Vélez de Guevara’s *El Caballero del Sol* and Calderón de la Barca’s *El castillo de Lindabridis*

*(A Response to Professor Valbuena Briones)*

*Ruth Lundelius*

The amorous adventures of Febo, “el Caballero del Sol,” hero of Diego Ortúñez’s chivalric novel *El espejo de príncipes y caballeros*, were freely adapted by Vélez de Guevara in his *El Caballero del Sol* and somewhat more faithfully assimilated in Calderón’s *El castillo de Lindabridis*. Actually, events and characters from *El espejo de príncipes y caballeros* were suppressed wholesale in *El Caballero del Sol*, and hardly more than the character of Febo, around whom Vélez’s own rich dramatic inventiveness wove an entirely new plot, remains as a tenuous link between the *comedia* and its distant inspiration. Calderón, on the other hand, has incorporated certain episodes and characters from the original romance: Rosicler, Meridián, Lindabridis, princess of Tartaria, and the Amazon princess Claridiana reappear on Calderón’s stage along with Febo, whose amorous waverings, according to Henry Thomas, follow the tradition of the fickle Galaor.¹ Such differences aside, it is evident that both *comedias* were born of a common literary matrix. That context was the idealized world of the Renaissance chivalric romances. It was the world of heroic ideals—the quest of *fama*, the celebration of courage, and the constancy of pure love—and their often spectacular ritual enactment, as in the pageantry of the joust, the knightly battles for the hands of noble ladies, or the devotion of the knight to his lady. Febo is this ideal knight-chevalier, at least in Vélez’s play, and nowhere more so than in his fidelity to his dead mistress, Sol, despite the enticements of Diana or political pragmatism in the case of the “flamenca hermosa, Margarita,” whom his English family urges him to marry.

Thus, although *El Caballero del Sol* departs almost completely from its source, it is replete with the devices of chivalric romance. To begin with, consider Febo’s monologue relating his lineage: “De ricos, y nobles padres /
heredero nací, y noble / en Londres . . .” (p. 4a). 2 Or consider the elaboration of the divisa of each knight in El Caballero del Sol, a minor genre in itself and an integral formula of chivalric literature—a formula Calderón reduces to ironic parody in El castillo de Lindabridis, where the recitation falls from the lips of the lowly gracioso. The decision to remit the choice of a lady to a duel, Febo’s challenge to fight at sea, the cartel proclaiming his fame, the arrival of Febo to the rescue of Diana after the other knights had abducted her, Paris’s challenge to Febo, the separations and reencounters in the forest—all were motifs Vélez incorporated from the romances of chivalry. Then there are those numerous references to fama, as when we read of Febo:

\[
\begin{align*}
cuyo valor extranjero \\
materia ofrece a la fama \\
discurriendo en esta Nave \\
al mundo.
\end{align*}
\]

(p. 3b)

And again consider Febo’s oath, reminiscent of that of Suero de Quiñones:

\[
\begin{align*}
mantengo . . . \\
desde hoy en cuarenta días \\
en aqueste puesto . . . \\
... que no ha avido \\
ni ávra belleza conforme \\
a la de Sol . . .
\end{align*}
\]

(p. 6b)

Nor was the chivalric element of pageant and spectacle ignored. In both plays, the one a particular, the other a court play, music and extravagant theatrical effects were integral features of their performance. Repeatedly the stage directions called for music, especially with changes of scene, and, in fact, the first part of Act III of El castillo de Lindabridis is a sarao. The Vélez play was first performed on the estate of the Duque de Lerma, where a natural feature, a river running through the estate, was utilized to produce striking scenic effects. 3 Two platforms were constructed projecting from each side of the river; one served for the stage, the other for the spectators. A contemporary, Fernando de Caso, relates that provision was made for a revolving set, since the scenery was said to be “todo tornátil.” Another witness, Pedro Herrera, reports that the stage first represented the facade of a city and “una nave grande y negra, con sus velas, con el Sol por farol,” then a mountain scene with clouds, thunder, lightning, rain, and so on, and finally the facade of a different city. The play opened, Herrera says, with a ship sailing up the river, from which Febo, clad in black velvet, disembarked onto the stage proper. Other more conventional stage machinery was also employed. A
trapdoor was used in the second scene to enable a prince to be engulfed by the earth, while another mechanism allowed another character to fly up to the clouds, and yet a third was swallowed up by a grotto that opened and closed. *El Caballero del Sol* as spectacle is closely related to the later extravaganzas of the court theater. Of course, by the time of *El castillo de Lindabridis*, several decades later, the mechanics of stage spectacle and illusion had been greatly refined.

The stage directions and the reports of contemporary spectators leave no doubt that both authors intended to create a stunning visual and auditory supplement to their own brilliant poetry. Both plays are masterful exercises in imagery and description, mythological reference, and contemporary allusion all cast in the mode of Gongoristic poetry. Calderón’s fondness for classical mythology is well known, but both authors dip into this common heritage to cast an aura of bygone myth, fantasy, and glory around their own creations. Take, for example, the description in *El Caballero del Sol* of Febo as “vn gallardo mancebo ... / como Narciso, el campo crystalino, / dorado, parto de la blanca Aurora” (p. 1a) who has crossed “el azul campo de Neptuno / ... / como Jasón a Colcos passa” (p. 2a) and “mis amores / lleno de más ojos que Argos / Cupido al Cielo ...” (p. 5b). A ship is a “monstruo que la [mar] supo arar,” (p. 21b) and “con intento de roballe / esta Nave, para Toro / desta Europa ...” (p. 23a).

Although it was commonplace in the comedias to compare a beautiful, virtuous woman to the sun, stars, etc., the astral imagery of *El Caballero del Sol* is especially noteworthy; *El castillo de Lindabridis*, too, is replete with solar and astral images. Naturally, a goodly amount of imagery plays on the name of Sol. Febo’s ship, for instance, “tiene un Sol por farol,” and of his deceased love Febo says:

\[
\text{... donde el Cielo} \\
\text{cifró en vn Sol muchos Soles.} \\
\text{.........................} \\
\text{como era la novia Sol} \\
\text{hizo fiestas todo el Orbe.} \\
\] (p. 4b)

Elsewhere, Diana is described as: “lloviendo Auroras, y cegando Estrellas / merced haziendo al sol otra mañana” (p. 2b). And stellar imagery is often combined with the chivalric motif of unwavering fidelity in love. Febo, for example, says he will not forget Sol “mientras las Estrellas / dieren luz” (p. 11a). Or, Adonis describes Diana in a chivalresque tone:

\[
\text{No es menester otra espada} \\
\text{para hazer al mundo guerra,} \\
\text{a las Estrellas, al Sol} \\
\]
If both authors and their audiences delighted in these verbal pyrotechnics, they also shared another common taste—a certain enthusiasm for curious dramatic character types: the *mujer esquiva* and the *mujer varonil*. The former, who initially spurns the traditional feminine goals of love and marriage, though in the end she succumbs to love, is illustrated in Diana of *El Caballero del Sol*. The beautiful Lindabridis and Claridiana are Calderón’s versions of the *mujer varonil*, and though they are not averse to love, they do exemplify ambitions and accomplishments which are masculine. The one, “la sin par Lindabridis,” is endowed with the requisites of leadership, that is, expertise “en ciencias, y armas, / sin que ley tan sola olvide / las hembras”; the other, Claridiana, is an Amazon princess who dresses “en traje de hombre” in order to pursue, and then challenge, an erstwhile lover, Febo. As is characteristic of Calderón’s version of these types, we hear much from both these women on the Renaissance ideal of masculine accomplishment—the union of “armas y letras.”

If there is something of the slyly comic, something of repressive ridicule, in Vélez’s portrayal of Diana as a *mujer esquiva*, his talent for unadulterated comedy emerges in the portrayal of Don Roque and his servant, Merlin. In more than one way they are reminiscent of Don Quijote and Sancho or anticipate Don Mendo and Nuño. At once comic and grimly topical, they serve as a mundane counter to the fantasies and absurdities of the chivalric world. Also under the indulgence of humor, Vélez makes himself heard concerning the real world around him. For example, to the question, “En España, ¿qué hay de nuevo?” Don Roque replies:

```
Muchos vsos,
poco amor, mucha ignorancia,
la nobleza desvalida,
y la fortuna muy falsa
con los que más merecemos,
querer la gente ordinaria
igualarse con nosotros. . .
```

Calderón, too, had his *gracioso* who mixed comic relief with realistic, often pointed, commentary, even to the performance of *El castillo de Lindabridis* itself. For example, Malandrín says:

```
Después de la salpicada,
Mil instrumentos of:
```
Like Vélez, Calderón was not hesitant to bring topical allusions into his romance, but in addition he introduced an allegorical dimension into his dramatic rhetoric: the symbolic struggle between evil, lust, and ugliness as opposed to love, virtue, and beauty, with the latter, naturally, triumphant at the close of the play. Chiaroscuro effects and conventional imagery identifying darkness with evil and light with virtue appear early in the play. In the first scene, the Fauno is described as “Compuesto de hombre, de demonio y fiera”; his cave is an “infausta boca,” “cueva oscura,” and “ bóveda oscura, / también a un tiempo muerte y sepultura” (p. 2054b). Incidentally, one also notes the freedom with which the dramatists of the time borrowed either their own or another’s felicitous phraseology. In Calderón the thematic ideals of chivalry—courage, fame, purity, and heroic deeds—are assimilated and transformed into an allegorical contest of good against evil. The contest is embodied in the contrast between the knights’ quest of the heroic virtues and the Fauno, between the dark labyrinthine cave and the radiant, enchanted castle of Lindabridis (“claraboya diáfana del día . . .”), and between the beneficent consequences of virtue and the enslaving, depraving effects of vice. In short, Calderón took elements from the romances of chivalry and fused them with original plot components to create a story centered around Lindabridis’s search for a husband and Claridiana’s pursuit of Febo.

Thus, the commitment of both dramatists to roughly the same world of values can be seen here with unequivocal directness. At the same time these two comedias also manifest the very real differences in dramatic style and sentiment that distinguish the two authors. Vélez, master of brilliant imagery, is the more lyrical of the two; Calderón’s commitment to the gongoristic manner and convoluted symbolism makes for a more labored effect.

But the differences of dramatic style and sentiment should not obscure the very real and deeply rooted appeal of these comedias de caballerías for Spanish audiences of the time. The comedia readily assimilated the structure and ethos of the chivalric romances. In both genres love, justice, honor, and fame prevailed. The fama of the romances was easily transformed into the honor of the comedia. Right triumphed over wrong, harmony and stability were restored, and the eligible couples were married. In short, the comedia de caballerías offered a peculiarly satisfying escape from the grim realities of the moment into the world of heroic romance. This nostalgic look at a lost Golden Age, with its ironic commentary on the glaring decline of present
realities from the idealized ethos of romance, was woven into every phase of both El Caballero del Sol and El castillo de Lindabridis. As escape literature, they reflect back from a less than satisfactory present to a past whose fantastic re-creation embodied virtues and sentiments that were surely appealing to their aristocratic audiences, who, still nominally committed to the chivalric ethos, would have found in them a wistful distraction from their time of troubles. But it seems clear that all classes of Spanish society would have gotten entertaining diversion from these fantastic romances. Such plays were strong agents of communal solidarity and patriotism as well as vehicles for the social identification and reaffirmation of the peculiarly Spanish values of the Counter-Reformation. Consideration of Vélez’s El Caballero del Sol and Calderón’s El castillo de Lindabridis tends to confirm, I think, a developing critical awareness of the complexity and richness of the thematic texture of the Golden Age comedia, of its diversity of inspirational sources, and of the multidimensionality of its audience appeal and social function.

Notes


2 I have used the suelta published by Francisco de Leefdael (Seville, n.d.).


4 Obras completas, ed. Angel Valbuena Briones (Madrid, 1956), II, 2056b.