



Moreto's Span of Dramatic Activity

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VARIA

MORETO'S SPAN OF DRAMATIC ACTIVITY

Little is known concerning the early or late years of Moreto's dramatic activity. I have had occasion in another article to show that the three plays¹ which link Moreto's name with the years 1635-1637 are apochryphal in his theatre. That he was writing verse, however, in the last year of the decade is made evident by his sonnet, published on the occasion of Montalbán's death in the *Lágrimas panegíricas*² of that year.

At the close of the autograph, *El príncipe perseguido*,³ one finds two *censuras* of Juan Navarro de Espinosa: the first of April 16, 1645, the second of October 21, 1650. The latter date, which was noted by Paz y Melia,⁴ has no particular interest for this study,⁵ but the earlier one, which escaped the vigilant eyes of that student of the drama, is important in the theatre of Moreto.⁶ Taken in connection with *La luna africana*, which was written before 1643,⁷ it shows that Moreto was sufficiently

¹ *La cautela en la amistad*, *Merecer para alcanzar*, and *Empezar a ser amigos*. Studied in an article entitled, *Manuscripts Attributed to Moreto in the Biblioteca Nacional*, *Hispanic Review*, 1936, IV, 312-332.

² Madrid, Imprenta del Reino, p. 48.

³ Ms. R-81, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. This play bears the signature of Martínez de Meneses at the end of the third act. The second is undoubtedly in Moreto's own hand, as a comparison with *El poder de la amistad* (V^a-7-4) will show. The signature is lacking, however, probably because the last pages of this act have been lost. I likewise do not find Belmonte's signature on the first act, though it is in his handwriting.

⁴ *Catálogo de las piezas de teatro . . .*, Madrid, 1899, p. 418.

⁵ It reads: "E visto esta comedia y si bien es su istoria humana, es tan piadosa y el caso tan decoroso y ejemplar que puede pasar por divina, que el *príncipe persigido* en ella es niño y en sus adbersidades se vale del asilo de San Francisco, tomando su ábito, con que se libra del tirano que le persige (*sic*). Siendo este el mejor paso de la comedia, puede llamarse *La inocencia persigida y sagrado de San Francisco*, con que el nombre es más piadoso y se podrá *repetir segunda vez* en los teatros desta corte . . . Madrid, a 21 de octubre de 1650." Such a date makes it virtually certain that this is the *Perseguido* which was played by Osorio in Madrid before the end of the theatrical year of 1650. See Cotarelo, *Sebastián de Prado*, Madrid, 1916, p. 73.

⁶ It was noted by W. A. Kincaid in his study of Belmonte Bermúdez (see *Revue Hispanique*, 1928, LXXIV, p. 182), but his observations escaped my notice at the time I was studying the play. See *The Dramatic Art of Moreto*, Smith College Studies in Modern Languages, XIII, Northampton, Mass., pp. 138-139.

⁷ See R. L. Kennedy, *Concerning Seven Manuscripts Linked with Moreto's Name*, *Hispanic Review*, 1935, III, pp. 306-308.

important in the first half of the forties to be collaborating with well-known dramatists and indicates that he began his literary tutelage under Belmonte and Martínez de Meneses. There is, however, evidence to show that all of Moreto's work at this time was not done in collaboration. In Pérez Pastor's *Documentos para la biografía de D. Pedro Calderón*,⁸ under date of July 7, 1645, one reads that Antonio García de Prado signed a contract to play in Madrid on the twenty-fourth of October of the same year and that "el arrendador se obliga a dar al autor tres comedias: una de Don Pedro Calderón, otra de Don Agustín Moreto, y otra de Don Antonio Martínez."

The date at which Moreto left off his literary labors is likewise a matter of dispute. In 1672, just three years after Moreto's death, Nicolás Antonio⁹ wrote: "Don Augustinus Moreto scripsit ante aliquot annos . . . comoedias quae in theatris nostris editae laudem ei pepere-runt. Abstinit tamen hoc scribendi genere ex quo sacris fuit initiatus, quod instituto vitae omnino debebatur." And in 1680, one Jesús-María wrote the life of the Archbishop Baltasar de Moscoso y Sandoval, following the facts which were supplied him by Juan Pasano, secretary to the worthy prelate.¹⁰ In this volume we read that Moreto after taking orders (in 1657) "renounced the applause which the theaters deservedly gave him and dedicated his pen to praise of the Divine, his poetic fire or enthusiasm having been converted into a spirit of religious devotion."

Yet as I have pointed out in *The Dramatic Art of Moreto*,¹¹ there are facts which seem to belie these two statements. In November of 1659, Sebastián de Prado played Moreto's *No puede ser* before the King. It is specifically stated that it is "a new comedy."¹² Moreover, it is certainly logical to assume that *La Arcadia*, played before the King in 1664,¹³ and published just two years later in the *Escogidas*,¹⁴ is Moreto's and not Tirso's nor Lope's play of the same name, both comedies which were written several decades before this date.¹⁵ Still again it seems difficult to believe that such splendid works as *El lindo Don Diego* or *Primero es la honra*¹⁶ (both published in 1662) would not have come

⁸ Madrid, 1905, p. 128.

⁹ *Bibliotheca hispana nova*, Madrid, 1783, I, p. 177.

¹⁰ In Gallardo, *Ensayo . . . de libros raros y curiosos*, Madrid, III, Columns 905-906.

¹¹ P. 27.

¹² See Cotarelo, *Sebastián de Prado*, p. 121.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 151.

¹⁴ *Parte XXV*, Domingo García Morrás, Madrid, 1666. It is here ascribed to Moreto alone, but it has also been attributed to him in collaboration with Calderón and Coello. See *The Dramatic Art of Moreto*, pp. 131, 221.

¹⁵ Tirso's play, *La fingida Arcadia*, was first printed in his *Parte tercera*, Francisco Martorell, Tortosa, 1634; Lope's *La Arcadia* in his *Parte trece*, Madrid, 1620.

¹⁶ *El lindo Don Diego* was published in *Parte XVIII*, Gregorio Rodríguez, Madrid and *Primero es la honra* in *Parte XVII*, Melchor Sánchez, Madrid.

out in an earlier volume of the *Escogidas* had they been written before 1657. Moreto was popular both at the Palace and with the general public—there is plenty of proof of this—and *No puede ser*, first played in November of 1659, was in press for the *Escogidas* by July of the following year. With these facts in mind, I stated in a previous study that it seemed “fairly certain”¹⁷ that “Moreto continued to write secular plays to the end of his life”—this in spite of the statements of Nicolás Antonio and Jesús-María to the contrary.

I have since that time had occasion to reconsider this whole matter. I am still of the opinion that Moreto continued to write (at least for the Court) after his retirement to Toledo in 1657, but I now doubt that he ever penned a secular comedy after Philip IV's death in December, 1665. The Court was in mourning, and the public theatres were closed from that date until May, 1667. Although Moreto did not die until the twenty-eighth of October, 1669, there is reason to think that his health was such as to make it improbable that he should take up his pen after this latter date. I have seen his signature in a protocol¹⁸ of the summer of 1667 which is to be found in the Archivo Histórico Provincial of Toledo. It is so unsteady as to show clearly that Moreto's health was quite poor at this time. This bit of evidence is strengthened by another found in Gallardo. In the *Libro de rondas*¹⁹ mentioned there, all entries are in Moreto's own hand until one dated November 11, 1667. This is signed by Moreto but not written by him, as are all the others. Moreover, it is the last entry signed by this dramatist, though the book contains notations from others up to 1693.

If Moreto wrote anything after Philip IV's death, it was no doubt a religious play. However, I am even inclined to take with several grains of salt Fernández de Buendías'²⁰ statement that Moreto was writing on *Santa Rosa del Perú* when he died and that Lanini finished the play for him.

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AN EARLY PERUVIAN ADAPTATION OF CORNEILLE'S *RODOGUNE*

It is interesting to note that one of the earliest (and quite possibly the first) imitations of Corneille's tragedies on the Spanish stage was written and performed, not in the Peninsula itself but in the far-off capital of vice-regal Peru. This fact is significant in the political as well as the literary history of Spain since it disproves once again the general belief

¹⁷ *The Dramatic Art of Moreto*, p. 27.

¹⁸ Cristóbal Ramírez, pp. 691-692. It is dated the eighteenth of July.

¹⁹ *Ensayo . . . de libros raros y curiosos*, III, Column 901. This book is now lost.

²⁰ *Escogidas, Parte XXXVI*, Madrid, 1671.