

ON THE ROMANCERO IN PERIBAÑEZ:  
LA ESPOSA FIEL AND LA ADULTERA

Lope's tendency to associate traditional poetry with rural society is nowhere more evident than in *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*, where the fate of the protagonists and the resolution of the action depend, in great measure, on the characters' relationship to the songs and traditions of the community. As Aubrun and Montesinos point out in the preface to their edition of the play, Peribáñez is able to avert domestic catastrophe because, as the epitome of that community, sharing its values, he accepts as true its version of events (Casilda's innocence) expressed in the song of the *segadores*.<sup>1</sup> Because it directly affects the outcome of the play, the singing in Act II by the *segadores* of the *cantar de la mujer de Peribáñez* may be considered the most important scene in *Peribáñez* involving the use and/or imitation of traditional poetry.<sup>2</sup> However, it is by no means the only significant use in it of traditional forms and language. In addition to the songs and dances (*folías*, *tréboles*, etc.) for which *Peribáñez* is justly admired, there are allusions to *cuentecillos* and *refranes*, and to *romances* of oral tradition. The very scene on which the *cantar* is based—Casilda's rejection of the Comendador—is itself informed by two such *romances*: *La esposa fiel*, and *La adúltera*. It is to these two *romances*, and the manner in which they function in the scene and in the play, that the following pages are addressed.

In the well-known scene in Act II, while Peribáñez is in Toledo for a

<sup>1</sup> Paris: Hachette, 1943. Reprinted in J.F. Gatti, *El teatro de Lope de Vega: artículos y estudios* (Buenos Aires: EUDEBA, 1962), pp. 7-49.

The words of the *cantar* are as follows: "La mujer de Peribáñez/hermosa es a maravilla;/el Comendador de Ocaña/de amores la requería./La mujer es virtuosa/cuanto hermosa y cuanto linda;/ mientras Pedro está en Toledo/desta suerte respondía:/'Más quiero yo a Peribáñez/con su capa la pardilla,/que no a vos, Comendador,/con la vuesa guarnecida'."

For the most complete discussion of the relationship between traditional forms of poetry and the rural community, see N. Salomon's monumental *Recherches sur le thème paysan dans la "comedia" au temps de Lope de Vega* (Bordeaux: Institut d'Etudes Ibéro-Américaines, Université de Bordeaux, 1965, 946 pp. & xxiv), especially Part III, Chapter iii. The *romance*—in particular, the *romance cantado*—and *Peribáñez* are dealt with in detail on p. 550, ff. See also G. Umpierre, *Songs in the Plays of Lope de Vega* (London: Tamesis, 1975), p. 56 and throughout.

<sup>2</sup> The song of the *segadores* is itself a re-creation, on stage, of the process by which a traditional ballad is formed, complete with *variantes*. See my article on "Ballad Formation in the Plays of Lope de Vega" in *El Romancero hoy: Historia, Comparatismo, Bibliografía crítica* (Madrid: Gredos, 1979), pp. 63-73.

night, the Comendador don Fadrique attempts to seduce his wife Casilda. He is unable to gain access to the interior of the house, which Casilda has locked securely, but the noise disturbs her; she appears at a window and inquires if the new day has begun. The Comendador, hiding in the darkness and pretending to be a *segador*, answers her, indirectly declaring his passion.

Señora mía,  
ya se va acercando el día,  
y es tiempo de ir a segar.  
Demás que, saliendo vos,  
sale el sol, y es tarde ya.  
Lástima a todos nos da  
de veros sola, por Dios.  
No os quiere bien vuestro esposo,  
pues a Toledo se fue,  
y os deja una noche. A fe,  
que si fuera tan dichoso  
el Comendador de Ocaña  
—que sé yo que os quiere bien,  
aunque le mostráis desdén  
y sois con él tan extraña—,  
que no os dejara, aunque el Rey  
por sus cartas le llamara;<sup>3</sup>

Casilda spurns her would-be suitor in a long passage in *romance* meter, beginning with the line:

Labrador de lejas tierras...<sup>4</sup>

Various commentators have called attention to the fact that the first line of Casilda's response to the Comendador contains an allusion to the traditional ballad *La esposa fiel*, which begins "Caballero de lejas tierras."<sup>5</sup> To my knowledge, however, no one has yet remarked that Casilda's words are in answer to the Comendador's wooing of her in phrases which recall the language of the *Romance de la adúltera* (known also as *Blancaniña*, *El adúltero castigado* and *La esposa infiel*).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Lope de Vega Carpio, *Obras completas*, Real Academia Española (Acad.), Vol. X, pp. 127b-128a.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 128a-b.

<sup>5</sup> J.A. Moore, *The "Romancero" in the Chronicle-Legend Plays of Lope de Vega* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Studies in Romance Languages, 1940), p. 91. See also Aubrun and Montesinos, p. 43, note 25. The ballad appears in F.J. Wolf and C. Hofmann, *Primavera y flor de romances*, published by M. Menéndez Pelayo, *Antología de poetas líricos castellanos* (Santander: CSIC, 1945), Vol. VIII, where it is No. 156. It is No. 318 in A. Durán, *Romancero general*, BAE X (Madrid: Atlas, 1945). "Caballero de lejas tierras" is a variant of the *romance* "Caballero, si a Francia ides" (*Primavera*, 155).

<sup>6</sup> *Primavera*, 136; Durán, 298. M. Díaz Roig, *El romancero y la lírica popular moderna* (México: El Colegio de México, 1976), p. 276, lists some of the different names by which this ballad is known.

*La adúltera*

The *romance* called *La adúltera* is composed of two parts. In the first part, the wife (Blancaniña, Alba) takes a wandering knight as her lover while her husband is away on a hunting trip in the mountains of León. In the second part, the husband returns, finds the armor, lance and horse belonging to the knight, and asks his wife about them. She confesses her guilt, and, although the *dénouement* of the ballad is left to the imagination (in sixteenth-century versions, at least) the deaths of the wife and her lover are strongly implied.

There are two subtle, but concrete, allusions to this ballad in the Comendador's speech at the beginning of the scene in which he hopes to seduce Casilda. The first line of the *romance*, "Blanca sois, señora mía/más que no el rayo del sol...", echoes in the first words of the lovestruck Don Fadrique when he sees Casilda in the window of her house: "...Señora mía,/ya se va acercando el día,/.../Demás que, saliendo vos,/sale el sol...." The Comendador's suggestion to Casilda that if Peribáñez really loved her he wouldn't have left her alone, even for a night ("no os quiere bien vuestro esposo,/pues a Toledo se fue/y os deja una noche") recalls the lines from the ballad in which the wife reproaches her husband for leaving her alone: "Que me dejáis a mí sola/y a los montes os vais vos." The Comendador assumes the role of the knight, seeking entry to the castle of pleasure that is Casilda's boudoir.<sup>7</sup> Casilda then responds with the first line of *La esposa fiel*, communicating to the audience, as well as to the Comendador, that his effort to seduce her is destined to fail.

Textual coincidences aside, it is likely that the *romance*, with its principal action and motif of the "unfaithful wife", would have occurred to the members of the audience, if only by reverse association upon hearing the line which alludes to *La esposa fiel* (the two *romances* are, after all, variants of the same general theme or motif: *la vuelta del marido*). For Lope's audience, the *romancero* was the equivalent in poetry of the alphabet, so familiar were its individual *romances* in their various versions. It is this fact which permits the *romancero* to function as a self-allusive system within the context of a *comedia* (or, for that matter, any other work in which it occurs). A reference to one ballad triggers recollection not only of its particular themes, phrases and episodes, but of other ballads in the *romance* network, all of which are part of the accumulated prior poetic experience of the playgoer, and these allusions and associations enrich the spectator's experience of the play. The audience thereby becomes a collaborator and the performance a collective endeavor of the sort that, in our century, the poet Yeats yearned for and evoked longingly:

<sup>7</sup> In the *romance* the Knight asks, "¿Si la dormiré esta noche/desarmado y sin pavor?" and, "¡Quién contigo la durmiese/una noche sin temor!" (Durán, 299).

In writing these little plays [*Four Plays for Dancers*] I knew that I was creating something which could only fully succeed in a civilization very unlike ours. I think they should be written for some country where all classes share in a half-mythological, half-philosophical folk belief which the writer and his small audience lift into a new subtlety. All my life I have longed for such a country, and always found it quite impossible to write without having as much belief in its real existence as a child has in that of the wooden birds, beasts, and persons of his toy Noah's Ark.<sup>8</sup>

Even taking into account individual, educational and class differences among members of the audience in attendance in the *corrales*, where the *romancero* was concerned, Lope's Spain was, in fact, such a country.<sup>9</sup>

The Comendador and Casilda are, in a sense, speaking to each other in *romance-language*, a code or sub-language comprised of ballad fragments, motifs, meter and various stylistic devices, to which the audience, the *oyentes* of the *comedia*, would have been responsive, and which we can assume, for the reasons elaborated above, they would have been quick to decipher and comprehend.<sup>10</sup>

### *La esposa fiel*

In the *romance* of *La esposa fiel*, a knight returns home after a long absence, so long in fact that his wife fails to recognize him. She asks him for news of her husband, describing his appearance and characteristics (the *romance* is also known as *Las señas del esposo*). The knight tells her that her husband has been killed in Valencia, and offers himself as a lover to take the place of the dead man. The wife refuses him, objecting that she would prefer instead to become a nun. The knight-husband then reveals his true identity.

*La esposa fiel* is, first of all, Casilda's response, in ballad language, to the Comendador—that is, to the allusion to *La adúltera* concealed in the Comendador's appeal. In addition, Lope's use of the *incipit* of this well-known ballad for the first line of Casilda's response no doubt conveyed immediately to the Spanish audience, so familiar with the *romancero*, that the Comendador's attempt to seduce her was destined to fail. In this sense, it

<sup>8</sup> William Butler Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers* (London: Macmillan, 1921), p. 106.

<sup>9</sup> R. Menéndez Pidal, *Romancero hispánico (Hispano-portugués, americano y sefardí)* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1953), II, throughout but especially Chapter XV:8, describes the extent to which the *romancero* was part of the daily lives and conversations of Spaniards of all classes and all ages, i.e.: "Después de los evangelios que en la iglesia se oían desde la niñez a diario, eran los romances los textos que ya en la escuela se frecuentaban más; eran el evangelio civil del pueblo español por los tiempos en que éste llegaba a su apogeo histórico. El romancero era el canto con que se adormecía a los niños..." etc. (p. 185).

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Gilman, "On *Romancero* as a Poetic Language", in *Homenaje a Casaldueiro* (Madrid: Gredos, 1972), pp. 151-160, defines *Romancero* as "an autonomous poetic language grammatically different both from that of the *cantares de gesta* and Lope's *comedias* which has existed from at least the fourteenth century into our own time." (153) Elements of the language that Gilman calls *Romancero*, along with ballad versification, themes, lines, and whole segments of *romances* are incorporated by Lope into his plays; as meaningful units (with significations derived from their independent existence outside the play), they function as a sub-language within the primary language of the *comedia*.

is an example of the use of *romances* for foreshadowing, of which there are numerous examples in Lope's *comedias*.<sup>11</sup>

In appropriating the line from the ballad for his play, however, Lope made a significant change in it. In his version, "*Caballero de lejas tierras*" becomes, instead, "*Labrador de lejas tierras*." J.A. Moore, in his monograph on the "chronicle-legend" plays of Lope de Vega, suggested that Lope changed the word *caballero* to *labrador* because it was "more appropriate to the situation."<sup>12</sup> The Comendador, surprised by the sudden appearance of Casilda at the window, and fearful of discovery, tries to conceal his identity by pretending to be one of the *segadores* who are sleeping in the courtyard, waiting to begin the next day's harvest. Casilda, responding to his words, addresses him as "Labrador...." More important, however, this slight, but meaningful, change in the text of the ballad has the effect of underscoring and calling attention to the play's central conflict.<sup>13</sup> This conflict, between the two social "worlds" of Peribáñez, *labrador de Ocaña*, and don Fadrique, *gallardo caballero* and Comendador of Ocaña, is developed at some length (sixty-four verses) through a series of images and contrasts in the lines which follow, the famous *discurso de Casilda*, but the basic thematic opposition of the play is eloquently condensed in the first word of Casilda's speech. Again, Lope would have been able to count on this being effective because he could reasonably expect that most, if not all, of the members of the audience would have heard, maybe even sung, the *romance* "*Caballero de lejas tierras*", and that on hearing Lope's variant, each listener would simultaneously recall the traditional version. The two terms, *caballero* and *labrador*, would resonate juxtaposed in the mind of each, and each would thus collaborate with him to give the line its full, rich meaning. Finally, the equation of the two opposing terms in the figure of

<sup>11</sup> In *Los comendadores de Córdoba*, for example, two verses of the *romance* of *La Adúltera* foreshadow the death of doña Beatriz at the hands of her husband, the Veinticuatro de Córdoba. In Act I of *Peribáñez*, when the *labrador* Bartolo curses the bull which has caused the Comendador's fall, he does so in a *romance* reminiscent of lines from *La jura de Santa Gadea* (*Primavera*, 52). His words anticipate don Fadrique's death at the hands of Peribáñez.

<sup>12</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> See E.M. Wilson, "Images et Structure dans *Peribáñez*," *BHi*, LI (1949), pp. 125-159, reprinted in Spanish in Gatti, pp. 50-90. For Wilson, the play is essentially about "las relaciones entre las clases sociales." In this fundamental article, he demonstrated that the conflict between Peribáñez and the Comendador manifests itself through imagery and language, which reflect the social conditions and "world views" of the two protagonists.

The question of the role of social class and class conflict in the *comedia* has received extensive treatment in recent years; in addition to Salomon and Wilson, see, for example, J.A. Maravall, *Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca* (Madrid: Seminarios y Ediciones, S.A., 1972), and J.M. Díez Borque, *Sociología de la comedia española del siglo XVII* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1976). Díez Borque's earlier monograph, *Aspectos de la oposición "caballero-pastor" en el primer teatro castellano* (Institut d'Etudes Ibériques et Ibéro-Américaines de l'Université de Bordeaux, 1970, 21 pp.), deals with the opposition *caballero-labrador* in sixteenth-century plays by Lucas Fernández, Juan del Encina and Gil Vicente. For another crucial aspect of the question which appears in the play—the existential conflict between castes (*labrador-cristiano viejo/caballero-hidalgo*)—see A. Castro, *De la edad conflictiva* (Madrid: Taurus, 1961) and J.H. Silverman, "Los *hidalgos cansados* de Lope de Vega," in D. Kossoff and J. Amor y Vázquez, eds., *Homenaje a William L. Fichter* (Madrid: Castalia, 1971), pp. 693-711.

the Comendador (he is, as the ballad line suggests, a *caballero-labrador*) calls attention to the fact that he is a problematical and disturbing element in a society in which individual behavior is expected to conform to certain rules and is predicated upon class and one's origins. Casilda, in the first line of her *discurso*, registers the confusion of things as they are for the moment; in succeeding lines, as we shall see, she indicates in words and behavior the way things ought to be.<sup>14</sup>

Despite his efforts at dissimulation, Don Fadrique's *capa guarnecida* reveals his identity, at least to the real *segadores* in the courtyard, who witness the attempted seduction.

Llorente.	¡Hola, Mendo!
Mendo.	¿Qué hay, Llorente?
Llorente.	En casa anda gente.
Mendo.	¿Gente?
	que lo temí te confieso.
	¿Así se guarda el decoro
	a Peribáñez?
Llorente.	No sé.
	Sé que no es gente de a pie.
Mendo.	¿Cómo?
Llorente.	Trae capa con oro.
Mendo.	¿Con oro? Mátenme aquí
	si no es el Comendador. <sup>15</sup>

It is not clear whether or not Casilda recognizes him right away, but she addresses him as though he really were a *segador*, using the *tú* form ("Ponte tu tosca antipara..."), reprimanding him for his *malicia*, and instructing him in his duties ("ata las manadas secas/sin maltratar las espigas..."). In the remaining lines of her speech, which develop and elaborate the *caballero-labrador* opposition, she contrasts herself with a hypothetical lady of the court whom the Comendador would surely serve in preference to a simple *villana* ("El Comendador de Ocaña/servirá dama de estima..."). "Labradora en guardar fe," she implicitly rejects the role of the *condesa* in the ballad of the *Adúltera*, and, in the lines of the famous *copla*, sums up her devotion to her husband, asserting that even if it were true that don Fadrique loved her "como a su vida," she still prefers Peribáñez with his "capa la pardilla" to the Comendador, "con su capa guarnecida." The two capes, it hardly needs to be pointed out, represent the respective social classes of the masculine antagonists.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The "hybridization" of the Comendador extends to other characters as well, most notably Peribáñez. Wilson ("Images et Structure...") points out the elevation of style distinguishable in Peribáñez' speech after he is made captain by the Comendador. Peribáñez becomes a *labrador caballerizado*, as a consequence of the Comendador's becoming *labradorizado*. Reflecting and enhancing this confusion of social natures, the bull imagery at times seems to apply to Peribáñez and at times to the Comendador.

<sup>15</sup> *Acad.* X, 127a.

<sup>16</sup> "Frente al amor cortesano, el amor rústico hace valer uno de sus rasgos peculiares: una fidelidad

Frustrated by Casilda's immovability, don Fadrique changes tactics. He ceases addressing her as *señora*, reveals his identity—like the failed suitor-husband of the *romance*—, and tries to entice her with the offer of rich gifts.

Quedo, señora... ¡Señora!  
Casilda, amores, Casilda,  
yo soy el Comendador;  
abridme, por vuestra vida.  
Mirad que tengo que daros  
dos sartas de perlas finas  
y una cadena esmaltada  
de más peso que la mía.<sup>17</sup>

Casilda not only refuses to yield to the Comendador's gold and pearls, but turns away from him as her interlocutor, addressing her remaining words to the *segadores* who have been feigning sleep during the conversation between the two of them. Having already given the Comendador a lecture on the rules of proper social interaction ("El Comendador de Ocaña/servirá dama de estima"), Casilda reinforces the lesson with a counter-offer of her own, of value only to someone who shares legitimately in Peribáñez' world: to the worker who cuts and ties the most wheat during the day, Casilda promises to give Peribáñez' large hat ("que al que a la tarde viniere/con más manadas cogidas,/le mando el sombrero grande/con que va Pedro a las viñas").<sup>18</sup>

In short, the allusion to the ballad of the *Esposa fiel* in the first line of Casilda's response, in addition to foreshadowing the outcome of the Comendador's attempt at seduction, signals the beginning of a long passage (*el discurso de Casilda*)—also in *romance* meter—in which the basic thematic opposition of the play, condensed in the first word (*Labrador/Caballero*), is developed and brought to a temporary resolution with her rebuff of the Comendador. In this scene, perhaps more than anywhere else in the play, poetic and thematic structure are unified.

Of the two *romance* texts, there is no doubt that the one with the clearest relationship to the thematic structure of the play, is *La esposa fiel*. At the same time, it is evident that Lope had the *Adúltera* in mind as well when he was writing the play. *La adúltera* is a *romance* which Lope knew well, probably in more than one variant, for he used it on at least three other occasions: in *Los comendadores de Córdoba* (1598?), and in both versions of *La locura por la honra*, the *comedia* (1610-12) and the *auto sacramental* (n.d.). In *Peribáñez*, it initiates the ballad-dialogue between Casilda and the

a toda prueba.... Un romance de Vélez distingue así las dos cualidades más deseadas de la amada: 'cortesana en el aseo/labradora en guardar fe.' (Aubrun y Montesinos, p. 32.)

See Díez Borque, *Aspectos...*, pp. 2-3, for a "consideración jerárquico del vestido".

<sup>17</sup> *Acad.* X, p. 178b.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Comendador, and casts them in the roles they will fulfill as the play unfolds. Just as *La esposa fiel* may be said to be Casilda's *romance*, the *Adúltera* (or *Adúltero castigado*) is the Comendador's *romance*; all its tragic implications are visited upon him at the play's conclusion. In a sense, too, it functions as a shadow-text, for its themes of infidelity, cuckoldry, honor and death are in fact present from the opening scenes of the play, as if in preparation for the initial appearance of the Comendador, and especially in connection with the complex symbolism surrounding the bull, cause of the Comendador's fall. The *romance* of the *Adúltera*, with its open ending, its moral lesson, its hint of violence and suggestion of the honor theme, functions inferentially, just at and under the surface, as the spectre of what might have been, had Casilda's response and Peribáñez' faith been otherwise. The allusion to *La esposa fiel* counterbalances the expectations set in motion by the allusion to *La adúltera*, and permits the audience to anticipate, correctly (and not surprisingly, given Lope's preference for happy endings wherever possible), that Peribáñez and Casilda will survive together the crisis which threatens to destroy their happiness.

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