

THE CID OF GUILLEN DE CASTRO: THE HERO AS MORAL EXEMPLAR

Stephen Gilman has shown how Lope de Vega seemed to have conceived of Spanish national history as "a kind of three-act play with a happy ending."¹ For Lope, as for Juan de Mena in the fifteenth century, the late Middle Ages represented a perilous epoch for the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula in that an earlier, formative period "characterized by rude virtue and simple customs" was replaced by "a time of decadence, self-seeking, and ruptured harmony."² In Lope's archetypal scheme it is the assumption of power by the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, that signals the restoration of these original values and virtues and sets Spain once again on the road to national glory and internal harmony.

This vision of Spain's medieval past as a period of violent moral crisis is shared by Lope's contemporary, the Valencian dramatist Guillén de Castro. In a pair of historical-legendary plays, *Las mocedades del Cid* and its sequel *Las hazañas del Cid*,³ Castro re-creates a tortuous period of history, the reigns of King Ferdinand I of Castile and his son Sancho, and portrays it as plagued with internal warfare and alienated from its true Christian mission, the unfinished work of the Reconquest. Rather than unite in a concerted effort against the Moorish infidel, Spanish Christians—Castilians, Aragonese, Zamorans—turn against one another, allowing ego-centric interests to take precedence over any sense of national welfare. Castro's indictment extends even to the royal family, which he places at the very center of this national disintegration. If Lope's exalted view of Spanish monarchy in general allows him to envision the Catholic Monarchs as Spain's redeemers, Castro, whose early plays reveal a fiercely critical—and, therefore, "un-Lopean"—view of kingship, chooses as the incarnation of moral and Christian values placed at the service of national unity not any royal personage, but rather a Castilian hero closely identified with Castro's

¹ Stephen Gilman, "The Problem of the Spanish Renaissance," *Folio*, 10 (1977): *Studies in the Literature of Spain, 16th and 17th Centuries*, ed. M.J. Ruggiero, Brockport, New York, p. 51.

² Gilman, p. 49.

³ In the 1618 edition of Castro's published plays the two works are given the following titles: *Las mocedades del Cid, primera* and *Segunda de las hazañas del Cid*. Henceforth we shall refer to them as *Mocedades* and *Hazañas* respectively.

native city: Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, the Cid.

The character of Rodrigo in Castro's plays can be identified neither with the epic hero of the earlier *romances* nor with the conflictive character of the later French counterpart, Corneille's *Le Cid*. While epic greatness and internal conflict are components of Castro's protagonist, Rodrigo is above all a moral paradigm, an ethical hero conscious of a mission to rescue the Christian state from the destruction threatened by assaults from both without and within. In his repeated appeals to duty, reason, and Christian principles, Rodrigo represents the moral touchstone against which the actions of other, more impulsive and less rational characters are judged. The *Mocedades* chronicles the process by which the young hero awakens to this moral consciousness, while in the *Hazañas* Rodrigo is the Christian hero grown to maturity and finely attuned to the ethical dimensions of the political crisis that is shattering Castile. If in the first play Rodrigo is a deliverer from danger, in the second he strives to be a healer of the state's deep inner wounds.

The two Cid plays must be seen from within the context of Castro's early theater. From what seems to be his first play, *El amor constante*,⁴ Castro's dramatic cosmos centers around the male protagonist caught in the cross-fire of three often contradictory imperatives: the personal, the social, and the Christian. Man as individual is ruled by passions and impulses he cannot, or will not, control; as a social being, the noble who "es quien es", he finds himself obliged to suppress feelings and judgments which contradict the demands made on him by a strict code of gentlemanly honor; as a Christian, he is sometimes called upon to take a critical look at the "correct" code of social behavior and re-define that code when it stands in violation of Christian law. Often these conflictive tensions operate in a situation where a monarch rules tyrannically. Thus, in *El amor constante*, for example, the courtier Celauro impulsively rebels against an unjust king, but then goes mad from the guilt he feels from having acted in a manner he considers dishonorable. His son Leonido, however, after failing to evince a change in the king's behavior by an appeal to rational argument, finds in the precepts of natural and Christian laws justification for killing the tyrant.

To a certain degree, we may take as an emblem of these three imperatives the first scene of the *Mocedades* where Rodrigo is knighted. In the forefront kneels Rodrigo, the individual about to be incorporated into the social system. Farther back is the king, the symbol of social cohesiveness, the bestower of honor. But behind all, like a guiding deity, stands the statue of the Apostle Santiago, representing the fighting impulse put to the service of a Christian mission. In our analysis of the plays we shall perceive various

⁴ For a tentative dating of Castro's plays see Courtney Bruerton, "The Chronology of the *comedias* of Guillén de Castro," *Hispanic Review*, 12 (1944), pp. 89-151. Bruerton sets the date of *El amor constante* as between 1596 and 1599, that of the *Mocedades* between 1612 and 1615, and that of the *Hazañas* between 1610 and 1615.

internal threats to the state that emanate from the first two areas of values: the impulse and passions of Count Lozano, King Ferdinand, and Prince (later, King) Sancho, and the uncompromising sense of honor of the same Count Lozano and of Diego Ordóñez. It is only Rodrigo who remains faithful to a higher vision and who, in his appeals to moral principles, works to redeem and heal rather than disrupt.

The Threats to Christendom

The well-being of the Christian kingdom of Castile is endangered by two distinct types of threat: armed attack from without and moral disintegration from within. However, the two are inextricably interconnected, since the moral confusion within the kingdom renders it more vulnerable to the advances of enemies from the outside. Thus, the death of Count Lozano temporarily leaves Castile without a warrior leader, and King Sancho's open warfare against his siblings leads to the capture of his brother Alfonso by the Moorish king of Toledo.

The Moorish enemy occupies a space "out there", a clear, wide-open space that stands in opposition to the claustrophobic and confusing "inside" of the Castilian court. On the battlefield action is unencumbered by ambiguity: it is the only place where allies and enemies are clearly differentiated, where the Christian soldier can prove his worth and attain untarnished glory. Accordingly, Rodrigo's sally to meet the Moors in battle is a kind of military "beatus ille" flight to the country. This association of ideas is suggested by Urraca's praise of country life in the second act of the *Mocedades*, where she contrasts the "concierto" (63)⁵ of her country retreat with the court's "confusa grita, / donde unos toman venganza / quanto otros piden justicia..." (65). Immediately following this monologue, Rodrigo, on the way to battle, stops to speak with the Infanta and receives her blessing. It is in this country setting that he declares his unambiguous intention to "vencer Moros" (67). Paradoxically, warfare against the heathen enemy leads to a type of inner peace for the soldier, and the "grita" of battle becomes, by its very clarity of purpose, a harmonious "concierto". The relationship between the pastoral and the martial is further underscored by the filtering of the battle scene through the running commentary of the comic rustic shepherd.

Much to the contrary, within the Castilian court confusion and moral ambiguity run rampant. The system of social values is turned on its head and the spectator can perceive no action as clearly right or wrong. Characters are constantly forced to make difficult choices, and even decisions taken

⁵ All textual references are to the edition of Víctor Said Armesto, *D. Guillén de Castro. Las mocedades del Cid* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1968). Numbers in parentheses correspond to page numbers of this edition.

in good conscience lead unwittingly to further disaster. Indeed, the texture of these plays may be seen as made up of a series of paradoxical situations. Thus, for example, Rodrigo's noble defense of his family honor offends both the king and his beloved; Jimena asks the king to punish a man he would honor; Ferdinand's move to protect his children from Sancho's belligerence only leads to open warfare between them; Bellido Dolfos, directed by Heaven to kill Sancho, is both a traitor and an instrument of divine justice; Urraca's veiled approval of Bellido's promise to murder Sancho renders Zamora both innocent and guilty of this "crime"; and Diego Ordóñez's loyalty to his deceased lord is both admirable and hubristic at the same time. Within this situation positive and negative have lost their meaning. The kingdom finds itself at a tragic impasse from which only Rodrigo's clear moral vision offers any hope of release.

Christendom is taken off its true track and condemned to moral confusion by acts of pride and passion, all of which place some value—the self, honor, paternal love, ambition, blind loyalty—over the welfare of the kingdom. Let us briefly examine the threats posed by Count Lozano, King Ferdinand, King Sancho, and Diego Ordóñez.

Count Lozano deals the first fatal blow. In the first scene of the *Moçedades* the entire court joins together in ritualistic ceremony to celebrate the knighting of Rodrigo. Yet, this apparent unity is severely undercut by the asides of the count, who objects to the untimely honoring of the young man. At this juncture, the count holds his impulses in check; his hushed asides—as opposed to the raised voices which will later mark the beginning of a violent confrontation of wills—signal the victory of dutiful behavior over rebellious impulse.

But the count betrays both himself and the kingdom when, enraged by the king's choice of Diego Laínez as tutor to the prince, he raises his voice in anger and commits a crime of *lese-majesté* by striking the old man in the presence of his sovereign. What is worse, when the king orders him arrested the count threatens sedition. Up to this point pride rather than honor spurs the count on. It is only on later reflection that the question of honor further complicates the situation. Although Lozano admits that his actions were a "locura" (31), his sense of honor demands that he not offer an apology. Peransules condemns this intransigence as completely unreasonable. But for the count, personal honor clearly takes precedence over the public welfare, and he utters what may well be the theme of the court: "y ha de perderse Castilla/antes que yo" (32). For Guillén de Castro, then, honor is not a uniformly positive value. If it can denote nobility of soul, as when Rodrigo sacrifices his love for the sake of family honor, it can also become synonymous with irrational, self-serving egocentricity.

Lozano's words find an echo in Prince Sancho. When Diego Laínez is about to be taken prisoner, Sancho threatens rebellion: "¡Ha de perderse Castilla/primer que preso vaya!" (52). This is the first indication of Sancho's violent temperament and selfish disregard for the land he is to

rule. His mistreatment of his siblings causes King Ferdinand to fear for his children and, consequently, divide his lands among them rather than maintain them as one kingdom under Sancho's rule. In acting as a loving father Ferdinand has abdicated his responsibilities as ruler. The warning of Diego Laínez makes clear that this decision endangers Christian unity: "Siempre el provecho común/de la Religión cristiana/importó más que los hijos..." (127).

Open inter-Christian warfare comes to a head in the *Hazañas* with King Sancho's siege of Zamora. It is a further indication of the moral ambivalencies of these plays that although Ferdinand's decision to divide his lands is condemned, Sancho's attempt to lay claim to his rightful inheritance is clearly an offense to Heaven. Whatever right Sancho may have on his side is morally undermined by his selfish ambition and blatant disregard of the principle of Christian charity. Rodrigo's description of the siege stresses the confusion of national values, as the name of Santiago is invoked not against the Moors but against fellow Christians: "¡Santiago!, dizen todos,/y todos, ¡España, España!;/todo es valor español/y todo sangre cristiana;/todo es sangre, todo es fuego;/aquí mueren y allí matan;/el peso oprime a la tierra,/y al cielo ofende la causa" (140).

Sancho's closest advisor, Diego Ordóñez, defines himself in terms of his absolute loyalty to his monarch. Not only does Don Diego not question the morality of the siege, but at one point he even dissuades Sancho from heeding a divine warning to cease the attack. This extreme loyalty reaches its culmination after the death of the king. Castro portrays the regicide performed by Bellido Dolfos as an act of divine punishment in response to Sancho's transgression of Heaven's laws. It is an act whose significance is not fully comprehended by any character on stage. Yet, Don Diego, misguided by self-righteous sentiment and an overweening pride in his loyalty to his dead sovereign, angrily accuses all Zamora. He seeks nothing less than total destruction of the city. His highly emotional *reto*, in which he challenges all the living and dead of Zamora, threatens, at least on the rhetorical level, to continue the senseless shedding of Christian blood and to only deepen the spiritual wounds already inflicted by war and dissension.

Rodrigo

Although Rodrigo emerges in these works as both the conqueror of the Moorish enemy and the voice of Christian conscience and reason, curiously enough, his first decisive action, the killing of Count Lozano, brings Castile to the brink of disaster and further contributes to moral confusion. Yet, from the beginning, Rodrigo is differentiated from the others in that he alone refuses to exalt his individual impulses and is aware of the existence of higher moral principles. Rodrigo's monologue, in which he weighs the honor of the family against his love for Jimena, clearly contrasts with the impulsive, unthinking attack of the count. Here Rodrigo reveals himself to

be a self-sacrificing individual who accepts his social responsibilities. Furthermore, the monologue's formal casuistry—as well as its very length, which serves as a brake to the uncontrollable momentum of violent actions and reactions—establishes Rodrigo as a character of rational argument.

If Rodrigo feels compelled to challenge the count, the irony that in defending his honor he offends the king does not escape him. Unlike Lozano, who questions the king's right to punish him for his pride, Rodrigo offers no self-righteous defense of his actions. Instead, he voluntarily banishes himself from Castile as an acknowledgement of the affront dealt to his monarch. In exile he hopes to expiate the offense committed against the state by fighting for his king on the battlefield, where "...Moros fronterizos arrogantes,/al Rey le quitan tierras y vasallos" (62). Rodrigo's new mission is to "servir al Rey a quien dexó ofendido" (63). If Lozano sought Castile's perdition, the thought implicit in Rodrigo's decision may, perhaps, best be paraphrased as "ha de salvarse Castilla." The defense of national honor replaces that of personal honor as Rodrigo's victories deflate the boastful claim of the Moorish king, "pierda su opinión Castilla" (70).

With the incident of the leper, Castro endows Rodrigo with a new Christian awareness, and the epic hero begins to assume a moral dimension that will fully blossom in the *Hazañas*. Rodrigo's Christian sharing of his provisions with the outcast—once again in a space outside the court—stands out sharply against both King Ferdinand's unwise dividing of his lands (another type of sharing), and Sancho's selfish grabbing of what he deems to be his inheritance. Rodrigo undergoes a type of moral re-birth as Saint Lazarus⁶ anoints him a "Capitán Cristiano" (108) and promises him future victories. But the saint also advises the knight that, "No con sólo pelear/se gana el cielo..." (104). From this Rodrigo learns that not only is it important to wage Christian battles but, even more importantly, that the Christian soldier must work to prevent needless bloodshed. Knightly courage and a Christian conscience need not be mutually exclusive: "El ser Cristiano/no impide al ser Cavallero" (103). Rodrigo will be called upon not only to fight but to judge.

In this light, Rodrigo's confrontation with Martín González is not merely an act of heroic valor, but heroism put to the service of Christianity. In order to avoid protracted inter-Christian warfare over the rights to Calahorra, Aragon had proposed a single combat between a Castilian and the super-human Don Martín. As Diego Laínez points out: "No hay negar que es cristiandad/bien fundada, y bien medida,/escusar con una vida/tantas muertes" (112). Rodrigo's acceptance of the challenge, then, helps to save countless Christian lives. Furthermore, Don Martín's arrogant dismissal of Rodrigo recalls a similar dismissal by Count Lozano when the latter is

⁶ Saint Lazarus himself is associated with re-birth as Lazarus was raised from the dead by Christ.

challenged by the youth.⁷ We witness Rodrigo's moral growth as we realize that if in the earlier incident Rodrigo shed blood for personal honor, in the later incident he prevents bloodshed and fights to defend the honor of Castile.

Only with a view towards the moral transformation that the Cid undergoes in the *Mocedades* can we understand his role in the *Hazañas*. The title of this play may seem a misnomer since Rodrigo performs no outwardly heroic deeds. His attempts to change the course of history are constantly frustrated, and he remains a passive witness to events he cannot fully comprehend. But Rodrigo is now a Christian warrior and his heroism is of a moral nature. It is Rodrigo who, in the name of Christian morality and reason, seeks to put an end to the warfare begun by King Sancho and continued by Diego Ordóñez.

While remaining loyal to King Sancho, Rodrigo tempers his allegiance with ethical considerations. He does not hesitate to chastize, and even disobey, his monarch when he thinks him wrong. The Cid identifies Sancho's disregard of his father's wish that Urraca govern Zamora with the violation of Christian precepts, and he repeatedly reminds the king that he is calling down divine retribution upon himself by continuing the siege. While restrained by his oath of loyalty from directly impeding Sancho from attacking the city, Rodrigo nonetheless acts to set aright the wrongs perpetrated by the ambitious ruler. This is nowhere more patent than in the scene in which Rodrigo frees Prince Alfonso, the brother of the king, after the prince has been taken prisoner in the battle of Golpejares. Castro purposefully deviates from the earlier *romances*, which, quite to the contrary, credit Rodrigo with Alfonso's capture. Later in the play, when the king orders his troops to resume attack against his brother, Rodrigo rebukes him for acting in an un-Christian manner: "Tu Majestad se reporte, / porque no es malicia tanta / digna de un cristiano pecho" (143).

But Rodrigo's warnings are of no avail. As punishment for crimes against the kingdom, Heaven infuses Bellido Dolfos with momentary courage and allows him to kill the king. Though Rodrigo pursues this strange messianic traitor, Bellido eludes him and takes shelter within the walls of Zamora. This, of course, leads to the *reto*.

Rodrigo's reason and circumspection with regard to Zamora's guilt serves as a foil to and a commentary on the reckless blind loyalty of Don Diego. Unable to determine Zamora's degree of guilt, Rodrigo demands the punishment of Bellido alone. Refusing to let anger cloud over his reason, he rejects Don Diego's accusation of the entire city. While the latter wants to

⁷ The relationship between Rodrigo's duel with Count Lozano and his confrontation with the giant Martín González—incidents that open and close a cycle of Rodrigo's life, taking him from the personal to the national—is anticipated in the first act by the repeated use of the word *gigante*. Rodrigo comments that "Qualquier agravio es gigante" (34), and refers to his love for Jimena as an "amor gigante" (37). Similarly, Count Lozano disdainfully refers to Rodrigo as a "Rapaz / con sobervia de gigante" (40).

punish the city for its certain guilt, the Cid suggests that a challenge might be issued so as to see *whether* it is guilty. When Don Diego arrogantly queries, "¿Quién pone duda en esso?", Rodrigo modestly replied "Quien lo ignora" (204), and he notes that he is certain he heard the voice of Arias Gonzalo from within the city warning the king to beware Bellidos. Don Diego's anger prevents him not only from seeing the truth but also from hearing it. Throughout the duel the arrogant knight insults his rivals and Rodrigo is forced to rebuke him for his lack of *cortesía*, which so offends the young hero's fabled sense of *mesura*. In short, whereas Diego Ordóñez seeks only to deepen the wounds and separate Castilians and Zamorans even farther, Rodrigo works as a healer, whose only desire is to promote a peaceful reconciliation. The ambiguous outcome of the duel vindicates the Cid's reluctance to take up arms against the city, for there is no clear victor and the question of Zamora's guilt is left unanswered. All that remains is to pick up the pieces and forge on as one nation under King Alfonso, still no closer to disentangling the truth than before. While Diego Ordóñez, the self-appointed minister of justice, finds himself disgraced and out of favor with Fortune, Rodrigo emerges unscathed.

If Rodrigo is not the audacious hero Castro's title promises, he *is* a moral exemplar: a *perfecto caballero* who weighs the import of his actions, questions his social obligations, and aspires to heal a kingdom victimized by its nobles and rulers alike.

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