

JUAN DEL ENCINA'S *REPRESENTACION A LA PASION*: SECULAR HARMONY THROUGH CHRIST'S REDEMPTION

In his review of J. Richard Andrew's invaluable monograph on Juan del Encina, Stephen Gilman pondered the Salamancan's inability to disentangle himself sufficiently from autobiographical matters to create a thoroughly successful work of art: "Precisely because Encina could not rid himself of the immediate concern of his topical relationship with his patrons, because he seems to have been chained biographically to a circumstance of commonplaces, his failure was inevitable."¹ In this sense, Encina's Easter plays represent an intriguing anomaly. They are the only two plays of the eight published in the *Cancionero* of 1496 in which the comic shepherd with his uncouth speech and manners does not appear. One significant result of the absence of the pastoral in these plays is the consequent absence of Encina's self-identification with the shepherd figure. The problematic levels of complexity inevitably introduced by Encina's autobiographical manipulation of the shepherd are missing in the Easter plays, which offer a particularly lucid expression of certain strains of thought in Encina's writing, unencumbered by blatant attempts to advance personal interests.

Américo Castro was the first to relate the theater of Encina to messianic currents, in the original 1949 edition of *Aspectos del vivir hispánico*.² According to Castro, Encina's first Christmas play captures the peculiar and not entirely orthodox fusion of Christian redemption and secular liberty which forms the principal nexus of the messianic feeling near the end of the fifteenth century (p. 29). Sixteen years later, in "*La Celestina*" como contienda literaria, Castro emphasized Encina's possible *converso* origin as the key to his messianism, suggesting that the Salamancan's theater was motivated by his "ansia por suprimir el conflicto religioso-social entre los viejos y nuevos cristianos."³ Juan Carlos Temprano, following Castro's lead, finds the clearest expression of Encina's messianism in the Christmas and Easter plays in the *Cancionero* of 1496, which put forth the

¹ *Romanic Review* (1960), 278.

² (Santiago de Chile: Cruz del Sur), p. 29.

³ (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1965), p. 72.

idea that all men are equal, since they have been redeemed by Christ's blood, regardless of caste or social position.⁴

To fully appreciate Encina's treatment of the Passion, it is helpful to review the spiritual climate in which he was writing and the evolution of attitudes towards the Passion in the last decades of the fifteenth and first decades of the sixteenth centuries. Marcel Bataillon and Américo Castro have amply documented the new spirituality of the epoch, with its growing taste for imaginative meditation, ardent spiritual devotion, and generally more interior manifestations of religion.⁵ Certain aspects of Encina's "Representación a la pasión" recall the extremely popular devotional literature circulating around this time. Manuals such as the Carthusian's *Vita Christi*, translated into Castilian, invited readers to contemplate the events of Christ's life, including the Passion. The goal of this kind of contemplation was to reach the heart by way of the imagination, if need be through the use of external aids such as the imagery of the Passion as depicted in traditional iconography. The widely read *Passión trobada* by Diego de San Pedro was one of the earliest literary manifestations in Castilian of the new spirituality based on the return to the ideals of early Christianity through Evangelical texts. Written in the 1470's and published in 1492,⁶ this long narrative poem was designed to "provocar a más devoción a los que la leyeren y oyeren" and relies heavily on meditative techniques (p. 20). Elaborating on the sparse narrative of the Evangelists, Diego de San Pedro frequently calls upon his readers to "contemplate" or "meditate" on Christ's suffering.

The new spirituality of the last decades of the fifteenth century anticipates the currents of Illuminism and Erasmism of the early sixteenth century. According to Bataillon, the *alumbrados* continued the movement inward, fusing the stress on interior religiosity with an optimistic feeling of grace and confidence in a God of peace and joy (p. 175). But the *alumbrados* differ on one important point from the proponents of the earlier movements: they consistently turn their backs on devotional practices which evoke the suffering of Christ. Erasmus and Spanish Illuminists are in perfect accord on this matter from the year 1523. For these thinkers, the excessive dwelling on the suffering humanity of Christ can act as an obstacle to the apprehension of the true spirit and meaning of the Passion: the joyful regeneration and transformation of the soul. This particular spirituality, however, never ceased to represent the thinking of a minority of the population and was fiercely persecuted in the 1530's. Already in 1525,

⁴ *Móviles y metas en la poesía pastoril de Juan del Encina* (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, Publicaciones de Archivum, 1975), p. 59.

⁵ Castro, "Lo hispánico y el erasmismo," *NRFH* (1940), 1-34. My discussion of the new spirituality is based on Bataillon's study of the earliest phases of Spanish Erasmism in *Erasmus y España*, trans. A. Alatorre (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1950).

⁶ See the Introduction to *Diego de San Pedro. Obras completas, III. Poesías*, eds. D.S. Severin and K. Whinnom (Madrid: Castalia, 1979), p. 11.

the tendency of the *alumbrados* to rejoice in the Passion is denounced among the 48 propositions of the Inquisitorial Edict in Toledo.

These two visions of the Passion—one concentrating on the suffering humanity of Christ, the other celebrating the joy of redemption—have clear social ramifications in late fifteenth-century Castile. Dwelling on the physical details of the Passion tends to lead to virulent denunciations of the Jews as murderers of Christ, an attitude which fueled caste conflict between *conversos* and Old Christians. Keith Whinnom remarks that the *Pasión trovada*'s obsession with the horrifying details of Christ's torture and death and "total entrega emocional" are far from the Evangelists' spirit, in spite of the close poetic rendition of canonical passages: "En toda la *Pasión trovada* no hay ni un momento de júbilo o alegría; todo es dolor, angustia, horror y crueldad, gemidos y lloros."⁷ The vision of the Passion which emphasizes the divinity of Christ and the joy of redemption eases social tension by shifting the "blame" for the Crucifixion away from the Jews to original sin, which was after all a *felix culpa* since it brought about salvation. An equally important social implication of this way of looking at the Passion is the collective sharing in the benefit of salvation, regardless of caste. Bataillon has pointed out the prominent role of *conversos* in the Illuminist movement (p. 179). This idealistic message of communal harmony and universal brotherhood must have been extremely gratifying to those who lived the daily strife of Christian Spain.

Diego de San Pedro's *Pasión trovada* and the *alumbrados*' joyful vision of redemption represent the two extreme poles of the spectrum of attitudes towards the Passion. These different attitudes did not necessarily succeed one another chronologically but co-existed in Castilian society. The "Auto de la Pasión" by Encina's contemporary Lucas Fernández, published in 1514 but probably composed around the turn of the century,⁸ begins after the Crucifixion and like the *Pasión trovada* ends before the Resurrection. The play's intense lyricism is concentrated on the anguishing features of the Passion and vengeful diatribes against the Jews. Encina's "Representación a la pasión," written around 1496, stands midway between the two poles of this spectrum. This is not surprising in the work of a complex man who consistently combines the old and the new in unique and at times contradictory ways. The play's visual climax is the display of Veronica's veil, which the other characters are invited to "contemplate"; the description of Christ's suffering is linked to attacks on the Jews. Nevertheless, the overall emphasis of the play is on the divinity of Christ, the meaning of the Passion and the joy of redemption. In his first Easter play Encina dramatizes different attitudes towards the Passion; Veronica with her veil does not stand for the only way of looking at the event. She is one character,

⁷ Introduction to *Diego de San Pedro*, III, pp. 31 and 35.

⁸ John Lihani, *Lucas Fernández* (New York: Twayne's World Authors Series, 1973), pp. 56-57.

interacting with others who present a different view. The play's linear structure comprises a process of rhetorical persuasion which ultimately communicates the joyful interpretation of the Passion.

The text has three moments or parts: the encounter of two hermits on the road to the Holy Sepulchre, the meeting of these two with Veronica at the tomb, and the appearance of the angel whose tidings of resurrection are celebrated in the final *villancico*. The first part begins with greetings: "¡Deo gracias, padre onrrado! / Por siempre, hijo."⁹ Some characterization is inherent in the words "padre" and "hijo" and the opposition between youth and age is reinforced by the son's reference to the father's appearance: "con tus canas, ya cansado" (p. 122). A series of rapid questions by the son and answers by the father conveys the essential information concerning Christ's crucifixion and death. Encina takes pains to situate the play in the time and place of the Passion, suggesting that the performance may have occurred on Good Friday: "Y dime, ¿cuándo fue? / ...Dígame por cierto que oy. / ¿Oy, en este día? / Sí" (p. 124).

The underlying purpose of the play's first part goes beyond setting the scene, the time and the introduction of characters; it also introduces a certain attitude towards the Passion. In his monograph on Encina, Andrews has provided a perceptive analysis of the Salamancan's use of theater for rhetorical persuasion.¹⁰ In his first eclogue, Encina created a shepherd figure who changes others' values and attitudes. In the "Representación a la pasión" this figure is the father. There is an emphasis on age versus youth which Encina has taken care to formulate in a generational relationship, suppressing individual names and referring to his characters generically as "father" and "son." The son's initial greeting reflects the respect and honor accorded to those who have lived longer and have supposedly acquired wisdom through experience. Encina underscores the educative process by which one generation hands down accumulated knowledge to the next.¹¹ It is the father who formulates the "correct" attitude towards the Passion not ten lines into the play. In response to the son's question, "¿Por qué padeció?" the father declares, "Por nos, / por pagar nuestra maldad" (p. 122), a statement which transcends the historical and social boundaries of Christ's life on earth by focusing on the redemption of original sin. He does not individualize evil as Adam and Eve's sin, but rather generalizes the fault to "our" fault, the sins of all of us. The son is not immediately convinced, preferring to doubt the reality of the Crucifixion ("¿Y es verdad?"), and is persuaded only after the father's second

⁹ Juan del Encina. *Obras dramáticas, I (Cancionero de 1496)*, ed. R. Gimeno (Madrid: Ediciones Istmo, 1975), p. 122. All quotes are from this edition. All underlining is mine.

¹⁰ Juan del Encina. *Prometheus in Search of Prestige* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, Vol. 53, 1959).

¹¹ See Georges Cirot's "Le théâtre religieux d'Encina," *Bulletin Hispanique*, 43, No. 1 (1941), 5-35 and "A propos d'Encina. Coup d'oeil sur notre vieux drame religieux," *Bulletin Hispanique*, 43, No. 2 (1941), 123-153, for a positive evaluation of Encina's use of characters taken from his imagination.

formulation of the mystery of salvation (“pues que tan caro le cuesta,/nuestra alma quiera salvar”): “Soy contento./Pues fue por nuestro pecado,/mostremos gran sentimiento” (p. 125). Once they arrive at the tomb, the father ends the first moment of the play with yet another expression of the same fundamental idea: “¡Cómo el Criador padece/por salvar la criatura!” (p. 126). Through repetition (4 times in 91 lines) and through a process in which others are brought to share in the same view, the suffering humanity of Christ has been carefully placed in the larger context of redemption.

The first moment of the play emphasizes that Christ died to save all sinners and stresses his divinity, for example, the father's reference to the “Verbo divino” (p. 123). The description of the Passion in this part is spare, reduced to a mere timetable in one instance (p. 124) and referred to poetically in another: the road to the Sepulchre is presented metaphorically as the trail of blood left by Christ carrying the cross (p. 123). The lengthiest passage describes the trembling of the earth and other wonders accompanying the death of Christ which call attention to his transcendent nature.

The second moment of the play presents the physical details of Christ's suffering, diverting attention to the humanity of Christ and the grief of the Virgin, away from the redemption's ultimate benefit, and inspiring un-Christian hatred of the Jews. After the father's gentle emphasis on salvation, the tone of Veronica's first speech seems jarring and accusative. She reproaches them for coming too late to witness Christ's torments and is quick to point the finger at the Jews: “Que desde muy gran mañana/andavan ya desvelados/estos judíos malvados/por matrale con gran gana” (p. 127). This emphasis on Christ's suffering laying the blame on the Jews provokes a cry of pain from the father, who hastens to correct her: “¡Ay, hermana,/muere por nuestros pecados/nuestra vida soberana!” (p. 127). Like the son, she is not completely swayed the first time. In her next speech Veronica struggles to integrate the father's vision (“...qué gran lástima de ver/tan gran señor padecer/*por dexar sus servos sanos!*/Pies y manos/clavados, sin merecer,*por salud de los humanos*”), but her imaginative recreation of the details of the Passion causes her to lapse once more in a condemnation of “aquella gente cruel” (p. 127). This time it is the son who corrects her, showing that he has by now internalized the lesson of the father: “Pues que por salvar la gente/padeció tantas passiones,/sientan nuestros coragones/lo que por nosotros siente” (pp. 127-128). From this point on, Veronica does not attack the Jews, but as if some discharge of rancor is deemed necessary, her diatribe against the isolated figure of Judas is tacitly accepted by the father, who echoes her sentiments in an outburst of his own: “¡O, Judas, Judas maldito,/malvado, falso, traydor...” (p. 128).

Veronica proceeds to tell how Christ left the imprint of his face on her veil, which she offers to the father and son for “contemplation”: “su pasión apassionada/aquí la contemplaréys” (p. 130). The dialogue generated by the contemplation of the veil begins on a high note, the father and son exalting the glory of such a gift and exhorting each other to serve the

Redeemer. But when Veronica calls attention once again to Christ's physical suffering, unmitigated by metaphor or symbol ("En su pasión tan mortal/podéys ver muy bien, hermanos,/si fueron los miembros sanos/yendo la cabeça tal") both father and son lash out at the Jews, though their respective outbursts reveal their different stages of evolution. The father, generalizing from his former critical stance towards Judas to the whole nation of Jews, still retains the idea of collective guilt: "*Nuestro mal/traxo su cuerpo a las manos/de aquella gente infernal*" (p. 131). The son, more recently converted to such ideas, forgets them more easily. His outburst is more explicit and impassioned: "*¡Pueblo judayco malvado,/traspasador de la ley!/¡Matar a su propio rey,/aviendo de ser onrrado/y adorado!*" (p. 131). This scene captures the struggle between the two ways of looking at the Passion which co-exist in the characters' experience. It is clear that the contemplation of the images of the Passion, vigorously eschewed by Spanish Erasmists, leads to sorrow and anti-Semitic anger. Such a vision of the Passion fed the flame of caste conflict in Castilian society. It is equally clear which version of the Passion imposes itself by the end of the play.

After Veronica turns from the suffering of Christ to describe that of the Virgin, the father explicitly directs attention away from the purely human sorrow of the *Planctus* tradition back to Christ: "En el hijo contemplemos./Dexa ya la madre triste" (p. 132). In his contemplation of the Son, the father concentrates on the meaning of the Passion ("Contemplemos la umildad/de aqueste manso cordero"), entering simultaneously the world of abstraction ("umildad") and metaphor ("cordero") as he points out the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrifice. At this moment the divinity of Christ is affirmed in the unity of one God: "hijo de Dios verdadero,/camino, vida y verdad/y bondad,/con el padre, por entero,/una mesma voluntad" (p. 132).

At the height of devotion inspired by contemplation of the Son, the angel appears for the last moment of the play before the *villancico*, announcing the Resurrection and the mystery of redemption. Proclaiming that Christ died to save the world from sin, the angel refers to Adam: "y pagó/Cristo, nuestro Adán segundo,/lo que el primero pecó" (p. 134). Adam is not singled out to carry the blame for Christ's death; the angel characterizes Adam's sin as the *felix culpa* which brought about the redemption: "¡O, qué primer pecador!/¡Culpa bien aventurada/que para ser desculpada/merció tal Redentor..." (p. 134). The major thrust of the angel's speech is the transformation of sorrow into the joy of resurrection and redemption. The celestial and earthly "plazer" promised by the angel is blended with the blessing of peace which ends the speech: "Andad en paz, mis hermanos" (p. 135). This vision of peace and brotherhood balances the treacherous kiss of peace of Judas, evoked earlier in the play: "Paz le dio/para que le conociese/la gente que le prendió" (p. 128). The collective sharing in the joy of salvation is expressed in the angel's message to all believers: "Crean *todos* ya conmigo/su resurrección sagrada"; "Y avremos

todos plazer" (p. 135). The *villancico* summarizes the central theme: "Esta tristura y pesar/en plazer se ha de tornar" (p. 135). The last stanza highlights the key concepts in this optimistic vision: "Pongamos nuestra esperanza/en la bienaventuranca,/pues que Cristo nos la alcança/muriendo por nos salvar" (p. 136).

In his manipulation of character and linear development of the action, Encina carries out a strategy of rhetorical persuasion which communicates the true meaning of the Passion. The father is the prime mover who sets the process in motion. He is lent authority by his age, symbolized in his status of "father." It is not accidental that Encina places such emphasis on Christ as Son of the Father instead of son of Mary in the crucial contemplation preceding the appearance of the angel. While this passage stresses the divinity of Christ, it also functions on a rhetorical level. The Father/Son relationship, writ large, shores up the father/son relationship on the level of the characters: "Padre y hijo en un querer,/un mesmo consentimiento;/que el paterno mandamiento/es al hijo obedecer" (pp. 132-133). This emphasis on paternal authority aids the acceptance of the father's vision of the Passion. Andrews has shown how in his first two eclogues Encina enhances his own prestige with images which operate both on human and divine levels (p. 119). Here, this technique is employed to enhance the prestige of the father, paving the way for the characters' and audience's acceptance of his point of view.¹²

The peculiar resonance of the "Representación a la pasión" embraces personal and social concerns as well as religious attitudes. In his treatment of the Passion, Encina touches the wound in Spanish society, namely the difficult position of the *converso*. The play encompasses two perspectives: one treats the Passion as a crime and condemns the Jews as the hateful perpetrators; the other emphasizes the collective sharing in original sin and joyous salvation for Jews and Christians alike. According to Ana María Rambaldo, Encina's treatment of such themes amounts to a conciliatory argument for the pardon and acceptance of New Christians.¹³ She places Encina in the tradition of apologist *conversos* whose writings during the third quarter of the fifteenth century defend the rights of New Christians (pp. 25-26). Among the arguments mobilized by the critics of the *estatutos de limpieza*, the appeal for the reconciliation of Old and New Christians through the grace of Christ figures prominently.¹⁴ In the last decade of the fifteenth century, with the constant threat of Inquisitorial investigation and recent horrific reminders of its efficiency, *converso* apologists were obliged to proceed with extreme caution. Rambaldo points out a duality in

¹² Henry W. Sullivan suggests that Encina's treatment of the Father/Son relationship here reveals "an unusually deep reverence toward figures in authority" in *Juan del Encina* (Boston: Twayne's World Authors Series, 1976), p. 55.

¹³ *El Cancionero de Juan del Encina dentro de su ámbito histórico y literario* (Santa Fe, Argentina: Editorial Castellvi, 1972), p. 24.

¹⁴ See Temprano, pp. 46-47.

Encina's writing which was characteristic of many in this period: on one hand, they express approval of the expulsion of the Jews and the work of the Inquisition (p. 27); on the other, symbolic or veiled appeals for unity among Christians, as in Encina's Christmas play and here in his Passion play.¹⁵

This duality engendered by the fear of persecution may help explain the co-existence of differing attitudes towards the Passion in Encina's first Easter play. The display of Veronica's veil and the attacks on the Jews provoked by the description of Christ's suffering may have functioned as a public demonstration of Encina's adherence to orthodox forms of Christianity.¹⁶ On one level he provides his audience with the view of the Passion that was expected of him. Although the Salamancan does present the attitude which nourished the desire for revenge against the social group to which he may have belonged, Encina balances it against the joyful message of redemption. The celebrative note on which the play closes is striking, especially if it was performed on Good Friday.¹⁷ One cannot help but recall that the joyous vision of the Passion would be perceived as heretical as early as 1525; Encina allows for the expression of sorrow while stressing the transformation of grief into joy. If the use of the images of the Passion to inspire "contemplation" links this Passion play to the devotional literature of the last decades of the fifteenth century, the tone of the piece as a whole is closer to the optimistic feeling of grace and confidence in a God of peace and joy characteristic of Spanish Illuminism. In Encina's Passion play this buoyant optimism is closely allied with the messianic vision of imminent social equality and harmony which flourished in the reign of the Catholic Monarchs. With the "Representación a la pasión" Encina offers an alternative to social strife made possible through the grace of Christ, captured in the angel's message of peace, joy and universal brotherhood on earth.

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¹⁵ Andrews pointed out this duality in Encina in his monograph, pp. 173-174, n. 9.

¹⁶ In her edition of the *Passión trobada*, Dorothy Severin underlines the weight of medieval convention in this treatment of the Passion, p. 133, n. 67.

¹⁷ A comparison with Fernández' "Auto de la pasión," which like Encina's Passion play was probably performed on Good Friday, helps us appreciate Encina's emphasis on the positive aspects of the Passion and the restraint exercised in his attacks on the Jews. See Lihani's discussion of the "Auto" in his monograph, already cited.