

Lope de Vega.  
*Comedias Parte XVII.*  
 Edición crítica de Prolope, coordinación  
 de Daniele Crivellari y Eugenio Maggi.

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**IN ONE OF THE MANY LOAS COLLECTED** in his *El viaje entretenido* (1603), the Spanish poet Agustín de Rojas Villandrando describes his compatriot Lope de Vega as “el Apolo de nuestros poetas,” who had written “tantas farsas por momentos, / y todas ellas tan buenas, / que ni yo sabré contarlas, / ni hombre humano encarecerlas” (edited by Jean Pierre Resson, 2nd ed., Castalia, 1995, p. 155). The exact number of plays that Lope de Vega wrote remains uncertain to this day: at one point he himself humbly claimed to have penned over fifteen hundred, although scholars nowadays believe it was probably closer to eight hundred. Many of them were published in large weighty anthologies; others were printed and sold individually as single plays; many others were never printed at all. In any case, Rojas’s words ring true: they are good, and they are countless. It is precisely because of this condition that the student of Spanish Golden Age drama should rejoice to hear that the Prolope research group has released its new critical edition of the *Comedias de Lope de Vega. Parte XVII*. As is well known, at a certain point Lope decided to start reacquiring the manuscripts of his many plays in order to collect and print them himself instead of letting others reap the benefits of his playwriting success. For the most part, he did so in large twelve-play compilations known as *partes*, the most common publication format for comedias in Spain throughout his lifetime. The seventeenth *parte* out of an eventual twenty-five was first printed in Madrid in 1621, in the midst of a particularly prolific moment in the dramatist’s publishing career. Its first modern critical edition appears almost four hundred years later, overseen by its coordinators Daniele Crivellari and Eugenio Maggi, in a new and elegant case containing two volumes of six comedias and approximately a thousand pages each. The twelve plays featured in this collection are the following: in volume 1, *Con su pan se lo coma* (ed. Crivellari); *Quien más no puede* (ed. Marco Presotto);

*El soldado amante* (ed. Gonzalo Pontón); *Muertos vivos* (eds. Luciana Gentilli y Tiziana Pucciarelli); *El primer rey de Castilla* (ed. Adrián J. Sáez); *El domine Lucas* (ed. Miguel Marón García-Bermejo Giner); and in volume 2, *Lucinda perseguida* (ed. Esther Borrego Gutiérrez); *El ruiñeñor de Sevilla* (ed. Maggi); *El sol parado* (ed. Fernando Plata); *La madre de la mejor* (ed. Elveizo Canonica); *Jorge toledano* (ed. Juan Manuel Escudero Baztán); *El hidalgo Bencerraje* (ed. Ilaria Resta).

As the coordinators note in their introduction at the beginning of volume 1, the underlying principle governing all of Lope's *partes*, this one included, is that of *varietas* (7). It is difficult to imagine that the playwright chose to publish these twelve plays together for their coherence; to the contrary, they single-handedly capture the impressive diversity of the eclectic *comedia nueva*. That said, the editors have been able to identify a few common threads that some of these comedias share. The most prominent is that most of the plays belong to Lope's early playwriting years of the 1590s and 1600s. This, Lope claims in his address to the reader (64), is due to his having recovered the playscripts only after the *autores de comedias* who originally purchased them had either retired or passed away. According to the editors, the dramatist's youth may account for the somewhat anarchic quality and uneven structure of many of these works. As Marón García-Bermejo Giner states in the case of *El domine Lucas*, they lack "la definición de rasgos de las comedias posteriores" (980). There are other commonalities as well: some of them share a medieval Spanish setting, others foster the values of rustic life over those of city and court, and many feature the conventional trope of female characters disguised as men. These occasional patches of common ground are nevertheless insufficient to make the collection work tightly as a unit (which was undoubtedly never the point of the *parte*, either for Lope or for his twenty-first-century editors). Indeed, precisely because of the piecemeal nature of the compendium, Prolope's long-standing policy of having individual editors and introductions for each of the twelve comedias is clearly the most effective approach.

Each *comedia* is presented in the same way, with an opening introduction written by its specific editor, followed by the play itself, and capped off with a list of textual variants and other miscellaneous back matter content when appropriate. The introductions also follow a recognizable pattern. The opening pages locate the play within Lope's corpus, survey the play's performance history during the author's own lifetime, and offer some very brief initial thoughts on the play's general features and themes. On average this takes up no more than six or seven pages, with some notable exceptions: Borrego's introduction to *Lucinda Perseguida*, Sáez's analysis of Lope's historical playwriting that prefaces *El primer rey de Castilla*, and Marón García-Bermejo's study of sources and thematic relations for *El Dómine Lucas*. The primary emphasis of the introductions is normally on the provision of a meticulous description of the play's history on the page, in which the editor details the differences among the surviving manuscripts, *partes*, and modern editions consulted. Depending on how many variant texts of the play survive, this section ranges up to forty-two pages, a testament to Prolope and its editors' commitment to bibliographic analysis. Finally, the introduction ends with a three-page summary of the plot divided into *jornadas*, along with the

play's polymetric breakdown. Students of the Spanish Golden Age will be very grateful for all these aids, which help us manage the embarrassment of riches that is Lope's dramatic legacy. As Alberto Blecuá, director of Prolope, acknowledges in his foreword, "la abundancia de Lope abrumba" (n.p.).

As for the plays themselves, none of the comedias collected in this *parte* belong to the canon of Lope's most celebrated, performed, or studied dramatic works. Out of the twelve, the one I personally found most interesting was *El ruiseñor de Sevilla*. Adapted from the fourth novella of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, *El ruiseñor* is a screwball *comedia de enredo* that bears certain stylistic similarities with Tirso de Molina's much better-known *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, especially with regard to its two lead female characters. Moreover, in a time in which comparative studies between Golden Age Spanish and Elizabethan English theater are on the rise, Lisarda's character arc and development in *El ruiseñor* calls for a tête-à-tête between her and similar heroines such as Viola and Rosalind from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It*, respectively. Another text that caught my attention was *Jorge Toledano*, a captivity play with unconventional resolution—the protagonist finds out at the end of the play that his love interest is in fact his sister—even if it is technically satisfactory within the framework of *comedia nueva* expectations. However, beyond these two plays one would find it understandable if the rest of this *parte*'s comedias remain relatively unknown to the nonspecialist reader, as they are teeming with the types of structural mistakes and inconsistencies one has come to expect from Lope's earlier work. Pointing this out is not meant to take away from the volume's worth; quite the opposite, precisely because these plays have commanded so little attention, were it not for Prolope's goal "to accomplish the critical edition of Lope de Vega's complete theatre" (prolope.uab.cat), we likely would never have had the opportunity to work with and enjoy such high-caliber renditions of these comedias.

The *Parte 17* of Lope de Vega's plays, following the example of previous Prolope publications, is without a doubt an exercise in the finest tradition of book-history scholarship. As indicated above, most of the editors' labors—above all the plays' introductions and commentaries—focus on this aspect. Thus, these volumes speak to a coterie and not a crowd: they are large (and heavy), sized up and weighed down by their own painstaking bibliographical analysis that probably will interest only a select minority of readers. Yet no professional working on Lope de Vega's theater will wish to forsake this series for any other. Its scrupulous approach and attention to detail allows this collection to bring the plays forward to the twenty-first century without leaving their original context behind. And while each *comedia* has an individual editor with his or her own personal preferences and idiosyncrasies, Prolope's overarching mission and style is blazoned onto every page of the *parte*, which helps create a sense of coherence and cohesion within the vast corpus of Lope's drama that is necessarily absent from individual editions of his plays. The big picture that Prolope paints fits in seamlessly with the growing collection of panoramic achievements in twenty-first century Golden Age scholarship to which this research group unquestionably belongs (I am thinking in particular of ArteLope, the research group DICAT and its database

CATCOM, and other digital instruments with which all the contributors to the *parte* interact constantly and dexterously throughout their editorial efforts). Above all, we all benefit from being able to add the *decimoséptima parte* of Lope de Vega's comedias to our libraries, whether or not we decide to include any of these plays in our personal shortlists of his best works.