

# Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco's *La Púrpura de la Rosa* in the Early History of Opera

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HEARING A PERFORMANCE of the first New World opera is to be reminded that the early history of opera beyond Italy was complicated. Even after Torrejón's *La púrpura de la rosa*, the court in Lima commemorated important occasions with partly musical plays more often than not, and opera was the exception rather than the rule for most of the eighteenth century. Far away in Madrid, the center of the Spanish empire, the royal court also heard operas only rarely until well into the eighteenth century, although *zarzuelas* (with spoken dialogue) were performed regularly. Before his departure for the New World, Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco (1644–1728) had little experience of fully sung opera. Only two operas are known to have been performed in Madrid during his time there; *La púrpura de la rosa* and *Celos aun del aire matan*, both with texts by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681) and music by Juan Hidalgo (1614–1685). It is possible that Torrejón heard them in rehearsal or performance, since he was a page serving the Count of Lemos and his father was Miguel de Torrejón, King Philip IV's huntsman. Tomás might have been Hidalgo's pupil as well, and his score tells us that he was certainly familiar with Hidalgo's music.

Roughly forty years after the production of the Hidalgo operas in Madrid, and a long ocean journey away from the homeland, the project of composing and producing an opera surely challenged both composer and performers in colonial Lima. But

it would be inaccurate to suggest that this part of the world was unique in venturing so late into the operatic endeavor. In the first years of the eighteenth century opera still was not performed in a number of important European cities, and in places like Madrid and London, where several kinds of musical theater were offered, opera as fully sung drama was set aside, for a few years, in favor of other genres.

It is difficult to say precisely why Torrejón and the Count of Monclova decided to try fully sung opera, but, given the occasion they sought to immortalize, their choice of genre makes sense within the sparse history of early Spanish opera. Opera was an extraordinary genre chosen for extraordinarily important circumstances. Calderón's works were still widely performed in the Spanish colonies, and *La púrpura de la rosa* was particularly appropriate for the celebrations in Lima in 1701. The libretto interprets the mythological love story of Venus and Adonis, but brings in the warrior god Mars as Venus's spurned and furiously jealous lover, turning the myth into a warning against the vices of jealousy and vengeance (in this, Calderón followed contemporary Spanish moralists and their emblem books). Venus ultimately triumphs over Mars because the libretto was written in 1659 to commemorate the peace between Spain and France after 35 years of war, a pact sealed with the marriage of Louis XIV to the Infanta María Teresa. Hidalgo's setting of Calderón's text was revived in Madrid in

1680 to celebrate another Spanish-French marriage, that of Carlos II and Marie-Louise d'Orléans. And in Lima in 1701 *La púrpura de la rosa* celebrated a Spanish-French alliance of another sort: Phillippe d'Anjou, grandson of Louis XIV, had assumed the throne of Spain. Calderón's old libretto was most likely chosen for its strong royal and pro-French associations, as well as its pacifist message. Mars's jealousy and his martial instincts are mocked, largely through burlesque presentation. His brash pronouncements ring hollow with cowardice and the schemes he hatches with Belona have tragic results and bring him no glory. A peaceful eternity sanctioned by the gods is finally conferred on the lovers, Venus and Adonis, in spite of the impropriety of their union (Venus has broken the rules of society by loving a mortal, a man of lower social status!). In the end, tragedy becomes a triumph of love. The opera argues for a resolution of earthly conflict between the two great European powers, a message as appropriate to the context of the War of the Spanish Succession in 1701 as it had been to the negotiations for the Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659.

Hearing Torrejón's *representación música* we are immediately aware that the composer did not turn to Italian or French models for inspiration, and it is easy to understand why. The repertory of the public theaters in the Spanish New World is identical to that performed in Madrid, except that certain dramatists, Calderón in particular, remained popular with American audiences well into the later eighteenth century. The wealthy patrons of secular culture in the New World identified with the royal court at Madrid through emulation. Around the time of Torrejón's opera, high culture and high society in Lima were defined very much according to the standards and customs that the Spanish aristocracy brought with them from Madrid. If they felt any cultural anxiety from their remote location in the empire, it could be assuaged with luxuries only dreamt of on the peninsula. In one especially defensive *relación* of a performance at the Viceroy's palace, the Peruvian chronicler described the music as "up to date" and just as "harmonious" as the music heard in the theaters of Spain, France, or Italy, while noting that the "richness of the fabrics and the precious jewels that covered the costumes far exceeded what would be seen in Europe, because such elegance could *only* be seen in Peru."

During Monclova's administration, when Peru-

vian high society felt itself to be Spanish, the Viceroy's composer produced an overtly Spanish score to honor a new sovereign's birthday. One of Lima's preeminent intellectuals praised Torrejón by comparing him to Sebastián Durón (1660-1716), who succeeded Hidalgo at the royal court in Madrid. The comparison to Durón is provocative. Working in Madrid, Durón came in contact with a number of foreign musicians and the music they brought with them. In 1701 Torrejón, at some distance from the European mainstream but perhaps the most renowned composer in the New World, had not yet begun to experiment with the *estilo extranjero*, the foreign style, with its Italianate but increasingly pan-European musical traits, that would soon be assimilated in the Spanish colonies as well. Durón was accused by conservative nationalist critics of having opened the door to a variety of "modern abuses" and "barbarisms" by introducing foreign musical forms and mannerisms in his *zarzuelas*. Curiously, his one-act "*ópera scénica*" *La guerra de los gigantes* (composed on commission for the Count de Salvatierra sometime between 1700-1707) unfolds through a series of strophic airs and four-part choruses, much like Torrejón's opera.

The score to *La púrpura de la rosa* is thoroughly Spanish in its music, yet it is very different from its only surviving older cousin, Hidalgo's *Celos aun del aire matan*. Both operas capitalize on Spanish dances (such as the *seguidilla* and the *jácara*) and quote popular songs in meaningful ways. Like all other Spanish plays of the period, Calderón's libretto is not divided into scenes with formal divisions between them. In performance, it is Torrejón's music that sets the pace and structures the drama, although the libretto is set with few alterations. The opera's principal roles were all intended for high voices, not for male sopranos but for female actress-singers (probably those of the regular theatrical companies) who would play the male as well as female singing roles. By giving Adonis the largest and most lyrical role, Torrejón, following Calderón, used ornate music to highlight both his anti-heroic sensitivity and his extraordinary physical beauty. Here a comparison to another lovetorn mortal, Hidalgo's Céfalo in *Celos aun del aire matan*, is unavoidable. The comic role of Dragón, the cynical servant, is similar to that of Céfalo's servant Clarín, a role written for a young actress-singer known for her pants roles; it may be that the role of Dragón in Torrejón's opera was

similarly cast. The most striking characteristic of Torrejón's *La púrpura de la rosa* (and this differentiates it from Hidalgo's *Celos aun del aire matan*) is that it contains no recitative but is constructed entirely from tuneful airs, arranged in sections of strophic *coplas* that are framed or punctuated by several refrains or *estribillos*.

It is easy to understand how Torrejón arrived at this solution to the problem of setting Calderón's text in music. Strophic *coplas* and refrain *estribillos* are the main component of his vernacular sacred pieces, the *villancicos*. And the strophic song (whether called *tono*, *tono humano*, or *tonada*) was the essential element of Spanish and Spanish colonial theatrical music, in the spoken plays called *comedias*, as well as in the mythological semi-operas and early *zarzuelas*. Long songs that consist of many strophes or *coplas* dominate whole scenes in contemporary plays, and several sections of the opera *Celos aun del aire matan* consist entirely of repeated *coplas*. In Hidalgo's opera, and in the extant music from his *zarzuelas*, these long repetitive airs focus the listener's attention through their mesmerizing power, especially appropriate to scenes of persuasion or seduction. The simple rhetoric of repetition (whether strictly declamatory or decoratively enticing) demonstrated the power implicit in musical harmony, through highly focused, extremely ordered music.

The convention of strophic *coplas* could be manipulated for dramatic effect or interpretation, even by a composer with little experience of the stage. The linked *coplas* and interlocking phrases of the comic pair, the *graciosos* Chato and Celfa, in their first scene, for example, bring them together and yet set them off from the other characters. Later on, the way that Venus and Adonis interrupt each other in mid-copla of their shared music lends a certain verisimilitude to their interaction and helps us to hear their love-engendered excitement and confusion. The same technique was used by Hidalgo in *Celos aun del aire matan* for the scenes between Pocris and Céfaló, albeit with a more acute sense of musical characterization.

Elsewhere in the opera Torrejón not only shapes his musical drama in a manner that reminds us of Hidalgo, but actually borrows tunes from Hidalgo's works. For example, when Venus hears Adonis sing his lament *estribillo* ("¡Ay de mí, que me da muerte a quien la vida di!"), she begins an extended series of *coplas*, first asking herself whose voice she has

heard ("Mas, ¿qué triste lamento intenta interrumpir mis penas con sus penas?"), then settling on the means for her revenge, and finally calling on Cupid ("O tu, velero dios, que en campos de zafir"). The song that binds together her progression from curiosity to resolve is nothing less than the tune that Eco sang to lure Narciso in a long series of strophic *coplas* in Calderón's *Eco y Narciso* (1661). Although it would seem a far off antecedent, *Eco y Narciso*, like *La púrpura de la rosa*, was a pastoral play with royal associations, performed various times at the court in Madrid, and in revival here and there throughout the Hispanic world during this period. Could it be that Torrejón's audience would have known the earlier play, recognized the tune, and thus the specific context and interpretation for this song?

One of the most memorable sections of music in Torrejón's opera, the chorus "No puede amor hacer mi dicha mayor" seems also to be based on borrowed material. The song-text was included in two other Calderón plays, and it is found as the *estribillo* of a solo song attributed to José Marín (1619-1699), another composer who traveled to the New World but returned to Madrid broke and in ill health. Marín's song seems not to be associated with any play, but it shares essential musical characteristics with Torrejón's setting in *La púrpura de la rosa*. Perhaps the song-text called for a well-known tune, and both Marín and Torrejón followed this cue. Or it may be that Marín's was an arrangement of a favorite tune from the Calderón/Hidalgo *La púrpura de la rosa*, a tune that Torrejón also knew and included in his 1701 opera.

"No puede amor hacer mi dicha mayor" dominates the scene in Venus's garden, in which Adonis assumes his traditional pose resting in the ample luxury of Venus's lap (as painted by Paolo Veronese). The pleasures of the garden of love, however, are not without their dangers, given that love may or may not lead to good fortune, as Amor is quick to assert when he comes into the garden. That danger threatens the lovers is clear from Torrejón's music, which transforms the scene into the form of an enormous *jácara* with solo strophes for the lovers and a choral *estribillo*. The sung dances or skits called *jácaras* were wildly popular with audiences, and, Torrejón, like Hidalgo before him, appealed to this vogue. *Jácaras* usually treated some aspect of the world of *germanía*, the street life of the braggart ruffians (*jáques*) and their abused women (*marcas*), and

their language is often the cynical slang of *jacarandina*. Although Calderón did not disgrace Adonis and Venus with lowlife utterance, Torrejón's music quite clearly lends a sinister, or, at the least, sexually explosive and titillating, quality to their dalliance. They converse about the risks of fortune in love, while enjoying their illicit affair. Torrejón, like Hidalgo before him, observed an important traditional distinction, between moral music and highly sensual and therefore immoral music. Concerning the *jácara* in particular, Cervantes had noted the difference between "*música divina*" (the music of the gods) and the rough song of the *jacarandina*.

Taken as a whole, Torrejón's opera is regal and divine in its unrelieved lyricism and consonance, yet rough-hewn and popular to the core in its exploitation of popular strophic songs and racy dances. By eschewing recitative, the musical setting for divine discourse in Hidalgo's works, Torrejón effectively eliminated the elite and imported musical genre that had been controversial in Spain during his youth. We may understand his rejection of recitative merely as an expedient born of his uneasiness with fully sung drama; but it might also represent the entrenched musical and aesthetic values of a thoroughly loyal and decidedly Spanish colonial artist.