

THE RELIGIOUS VERSE OF PEDRO ESPINOSA ¹

Pedro Espinosa, as regards his propensity to the Baroque, marks a definite point of advance in the progression from Herrera to Góngora. Most of his poems on religious subjects — such as the *canCIÓN Al Bautismo de Jesús* and the sonnets dated 1605-15 — conform to type: they have the decorativeness, the brilliance of imagery, the sumptuousness of colour, the preoccupation with every form of light to be found in his verses of secular inspiration. Sometimes he even outdoes these. Nothing that he ever wrote is more advanced in this respect than the sonnet *A la Asunción de la Virgen María* which begins with an exuberance of light and colour — “turquesadas nubes y celajes”, “blancas hachas”, “blancos cirios” — goes on to invoke an Oriental exoticism — “enciensos indios y pebetes sirios” (humeando) “entre amaranto y plateados lirios” — before drawing his final churrigueresque picture of the Virgin, clothed in the sun, with the moon for *chapines* and at her feet adoring seraphim and choirs of angels who sing while Christ — “el Verbo Santo” — seats her at His side. Ornate in a slightly different sense is an ode which leaves the Song of Solomon far behind in its attempt to render full floral honours to a Baroque Christ:

Deste sidonio acanto
y estas del prado estrellas
coronaré las aras de mi amado,
y en sedas de amaranto,
cantuesos y mastranto,
haré cortinas bellas
que a cuanto Mayo brota den cuidado.
Tú, autoridad del prado,
tú, suma de claveles,

¹ The edition of Espinosa quoted throughout this study is *Obras*, ed. Rodríguez Marín, Madrid, 1909.

merecerás las rosas del costado;
 vos, narcisos noveles,
 limitadores de la nieve en ampo,
 iréis de un campo verde a un rojo campo,
 tejiendo en esmeralda
 espléndida guirnalda
 al brocado cabello de mi Cristo².

Even when he is less ornate, the intimate religious themes which from time immemorial have inspired Christian poets seem to make little impression upon him. In a sonnet *Al Santísimo Sacramento* there is conceptism —

Guardan a un señor preso con precetos
 rigurosos los guardas diligentes;
 mas en el pan le esconden los parientes
 un papel y le avisan los secretos —

and, of course, unexceptionable orthodoxy —

Bien que a Cristo no vemos ni sentimos,
 mas la fe certifica con su sello
 que en pan se pasa al alma por la boca³ —

but no emotion and hardly any poetry. Another sonnet, *A Jesucristo en la Cruz*, is, except for one single phrase —

que... te hagas hombre,
 Dios mío, por morir por tu criatura —

completely objective. And so, for page after page, and poem after poem, one could go on.

I have been engaged of late upon a study of the mystical element in those Spanish poets of the sixteenth century to which that much-misused adjective is most generally applied. In almost every instance it has been misapplied. The whole of Lope de Vega's *Rimas sacras*, for example, contain hardly a phrase which, within the strict limits of Catholic tradition, can be described as "mystical", and even Luis de León, who has freely been compared in this respect with San Juan de la Cruz, has left only one poem in which such a comparison has any meaning.

² *Op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

With Espinosa, however, the reader of such poems as I have just quoted is surprised to find as much of the mystical as in fact he does. A closer scrutiny of this ornate, decorative poet will reveal verse in which he discards his technical devices and is admirably simple and sincere. Though simplicity and sincerity are not mysticism, they create an atmosphere in which mysticism flourishes.

Sometimes, as in the sonnet *A la Ascensión del Señor*, we find the two manners in one and the same poem. The "cloud" which, in the Biblical narrative, "received Him out of their sight", has to be a "golden" cloud; and its origin cannot of course be natural: by some strange process it is

engendrada del llanto de tu ausencia.

So much is in harmony with the literary evolution of the day, but the poet also strikes the personal note by his opening words:

Jesús, mi amor...

and, when due homage has been rendered to incipient Gonorism, he banishes his pictures and pours out his soul in a profession of penitence and faith:

Mi corazón se va tras su teroso:
tras Ti se va con alta diligencia,
y yo te sigo en dulce competencia,
con cudiciosa vista y triste lloro.

A similar juxtaposition of the poet's two manners is found in *Soledad de Pedro de Jesús, presbítero*, where, before plunging into a wealth of colour and flower-imagery, he delivers himself of the striking line:

No quiero más que soledad y Cristo,

and proceeds to develop a contrast found, in one form or another, in the works of all devout writers:

¿Qué es esto, Cristo mío? Yo en regalo,
Vos, anegado en un turbión de enojos,
cosido con tres garfios en un palo,
yo buscando lisonjas a mis ojos,
yo en opinión de bueno, y Vos de malo,

yo corona de rosas, Vos de abrojos. . . ?
 Mis pasos recordad: de culpa salga;
 camino os siga; vuestra Cruz me valga ⁴;

In much the same spirit as this poem is a striking *plegaria*, of only five lines, which, with an economy of language rare in Espinosa, establishes a personal relation between the soul and Christ such as any of the mystics could have claimed as his own:

Ausente llamo al que presente adoro:
 concede Tú a las lágrimas que lloro,
 yo, solitario tuyo, en tierra fría,
 dulce Jesús, merezca en mi porfía,
 ciego, a mi Sol; y pobre, a mi Tesoro ⁵.

In the poems addressed to San Ignacio de Loyola at the time of his beatification ⁶ and canonization ⁷ there are suggestions of something more — of a fervent love such as inspires the famous anonymous sonnet *A Cristo crucificado*. But for two reasons they must be largely discounted: first, because they are everywhere overlaid by a characteristically florid art; secondly, because they are partly dependent on the formula *Que Ignacio es ignis* ⁸, and thus the references to fire and heat may be interpreted as excursions in conceptism. The reader must judge from such passages as:

Que del fuego de Dios eres esfera
 cantaré, si esto puede voz alguna,
 cuyas llamas te encienden de manera
 que ardes dentro de l'agua en la laguna ⁹.

¿Cuál ardiente tiro iguala,
 Ignacio, al fuego que te vuela preso,
 entre tu libertad y tu sosiego?
 Tu luz me ofusca ya, en tu mar me anego. . . ¹⁰.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁶ *Al Beato Ignacio de Loyola, Al Beato Padre Ignacio*, *op. cit.*, pp. 45-53. Cf. *Al retrato del Beato Padre Ignacio*, p. 36.

⁷ *A San Ignacio*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-81.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 47. Cf. p. 56.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

¡Oh Ignacio! a la devoción
que os ofrece esta canción,
inclinad el cetro y luz,
y un rayo de ese Jesús
le enviad al corazón¹¹.

One is the more inclined to suspect this kind of fervour because of the numerous artificialities in these poems — the profession of allegiance in the latest of them, for example, which is followed by an almost puerile play upon the title of the Society (*Compañía*) of Jesus:

Sancto Ignacio, Sancto Ignacio,
que a la fe y la caridad
dais un mundo por ciudad,
yo os ofrezco el alma mía;
que cuanto no es Compañía
es desierto y soledad¹².

These strictures, however, cannot be applied to a number of other passages, in some of which we approach very closely to the mystical life. There are, for example, two of the poems curiously termed *Psalmos* — perhaps because the point of departure for each may have been suggested by one of the Psalms of David. In the first of these the poet avows his sincere, personal, ardent desire for God:

Y todo cuanto veo
me dice que te ame
y que en tu amor me inflame;
mas mayor que mi amor es mi deseo¹³.

The starting-point of this *Psalmo* is Psalm XIX, 1 (“The heavens declare the glory of God. . .”) and it is the wonders of Nature (ornately presented, we may be sure) that incite this desire. But they do their work well. Whether the poet be thinking of this life or the next, his cry is always: “Where shall I find Him?”

¿Adónde te escondiste
Amado. . . ?

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹² *Op. cit.*, pp. 53-4.

¹³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 60-1.

Buscando mis amores,
iré...

Thus San Juan de la Cruz. This in Espinosa:

¡Oh Señor! tu presencia, que es mi gloria.
¿En dónde estás, en dónde estás, mi vida?
¿Dónde te hallaré? ¿Dónde te escondes? ¹⁴.

True, it is of vision that he is speaking, not of union:

¡Ay! tu olor me recrea,
sáname tu memoria,
mas no me hartaré hasta que vea ¹⁵.

... Mi alma ...
desfallece de amor y dice a gritos:
“¿Dónde te hallaré, que no le veo,
a Aquél, a Aquél hermoso que deseo?” ¹⁶.

But there are notable similarities with the *Cántico espiritual*, which are so obvious that they need not be insisted upon.

Ven, Señor, que mi alma
de amor está perdida.

Oigo tu voz y cobro nuevo aliento;
mas como no te hallo,
derramo mis querellas por el viento.
... mi alma,
... herida de amores... ¹⁷.

The second *Psalmo* goes farther. It is inspired by a genuinely mystical conception of love. Beginning with an exhortation to the soul to love God, it breaks at once into an apostrophe to the Spouse —

Oh mi Esposo gentil, oh, dulce Esposo ¹⁸ —

to Whom it refers in language probably suggested by the Song of Solomon, though an artist so enamoured of the decorative hardly needed any such suggestions. Here, amid a profusion of

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

images — the fire, the arrow, the wine, etc. — commonly used by the Mystics, come references to the suspension of the faculties:

luego luego
 tu rayo me deshaga.

 El generoso vino...
 robóme los sentidos.

 Ni yo me hallé en mí, ni en mí está l'alma ¹⁹.

and (which is very much more important) to the absorption of Union:

Anégame y escóndeme en tus llamas;
 hazme, Señor, contigo un mismo espíritu.
 Amado, amado mío...

After this, the *Psalmo* goes off, like its predecessor, into the beauties of Nature, though the theme of desire never entirely leaves it, though once more it is desire for vision rather than for union.

... por hallarte, voy perdido.

 solicito
 la dulce vista del esposo ausente.

 Así mi alma, con afecto ardiente,
 desca de hallarte ²⁰.

The final reminiscence of St. Augustine ("Tarde he venido a amarte, etc.") will not be lost on the reader.

There are many more passages — a few of them striking in expression — on love:

Por tu amor me ejecutan las montañas:
 dísteme a mí y a Ti por tantas cosas;
 sólo mi amor me pides,
 y el amor no se paga sólo en rosas ²¹.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 64.

²¹ This characteristically Espinosan expression should not be missed.

Por el amor, no por las obras mides,
 ¡Oh vida de mi alma!
 que tanto mi amor quieres,
 que porque te ame mueres:
 honre la palma de tu amor mi palma,
 pues dentro en mí te has puesto,
 porque te ame, conmigo,
 y perdonas de presto,
 mi Cristo, al enemigo,
 porque no tarde ya en amarte amigo ²².

¿Qué tiene que hacer el alma mía,
 sino en amarte más, y más amarte...? ²³.

Dame el amor, pues quieres ser amado;
 ame yo al que me amó más que a su vida ²⁴.

Mi alma te desea,

Dios de mi corazón, Dios, mi alegría;
 en Ti mi amor se emplea ²⁵.

But Espinosa goes no farther towards the purely mystical than in the few brief passages already quoted. His general position is approximately that of Lope de Vega: deep penitence, ardent love and desires (perhaps only vague desires) for something closer to Christ than the foot of the Cross and the hope of Heaven.

E. ALLISON PEERS.

University of Liverpool.

²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 81-2.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 82.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

²⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 135.