, Señor, quisiera
que vn Angel por Vos muriera,
por no sentir vuestra muerte. (65)

The incomprehension that accompanies the narrator's resignation evokes Job's call for God to explain himself. The unsaid words verge on resistance. Camacho Guizado notes 'un católico creyente [...] no podía imaginar una maldición a la divinidad más que bajo formas ya sentenciadas como vacías y no relacionadas directamente con la creencia religiosa imperante en el momento histórico en que vivía el poeta' (23). The suggestion

that the proscription resides only in the articulation of private thoughts affords an interpretation which sees Lope's silence as close to criticism. Lope appears to attribute Carlos' death to an oversight on God's part:

Amábaos yo, Señor, luego que abristeis
mis ojos a la luz de conoceros
y regalome el resplandor süave.
Carlos fue tierra; eclipse padecisteis,
divino Sol, pues me quitaba el veros,
opuesto como nube densa y grave. (vv. 53–58)

Ambiguity rests in the words 'me quitaba el veros' which could be taken to mean that he is now merely paying the price for a lapse in his devotion. But the verb 'padecisteis' refers back to God; it was Him who suffered the eclipse which impeded Lope's vision and is the subject of his blame. However, resignation and obedience associated with the paternal relationship, in this case of both Lope to God and Carlos to Lope, is seen as a virtue and the 'abismo / de la obediencia' (vv. 76–77) becomes the void of silence that Lope cannot express. He switches his allegiance to God and resigns himself to the consolation of seeing the gift of his sacrifice in God's hands: '¿qué major consuelo / que lo que pierdo yo me gane el Cielo?' (vv. 24–25). He then turns his attention to his own salvation. Carlos is alluded to as a 'rémora', an obstacle that affects the course of Lope's own 'nave' (v. 59) as he steers his course 'al puerto del eterno salvamento' (v. 63).²⁶ Further, Carlos, is referred to as an impediment to Lope's adoration of God:

¡Oh, cómo justo fue que no tuviese
mi alma impedimentos para amaros, (vv. 66–67)

The sacrifice of Carlos is now viewed as part of the process of Lope's own salvation; it is the destination of his own soul that is important and must be addressed, despite the human instinct to love. Lope has to overcome his emotions to enter into a state of resignation; he is left with no choice but to accept the divide between the divine and the mortal.

²⁶ The 'rémora', a small shellfish with spines, was associated, from ancient times, with affecting the navigation of ships presumably by attaching themselves to the hull, *RS* pp. 458–59, n. 59–65.

There is a perception of confidence in the final outcome for both Carlos and Lope. He pictures Carlos already in heaven, described in earthly terms:

¡Oh, qué divinos pájaros ahora,
Carlos gozáis, que con pintadas alas
discurren por los campos celestiales
en el jardín eterno, que atesora
por cuadros ricos de doradas salas
más hermosos jacintos orientales,
adonde a los mortales
ojos la luz excede! (vv. 131–38)

‘Cuadros’ are a reference to the ‘divisiones’ of Lope’s garden in which he imagines Carlos playing, ‘una imagen de vida doméstica’ (Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez 462 v. 131–38). But the ‘doradas salas’ also indicate a palace in which the ‘cuadros’ are paintings which depict an Arcadian scene in which Carlos is surrounded by divine birds, presumably angels, with gilded wings. In this interpretation Lope’s vision of the afterlife becomes a stunning and self-replicating horizon of painting, palace and garden, an infinite celestial hall of mirrors. There is clearly none of the suffering associated with purgatory in this description. However the last lines of the poem reintroduce an element of doubt; referring to his own passing he writes:

que espero que algún día
la que me da dolor me dará gloria,
viendo al partir de aquesta tierra ajena
que no quedaís adonde todo es pena. (vv. 192–95)

Lope implies he will find himself in purgatory and hopes that Carlos will have passed on to paradise. Nevertheless, there is no sense of fear or terror in the tenor of these words, nor is there lament for Carlos. Camacho Guizado observes how Christian doctrine and the natural fear of death limits displays of lament in funeral elegies. He writes:

el natural temor a la muerte, exacerbado en el poeta barroco por su peculiar e intenso sentir de la muerte, acepta con agrado el cambio de signo que hace de ella un suceso feliz y una posibilidad de mejor vida, aunque [.....] detrás de estas racionalizaciones, despues de todos los consuelos, queda siempre el hombre solo ante la muerte, con desesperación y terror, con angustia y protesta. (176)

Lope displays that sense of optimism in this poem, as he does throughout both *Rimas sacras* and *Los soliloquios*.

Martínez Gil notes the souls of children up to the age of seven were protected by baptism. That was regarded as the age at which children developed reason (594) and thereby started to lose the security of the sacrament; any death after that was viewed as ‘sospecho’ (594). Carreño and Sánchez Jiménez do not believe Lope is referring to this when he writes ‘conocí la vejez que os inclinaba’ (v. 106); instead they explain: ‘la temprana sabiduría de Carlos Félix solamente sirve para anunciar su muerte’ (461 v. 105–6); these words also allude to the ancient custom of ascribing young princes with adult wisdom. He thereby avoids this sensitive issue and instead implies Carlos’ death was timely and part of a preordained plan:

Más no os temiera yo por santo y bueno
si no pensara el fin que prometía
quien sin el curso natural vivía. (vv. 115–17)

There is no element of doubt; like the rest of the address to Carlos, it carries a markedly different tone to the earlier section in which he addresses God with what can be inferred as aggrieved acquiescence, almost as if they were two different subjects. Here he displays a total trust in God; it is not his future currently under negotiation, it is that of Carlos. The poem portrays personal and, therefore, human endeavour within a robust religious framework. The presence of God is pervasive, but there is no didactic intent, rather, once again, Lope stresses the human drama rather than the religiosity of the situation. It is notable, though, that this poem represents the only occasion in the religious works studied in which he directly exposes the intimacy of his private life.

Two earlier poems written in relation to family deaths offer distinct contrasts to the poem about Carlos. Religion is absent from the sonnet written on the death of Teodora, his daughter by Isabel de Urbina, who died at one year of age in 1596 (Castro and Rennert 100). Lope’s memory of her is one of physical rather than divine beauty:

Beldad que del artífice superno
imagen pura fuiste en cifra y suma,
sujeto de mi lengua y de mi pluma,

cuya hermosura me ha de hacer eterno; (*Obras poéticas* 130)

His concern is to immortalize her in his memory. The sonnet written on the death of his father in 1578 (*Obras poéticas* 120), ‘A la muerte de Félix de Vega Carpio’, addresses death itself rather than God:

Parca, ¿tan de improviso, airada y fuerte,
siegas la vega donde fui nacido
con la guadaña de tu fiero olvido,
que en seco polvo nuestra flor convierte?

¿Ni vale el nombre, ni el valor se advierte?
Cárcel de enfermedad no ha precedido,
ni información de haberle merecido,
y ¿sin proceso le condenas, Muerte?

¡Oh tribunal, adonde no hay reparo!
¿en un hora del mundo se destierra,
a quien Félix nació, sin que lo fuese?

Mas justo fue, que siendo sol tan claro,
se pusiese al ocaso de la tierra,
y al Oriente del cielo amaneciese. (*Obras poéticas* 120)

The poem contains the language appropriate to death; the ‘tribunal’ is clearly there ready to judge and the insignificance of human action is evident in the line, ‘¿Ni vale el nombre, ni el valor se advierte?’. But there is a suggestion also of malice not present in the previous works studied: this death is ‘de improviso, airada y fuerte’; death’s scythe is associated with a ‘fiero olvido’; and he has been ‘condemned’ both ‘sin proceso’ and without the benefit of warning. The tacit resistance recognized in the *canción* to Carlos is much closer to the surface in this poem. These two sonnets were written long before *Rimas sacras*, *Los soliloquios*, and the period generally associated with Lope’s religious writing. They appear to reflect a less conscious view of the afterlife and the religious significance of death held before his so-called religious conversion. However, as I have shown elsewhere and demonstrated in the example of *Los cinco misterios dolorosos*, his religious writing began at a very early age.

The poem written by Ben Jonson on the death of his son in 1603, also at the age of seven, provides an interesting comparison to Lope's poems. The epigram entitled, 'On my First Son' reads as follows:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy,
Seven yeeres tho'wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
O, could I lose all father now. For why
Will man lament the state he should envie?
To have so soone scap'd worlds and flesh's rage,
And, if no other miserie, yet age?
Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say, here doth lye
Ben Jonson his best piece of poetrie?
For whose sake hence-forth all his vowes be such,
As what he loves may never like too much.²⁷

This echoes several of the themes of Lope's poem to Carlos. In the words 'my sinne was too much hope of thee' there is a suggestion that the poet's filial love was the cause of his son's death as in Lope's poem. The notion of being God's possession is also present in the word 'lent', as is the contradiction inherent in the act of lamentation for something that alleviates the rigors of the world: 'scap'd worlds and flesh's rage'. The idea of payment for the loan is in the words 'I thee pay'; the nature of the payment is the poetry itself deliberately confused with the procreation of his son, 'his best piece of poetrie'. This is similar to the idea of fruit contained in the first line of Lope's poem: 'Este de mis entrañas dulce fruto'. The words, 'O, could I lose all father now' are enigmatic; when Dutton writes 'For Jonson the day has been anything but just, and his impulse is to renounce all fatherhood' he indicates that the frustration recognized in the line is redirected not at God but at himself.²⁸ In only a few lines he manages to touch on several of the ideas presented by Lope. The similarity of the themes and images is remarkable despite the confessional differences.

An ascetic strain

²⁷ Ben Jonson, *The Complete Poetry of Ben Jonson*, ed. by William B. Hunter Jr (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 20.

²⁸ Richard Dutton, *Ben Jonson: To the First Folio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 84.

The last work to be studied presents an austere contrast. Whereas the poems of the early period lack religiosity and *Rimas sacras* and *Los soliloquios* convey a sense of optimism, the *Segunda parte del desengaño del hombre*, probably written at the same time, reflects a distinctly penitential and ascetic message.²⁹ It consists of two short poems each with a gloss of eight stanzas addressed to his soul which he implores to effect a change in his ways:

Rompe pues alma mia el lazo fuerte
Que te puso del vicio el torpe encanto (f. A4)

Death must always be at the forefront of his mind:

Lleua delante siempre en la memoria,
Que es aquel riguroso y triste dia. (f. A4)

Maintaining your soul in constant readiness, cleansed and repentant is an absolute requisite because of the uncertainty with which death strikes; the final outcome depends on the state of your soul at that decisive moment:

Pues como de la enmienda y penitencia
tan descuydado vino en esta vida,
como no limpio y curo la conciencia
antes que llegue el fin de esta partida,
porque si llega y falta diligencia,
el dar en el infierno una caida,
hasta el centro profundo mas horrible
triste cosa sera, pero posible. (f. A4)

Fear of hell is the overriding deterrent and the gaping hole of hell becomes an enduring image. God as 'juez' can turn from a 'cordero' to a 'leon':

Veras hecho Leon quien fue Cordero
y al que te amaba, vuelto en enemigo (f. A2)

²⁹ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Segunda parte del desengaño del hombre* (Cuenca: Salvador de Viader, 1616).

The message is clear and simple: complacency may damage your chances; repent and change now or face the consequences. Despite the poem's obvious austerity, however, Lope stops short of total pessimism; he uses the oddly mild words 'triste cosa sera, pero posible' which have the effect of counterbalancing the bleakness and of qualifying the message as a threat rather than a prophecy. Although the poem is addressed to his own soul, and thereby appears to represent the narrator's personal state of mind, it has a universal significance and an obvious didactic message, something not evident in his other poetry in relation to which it appears anomalous.³⁰ It is perhaps because of this that it was not published with the *Rimas sacras*. The brevity of the work enables Lope to provide more of a consistent message than in the longer works analysed. With the exception of the absence of the mention of purgatory, his understanding of the process of death and the journey to the afterlife conforms to the ideas of the period as explained by the social historians such as Eire, Nalle and Martínez Gil.

Signs of disillusion

Quoting Montesinos, Aaron wrote 'la poesía de Lope no hubiera sido posible sin "las tristezas de la carne, el hastío de las pasiones o el terror del infierno"' (187). This implies Lope was driven by religious fervour, fear of death, old age, and spent passion. The evidence of this study suggests otherwise; whilst his religious poetry presents constant references to the next world Lope was motivated by the events of this one. Hilaire Kallendorf appears to capture the essence of this when, writing of what she calls 'the pattern of extreme baroque paradox',³¹ she says 'these early modern figures are chained to a pleasurable and painful humanity, to a radical ambivalence and moral tension' (124). Lope seems to be driven by the human dilemmas which are accentuated by the code imposed by the Catholic religion rather than by trying to preach its doctrines to others. A predominant sense of both *Los soliloquios* and *Rimas sacras* is the narrator's shifting attitudes to authority, a mediation of his state of subjection to an omnipotent power. This conflict is represented within the narrator, a soul in torment, enveloped in an internal

³⁰ Sánchez Jiménez has produced an edition of this work which I have been unable as yet to locate: (pliego suelto de 1615) *Pliegos volanderos del GRISO Grupo de Investigación Siglo de Oro de la Universidad de Navarra* 6, Pamplona, 2004.

³¹ Hilaire Kallendorf, *Exorcism and its Texts: Subjectivity in Early Modern Literature of England and Spain* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 123.

struggle to subdue his baser nature and be reunited with God. As early as Sonnet III of *Rimas sacras* the narrator is depicted immersed in a civil war with himself. He imagines himself as an outcast in Sonnet IX in which he forms an analogy with Adam, the original sinner and rebel, ‘rebelde estoy como la vez primera’ (v. 14), an image he extends in Sonnet XI by creating a comparison of himself with Jonah. The idea of the outsider is again repeated in the model of Job in *Los soliloquios*. The sense of alienation is clearly associated with the ‘truancy’ which forms the central theme of the work identified as a cycle of ‘truancy’, confession, and repentance. But all these examples appear to dwell on the emotional drama of the situation. In dramatizing this predicament Lope does not search for a resolution through any rationalization or intellectual argument. Instead he uses these books as vehicles to reflect the emotions of everyday paradoxes and inconsistencies gleaned from both personal and vicarious experience centred around the dichotomy and frustrations between the interests of the individual and the omnipotence of an impersonal authority.

Aguirre sees in the poetry of Valdivielso and the baroque period generally the beginning of ‘la experiencia escéptica’ (L), an ‘expresión, implícita o explícita, de una duda y de un desengaño’ (L) a product of a world that ‘ha empezado a dudar’, torn between ‘el viejo y el nuevo orden de ideas, científicas y filosóficas’ (XLIX). The picture he creates is of a point in European history caught in an era of enormous change contained between the established views on all aspects of culture and civilization and the new ideas provoked by the science and knowledge of the early Enlightenment, a society facing the doubts arising from realisation ‘that the accumulated wisdom of the Ancients might be, if not entirely false, at least seriously flawed’.³² It was a period in which Spain suffered the additional disillusion associated with its diminished military and economic status whose growth was so closely related to the faith and religion with which they became synonymous. Aguirre suggests the collective disenchantment arising from this situation found expression in baroque poetry in general and in religious poetry in particular as it attempted to articulate the ‘perpetuo combate entre fe y razón’. He also points to the influence, at a personal level, of what he describes as the ‘dualismo carne-espíritu’ (LI), the source of a conflict within the self in an effort to reach an equilibrium

³² Anthony Pagden, *European encounters with the New World: From Renaissance to Romanticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 89.

between society's expectations and the instinctive needs of the individual. We can read the civil war in Lope's 'república alterada', acted out in both *Rimas sacras* and *Los soliloquios* along these lines. It becomes the narrator's confused struggle to achieve the values that will meet the demands of both sides of such a conflict.

There is nothing within Lope's poetry to suggest that he deliberately attempts to project some form of metaphor for an ailing society. Nor does Aguirre produce any evidence within Valdivielso's *Romancero espiritual* for his observation. If, as has been shown, the narrator does not offer direct personal, or autobiographical information, then it is easier to read this figure as an 'everyman' and the agonized soul searching for God as an articulation of collective disenchantment. Seen in this way, the religious poetry of Lope is the bound up in discourses of the early modern state as well as responding to the demand of literary fashion.³³ The religious poetry of Valdivielso and Lope corresponds with what historians see as a concentration of religious zeal in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but this does not of course prove any direct link. The proclivity for dramatic impact in the poetry and the absence of didacticism reflect less an inspired product of devotional idealism than a general feeling of religiosity and that, in this respect, these works may be a subliminal display of the 'desengaño' historians recognize. They represent a social apprehension that seeks relief in religion.

Aguirre, quoting T.S. Eliot, notes how faith, doubt and religious scepticism are closely linked:

el demonio de la duda que es inseparable del espíritu de la fe [...] Porque todo hombre que piensa y vive en su entendimiento tiene que tener su propio escepticismo, el que se para ante el problema el que termina en negación, o el que lleva a la fe y que está de alguna manera integrado en la fe que lo trasciende. (LI)

To express faith presupposes the existence of doubt and perhaps the voice of 'desengaño', as a register of the gulf between the ideals reflected by Church and state and the evidence of everyday experience, is a disguised articulation of a dissonance that in essence represents a challenge to authority. We have seen how Weber interprets *Rimas sacras* as a defiance of Sessa's control. In an alternative reading, his patron's domination

³³ See Dámaso Alonso, *Poesía española*: 'se nos convierte en símbolo barroco. Lope, símbolo del barroco. [...] Sí, Lope vínculo de España, nudo de España, símbolo de España', p. 478.

could be figuratively substituted by that of the monolith, represented by church and state, and the work seen as an expression of collective disenchantment whose only resolution lies in the total acceptance of the selfsame centres of power and the denial of the selfhood that conceived the discontent. Lope, though, writes with a personal tone, he appeals to human emotions; the voices of his personae express the tensions of the narrator's difficulty in conforming as an individual to the model God has imposed on him. He depicts himself in the role of the outsider attempting to adapt; employing the models of Jonah, Job and Mary Magdalene as examples of self-confessed rebellion (*RS* Sonnet IX v. 14) and delinquency (*RS* Introduction v. 81). There is a sense of Foucault's outlaw in these illustrations. Edmundson writes:

If what Foucault says about prison and the genesis of normative subjectivity is true, then it follows that the prisoner is, at least in some regards, our representative man. That is, prison discipline attempts to create a normal citizen from resistant material; for the prisoner is the person who could not be inducted into existing norms without strife. What most of us assumed as second nature – the limiting contours of ourselves and our souls – the prisoner had to be broken to accepting. Thus in the gradual, painful rehabilitation of the prisoner, one may see, as if in slow motion, an allegory for the process by which we of less resistant temperament became who we are. (158)

Lope's religious persona, identified as the rebel in *Rimas sacras* and *Los soliloquios*, can be seen as the outsider wanting to reunite himself with what he perceives as the 'existing norms'. He seeks the safety of God's house and to be reunited with His flock. He views his ordination as a liberation and promotion to the echelons of the controlling authority. The 'insignias reales' give him the status of 'sacerdote y rey'. Sánchez Jiménez qualifies Greenblatt's theories of self-fashioning as inappropriate in the Spanish environment:

Greenblatt sostiene que el 'self-fashioning' siempre se lleva a cabo en oposición a algo, un algo 'perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other [...] must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked or destroyed'. (10)

Sánchez Jiménez sees Lope's self-fashioning in the roles of epic poet and repentant sinner as a progression of the line of accepted literary tradition: 'lo que destaca es asociación con otros autores, normalmente precedentes' (10). Lope and, he implies, other Spanish writers of the period, 'no necesita oponerse explícitamente a nada para crear una

imagen determinada de sí mismo, sino más bien le basta asociarse con una tradición ya formada'. He does not see how Lope's repentant sinner, in fact, fits exactly into Greenblatt's model: he is created, like the obvious example of Christianity itself, in opposition to the alien otherness of the outcast. In this interpretation Lope can be seen as a voice of conformity. This is clearly the direction of Foucault's ideas. Edmundson writes:

the New Historicists, led by the gifted Stephen Greenblatt, have been working hard to apply Foucault to the reading of literature, and with the overall result that literature is revealed as another among the disciplines, as a force for social conformity. (185)

However Greenblatt, I think, allows for a wider and richer range of interpretations. When he writes 'art is an extraordinary sensitive register of the complex struggles and harmonies of culture' (*Renaissance self-fashioning* 5), he recognizes more complex circumstances than the simple promulgation of a social or religious doctrine. In his essay 'Invisible Bullets' he writes: 'Alongside the testing of a subversive interpretation of a dominant culture, we find the recording of alien voices or more precisely, of alien interpretations' (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 35). The sense of subversion is a theme we will investigate in the next chapter in the context of Lope's religious drama, an example more directly related to Greenblatt's text; but here I want to note that Lope's religious poetry contains signs of these 'alien voices'. We have seen examples where he has dwelt too much on the unexplained paradoxes, the containment of human desires and limitations of earthly delights to be summed up as the mouthpiece of a 'dominant culture' or for his poetry to be neatly categorized as affective piety. Rather the visual and dramatic nature of his verse, the need to populate his work with characters rather than ideas all point to a desire to illuminate the tensions and contradictions that surround 'baroque paradoxes'. In particular these poems articulate the apparently irreconcilable distance between God and the experience of the human subject. In the previous chapter, Mary's grief and incomprehension at the abandonment of her son at the crucifixion and, in this chapter, the narrator's emotions on the death of Carlos highlight instances where human love and divine love are in opposition. Without any attempt to explain these circumstances, they allude to some form of lingering resistance. In his religious poetry,

he fashions two characters: the sinner and the priest; but is never able to fully reconcile the two.

Poetry and religion share a complicated and at times inconsistent relationship. David Daiches makes an observation relevant to the whole of Lope's religious poetry and at the centre of this thesis. Writing about Milton's *Paradise Lost* in the context of a defence of God's treatment of Job he states:

The epic is not an appropriate form for a poem about God's relation with men, for the epic demands struggle and intermittent dubiety about the outcome and above all a sense of the limitations of even its greatest heroes. Further, the justification of the ways of God to men in terms of arguments put mostly into God's mouth is simply not persuasive, raising as many questions as it answers. (32)

Lope's poetry contains these dramatic qualities. He thinks of the human condition and man's relationship with God in dramatic terms and on this measure his poetry is inevitably going to portray uncertainties and 'dubiety' that, at times, might appear subversive.

Chapter VI

'Invisible Bullets' in the Saint's Plays

Yolanda Novo notes the 'textura dramática y teatral evidente' of *Rimas sacras*, a 'diseño escénico' and the presence of 'el hablante poético' who functions as 'una persona movil y versátil, capaz de dramatizarse en figuras, poses, y máscaras diversas' (Novo 310). The dramatization of these personae produces a paradoxical effect: it creates a visual display, an exteriorization, of the interiorizing act of self-reflection and self-examination. Literature itself, of course, exposes a private act, but Lope's conception of the subject in dramatic terms highlights the contrast between privacy and exposure. In *Rimas sacras* the constant emphasis on the visual image conflicts with the narrator's avowed purpose of inner contemplation (for example Sonnets I and III). Self-examination, as we have seen, is the foundation of the work of Loyola, Granada and 'the devotional movement of the seventeenth-century' which according to Niklas Luhmann 'privatized the attempt to achieve salvation'.¹ The Catholic religion's focus on images and public manifestations of piety and grief is inherently visual, but is principally concentrated on the object of worship rather than the worshipper. Lope's characterization of the protagonist-sinner distorts this view; it has the effect of situating the reader not in the place of the worshipper but behind him, as a spectator; the narrator, like an actor, becomes the object of attention.

Jonathan Sawday identifies a search for 'selfhood' in the 'interiority' of the Renaissance, and a break away from the traditional view of the 'self' 'anchored, in a theological sense, to an entirely negative set of ideas'. He continues:

¹ Niklas Luhmann as quoted by Jonathan Sawday, 'Self and Selfhood in the Seventeenth Century', in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the present*, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 29–48 (p. 30).

Selfhood was the mark of Satan; it was a token of the spiritually unregenerate individual, in thrall to the flesh rather than the spirit. (30)

The new idea of the 'self', he suggests was 'born' out of the 'modern idea of "corporeality"', experiencing for yourself: 'Autopsia'- the science of seeing 'for oneself' was also the science of seeing 'teipsum', of seeing yourself (48) and has its basis in the recognition of "'Autonomy" from God'(30). The suggestion of separation and independence from God resonates with the struggle with authority experienced by Lope's religious personae. The traditional idea of selfhood as sin also conveys the notion of what Roy Porter refers to as the 'annihilation of self', an understanding which:

harmonized with the feudal doctrine that everyone had his or her preordained place in a hierarchal order of lords and serfs, masters and men: the whole greater than the part. (Porter, *Rewriting the Self* 2)

The embodiment of the persona as a character can thereby be viewed as a challenge to the negation of self associated with the old order. The drama surrounding Lope's religious personae is mostly represented as the battle between body and soul; but seen in the context of an emergent selfhood it can also be interpreted as a discourse on the conflict between the burgeoning notion of the individual and the medieval idea of mortality. This is, perhaps, another way of expressing what Aaron refers to as Lope's 'humanización' of Christ: a search for 'autonomy' and identity through the representation of human experience in a religious drama. It is something which can only be achieved through a positive conception of 'self': the actor is, after all, an embodied corporeal being. Theatre, which thrives on nuance, irony, and uncertainty, sits uneasily with the confidence of religious dogma. Without an adequate response to the doubts it naturally creates, such drama remains an unsatisfactory medium for Christian education. The dramatic nature of Lope's religious poetry gives rise to ambiguities and strangely dissonant 'voices', amongst which are those of the two Marys in their relationships with Jesus and that of the narrator's constant conflict with and resistance to Divine subjection. This chapter turns to Lope's plays in order to investigate whether the same discordant signals reappear in his theatre.

Lope's religious drama can be divided into two categories: the *autos sacramentales* and the religious plays performed in the *corrales*, termed '*comedia divina*' by Morrison (1). Parker describes how the *autos* were written for the celebration of the Eucharist and associated with the liturgy. Based around 'dogmatic instruction' in the style of 'sermons' their didactic purpose lent itself to allegory as a means of expression and precluded any notion of nuance or ambiguity. But the religious plays, written for the *corral* audience, reveal a different character. They are populated by human rather than allegoric figures and are intrinsically concerned with the representation of 'human' experience.² These plays therefore offer the poet more scope for personal expression and it is to them I turn in order to investigate Lope's religious personae and language.

Truth and belief

As examples I have chosen two plays from within the canon of Lope's religious work.³ The first is *Lo fingido verdadero*, classified by Lope as a 'tragicomedia'. The implication of a tragic reading of the play, as we shall note later, influences its overall interpretation. The focus of the critical attention thus far paid to the play has been principally directed to its distinctive metatheatrical qualities which have been seen to dominate its hagiographical content. Amongst these have been Victor Dixon and Susan Fischer. Additionally, Elaine Canning, while including the play in her study of Lope's religious drama, also directs her approach from this metatheatrical stand point with the declared objective of uncovering 'the varying degrees of audience estrangement provoked by the exploitation of particular forms of metadrama and to demonstrate how such self-referential devices serve to illustrate the thematic tensions of the plays - the conflict between human and divine love' (Canning 94). Her work recognizes the inherent polemic between the concept of metatheatre and religion, an issue raised by Thomas O' Connor in his article 'Is the Spanish Comedia a Metatheatre?', and also notes the ambivalence inherent in several aspects of the play; but, as I will demonstrate, it does not fully reconcile such ambiguities either with the theocentric view she uses to interpret the play

² Alexander A. Parker, *The Allegorical Drama of Calderón: A Introduction to the autos sacramentales* (Oxford: Dolphin, 1943), p. 65. See also Morrison, p. 56. They both note the distinguishing feature between the two genres is the use of allegory.

³ Morrison, p. 321, and Canning, p. 141.

or with the religious messages the play appears to transmit. O'Connor refers to 'the contradiction of role-playing and Christian authenticity';⁴ he explains 'while *metatheater* gives many insights into the structure and form of the serious Spanish *comedia*, it fails to explain the Christian response to pretense and theatricality – to sin is to dramatize oneself, to theatricalize oneself, to deceive oneself; virtue is the humble acceptance and pursuit of one's God-given destiny' (287). He reconciles this position with the suggestion that the Spanish theocentric world view saw role-play as integral within the *theatrum mundi* concept in which:

the man who is true to his Christian faith is not an actor; he is a man being proved and tested by God. He is not playing a role; and thus, armed with faith, that implacable Spanish value, he has absolute certainty that his world view is true. (279)

This endorsement of the theocentric view overrides the paradox and is, I believe, the basis which has enabled Elaine Canning to accept the ambivalence the play generates without further comment. However, as I will demonstrate, the way in which *Lo fingido verdadero* appears to test the line between the two positions and indeed challenges the theocentric view needs further elaboration. The work contains several of the themes previously noted in our assessment of Lope's religious poetry, conceived both as self-promotion and in the style of metatheatre with the narrator as protagonist, a situation that exposes his religious persona to the charge that 'the "man" who plays a part is inauthentic, false and inevitably doomed to deceiving himself about the nature of reality' (O'Connor 279). In particular the play addresses the roles of poet and audience in the interpretation of artistic creation in both their secular and religious contexts. In doing so it reveals a 'play-space' contained within a conventionalized framework of meaning in which the poet toys with and manipulates his audience's understanding. Above all, it does this in a search for a source of 'authenticity' within a spectrum which encompasses the poet's personal experience, his conception of the world, and his religious values.

⁴ Thomas Austin O'Connor, 'Is the Spanish Comedia a Metatheater?', *HR*, 43 (1975), 275–89 (p. 284).

Castillejo⁵ and Morrison (186) both date the drama around 1608, which would place it at the beginning of the period generally associated with Lope's religious writing. Sainz Robles points out that it was written between 1604 and 1618 because it appears under the name of *El mejor representante* in the list of plays included in the 1618 edition of *El peregrino en su patria*, but not the first edition printed in 1604. The work appears in the sixteenth part of Lope's theatre published in 1621, where it is dedicated to Tirso de Molina (*OE* III 169). The fact that Lope made the dedication to Tirso in 1621, some years after the writing of the play, suggests not only that it was a work he thought would have some relevance to Tirso, who, as a priest and a playwright, shared some evident common interests, but also that it had a particular value to him, one that was sufficiently significant for him to have singled it out from the rest of his opus some years later.

The play is about the demise of St. Genesius who, as Morrison notes, was an actor and playwright 'performing a burlesque of a Christian baptism before the Emperor Diocletian when he was suddenly converted and was forthwith martyred' (*OE* III 191). Morrison (193), Sainz Robles (*OE* III 169b) and Menéndez y Pelayo note the source as being Ribadeneira's *Flos sanctorum*, but it is Lope who is credited with the creation of the 'movimientos de vida y de gracia' (*OE* III 169b) that form the intricacies of the plot and transform the history into a drama.⁶ By telling the story of an actor-playwright who converts to Christianity, the play carries some ironic similarities with the biographical events of Lope's life during the same period. The character of Ginés seems ideally chosen as Lope's *alter ego*. He is introduced as 'vn gran Letrado',⁷ who, like Lope, 'es Poeta / y las comedias compone' (266a). When asked to perform the play of his choice, he responds: 'Haré la mia' (271b). The use of the possessive pronoun 'mia' suggests that not only do the events on stage have an autobiographical basis, but also bear the authenticity of first hand experience. The play contains several intertextual references

⁵ David Castillejo, *Las cuatrocientas comedias de Lope* (Madrid: Teatro Clásico Español, 1984), p. 73 and p. 75. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, 'Estudios sobre el teatro de Lope de Vega', *Obras completas*, 29 (Madrid: CSIC, 1949) p. 272.

⁶ Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, 'Estudios sobre el teatro de Lope de Vega', *Obras completas*, 29 (Madrid: CSIC, 1949) p. 272.

⁷ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Decima sexta parte de las comedias de Lope de Vega Carpio* (Madrid: Alonso Martin, 1621) 260–85 (p. 265a) All references are to this edition and given in the text.

which can be construed as allusions to the events of Lope's own life. Lope and Isabel de Urbina like Pánfilo and Nise of *El peregrino en su patria* and the leading actors of Ginés' play, Marcela and Octavio, elope (276) when faced with the prospect of an arranged marriage (Castro and Rennert 59–63). The name of his leading actress, Lisarda, who flees 'a ser nueva penitente / en las peñas de Marsella' (266a), is similar to that of Lisardo, the lover of Finea, in *El peregrino en su patria*, who is abandoned in 'Marsella' (*Peregrino* 352).⁸ 'Lucinda', referred to in the *canción* preceding the first inset play, is the pseudonym frequently used by Lope for his mistress, the actress Micaela de Luján (Canning 111). The soliloquy before the first inset play:

GINÉS Amor me puso en tanta desventura
 La verde Primavera de mis años,
 Que pense por el mar de sus engaños
 En vez del puerto hallar la sepultura. (279a)

resonates with both the closing passages of *Los Pastores de Belén*, 'los errados pensamientos de mis primeros años [.....] han sido luz de mis engaños' (588–89),⁹ and parts of *Rimas sacras*, 'canté la verde primavera' (Sonnet XIX). The conversion of San Ginés appears deliberately crafted with similarities to the religious metamorphosis experienced by the narrative personae of Lope's religious poetry.

The intertextual references noted above indicate a deliberate fashioning around previously conceived characters who themselves have correlations with the author's own well-publicized personal life and the personae reflected in his writing. Again, therefore, in this play we find a further example of Lope, deliberately, introducing the suggestion of autobiography within his work, a device which contributes to the notion of authenticity which is central to *Lo fingido verdadero*. McGaha describes the play as 'a sustained meditation on the phenomenon of role-playing and its consequences in human life'.¹⁰ As the title suggests, the audience is asked to differentiate *lo fingido* from *lo verdadero*. The ability of the author and actor to give the appearance of truth and the audience's ability to

⁸ Legend tells that Mary Magdalene fled to Marseille. See Powers, p. 276.

⁹ It is interesting to note *Pastores de Belén* was written in 1611. This may have some significance in the determining the date of this play.

¹⁰ Michael McGaha as quoted by Elaine Canning, p. 97.

distinguish representation from its underlying object become the essence of the drama. Ginés describes the challenge which depends on imitation and understanding:

Hasta al Magno Emperador
llega de que represento
tu fuego, tu sentimiento
con tanto extremo que ya
de ver deseoso está
como imito lo que siento,
pero en tanta propiedad
no me parece razon
que llamen imitacion
lo que es la misma verdad.
Comedia es mi voluntad,
Poeta el entendimiento
de la fabula que intento,
donde con versos famosos
pinta los pasos forçosos
que ha dado mi pensamiento. (272a)

Truth, 'la misma verdad', is associated with 'lo que siento', and differentiated from 'imitacion'. This alludes to a form of inner reality based on individual experience and the manner in which the poet can recreate such 'truth'. The artistic challenge becomes a convincing replication of such feelings.

The metatheatrical qualities derive from the way the work contains two plays within-the-play, both performed for the emperor Dioclecian and his entourage who create an on-stage audience. In the first of these, Ginés represents Rufino the spurned suitor of Fabia, played by Marcela; but he is unable to separate his 'real' off stage feelings for Marcela from his stage role. He confronts her directly during the performance:

GINÉS Bien se, Marcela, que nace
 el hazerme aqueste agrauio
 de que quieres bien a Octauio;
 Octauio te satisface,
 Octauio te agrada, ingrata;
 por el me dexas a mí.

Marcela responds with bemusement:

MARCELA Ginés, representas?
[.....]
Como me llamas Marcela,
si soy Fabia?

The ‘truth’ of the actors’ ‘real’ relationship invades the ‘fingido’ world of the script. The confusion then extends to the on stage audience:

MAXIMIANO Sospecho que se han turbado,
que hablando a solas estan.
LÉNTULO Con mirarte, oluidaran,
señor, lo más estudiado.
DIOCLECIANO Mas pienso que es artificio
deste gran representante,
porque turbarse vn amante
fue siempre el mayor indicio. (274b)

Marcela highlights the dramatic irony of the circumstances with her comment ‘Ay cielo, si verdad fuera / la comedia’ and Diocleciano concludes ‘Sospecho que representan / estos su misma verdad’ (276a). As the reality and fiction of the events on stage become blurred, Marcela and the actors watch and react with bewilderment to the unscripted actions that unfold. Elaine Canning defines the audience formed by Diocleciano and his entourage as the inner audience and the *corral* itself as the outer audience (94). The acting troupe themselves, though, form a third audience; despite having knowledge of the script, they are as much at the mercy of Ginés’ improvisation as everyone else and thereby create further scope for dramatic irony. The inner audience of Diocleciano and his entourage are drawn into the play as participants, something the Emperor himself acknowledges:

De la burla estoy contento,
y pues he representado
mi figura en vuestra historia, (277b)

The distinction between reality and fiction is finally tested at the conclusion of the second of the two inset plays in which Ginés is requested to play the role of a pagan converted to

Christianity. Whereas, in the first inset play, the *corral* audience was alerted to the circumstances of his thwarted love for Marcela, in the second, they are put in the same position as the inner and stage audience. The merging of the events in the inner play with those of the outer play confuses all three audiences witnessing the drama. Ginés performs the role of the converted Christian with such conviction that no one is able to ascertain whether he has truly converted or not. The inner audience conclude:

DIOCLECIANO	Notable ha sido este paso.
MAXIMIANO	Buena ha estado la apariencia.
CAMILA	Qué gracia.
LÉNTULO	No ay diferencia desto al verdadero caso.
CAMILA	Qual estaua en el bautismo imitando a los Cristianos humilde y puestas las manos. (282b)

However, this time the difference between fiction and reality is not the ‘burla’ of the first play. In the pagan world of Rome playing a Christian and being a Christian are very distinct things, distinguished by the martyr’s death that awaits the Christian convert. Before condemning Ginés to death, Diocleciano asks ‘Hablas de veras, Ginés?’ (283a); he is thereby seen to give him a final opportunity to spare himself. If Diocleciano believes Ginés is still acting he will be saved. The difference between life and death rests on an assessment of whether the performance is ‘verdadero’ or ‘fingido’. Learning the role of being a Christian is equated to the role of any actor; performing his part well will result in the path of Christianity. The association of religion and role-play raises a potential controversy, the audience is unsure whether or not Ginés is simulating his religious belief. When Diocleciano questions the appearance on stage of Fabio as the angel he asks ‘Pues te he visto yo mismo?’ (283a); the audience is made aware that even visual perception is fallible. Lope appears to tease his audience with the ambiguity before delivering the final ‘proof’ reflected in martyrdom.

Stephen Greenblatt writes of the ‘unsettling of man’s sense of reality, the questioning of his instruments of measurement and representation, the demonstration of blind spots in his field of vision’ (*Renaissance Self-fashioning* 24–25). The poet and playwright,

represented by Ginés self-consciously works within this world of uncertainty, trying to find a language which describes truth:

GINÉS El imitar, es ser representante.
Pero como el poeta no es posible
que escriua con afecto, y con blandura
sentimientos de amor, sino le tiene,
y entonces se descubren en sus versos.
Quando el amor le enseña los que escriue,
assi el representante, si no siente
las passiones de amor, es impossible
que pueda, gran señor, representarlas, (272a)

For imitation to be effective, he proposes, it must emanate out of experience and an intensity of feeling, something that suggests what Susan Fischer refers to as ‘a search for authenticity in expression’, a value critics of Golden Age literature have downplayed.¹¹ Ginés’ emphasis on truthfulness may well have struck the audience as an ironic commentary on the deceit inherent in theatre and a response to anti-theatricalist critiques.¹²

Changing the script

The play reflects the medieval idea of *theatrum mundi* in which, as E.J. Hundert explains, individuals were made aware they were ‘subject to the scrutiny of a higher power into whose care they were entrusted’ and in which they ‘could be viewed as puppets in a drama of which they remained unaware, as unwitting actors who inhabited roles which had an illusory, because merely mundane, importance’.¹³ Elaine Canning notes the ‘illusory nature of life’ was ‘central to seventeenth-century Spain’s theocentric

¹¹ Susan L. Fischer, ‘Lope’s *Lo fingido verdadero* and the Dramatization of the Theatrical Experience’, *RHM*, 39 (1976–77), 156–66 (p. 162).

¹² See Morrison, pp. 28–31, for catalogue of actions taken against the theatre. Also religious attitudes to the theatre are expressed clearly by Juan de Mariana in his ‘Tratado de los espectáculos’ (1609), Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, *Bibliografía de las controversias sobre la licitud del teatro en España*, ed. by José Luis Suárez García, facsimile edition (Granada: University of Granada, 2007), pp. 429–37. For theatre and the Catholic Reformation see Janelle pp. 148–58.

¹³ E.J.Hundert, ‘European enlightenment and the history of the self’, in *Rewriting the Self: Histories from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 72–83 (p. 77). See also Canning, p. 92.

view of the world' (115). Mundo, in Calderón's *El gran teatro del mundo*, explains the rules of this role-playing:

MUNDO Autor generoso mío,
 a cuyo poder, a cuyo
 acento obedece todo,
 yo *el gran teatro del mundo*,
 para que en mí representen
 los hombres, y cada uno
 halle en mí la prevención
 que le impone el papel suyo,
 como parte obedencial,¹⁴

Obedience to the established order in the name of Christianity has a potential application as a mechanism to control society; it maintains each subject in their assigned place within the earthly hierarchy. In *Lo fingido verdadero* the deliberate use of the theatre as a metaphor for the illusory nature of role-play is made clear by Celio when he addresses Carino, the newly appointed emperor:

CELIO Luego tu piensas que Reynas
 con mayor estimacion.
 La diferencia sabida,
 es que les dura ora, y media
 su comedia y tu comedia
 te dura toda la vida.
 Tu representas tambien,
 mas estás de Rey vestido
 hasta la muerte, que ha sido
 sombra del fin. (265b)

Celio uses the *topos* to criticize and control the behaviour of the emperor, to remind him that his role on earth is preparation for a potentially different one in the afterlife, a method of censure for those entrusted with power. But the notion of obedience also functions as a control of those at the bottom of the hierarchy who, like Calderón's Pobre, have more to complain about:

¹⁴ Pedro de la Barca Calderón, *El gran teatro del mundo* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), ll. 67–75.

POBRE Desde la miseria mía
 mirando infelíz estoy,
 ajenas felicidades. (ll. 835–37)

The metaphor therefore serves not only to criticize, but also to uphold the status quo of the preordained order of society as a whole. However, in doing so, it assumes an absence of both individuality and sense of self. Each actor must be devoid of any selfishness to allow the play to proceed in accordance with its script. By deviating from his lines Ginés destabilizes the status quo on two counts: firstly, he imposes his own feelings on the assembled company, a representation of society as a whole; and, secondly, he directly challenges the authority of the emperor. To effect this destabilization in the name of Christianity carries an element of irony because, in early modern Spain, it was a structure supported by religion and obedience.

Whilst the audience will never be certain of the ‘truth’ of Ginés’ performance, he himself makes it clear that his accountability is to God and God is the only reality:

GINÉS Mi Dios, quando por burlas fuy Christiano,
 Y me llamastes a tan altas veras,
 Representaua burlas verdaderas
 En el teatro de mi intento vano.
 Mas como el Auditorio soberano
 En las gradas de altissimas Esferas,
 Y vos por las celestes vidrieras
 Vistes de mi Comedia el Acto humano,
 He pensado que lástima tuuistes
 Que estuuiesse en tan mala compañía,
 Y que para la vuestra me quisistes.
 Dadme partido vos, que yo querria
 Estar con vos, pero si entero os distes,
 En vos acabe la Comedia mía. (284a)

This comes close to a homily; but for this speech to function as a sermon it also has to be an admonishment of his audience who have paid to be in the presence of what he now describes as his ‘mala compañía’, and, a few lines later, ‘la compañía / del demonio’ (284a). His challenge to Diocleciano is, here, replicated as a challenge to the audience. But the didactic force of this tirade is lost in what we will see later as the comic undertones of his characterization. The resultant mix creates a disconcerting absence of

todos los hombres respeto. (279a)

It is a charity which is emulated by Diocleciano: ‘que no es fiesta la crueldad’ (279a). The newly appointed Roman leaders react with the respect Golden Age Spain might have expected from their own monarchs. Diocleciano shows generosity and responsibility on his appointment:

DIOCLECIANO Pues essa tienda todas
de Numeriano, y su suegro,
dineros, armas y joyas
repartid entre vosotros;
que a mi me basta esta ropa
y esta espada que os defienda. (269b)

When he agrees to share the empire with Maximiano his words are indistinguishable from those associated with a Christian emperor:

oy que este Imperio nos dan
Los benignissimos cielos
partamosle entre los dos,
que yo se, y lo espero en Dios,
que no aura envidia ni celos, (270a)

These characters display all the trappings and behaviour of good Christian monarchy. The ‘Dios’ and ‘benignissimos cielos’ appear to refer to a singular God and heaven, rather than a plural paganism. The language is similar to that of Christian kings and Lope makes no attempt to paint Diocleciano as malign. Ginés’ first address to him would therefore appear entirely in keeping with the audience’s expectation:

Si tus glorias,
si tus grandes hazañas, si tu raro
diuino entendimiento, Cesar inclito
fuera capaz de versos y de historias, (271a)

Ginés’ subsequent behaviour is therefore made to appear even more eccentric. Nothing, other than Ginés’ conversion, changes to cause him to turn such praise to the vitriol expressed later in the play. Lope appears to orchestrate the ambivalence; he may have

The first act appears to fall into the genre of the kingship play; but that is not the heart of the work. In his treatment of Carino, Lope makes his point very forcefully. However, that is not his only point; he distinguishes between a good and bad king and it is the good king in Diocleciano who Ginés challenges. Lope's drama, intriguingly, pits the good king against the Christian convert and in doing so sets Christianity in opposition to earthly authority in a more general context. The suggestion that he may be using religion in his 'range of manoeuvres' to contain absolutism is not noted by McKendrick, but the play is susceptible to this more radically subversive reading: the implication that Church and state are incompatible rather than complementary.

Challenging the King

Elaine Canning notes that 'paganism is debased while Christianity is extolled in the play' (125) and that it 'is highly probable that the *corral* audience would not have seen Diocleciano in such a positive light since he is the pagan who is ultimately responsible for imposing a death sentence on Ginés' (108). To support this she refers to the regenerative powers of Christianity (125) mentioned in Ginés' closing lines:

Nicodemos mete mvertos,
pero lvego resuscitan.
En essotra compañía
Ivdás haze traydores,
Romanos emperadores,
la crueldad y tirania, (284b)

However these verses are included at the end of a long soliloquy which catalogues several biblical figures. The significance of Nicodemos and the regenerative power of Christianity is diluted by the extent of the other references within the list; the message is neither reinforced by repetition nor by any concluding commentary. The mention of the tyranny and cruelty of Roman Emperors, 'la crueldad y tirania', is likewise brief and no more forceful than Ginés' earlier denunciation, 'De veras hablo, tiranos' (283a). Cruelty, as we have observed, is something Diocleciano specifically wanted to avoid. Ginés does not criticize the paganism of the Romans; rather, he attempts to demonize the despotic aspects of their government, and not their religion, a process that at times produces

destabilizing results. It is my contention that while Lope expects his audience to presume Roman paganism's malevolence he introduces nuances that temper the audience's preconceptions. Carino, appointed as emperor on the death of his father Aurelio, is described in the opening lines as 'vn Neron de vituperios, / y un Satiro en las bodas de Hipodamia' (261b). Whilst he is undoubtedly characterized as evil, a 'monstruo vicioso, viuora de Roma' (267a), his vices are not regarded as representative of the Romans. His actions are the 'infamia del valor Romano' and 'viue con tanta furia y desatino', but, as Curio suggests, in contrast, his brother is worthy of praise:

es digno de Aras, y de honor diuino
su fuerte hermano el Cesar Numeriano, (261b)

Carino's badness arises from the abuse of his position not his religion.

Whilst the first act revolves around issues of kingship, Lope does not develop this theme in the last two acts; instead the centre of attention is turned to Ginés whose actions are made to appear curiously selfish. He is the only one to have been affected by the visions that brought about his conversion. The play contrasts Diocleciano's promotion from soldier to emperor with Ginés' baptism into Christianity; however, Lope never refers to Ginés' origins as a pagan. Ginés is not so much converted as possessed. He says:

La voz que todo mi oydo
me ha penetrado el sentido,
sospecho que fuera bien
pensar que es Christo, si es quien
me ha tocado y me ha mouido. (280b)

The only conversion highlighted by the play is Ginés' realisation that the love which is built on and generates jealousy is not 'amor, sino locura' (279b). The uncontrolled passions that such a love provoke need to be controlled, as Celio points out:

No des Rufino la rienda
a tu amor con tanto exceso,
que es cauallo desbocado. (277a)

His baptism becomes the mechanism by which he sublimates his passion into the love of God, an act with obvious religious symbolism. The soliloquy before the second play shows him preparing for the part of a Christian:

aora bien, bueno será
pensar en esta figura
que al Cesar gusto le da;
ver vn Christiano procura
que firme en su ley está. (280a)

His vision of what it is to be a Christian before his conversion is precisely the part he plays after it. He promises to attack Diocleciano with the same ‘desbocado’ passion he displayed in the first play:

llamaré al Cesar cruel,
como que a mi lado estaua.
Perro, tirano sangriento
(bien voy, bien le nuestro furia)
mira que de mi tormento
sola tu crueldad se injuria,
que Dios recibe contento. (280a)

The Christian’s opinion of the Emperor is at odds with his on stage portrayal. Ginés’ conversion takes place while he is practicing his part; the exact moment is imperceptible either to him or the audience. Unable to distinguish between role-play and his real state, he explains to Fabio, the actor playing the part of the angel:

Perdona, que diuertido
en imitar al Christiano
fuera me vi de sentido. (280b)

The conversion is thus identified with a loss of control, described on two occasions as a penetration of the senses: ‘penetre mi sentido’ (280b) and the previously quoted ‘me ha penetrado el sentido’ (280b). Fabio adds a curiously subversive nuance as he appears to interpret the event as a form of affliction, ‘cosa cruel / es sufrir vn mal gouierno’ (280b).

Elaine Canning recognizes the incongruence of the situation; but her explanation does not fully respond to the dramatic context of the scene. She writes:

the impact of the *voz* on Ginés,[.....] is undermined by Fabio. The latter reduces Ginés' supernatural experience with the divine to a confrontation with human love through the association of the *cielo*, from which the *voz* has spoken to Ginés, with Marcela. He states:

Como Marcela es tu cielo,
y el ángel había de hacer,
pensando en ella recelo
que piensas que ha de poder
glorificarte en el suelo,
pues advierte que no sabe
el ángel, y que me manda
que le estudié.

Fabio's unintentional degradation of Ginés' heavenly encounter is made all the more poignant for members of the corral audience, given their awareness of the influence of the supernatural. (119–20)

However, the confusion of the events does not fully support her reading in which Fabio, by adding yet another interpretation, far from offering a definitive solution, complicates the audience's reception further.¹⁵ Rather, I suggest the most robust reading sees this as farce. There is the making of a fool in his characterization in which chaos is attached to him from the start. In particular, the conversion scene can only serve, regardless of the awesome significance of the workings of God, to make him look foolish and comedic. Seen in this way the misunderstandings between Ginés and Fabio employ dramatic irony designed to draw laughter from the audience. When Ginés asks 'Tú del Angel?' (281a) it is only the audience that comprehends the extent of the confusion. Elaine Canning acknowledges the deliberate ambiguity inherent in Ginés' role. The audience, she writes, 'experiences difficulty in distinguishing between Ginés the feigned Christian and Ginés, the new convert' (120–21). But she does not fully explain how the resultant destabilization serves to bolster her conclusion that 'while the complexity of reception cannot be denied, there is no doubt that both the inner and outer audiences ultimately are persuaded to accept the superiority of divine love to human love' (124). Without a

¹⁵ Victor Dixon, in 'Lo fingido verdadero y sus espectadores', *Diablo Texto*, 4–5, (Revista de la Crítica, 1997), pp. 97–114 (p. 112), also notes Lope's deliberate attempts to confuse the audience.

resolution to the ambiguity, the most obvious audience response to the confusion must surely have been laughter with the consequent result that the image of Ginés as the paragon of saintliness is undermined and replaced with that of him as a fool.

Lope structures the play to balance the intervention of the pagan gods in the first part to that of the Christian God in the second. Diocleciano is guided by omens in his aspiration to emperorship in much the same way as Ginés is inspired by God's voice to become a Christian (263a). Diocleciano attributes his succession to straightforward fortune: 'Agora que la fortuna / me puso en alto lugar' (270a); whereas Ginés is converted in a supernatural visitation in which he appears powerless: 'lleuame donde pretendes' (282a). Both outcomes are dictated by a sense of benign predestination in which the playwright also plays an ambiguous and ironic part, providing the drama with a distinct ludic quality. Aurelio César challenges the authority of the Gods (264a) and reaps the reward through a thunderbolt. Carino, as the bad leader, is murdered in an act of regicide justified as an honor killing. Apro achieves the appropriate reward of death at the hands of Diocleciano for his unashamed regicide carried out for the purpose of personal ambition. Poetic justice is seen to be meted out to all the protagonists.

By showing religion in opposition to secular authority and jurisdiction, the play carries a controversial religious message. Ginés' declaration that, as a Christian, he is not answerable to any mortal is not qualified by a reference to Diocleciano's paganism:

Después que tengo otro Autor
represento a lo diuino,
porque a vn hombre es desatino
tener respeto y temor. (284a)

However, if the Emperor's sovereignty had been supported by Christianity there would have been no cause for defiance. Such a challenge to a Christian king would have ranked as heinous a crime as the regicides of Carino and Numeriano committed at the beginning of the play. But Lope does not make this point; instead he leaves the conclusion ambivalent. The portrayal of Ginés as a poet and jilted lover consumed by passion and jealousy who sublimates his corporeal and worldly pleasures into divine love mirrors the persona of his religious writing. Indeed the ludic quality of the play, whose central theme

appears to demonstrate the power of illusion and perception created by the poet's art, may suggest that creation of religious ambiguity is a specific objective.

Challenging the Church

On being questioned, the acting troupe distance themselves from Christianity. When Léntulo asks '¿sois cristianos?', the actors reply in unison 'No, Señor' (284a). Rather than have to profess their Christianity in the face of heresy in order to avoid punishment, they have to prove the opposite; they have to 'confess' their heresy:

LÉNTULO Pues con essa confession
 solo salid desterrados
 de Roma. (284a)

The techniques applied in their interrogation have a resonance with those applied by the judge in *Fuente Ovejuna* and have a parallel with the *santa inquisición*.¹⁶ In pagan Rome, it seems, the world is turned upside down. Likewise, there is irony in the manner in which Ginés' *auto de fe* is the inversion of the normal practice by which the heretic is tortured until he confesses his heresy.¹⁷ By creating a scene which parodies the processes of the Inquisition, Lope pokes fun at both Church and Monarchy and thereby treads a thin line between comedy and blasphemy, a danger he, however, attenuates through the possibility of alternative readings. The plot is a recreation of historical fact and the religious expression uses appropriate language. Ginés' dogma is faultless in his explanation of the workings of his new company of Jesus:

Agora mi compañía
es de Iesús, donde ay Padre
del santo Verbo, y ay Madre,
la siempre Virgen María,
Espíritu que me guia
a los dos de quien procede;
vn Bautista que hazer puede
pastores en el desierto
y musica a tal concierto

¹⁶ Compare the interrogation of the villagers in *Fuente Ovejuna*. Lope de Vega Carpio, *Fuente Ovejuna* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2001), ll. 2200–75.

¹⁷ This is something Victor Dixon has also noted, 'Lo fingido verdadero y sus espectadores', p. 103.

que al de los cielos excede,
Ay vn Iuan que habla altaméte,
ay un Daudid gran poeta
y vna Comedia perfeta
de cantares excelente, (284b)

Taken at face value the play upholds both Church and State. Diocleciano's authority remains unimpaired and Ginés expects a deserved union with God in 'la segunda parte'. However, the inconsistencies of how he arrived there leave the audience in a state of ambivalence and lacking a definitive closure. Octavio's final comments, made as the troupe pass in front of the figure of Ginés, impaled Christlike, only serve to increase the ambiguity:

Gracias á Dios, que paró
en el mejor personaje
la tragedia de su mverte
sin que á los demas alcance. (284b)

His death is called a tragedy and he is thereby identified as the tragic hero of a play, labelled a *tragicomedia*.¹⁸ The traditional emotions of fear and pity associated with tragedy are mitigated by the protagonist's anticipation of the outcome.¹⁹ Neither does any character go through a process of *anagnorisis* (Poetics 18) or *catharsis* (Poetics 10). The purification implied by Ginés' religious conversion does not attach to any recognition or knowing change in character, it merely happens to him. If Ginés is cast as the tragic hero then his downfall is his martyrdom and his place amongst God's select, a reversal of the expected outcome of tragedy. Lope is clearly playing with the audience, asking them to consider whether Ginés' demise is for the worse or better. If, as I suggest, this is a comedy, Lope attempts to create humor from the analogy between contemporary authoritative processes and those of pagan Rome, an act which implicitly pokes fun at both Church and authority. The only people, other than Ginés himself, to be affected are the acting troupe and, by implication, the paying audience who, as a result of the troupe's expulsion, will no longer have the benefit of watching their performances; the drama has

¹⁸ *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias* describes history and comedy thus: 'Lo trágico y lo cómico mezclado [...] harán grave una parte, otra ridicula', *Obras Poéticas*, p. 261, ll. 174–77.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Poetics* (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 17.

not affected or influenced any other character. The Alcalde sums up the tedium with which he views the events:

Quien tantas burlas hazia
de aquestos martirios vanos
que parecen los Christianos,
en ser Christiano porfia. (284a)

Octavio makes it very clear who he believes is responsible for the disruption:

culpo á Gines, que ha querido
representar el remate
de su vida en la sazón
mas rica y mas importante. (284b)

The characters who make these blasphemous remarks do not suffer any punishment. Life, it appears, goes on. Marcela prepares the troupe to perform for another, more privileged audience, who, unlike the current one, will have the benefit of seeing their play:

Remediese otra comedia,
que mientras estas se hazen,
estudiaremos algunas
para hazerlas adelante. (285)

The audience is left with the contrasting images of the disgruntled actors leaving Rome and the martyred Ginés talking of his own salvation. The vision of Gines impaled would have left the audience with a sense of shock; but neither is the force of his final soliloquy strong enough, nor is his figure heroic enough to endorse a meaningful religious reading:

Pueblo Romano, escvcharme;
yo representé en el mundo
sus fabulas miserables,
todo el tiempo de mi vida,
sus vicios y sus maldades;
yo fui figvra gentil,
adorando dioses tales;
recibióme Dios, ya soy
christiano representante;
cessó la humana comedia,
que era toda disparates;

hize la que veys diuina;
voy al cielo, á que me pagven,
que de mi fẽ y esperançã
y mi caridad notable,
deuo al cielo, y el me deue
estas tres particvlares.
mañana temprano espero
para la segvnda parte. (285)

The impact of these lines is too muted and the passage too short to provide the explanation necessary to provide a conclusive response to the play's confusing events. Elaine Canning notes how it 'expresses a sense of disillusion with life' (127). The essence of *contemptus mundi* is evident in Ginés' words 'fabulas miserables', 'vizios', 'maldades' and 'disparates' and would signal a doctrinal point consistent with a theocentric world view generally associated with early modern society. But these words do not respond to what the audience have witnessed. In fact, by giving the concluding words of the play to Octavio, who criticized Ginés a few lines earlier, Lope appears determined to emphasize the play's ambivalence. As with so much of Lope's drama, the lack of definitive closure leaves the audience to contemplate the play's significance. By not making his religious argument obvious he leaves the possibility of a controversial interpretation. Although he may have relied on the protection provided by historical fact Lope appears to have created a play which, whilst exhibiting appropriate dogma, actually exposes the practical limitations of fervent religious belief within the framework of a functioning society. I have suggested that Lope's religious poetry was driven by a sense of drama rather than by ideology. In this play the religious ambivalence is touched by distinct traces of subversion, perhaps influenced by the Church's attacks on the *comedia* in general.²⁰ There is no neat didactic lesson other than the restatement of Christian doctrine in broad terms by Ginés. If this life is a farce there is no evidence to suggest the next one will not be. Indeed, if the illusory nature of the poetic act acknowledged in this play is taken into account, the actor and playwright are to be treated with suspicion.

The figure of Ginés, as a model of Lope's alter ego, provides a unique opportunity to turn the mirror back on the author; his role functions as a commentary on Lope's own

²⁰ See note 12, p. 229.

religious writing, one in which he questions his understanding of ‘authenticity’ and tests his ability to recreate it. Ginés exemplifies the artificiality of role-play and poetry, but at the same time, in his assertion that experience is integral to performance, alludes to the existence of an inner reality determined by a sense of selfhood which is distinct from his role as a Christian. The events of the play demonstrate that you cannot be an actor and a Christian. When Ginés says ‘que tengo otro Autor / represento a lo diuino’ (284a) he also denies his position as an author: as Fischer says, ‘his role has ceased to be esthetic and has become religious’ (165). Put in the context of the concept of *theatrum mundi* this presents a perplexing paradox, one that O’Connor, as we have noted, resolved with an insistence on a theocentric world view in which the actor’s part is merely a test for the reality of the afterlife. The problem with *Lo fingido verdadero* is that Ginés’ actions and the ambiguity generated within the play are destabilizing. They do not result in an affirmation of the ‘certainty’ that supports O’Connor’s position (O’Connor 279). It is a huge irony that, in the exact reverse of demoniac possession, he allowed a lapse of control to convert him and set in train the dislocating chain of events that end with his demise. I suggest that the playwright’s ludic capacity is in total control in this play and centres on the ambivalence of the language which allows Ginés’ conversion to be unclear and his sacrifice to be seen as foolish. The blurring of performance and reality at the end of the play contrasts with the opposition between authenticity and theatricality established at the outset and does not work to a clear theocentric agenda.

Lope’s Buddha

My second example is Lope’s *Barlán y Josafá*, a play now recognized as a representation of the story of Siddhartha Gautama, or Buddha²¹ and his mentor. The circumstances for what might seem at first a rather obscure choice for this ‘comedia de santos’ are explained by the inclusion of the pair in the Roman Martyrology of Saints in 1356²² and the adoption of the legend into the Christian tradition in circumstances that Rafael Aguirre refers to as ‘uno de los más interesantes casos ocurridos en la historia de

²¹ Siddhartha Gautama derived from the sanskrit ‘Bodhisattva’ born 473 BC.

²² Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, ‘Estudios sobre el teatro de Lope de Vega’, *Obras completas*, 29 (Madrid: CSIC, 1949), p. 224.

la literatura universal'.²³ However, I can find no evidence to suggest Lope chose the subject with any knowledge of the historical provenance of his protagonists. It is understood the connection between Buddha and the two saints was first suggested by a Portuguese explorer, Coeto, in the late sixteenth century²⁴ but never fully justified until the nineteenth century.²⁵ There is general agreement that the original European source of the legend is a work in Greek attributed variously to Saint Eutimio in the tenth century, Saint John of Damascus in the eighth century or to an anonymous monk a century earlier.²⁶ In any event it became popular in Europe²⁷ in several Latin versions, probably the most widely circulated of which was Voragine's *Golden Legend*.²⁸ Keller and Linker note three vernacular versions circulated in Spain as early as the thirteenth century.²⁹ José Montesinos³⁰ and María Guadalupe Silva³¹ believe Lope's source was Arce de Solórzano's translation of one of the original Latin versions.³² His book was published in

²³ Rafael A. Aguirre, *Barlaam e Josafat en la narrativa medieval* (Madrid: Playor, 1988), p. 15. Also: Joseph Jacobs, *Barlaam and Josaphat: English Lives of Buddha* (London: David Nutt, 1895): 'the case for the dependence of Christianity on Buddhism would have to be solved on Folklore principles [...] If we can show that in the fifth or sixth century Buddhistic legends and doctrines percolated as far at least as Syria, and there became inextricably combined with Christian dogmas and legends, it becomes more probable that a similar mixture of Buddhism and Judaism had taken place in Babylon or Syria in the first century. Such evidence is afforded, as is now well known, by the Legend of SS. Barlaam and Josaphat, which beside being one of the curiosities of literature, is thus seen to be of considerable theological importance' (p. xiv-xv).

²⁴ *Barlaam e Josaphat*, ed. by John E. Keller and Robert Linker (Madrid: CSIC, 1979), pp. xvi-xvii. Aguirre, p. 16.

²⁵ John C. Hirsch, *Barlam and Iosaphat: A middle English Life of Buddha* (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. xvi.

²⁶ St. John Damascene, *Barlaam and Iosaphat* trans. by Rev. G.R. Woodward and H. Mattingly (London: Heinemann, 1964), p. xii. Keller and Linker, p. xvii, and Aguirre, pp. 21–22, describe the migration of the legend from Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, Georgian, Greek and finally Latin. The dating and authorship arguments revolve around various issues including allusions to the Iconoclastic debate which was taking place in C6th and the lack of reference to Islam.

²⁷ Oscar de la Cruz Palma, 'El Barlaam y Josafat de Lope de Vega', *Anuario de Lope de Vega*, 5 (Lleida: Milenio, 2000), p. 73.

²⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), II, pp. 355–66. The Golden Legend contains the story in a shortened version. See also Hirsch, p. xix.

²⁹ Keller and Linker pp. xxiv–xxix. Also Aguirre: 'gozó de una gran popularidad durante la edad media en los países de Europa', p. 24.

³⁰ Lope de Vega, *Barlaam y Josafat*, ed. by José F. Montesinos (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1935), p. 181.

³¹ María Guadalupe Silva, 'El Barlaam y Josafat de Lope y su fuente. Estudio de reelaboración para el teatro' in *Pervivencias de Barlaam & Josafat en la Literatura Hispánica*, ed. by Graciela Rossaroli de Bredan (Bahía Blanca: Universidad Nacional del Sur, 1998), pp. 75–101.

³² San Juan Damasceno, Doctor de la Iglesia Griega, *Historia de los dos soldados de Christo, Barlaam, y Iosafat* (Madrid: Imprenta Real por Juan Flamenco, 1608). Cruz Palma notes the similarities between the

1608 three years before Lope's *comedia*. A comparison between this translation and Lope's play reveals sections which use identical words, something I could not identify in the vernacular versions edited by Keller and Linker. I therefore concur with Montesinos and Guadalupe Silva in attributing the source to Solórzano; nevertheless, the underlying story and themes appear to have been consistent in the various versions that circulated in the period and were firmly entrenched in popular culture, making it an attractive subject for Lope to choose. Because the legend appears to have been well known, the modifications to the original material would have been patent to Lope's audience. As a deliberate attempt to reconcile his poetic and dramatic ideas with the expectations of the audience his amendments and interpretation are a fruitful area for analysis.

The most notable variation is the reduction of the religious dogma which forms the substance of the original and is the basis for Josafá's conversion to Christianity. The dramatic potential of the plot allows Lope, with one notable exception, which we will address later, to be faithful to his source.³³ Lope omits much of the historical background to the legend according to which King Abenir hears the prophecies of a soothsayer who predicts the rise to power of the King's son, Prince Josafá, as a Christian rather than pagan ruler. Abenir imprisons the Prince to prevent the fulfillment of the prophesy. The play starts in *medias res* at this point. The Prince discusses his captivity and expresses his curiosity to see the outside world. He later approaches his father who allows him to widen his horizons outside the palace, but only on the condition the Prince is protected from anything that is likely to make him reflect on the human condition and therefore Christianity. On his first excursion, his chaperones prove to be ineffective. Encounters with an old man and a pauper merely whet his appetite for more knowledge. The monk, Barlán, takes on the disguise of a salesman and is transported by an angel to Josafá to sell him a figurative 'diamond', symbolic of Christianity. It is here that the extensive apologues and parables which are the substance of Josafá's conversion and form most of

title of this version and that of the edition of the play found in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, *Los dos soldados de Cristo*.

³³ Cruz Palma: 'coincide en prescindir del grueso más directamente doctrinal de la misma y quedarse con lo argumental', p. 76. Montesinos notes: 'a- eliminó la mayor parte del contenido doctrinal; b- redujo la narración a su conflicto central; [...] y d- agregó una línea de acción secundaria – inexistente en el hipotexto- que, sin embargo, no sólo no interrumpe la "unidad de acción" sino que por el contrario, la complementa y refuerza', p. 85.

the original work are eliminated by Lope. Instead, the ‘conversion’ in the play is condensed into a summary account of the Bible and Christian doctrine in one hundred lines delivered by Barlán and sealed simply with the words ‘Admirado me has dexado’.³⁴ With obvious brevity it covers the events of the Old Testament including the flood, Abraham, David and the exodus to the Promised Land, and then turns to the birth and death of Jesus, a description of the foundation of the Church and the preparation of the Gospels, followed by an explanation of divine, natural and written law and a list of the sacraments. It functions as an aide-mémoire of the key points of a Christian education.

There are two versions of the play. What I will refer to as the first version comes from a signed manuscript dated February 1611, edited and published by Montesinos in 1935.³⁵ The second version was included in Part XXIV of the *comedias* printed in 1641 and is the one contained in the *Obras escogidas*, published by Aguilar. In the first version, the king, angry and worried by his son’s newly found Christianity, arranges for Nachor to impersonate Barlán in a staged debate that will decide whether the kingdom is to be ruled under Christianity or continue under paganism. The intent is that Nachor, under the disguise of Barlán, will repudiate his Christian convictions and lose the debate for Christianity. Nachor, placed in an untenable position when both the King and Josafá threaten him with death if he loses, chooses for Christianity and gives a stirring discourse. The debate forms a large part of the third act and therefore serves as a cornerstone of the drama in which Christianity is shown to be victorious over paganism. Having lost, the king employs Teudas, a magician, to advise on a last attempt to prevent the Prince from turning to Christianity. The proposed strategy involves the replacement of the prince’s household with a harem of maidservants to seduce him. When this fails the King finally submits and gives one half of his kingdom to Josafá to be ruled under Christianity. When, thereafter, the King dies, Josafá, having united the kingdom, abdicates in favor of Baraquías, a trusted noble, to pursue a monastic life in the desert. Apart from some minor

³⁴ Lope de Vega Carpio, *Barlán y Josafá*, in *XXIV Parte de sus comedias* (Madrid: Viuda de Alonso Martín, 1667, privilegio Zaragoza, 1640), p. 246b. All references are to this edition unless otherwise stated.

³⁵ Cruz Palma notes that a copy is maintained in the Biblioteca Nacional under the title *Los soldados de Cristo*, p. 74; but he is the only one to suggest that. Montesinos notes that the copy in the Biblioteca Nacional mirrors that of Part XXIV, p. 168.

rearranging of scenes, this version faithfully follows Solórzano's original as outlined above. The play ends on a triumphant note with Christianity in the ascendancy.

The second version, referred to as 'la versión refundida' by Montesinos (213), compresses the second and third acts of the first version into a revised second act. This is achieved by the elimination of the character of Nachor and the debate and has the effect of reducing the overall quantity of religious doctrine.³⁶ It also contains a new third act which follows Josafá's journey into the wilderness during which, in the original story, he is subjected to unspecified trials and tribulations before encountering Barlán; they, then, both die some years later. This section of the legend occupies only seventeen pages of Solórzano's total of two hundred and fifteen. But, in the second version of the play, it constitutes a whole act. The lack of original source material allows the author to apply considerable poetic licence. The contents of the new plot and differences between the two versions merit analysis and comment.

The main variation from the play's source relates to the character of Leucipe. In Solórzano's original she is an anonymous captive princess who is a member of the harem sent to seduce the Prince; but here she is promoted to a major part serving as a model for feminine beauty and temptation. As we shall evidence her role is further enhanced in the revised third act of the second version to become what appears to be the protagonist of the play.

Whilst he admits the revised play contains 'tópicos de Lope' (213), Montesinos dismisses it as being of doubtful authorship. It is notable that the few critics who have studied this play fall into two groups. Montesinos, Cruz Palma, and Guadalupe Silva have focused on the so-called original first version. The others, who include Menéndez y Pelayo, Sainz Robles, Garasa, Sumner and Morrison (Morrison 219–227), have concentrated on the second version, without mention of the existence of the first. No one

³⁶ The eliminated scenes are: Act 2, ll. 1075–1155, scene with Capitan, Rey and Leucipe of no great significance; the only reference to the astrologer's predictions: 'que voy pensando que son / los astrólogos juiçios/ ciertos en su nacimiento', ll. 1150–52; ll. 1385–1435, which is a scene also between the King and Cardan when he elaborates on the conversion of Josafat, this scene makes no difference to the plot or the themes; ll. 1520–1540 where the King plots with Arachis over the false Barlán. Obviously this scene has to be removed if the Nachor debate is removed; ll.1685–2620 which are the events leading to the debate and Teudas's struggle with the demons that follow it.

appears to have attempted to compare the differences and assess the affect of the variation, something, Cruz Palma suggests, merits further attention if only to demonstrate the diverse literary treatments of the legend.³⁷

Human versus divine

The playwright is clearly attempting to express a point with the dramatization of Leucipe's role. She is introduced in the middle of act one at the end of Josafá's excursion from the palace. She is represented as the symbol of feminine beauty and the pinnacle of his newly discovered earthly delights which include poetry, painting and science all of which are reflected in a positive light (240–41). Josafá comments:

PRINCIPE Capitan de las cosas que he mirado
 por el Autor del cielo fabricadas,
 la hermosura, la lengua y el agrado,
 si en sus partes estan proporcionadas,
 me agrada en las mujeres justamente,
 mas por los Dioses casta y limpiamente
 [.....] bella cosa
 mirando honesta vna muger hermosa. (242b)

She is not only a creature of beauty but also fundamental to the laws of nature:

CAP Naturaleza no se conservara
 sin las mujeres. (242b)

However this positive view changes abruptly, not because of anything done by her, but as a result of Josafá's adoption of Christianity. The first sign of this appears immediately after his conversion when the musician, Fabio, sings a romance to him. Josafá instructs: 'pon en mi tristeza / un resplandor de alegría;' but when he attempts to do that he is rebuked by the Prince in an unmeasured and hostile manner:

 Calla, ignorante grosero,
 tú cantas cosas lasciuas ! (249a)

³⁷ Cruz Palma writes: 'A partir de la versión de Lope, aparecieron otras posteriores, pero, de acuerdo con Montesinos, de menos calidad literaria, y que sin embargo deberían ser estudiadas en el futuro para completar loa análisis de recuperación del BJ en la tradición literaria occidental', p. 82.

Fabio tries to defend himself by explaining that his songs are of classical origin: ‘son de Ouidio y Homero’ (249a). But it is to no avail. Fabio’s view of the Prince’s behaviour is incisive:

FABIO
Es en vano,
porque el Principe es Christiano
y a vn Armiño semejante.
Esta gente es tan compuesta,
que no ay que tratarla de amor. (249a)

The correlation of Christians and stoats together with the association of ermine with both the clergy and royalty form a strong image which, when associated also with an inability to understand love, presents what seems an audacious challenge; but he is not punished.³⁸ His words carry the weight of truthfulness only afforded with impunity to a *gracioso*, allowed to speak as an outsider. They were, however, uttered and serve to highlight the remove between the world of the religious and everyday life. The spurning of Fabio is followed by the rejection of Leucipe:

PRÍNC
Viles mujeres
fragiles hermosuras, que a los hombres
aueys traydo a tanta desventura;
dexadme aquí. (250b)

Her reaction to her predicament shows how, as a representative of womanhood and a symbol of human love, she has been let down:

Como es possible que pueda
viuir entre nieue y llama.
Que aya perdido mi fama
por vn hombre, y que se asombre
vn hombre de oyr mi nombre? (249a)

The key words here are ‘nieue’ and ‘llama’ taken to reflect the coldness of religion and the heat of human emotions. The inference is that the world of stoats and ‘nieue’ is the unflattering province of the religiously inspired while the rest are left to deal with the

³⁸ Covarubbias explains that stoats were associated with the clergy who used them as adornments.

flames of their passions and presumably also the flames of hell. The absence of a middle ground between the two is evident. Religion does not appear to bridge that gap and it is the disconnection of religion from the human issues affecting Leucipe that I suggest Lope plays on. That is not to say that Christianity is debased. It is seen to prevail in both versions of the play before Josafá begins his journey through the wilderness. Even King Abenir bows to its superior power:

Sin duda, amigos que Christo
es el verdadero Dios. (251b)

The broad gesture reflected in the spurning of womanhood functions as a symbol of the soul's authority over the body and is thereby consistent with the central theme of the supremacy of Christianity present in Lope's source. But as Garasa notes, Lope has taken some pains to create more than symbolism in his characterization of Leucipe:

Este personaje, opaco e incidental en la leyenda, cobra en Lope inesperado relieve. De un mero instrumento diabólico en las tentaciones del príncipe, se convierte en una hembra apasionada, sacudida por los más encontrados impulsos.³⁹

She is deliberately depicted with human qualities, torn between the vicissitudes of the world around her, and her emotions:

Olas del mar furiosas me parecen,
Amor por tu ocasion mis pensamientos
Que a voluntad de los ligeros vientos,
A vn mismo tiempo como menguan crecen.
[.....]
Que amar y resistir es el estado
Mas riguroso que la vida tiene. (246a–b)

After her rejection Lope positions the devil by her side (249b). In doing this he exploits the potential ambiguity of her motives. Hilaire Kallendorf, in her book *Exorcism and its*

³⁹ Delfin Leocadio Garasa, *Santos en escena* (Bahía Blanca: Universidad Nacional del Sur, 1960), p. 17.

Texts, notes how love sickness and possession by the devil were closely linked.⁴⁰ Leucipe is established as beautiful, chaste and rational, but also a lovesick temptress with the strong suggestion of demonic possession. Lope dwells on this paradox and creates uncertainty in the interpretation of her words. The first version of the play ends with the symbolic victory of Christianity over Paganism and in this triumph it loses the subtlety of Leucipe's predicament which Lope has taken care to create but then fails to develop. Identifying her real nature and facing her dilemmas becomes the central theme of the new third act and has a key influence on the outcome of the play. The new act begins with various 'pastores' and a conventional *gracioso* in scenes which recreate an Arcadian rusticity, similar to that portrayed in *Fuente Ovejuna*: the 'Felicissimas montañas' of this idyllic scene have a celestial other-worldliness about them; they emulate 'parayso':

dulces cristales days
por aquestos verdes suelos,
con que alegres imitays
a las aguas de los cielos.

But they also generate fear through an excess of spirituality and strange events:

RUFINO	Con justa razon, Lisenio, encareces estos santos de que este monte esta lleno, aunque estoy de sus espantos casi de sentido ageno; Que andan visiones aquí que estremecen los Pastores. (253a)
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Here then is a form of limbo, a no-man's-land, in sharp discordance with the tone of the earlier acts. The deliberate insertion of the 'extraña simplicidad' (253b) of these characters, together with the elimination of the Christian dogma contained in Nachor's debate, creates the impression that the author is merely attempting to trivialize the subject

⁴⁰ Kallendorf, p. 39. See also Dawn L. Smith, 'Introduction: The Perception of Women in the Spanish Comedia', in *The perception of Women in Spanish Theater of the Golden Age*, ed. by Anita K. Stoll and Dawn L. Smith (Lewisburg: Bucknell, 1991), pp. 17-29 and María Helena Sánchez Ortega, 'Woman as Source of "Evil" in Counter-Reformation Spain', in *Culture and Control in Counter Reformation Spain*, ed. by Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elisabeth Perry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 198-215.

by introducing some light relief. It is possible this view formed Montesinos's opinion when he wrote:

Pero, con ser tan revueltas, confusas y vulgares las más de las comedias de tema sacro, no recordamos en ellas ninguna jornada de tanta inconexión, tan desligada del resto de la pieza a que pertenece. De otra parte, es singular que el poeta que tan escrupulosamente se atuvo a los datos que una fuente escrita le ofrecía, se pusiera a novelizar a capricho unos paralipómenos nada necesarios. (217)

The comedic intent in this new third act centres around Bato who speaks in *sayagués* to accentuate his role as the *gracioso*. The tragedy of the loss of his wife and donkey in the sudden flooding of a dry river bed is turned to humour:

BATO Dome a Dios sino me aburra,
 Que tengo ya que perder,
 no bastaua sin muger,
 que aun he de quedar sin burra. (253b)

The innocent pantomime essence of this quip is extended to include jokes of a religious nature. He confuses the name of Barlán with Barrabás (253b); he takes the robes of a dead monk and is then mistaken for a priest (257a). He makes his purpose clear: he wants to become a monk not for any spiritual reason, but in order to obtain alms to provide food for his livelihood (257a). He responds to the seriousness of Leucipe's final reconciliation with God with an indecorous jest:

LEUC Hoy tengo este nueuo ser,
 oy vivo, que muerta he sido.
BATO Más dicha aueys vos tenido
 que mi burra, y mi mujer. (257a)

The inclusion of such humour within an ostensibly serious Saint's Play has a disarming effect. The seeds of comedy were present earlier, in the role of Fabio, the musician; but in the new third act they threaten to turn the proceedings into farce. This mixture of religiosity and comedy creates a strange effect. The scene in which Leucipe and the shepherds try to identify Josafá from amongst the monks in their cells on the sacred mountain is curious to the modern audience. Rufino describes the sight:

Mira esas verdes cabañas,
que visten ramas, y peñas,
entre esas fuentes risueñas,
que baxan de esas montañas.

The sense of otherness suggested by their act of spying is accentuated by Laurencia's remark 'O que vista / tan espantosa?'. The monks' existence is conveyed as unnatural and hellish:

RUF Ni aquel que enlaza
 aquellas torcidas mimbres
 que aquellas cadenas atan
 los pies, para que jamas
 de su cueva al campo salga. (255a)

The devil reappears in this last act; his personification here is clearly an attempt by Lope to be faithful to the legend which describes how Josafá was faced with various trials and tests on his wanderings through the wilderness. However, Lope also takes advantage of the dramatic qualities that such a characterization provides.⁴¹ The devil's appearances punctuate the development of the main plot which leads to the reunion of Leucipe and Josafá. These manifestations add a crude confusion to the on stage action: the devil attempts to drown Josafá while he crosses a river and appears one more time disguised as Leucipe in a final attempt to fool the prince:

Mas ya que forma he tomado
de Leucipe, quiero ver,
si en forma de esta muger
queda este Santo engañado. (258b)

The suggestion of Leucipe's demonic possession fostered by Lope earlier in the play is raised again at the beginning of the new third act. She, herself, admits her emotions were overtaken by a strange external force:

⁴¹ Kallendorf suggests that the appearance of devils on stage was an attempt at verisimilitude. They were used because they were believed in, an example of the 'Christian legitimate marvellous' and not as an interruption of irreality, pp. 198–99.

conozco que me engañó
alguna furia infernal,
que disfraçada en amor,
me obliga a tanto furor
y me pone en tanto mal. (254b)

By suggesting that she was both aware of the presence and that she has returned to her normal self, she establishes the sincerity of her actions. She pursues the Prince into the desert to restate her case and salvage her honor from the damage done by his rejection. The meaning of her address to him is clear:

honra, hazienda, Reyno, y vida
me has obligado a dexar.
Christiana he sido por ti,
que quieres sino es quererme,
cansate ya de encenderme;
yelame, o matame aquí.
Si quieres seruir a Dios,
casados le seruirémos,
y a nuestro Reyno podremos
boluer a viuir los dos.
No es obligacion de un Rey
el ayuno, la abstinencia,
la oración, la penitencia,
sino el gouierno, y la ley.
El administrar justicia
y el administrar su Reyno. (256b)

In this thinly veiled criticism, Leucipe becomes the voice of reason and stability, wronged by Josafá's form of religion. Christianity has been seen to prevail over his responsibility, 'obligacion', as a King. As Anaximandro observes, the forsaking of earthly pleasures is viewed as a strength:

Que exemplo de fe tan viuo,
y que desprecio del mundo? (252b)

But, the result has been to situate religion directly in opposition to his worldly obligations, both governmental and personal. Leucipe points to her sacrifices, 'honra, hazienda, Reyno, y vida', and seeks a middle ground which appears to resolve all points

of view; married, they can return to fulfill all their earthly responsibilities: ‘viuamos aquí casados’. She has lost her honour by reason of their relationship and as a result has lost all. But this is a compromise Josafa cannot contemplate; his ordination comes in between them:

Sacerdote soy Leucipe,
ya no me puedo casar. (256b)

Leucipe’s characterization conveys the vulnerability of womanhood and her predicament is never debased. Her sometimes hysterical behaviour is regarded as an inherently human quality to the shepherds:

LEUC	Vamos, y de mi te duele, serrana hermosa si amas, porque he de perder la vida si el bien que busco me falta. (<i>Vanse</i>)
LIS	Braua determinacion.
RUF	Algún demonio la engaña
LIS	Es mujer y tiene amor.
RUF	Buena disculpa.
LIS	Esta basta. (255a)

After her final rejection by Josafá, she turns to Christ and faces death. The circumstances of her death are unclear. The words ‘he de / perder la vida’ carry connotations of suicide. But later she suggests her death is from natural causes:

Padre yo vengo de suerte,
que sospecho que la muerte
viene ligera tras mi. (258b)

The sage Barlán reveals her saintliness:

vn Santo, que en pocos dias
tanta penitencia ha hecho
que excede a los muchos años,
que tenemos los mas viejos, (258b)

Josafá has been unable to distinguish her real self from its demonised personification. For him, she is ‘essa mala muger’. But Barlán puts him right:

Digo que no puede ser,
porque sus lagrimas, y ansias,
su ternura y deuocion,
eran de criatura humana,
y no de espiritu fiero. (259a)

But, by this stage, it is too late; she is revealed dying at the foot of a cross in prayer, a scene that evokes the image of Mary Magdalene at the feet of Jesus. Through her deeds, she has literally upstaged all the piety expressed by the two Saints, projected as bystanders. The vacuity of the Prince’s closing lines highlight his impotency and the inadequacy of his response. The play is left suspended:

Muy bien,
y quedame embidia tanta,
quanta mis lagrimas muestran.
[.....]
Y en ella con justa causa
de Barlan y Josafat
la primera parte acaba. (259b)⁴²

Contemplating a conclusion

This play, too, lacks closure; the ending, which Montesino sees as ‘sumamente curioso’ (165), leaves the audience to contemplate Leucipe’s demise and in search of a significance. Laurencia’s final words offer some direction:

que no es razon enterrarla
hasta que todos entiendan
tan milagrosas hazañas
de vna muger penitente. (259b)

⁴² This point is even more curious when noting the ending of the play which refers to a second part. The second part cannot be an extension of the legend, there is nothing else to relate. This may be a reference to the earlier version for which this could be a sequel. Or possibly this was written before the ‘first’ version. In *Lo fingido verdadero* this device refers to the afterlife; but the context here does not suit that interpretation.

She thereby invites the audience to interpret the play as a celebration of the rejection of human love for divine love. Each of the protagonists have done just that. But Leucipe has gone further by finding Christ in her own death. The play, however, was not ostensibly about her; it was about Barlán and Josafá. The first version elevates her from anonymity in the original source, but does not provide her with a significant role. The revised version effectively creates a different play which develops the ideas set out in the first version and makes her the principal protagonist. Despite Montesinos's doubts about the authorship of the second version and his denigration of the last act, it is consistent with the earlier version and loses nothing other than the dramatic effect of Nachor's debate. In fact, the play could have constituted a consistent four act drama. On its own, though, the revised version, because of the characterization of Leucipe, contains significantly more substance. If we are to read it as a panegyric for a repentant woman the remainder of the play, and the themes we have identified, seem very unsatisfactory because they appear to have led the audience in a different direction. If we read it as a tragedy, it offers a range of richer but equally inconclusive interpretations. The fact it suggests a more diverse range of readings may be due, of course, to undisciplined writing by Lope. But, because the conflicts it alludes to, the incompatibility of religion and the human condition and the difficulties faced in the reconciliation of earthly government with divine rule, are seen to be consistent throughout Lope's artistic interpretation of religious issues, I believe the play conforms to a pattern in his language no matter how haphazard its construction. The fact that he does not make his purpose or message abundantly clear may just be because he wants to leave his audience to ruminate and to question, a goal he may see as a key aspect of drama. Certainly, if that is, as I suggest, his message then he would be unable to say it clearly or succinctly without considerable reprobation.

Throughout both versions of the play, religion is portrayed in disharmony with nature and authority. The Prince defies paternal and monarchical jurisdiction. Christianity is shown as all powerful and victorious principally against paganism, but that power also has a negative and destructive potential for human relationships. Leucipe is first controlled by her capturers and then by Josafá's selfish ambition for divinity. Ironically her only release from both comes in a Christian afterlife; but the sense of the play does

not lead to that as the preferred solution; rather it makes use of this paradox to create a drama that has no clear resolution. The first version of the play ends on a victorious and unambiguous note which masks the underlying dilemma, whereas the second ends in uncertainty. Even though he was unaware that he was depicting Buddha in a 'comedia de santos' I believe Lope was creating something equally as controversial.

These plays leave us, the contemporary reader or audience, questioning what Lope was trying to say. Greenblatt notes 'there can be no motiveless creation. [...] There can be no autonomous artifacts. [...] There can be no expression without an origin and an object, a *from* and a *for*' (*Shakespearean Negotiations* 12). Everything, therefore, has a purpose. He suggests the plays of the English Renaissance reflect what he calls 'the circulation of social energy' (19) the product of collective culture which itself allows for transgression only to contain it (52). Whilst he suggests we can never achieve 'the satisfying illusion of a "whole reading,"' an attempt to 'illuminate every corner of the text and knit [it] together into a unified interpretative vision', there is something to be gleaned at the 'margins' (4). I suggest Greenblatt's measures are applicable to the Golden Age stage. The ambiguity of Lope's theatre pushes us to look at the edges and question whether these dramas support subversive readings. It leads us to ask whether the attacks on the authority of Diocleciano and King Abenir constitute a challenge and whether the references to the church's containment of the theatre in *Lo fingido verdadero* and Josafá's confusion of the responsibilities of monarchy with personal salvation are veiled defiance.⁴³ As Greenblatt notes, our contemporary ideas of subversion are affected by the factors that govern our modern day lives (39); but the signs of subversion are to be found in the 'alien voices': 'the voices of those who have no power to leave literate traces of their existence' (48) and 'seem to dwell outside the realms ruled by the potentates of the land' (43). Lope's protagonists fall within this categorization. The actors of *Lo fingido verdadero*, Leucipe, the shepherds and the gracioso, Bato, of *Barlán y Josafá*, all 'outsiders', express views that do not appear to affirm the dominant voice of authority. Greenblatt notes that Shakespeare's plays are 'centrally, repeatedly concerned with the productions and containment of subversion and disorder' (40). But he, nevertheless, notes

⁴³ See Greenblatt's measure of subversive and orthodox, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 39.

how this subversive process forms part of the endorsement of the central power to which any given culture is subject. He sees the subversion less as a veiled attack on authority in order to keep it in check, but more a part of the system that controls it (52). There is something of Foucault's ideas in this as society is drawn back by a centripetal force towards 'existing norms'. In this vision, a given culture protects itself by exposing its potential threats. The whole is seen as a manipulation of power in which subversion is viewed as part of the overall process of containment. However containment is ensured through what Greenblatt calls 'the reversal' (63) in which order is ultimately affirmed through closure. It would be as well to test our two plays against this measure.

The 'alien voices' of Marcela, Octavio, and Bato experience no correction; they all remain marginalized from authority at the end of their respective plays. However Ginés and Leucipe, through their acts of martyrdom, are accepted in the normative discourse of power; they have entered the mainstream. It is, though, ironic that, in keeping with Christianity, their only means of achieving this recognition is in death. Leucipe of course has to be understood within the conventionalized character of the fallen woman whose expectations were limited to death or the convent;⁴⁴ however her transgressions were not entirely of her own making and, as a victim, the injustice of such an inevitable outcome would have been evident to the audience. If we see central authority as represented by Church and State then this example conforms to Greenblatt's idea. Likewise Christianity itself, as we have seen, works as a leveling mechanism. It offers a third party control to contain and mediate between the individual and authority, both of whom are subservient to an omniscient and invisible deity. The intermittent challenges to authority reflected in these plays, and Lope's religious writing in general, can be seen as a momentary empowerment of the individual, a mere instance of fantasy in which the underdog takes pleasure in an imaginary role reversal and claims his or her moment of recognition within the echelons of influence. They respond to Greenblatt's term 'communitas' used to describe 'the momentary breaking of the hierarchical order that normally governs a community' (49), perhaps itself only a further interpretation of the generalized

⁴⁴ Dawn Smith notes how a 'fallen woman' must pay the price of death or banishment to a convent as an example of her reintegration into the 'social status quo; even the rebel is obliged to conform or be effectively eliminated', p. 21.

Rabelaisian ‘travesties’ that Bakhtin sees at the heart of Renaissance humour.⁴⁵ There is an essence of medieval carnival in the way that the *gracioso* roles of Bato and Fabio in *Barlán y Josafá* poke fun at the established order; likewise, the voices of defiance reflected in these plays can be identified as an extension of a ‘festive folk laughter’ (Bakhtin 92) in which ‘for a short time life came out of its usual, legalized and consecrated furrows and entered the sphere of utopian freedom’ (Bakhtin 89). However, these plays contain deliberate intent that appears to stray beyond the universality of Bakhtin’s depiction of folk culture, an intent which seems out of place. Nevertheless, whether by Bakhtin’s or Greenblatt’s measures, Lope’s subversion is seen to conform to Foucault’s ideas on the totalizing forces of power. There is no lasting or overwhelming damage. As Greenblatt points out, neither is such intent a rationalized objective within the Elizabethan theatre, designed to support the centre of power. We have seen how Lope used the paradoxes, tensions, and ambiguities revealed in his relationship with authority to enhance the dramatic force of his writing. This, too, Greenblatt sees as integral in supporting the whole mechanism of the structure of English Renaissance theatre: it makes it appealing. The alternative, the use of undisguised dogma would fail: ‘the undisguised, unambiguous celebrations of royal power [.....] have no theatrical force’ (63).

However, I believe Greenblatt’s process of ‘reversal’ which attaches and justifies the ‘correct’ interpretation is not present in these plays. His idea assumes that, by depicting his protagonists with human weaknesses, the audience can use their imagination to reinvent these characters in their own ideal: ‘the ideal king must be in large part be the invention of the audience’ (63). For this to work the man or woman in the audience must empathize with the character. Whilst there is an evident analogy with the writer’s religious persona in *Rimas sacras*, with whom the reader could conceivably identify, this is not Lope’s intention in the characterizations of these plays. The fool in Ginés is not meant to be taken seriously; Leucipe’s demise is merely a loss and a waste. The pious amongst the audience would have taken comfort in the great piety involved in their self-sacrifice, but none of them would have aspired to emulate their convictions. The characters reveal the ludic qualities of the playwright. Greenblatt’s ideas seem to work

⁴⁵ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 81.

against the notion of burgeoning 'self' identified by Sawday, but he observes how culture is formed by 'complex struggles and harmonies' (5). I believe these plays and Lope's religious writing in general can be viewed as part of that struggle, one in which he searches for a middle ground that can accommodate both the dictates of authority and the call of the individual. The fact that the protagonists only found that harmony in death and that the only form of self-expression available to them was suicide is perhaps an ironic reminder of how unsatisfactory the earthly experience was. However, I do not believe these are serious plays and whatever subversion can be found in them probably falls under the category of 'social energy'; likewise the 'bullets' he fires are aimed at a totalitarian system he can neither influence nor live without.

Conclusion

On closer scrutiny the personae adopted by Lope's narrators in this study fray at the edges to reveal less complete models. The religious chronicler of *Isidro* combines nationalistic fervour and religious zeal in his attempt to promote Isidro as a saint; however, his declared intention to increase the devotion in his reader is compromised not only by his own self-promotion, but also by suggestions of political and social commentary, thereby blurring the boundary between the religious and the secular. Similarly the chronicler of *Pastores de Belén* who envisages himself as the translator of the nativity for the Spanish people, a function he undertakes in the spirit of declared altruism based on religious obligation, ends by dressing his translation in the fabric of his own imagery as the poet who gestates and delivers the story of Christ. The duty with which he discharges the responsibility of his God-given talent as a poet is similarly compromised by the self-conscious and self-serving reference to his previous work in the *Arcadia* which the reader is intended to compare with this re-writing and is drawn to the creative *imitatio* of his poetic wit. The self-interest exhibited in the voices of the chronicler and translator expose the author's 'satisfaction' which interferes with his professed unworthiness. Lope's most prominent and enduring religious persona, that of the repentant sinner, is established in the *Rimas sacras*, *Los soliloquios* and the body of his religious poetry composed during the period of his so-called religious crisis. The narrator of these works appears in an act of contrition, a public *mea culpa* intended to encourage and help his reader achieve a similar state of religious emotion. The characterization and portrayal of this private drama are deliberately infused with autobiographical allusions; however, the narrator and the direction of his journey from sin to forgiveness are revealed as literary constructs that conform to established literary traditions.

The sense of literary precedent and artistry in Lope's work is captured by Mary Gaylord Randel when she refers to Lope as a 'counterfeiter' and 'literary felon' (228). She comments on 'Lope's trick' which is 'to re-possess the common-place, to impress on it the personal seal of one's own wit' (222). She confirms the idea of imitation of poetic models as a central technique in his writing and presents his uniqueness as how he appropriates language and makes it his own, to 'stamp (it) with his own identifying mark'. She establishes the process of poetic artifice and the playfulness it represents as a valid literary activity and one that Lope made his own: 'most often the Fénix is envisaged as the quintessence of *homo ludens*, delighting in the possibilities of poetry's play' (242). We have evidenced the author's ludic qualities in the prefaces to *Rimas sacras* and in the introduction to *Los soliloquios* in which he disguises the identity of their true author. The effect of this playfulness is to maintain the reader's interest as a form of voyeuristic curiosity awaiting the fulfillment of the ongoing promise of an autobiographical unmasking: 'the suggestion that, once (the mask) is stripped away, the "real" face or voice that lies behind it will be made visible' (241). This game, whilst being, as Gaylord Randel demonstrates, appropriate in the world of fiction, runs into the obstacle of decorum in its application within religious literature. We observed how Helen Dundas points to the dubious merit of wit in the context of devotional poetry and to the care required in its application; it is a caution Lope seemingly neglected in the various examples of poetic and dramatic excess which threaten the decorum of his creations. The very moment of 'intercourse between an individual soul and its Maker', the moment when the poet bears himself in front of the ultimate authority is the moment when the *homo ludens* should stop playing. But, as with Ginés in *Lo fingido verdadero*, this is precisely the moment when metatheatrical and the poetic function take over. By straying into the religious genre, an area determined by its own set of preconceived conventions and meanings, Lope tests the roles poet and reader play in artistic interpretation. In *Rimas sacras*, because of the continuous involvement of the narrator, the reader is placed in the same position as Diocleciano in the play. They sit confused, not knowing whether their place is within the cast or audience, continually questioning whether the narrator is real or illusory. This creates a distancing effect through which the reader becomes a

participant, persistently reminded of their manipulation by the writer. By never losing himself, the author never lets the subject take over. The reader, like Diocleciano, is perplexed by the myriad of refracted images. The resultant disconcertion leads to the notion of vacuity that makes us stand back from the obvious voices and take a second look, take stock beneath the surface.

Here we find two distinct voices. One is the art of playfulness itself. When Gaylord Randel writes of Lope's *Rimas*, 'the most effective fiction is one which denounces as false the masks of artifice and even of its own art', she appears to suggest the theme of that work is the deliberate exposure of the artificiality of language. The illusory nature of words and acting is clearly the theme of *Lo fingido verdadero*, but to suggest that it is also an inherent theme in *Rimas sacras* and the rest of his devotional writing is a radically subversive notion. However, by stressing the poetry before its object, that is the conclusion. The literary drive points to cleverness, to a wit generally associated with the Baroque. Beverley writes of the ambivalence of the Spanish Baroque caught Janus-like between the 'rules' of Aristotelian plain speaking which link *verba* with *res*, 'of language and that which language represents' and the pursuit of 'aesthetic pleasure' through 'conceptual wit'.¹ Kuchar notes how hyperbole and poetic excess serves an appropriate function in the attempt to emulate religious objects which:

Provide(s) an answer to the question of how one should give expression to the profound sense of lack and thus the experience of unquenchable longing one feels before God. For these writers, being a properly desiring devotional subject means being an excessively, hyperbolically desiring subject. (20)

But we have seen how Lope's poetic excess is both self-conscious and tends to the sensuous, and, accordingly, disengages with its objective. It thereby treads a thin and ambiguous line between pure 'aesthetic pleasure' and a representation of a spiritual epiphany. Excess, as a sign of loss of control, on one hand, finds itself, uniquely, condoned, even encouraged, and, on the other, censured as indicative of something

¹ John R. Beverley, 'On the Concept of the Spanish Baroque', in *Culture and Control in Counter Reformation Spain*, ed. by Anne J. Cruz and Mary Elisabeth Perry (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 216–27 (p. 217).

‘ideologically and psychologically dangerous’ (Kuchar 223). When, as we have seen, this excess is associated with sexually charged imagery, it falls into the category of transgression. Hyperbole that fails to fulfill the expectations of decorum imposed by its subject can suggest merely an over zealous poetic impulse; however, seemingly deliberate attempts to test the boundaries of conformity are consistent with the poet’s dramatic instincts and the voice of the rebel identified at various points within the texts. The subversion witnessed in the two plays studied, the erotic imagery of the Magdalen poem, the questioning of God in the cases of the Virgin Mary and the death of Carlos, and the flamboyance of the characterization of his personae, all indicate a rebelliousness which compromises any profession to artistic or religious apotheosis. It appears to respond to a form of repression by which the narrator is contained and controlled. I have suggested that such resistance represents both a societal sense of *desengaño* at the failure of authority in general to respond to the needs of the individual and a sense of constriction of ‘selfhood’, a situation Cascardi refers to as a ‘crisis of subject formation’ and which he associates with the early modern period. The alien voices identified within the poetry and plays studied appear to represent an audible but mild level of resistance to conformity.²

Social historians point to a degree of dissent within society. Eire notes the modes in which cynicism can be voiced. Rawlings writes of ‘a significant level of religious scepticism and idiosyncrasy in Spanish society’ (83) and describes the nature of such incidences:

Most blasphemous oaths were said in anger or haste and reflected the popular attitude that religion consisted of a series of fair exchanges between God and the believer: if God did not help in one’s purpose (regardless of the legitimacy of the request), then so much for God. (Rawlings 62)

Whilst the examples she refers to clearly do not reflect outspoken heresy, they do point to a heterogeneous culture in which, despite ‘the efforts of post-Tridentine clergy and inquisitors to impose a uniform religious culture on society, Spanish Catholicism retained

² Anthony J. Cascardi, ‘The Subject of Control’, in *Culture and Control in Counter Reformation Spain*, pp. 231–54 (p. 232).

its diverse and popular roots' (Rawlings 99). None of this presents a back-drop of deep-seated resistance, rather the picture emerges of a diverse society, one which can assimilate a variety of postures and ideas over a wide range of issues. It is precisely the sort of society represented by the *corral* audience; one that has the ability to operate as a forum for the distribution of the 'social energy' reflected in the plays studied, a process of cleansing and catharsis that empowers the individual but, also, maintains the status quo.

The heterodoxy presented in the *comedia* is also contained in the eclecticism of the major works referred to in the study. I have referred to them as 'compendiums'. *Pastores* in particular gives the impression of being a book of books. Similarly *Rimas sacras* seems designed for a spectrum of readers. The variety of styles and haphazard structure of each disorients the reader. I assert that the eclectic quality is reflective of the diversity of the expectations of his readership. It points to a readership and audience programmed to react and interpret at many different levels of reception, both in terms of understanding and tolerance. On this basis, these works can of course be interpreted, as Mayo has done, as spiritually profitable diversions. But they cannot be accepted as any more spiritually orientated than that. Certainly they lack the religious coherence evident in the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz or José de Valdivielso, whose product was consistent with their declared ambitions. It is, perhaps, the overall lack of coherence that, I believe, makes Lope's religious poetry disconcerting. Gaylord Randel writes of how Lope's language 'entertains the possibility, even more threatening than language's function as an obstacle to self-knowledge, that artifice may simply mask an absence' (232). I note such an absence in his religious poetry. It lacks the purpose generated by religious idealism and as a result leaves his reader stranded between his *verba* and his *res* unable to equate the aesthetic pleasure of his words with the object of his poetry. Howe captures this essence when he writes: 'Lope seems to be drawn to the dramatic possibilities of using the doctrine as a vehicle for interpreting popular tastes. In doing so he places theology at the service of poetry'.³ It suggests a continuing discourse on wit rather than devotion and thereby fails to convince on both counts.

³ E.T. Howe, 'Lope de Vega and the Immaculate conception', *BCom*, 38 (1986), 39–54 (p. 41).

Lope's religious poetry, like the poet himself, resists any attempt to be labeled or categorized. The multiple voices, personae and poses distract and confuse. Beverley sees Baroque spiritualism as 'the paradoxical conjunction of the principle of submission to authority with the practical and theoretical ideal of the self-willed, independent individual' (225). If there is an identifiable and enduring voice in Lope's religious poetry it is that of the narrator who serves as a synecdoche for the Baroque struggle for an identity and sense of selfhood from within the forces that control him.

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