



CONSTRUCTING POETIC AUTHOR(ITY)S: RENAISSANCE, BARROCO AND ENLIGHTENMENT

IV. AUTOFIGURACIONES

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Lope de Vega: a literary critic in his texts and paratexts

As all enthusiastic Lope scholars know, throughout his exceptional artistic career *El Fénix de los Ingenios* (The Phoenix of Wits) builds up a two-fold image of himself in his texts and paratexts: that of a cultured author worthy of his place in the hall of fame and that of a poetical character, the lover in pain, whose most recurrent and well-known figuration is that of the shepherd Belardo. The former emerges thanks to the publication of his Italian-style books (a pastoral novel, collections of sonnets and miscellany, and epic-narrative poems) topped off with portraits apt to promote the hieratic image of the educated writer for the elite. For the latter, *El Fénix* manages to put together his very own lyrical legend in his dramatic (as well as non-theatrical) works, through the constant literaturization of his agitated private life, privileging what has come to be known as *La Dorotea* theme. His socio-cultural condition as the son of an embroiderer, albeit incompatible with the ambition of joining the aristocracy, by no means prevents him from having a lucid awareness of his own value as an author. The mere fact of playing a leading role in all the main literary wars of the time strengthens this awareness *de facto*. The only thing that never falters for Lope, despite the disappointments and frustrations of his courtly ambitions, is his awareness of being a legend in the flesh, *El Fénix*, *El Monstruo de la Naturaleza* (The Monster of Nature), the sublime poet and playwright acclaimed by all in his own lifetime.

Probing the fissures in his combative persona (as writer and literary critic) brings to light certain contradictions surrounding the projection of his own authorial image, which adopts a different position in the poetic arena to that adopted in the theatrical field. In the former, *El Fénix* needs to

exhibit his Spanish and Italian cultural referents, in keeping with the *imitatio* principle characteristic of the courtly style; in the latter he simply affirms his own superiority and originality, concealing the paradigmatic models he actually used. The literary wars he got involved in (usually in spite of himself) keep him from the intellectual honesty he only managed to show in the case of Góngora and, for that matter, *postmortem*. Moreover, his personal friendships and pursuit of self-promotion stopped him from building a cannon consistent with his approach to literature, with some relevant exceptions. The fact that, at a certain point he was forced to put his Ariostian octaves to one side, is nothing more than the most palpable price he had to pay under the censorship and spirit of the time. There is no doubt about it: Lope the author and critic lives the same paradoxes as Lope the man, as the brilliant product of his own works at a time when the writer was not yet free from ideological and social obstacles. Of course, he does possess one unquestionably modern characteristic in his determination to actively promote and censor his contemporary publishing market, rather than limiting himself to merely keeping an eye on it.