

UCLA

Mester

Title

New Myths from Old: Lope Metamorphosizes Ovid

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0s60r4rs>

Journal

Mester, 9(1)

Author

McGaha, Michael

Publication Date

1980

DOI

10.5070/M391013623

Copyright Information

Copyright 1980 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

New Myths from Old: Lope Metamorphosizes Ovid

The myths of Orpheus and Eurydice and of Cephalus and Procris, both of which had received their best known classical treatment in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,¹ provided the inspiration for scores of fictional, dramatic and poetic works in Spain during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Lope de Vega adapted these myths in two of his late plays, *El marido más firme* (1620–21) and *La bella aurora* (probably 1620–25).² Lope's principal source for both plays was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but there is reason to suppose that he relied more heavily on Jorge de Bustamante's Spanish translation of that work than on the Latin original. This "translation"—really a paraphrase—includes many popular accretions to the myths which were not present in Ovid's text.

Ovid, apparently assuming that his audience would be familiar with Orpheus, does not bother to explain who he was but begins his story very abruptly at the beginning of Book X of the *Metamorphoses*. Bustamante, however, immediately follows his first mention of Orpheus with a description of the power of Orpheus' music: "el qual era tan excelente musico de vihuela que los rios se denteniã a oyrle: y los mōtes y las piedras y arboles todos veniã juntos. pues assi mismo veniã los animales que por todas aquellas partes habitauã con gran admiraciõ a escucharle: y lo mismo hiziera el dios Febo si alli se hallara dexando su arco y saetas y otra qualquier cosa que cuidado le pudiesse dar por estar mas atento ala dulcedumbre y suauidad dela musica. Pues por esta manera tambien se dentia el ayre y se sosegauã los vientos y dexauã de bolar las aues que en ellos andauan."³ Lope seems to have imitated and improved upon this passage when in Act I of *El marido más firme* he had Fabio tell Orfeo:

. . . en este prado
Los árboles te siguen, y en el viento
Las aves a escucharte se han parado,
De aqueste río el líquido elemento
Cubrió las ondas de silencio helado,
Y te oyeron sus íntimos vecinos
Debajo de doseles cristalinos.

Estaban los leones, y pintados
Tigres, como de pórfidos de fuentes,
De tu divino canto transformados,
Y suspensos los ojos transparentes;
Hasta los elementos concertados
Dejaron los enojos diferentes,
Haciendo por tu dórica armonía
Con detener el sol, mayor el día.⁴

Bustamante also inserts the story of Aristaeus' pursuit of Eurydice, which led to her death. However, he does not mention Aristaeus' distinction as inventor of bee-keeping, which Lope seems to have adopted directly from Virgil. For Ovid, Virgil and Bustamante, Aristaeus was a shepherd. Lope, perhaps in order to justify his description of *El marido más firme* as a *tragedia*, makes his Aristeo a "Príncipe de Tracia" who disguises himself as a shepherd in order to court the nymph Eurídice.⁵

Ovid begins the story of Orpheus by stating that the god Hymen was summoned by Orpheus "Ciconumque ad oras," which Bustamante translates as "ala tierra de los Aconios," adding by way of explanation: "q̄ es ahora llamada Tracia endonde habitaua Orfeo" (131r). Aristeo, the first major character to appear in Lope's play, explains how he became infatuated with Eurídice when he saw her while traveling through the country on a hunting trip. Perhaps Lope originally meant to make Aristeo Eurídice's sovereign and then changed his mind. In any case, after presenting Aristeo as "Príncipe de Tracia," Lope went on to portray him as on a hunting trip away from his own kingdom. His prolonged absence from the kingdom would lead to his being overthrown, a major factor in the play's subplot. Hence the action of the play could no longer take place in Thrace, as it had in Ovid's version. It is not until halfway through the third act that we discover that the story occurs in Thebes, when the character Filida thanks Aristeo for bringing the beehives "Desde los valles de Tracia/ A las montañas de Tebas . . ." (p. 203).

Lope again departs from tradition by making the setting of *La bella aurora* Thebes and the surrounding woodland, though both Ovid and Bustamante had placed the story in Athens. The evidence for Lope's borrowing from Bustamante is somewhat more substantial in *La bella aurora* than in the earlier play. In Ovid's text Procris' father is called Erechtheus. Both Bustamante and Lope hispanicize the name as Ericteo. Bustamante calls Ovid's *jaculum*—the magic weapon given by Diana to Procris, which results in the latter's death—a *dardo*, and Lope follows his lead, though he could have used *venablo* or another word. For Ovid Aurora is *dea*, a goddess. Bustamante, however, introduces her as "vna nymfa," and for Lope a nymph she remains. When Cephalus begins to suspect that Procris has been unfaithful to him, Ovid has him muse that "facies aetasque iubebat/ credere adulterium." It is Procris' beauty and youth that make him fear adultery. Bustamante elaborates: "por cuya causa siēdo ymportunada de algunos mancebos no era marauilla auer hecho algun yerro" (102v). Lope's Céfalo remarks: "Es sola, es moza, es hermosa:/Tiene gallardos mancebos/ Tebas, y tan atrevidos,/ Que a nadie guardan respeto" (p. 229).

When Cephalus decided to return home and test his wife's fidelity, Ovid states that Aurora changes his form so that he would be unrecognizable to Procris. Bustamante, however, has Cephalus disguise himself as a merchant and offer her jewels and wealth, and Lope follows suit. Henry M. Martin, failing to find Cephalus' disguise as a merchant in any

classical source, argued that Lope must have taken it from Boccaccio's *Genealogie Deorum*,⁶ but as we can see, Lope could have found the detail in a source closer to home.

The myth's final tragedy results form a misunderstanding. Once Cephalus and Procris had been reconciled, Cephalus resumed his habitual hunting expeditions. Hot and tired from pursuing game, Ovid recounts, he would stretch out in the shade and summon *aura*. Since the Latin word *aura* means "a gentle breeze," Ovid did not need to explain it. Procris would of course mistake the word for the name of a nymph. When Bustamante uses the word *aura*, he immediately explains: "q̄ es vn ayre muy fresco" (103^v). When Lope's Céfalo calls upon *aura*, his servant Fabio asks: "¿Quién es Aura?" and Céfalo replies: "El viento manso/ Que por estas hojas suena" (p. 219).

Lope's obsequious biographer Montalván stated that the poet "de cinco años leía en romance y latín,"⁷ and Lope himself boasted in his *Dorotea* of his "ejercicio grande de la (lengua) latina."⁸ Most Lope scholars have tended, if not to accept these statements at face value, at least to support Lope's claims to classical scholarship. Thus Menéndez y Pelayo insisted that Lope was "mucho más culto y leído de lo que generalmente se supone," that he treated the classical myths "con cierta fidelidad histórica" and that "voluntariamente no las altera ni desfigura."⁹ Rudolph Schevil claimed that "Lope's education must have been excellent: his information is astounding, and the evidence leads one to believe that he read the classics continually, and, at all events, as regards the Latin authors, in the original."¹⁰ It was perhaps Schevil's awareness that Lope's practice in his mythological plays belies this claim which led him to assert that these plays "do not represent Lope's most characteristic use of material from Ovid. . . ."¹¹ However, in recent years sufficient doubts about Lope's knowledge of the classics have been voiced to lead Joaquín de Entrambasaguas to state that "ningún aspecto de la cultura de Lope de Vega ha sido tan traído y llevado . . . como el de su conocimiento de la lengua latina."¹² The limitations of the present article prohibit my entering into the debate on this vexed question at the moment. I wish merely to state that if I am correct in believing that Lope's principal source for *El marido más firme* and *La bella aurora* was Bustamante's translation rather than the Latin original of the *Metamorphoses*—and I would be the first to admit that the evidence presented here is less than conclusive—this fact will contribute to the arsenal of those who doubt Lope's claims to classical erudition.

There can be no doubt at all that Lope altered the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice and of Cephalus and Procris in his dramatic adaptations of them, but I would argue that in at least some aspects the changes he introduces are embellishments rather than disfigurements.

In Ovid's account Orpheus is presented as having shunned the love of women after his second and final loss of his beloved wife. Lope makes this character trait precede Orpheus' first encounter with Eurydice.

Orpheus' scorn for sexual love constitutes a sort of hamartia. Though he sings the praise of the other gods, he despises Venus. The play's tragic dénouement results from the goddess' revenge. Lope carefully integrates this theme into the play's structure. Urged by her father to marry, Eurídice visits a shrine of Venus to consult the goddess about the outcome of her prospective marriage. Venus warns her that it will be "breve, gustoso, perdido." Summoned by Orfeo, Venus attends his wedding, and a further presage of tragedy occurs when the goddess' torch sputters and goes out. In Ovid's text it was Hymen who attended the wedding. Bustamante added the presence of Juno, but Lope substituted Venus for Juno. Lope makes further use of foreshadowing when he has a portrait of Eurídice, erected to decorate the wedding, fall to the ground and then miraculously rise again.

Eurídice is also endowed with an element of hamartia which gives a semblance of poetic justice to her punishment. Secure in her love for Orpheus, she believes herself the unique exception to the rule that there can be no love without jealousy and even goes so far as to doubt the existence of jealousy:

Yo sola, de tus iras,
 Libre, amando salí: libre me veo;
 Sospechas ni mentiras
 No me han dado temor, ni apenas creo
 Que hay celos más que el nombre,
 Ni que los tiene la mujer del hombre (pp. 187-88)

Though Virgil and Bustamante had presented Eurydice as the innocent victim of Aristaeus' amorous aggression, Lope makes her partially responsible for her death. She sins against love by believing a false report that Orfeo was unfaithful to her and is lured to the spot where Aristeo awaits her by the desire to confirm her unfounded suspicion. When Orfeo arrives as she is dying and asks who killed her, she rightly replies: "Tus celos, esposo mío" (p. 198). The changes Lope introduces into Ovid's tale humanize it and make it more complex and interesting.

This is even more true in the case of *La bella aurora*. In Ovid's text Aurora abducted Cephalus *invitum*, i.e., against his will, and he never succumbed to her blandishments. He thought only of his beloved Procris and spoke of her continually until Aurora finally angrily sent him home to her. Bustamante, on the other hand, presents Cephalus as having been temporarily won over by Aurora's flattery: "al fin tanto supo el aurora lisongearme que por mi amiga la tome: y assi juntos el vno del otro algun tiēpo nos gozamos" (101v). Lope's Aurora is a sorceress who bewitches Céfalo, causing him to forget his wife and become her lover until his servant Fabio reveals what has occurred. The enchantment mitigates Céfalo's guilt for having betrayed his wife, but still the knowledge of his reluctant infidelity should have prevented him from judging her with

undue harshness. When he sets out for home after spending a year away from his wife, Céfalo himself says that it is “. . . con vergüenza y con razón turbada/ De ver que la ofendí” (p. 229).

Lope changes Procris' name to Floris probably, as Menéndez y Pelayo supposed, for reasons of euphony.¹³ I have already mentioned the fact that when Cephalus decides to test his wife's faithfulness, Ovid facilitates this by having Aurora magically change his appearance. Bustamante and Lope instead have Cephalus disguise himself as a merchant, which adds to the play's verisimilitude, and in Lope's play Céfalo also counts on the change he has undergone in a year to keep his wife from recognizing him. According to Ovid it was Cephalus' *census* ("presents") and *munera* ("gifts") which finally caused Procris to hesitate. Bustamante more specifically casts the blame on "grādes joyas y riquezas." Bustamante then adds insult to injury by having Cephalus state that when he pursued Procris to beg her pardon, he told her: "Señora no pienses que soy tan simple que me espante delo que tu hiziste y que no se q̄ no ay muger en la vida tan honesta y casta q̄ al fin no sea de carne y vencida de vn hombre si mucho tiēpo la sigue y cō dadiuas y promesas de continuo la cōbate" (p. 102v). Lope's Floris, as she later explains to Diana, was not tempted by bribes:

Mas porque el retrato,
El rostro y presencia
De mi esposo vía,
Alguna flaqueza
Repertí a los ojos,
Permití a la lengua . . . (p. 233)

It is interesting to note that Cervantes in his *Curioso impertinente*, also inspired by the Cephalus and Procris myth,¹⁴ likewise had his heroine Camila succumb not to bribes but only to passion. This insistence that love is more powerful than greed makes both Cervantes' and Lope's stories more romantic and more palatable to the modern reader.

Lope unifies his play by omitting Ovid's irrelevant tale of the magic hound Laelaps. As was often his practice, he harmonizes the beginning and end of his play by introducing a scene early in Act I in which Céfalo, while out hunting on a hot afternoon, stretches out and summons *aura*, just as he will do at the play's tragic conclusion. As in *El marido más firme*, Lope adds a further note of foreboding early in *La bella aurora* when he has Floris tell Céfalo, who is about to leave on a hunting trip: "Temo que os he de perder,/ Porque me suele decir/ El alma muchas verdades" (p. 215).

Perhaps the most interesting thing about Lope's treatment of these two myths is the way in which he has blended them, superimposing elements of each one on the other. The two plays complement each other and form a sort of dramatic diptych. As told by Ovid, the stories seem to

have little in common. It appears that the original common denominator for Lope was the fact that both Orpheus and Procris were considered models of conjugal fidelity. Orpheus remained faithful to Eurydice even after her death, and Procris remained true to Cephalus despite his prolonged absence, his dalliance with Aurora and his unjustified harshness towards her. Hence Lope called the first play *El marido más firme* and concluded *La bella aurora* with the words: "Y acabe aquí la tragedia/ De la mujer que ha tenido/ Más desdicha y más fermeza" (p. 248). Both myths are of course stories of love triangles, and the fact that Eurydice was traditionally associated with the dawn may have offered another link.¹⁵ Both Orfeo and Aristeo compare Eurídice to Aurora in Lope's play.

It is clear that Lope had the myth of Cephalus and Procris in mind while composing *El marido más firme*. Hunting expeditions figure prominently in Ovid's story of Cephalus and Procris but are totally absent from his tale of Orpheus and Eurydice; yet Lope begins *El marido más firme* with a hunting scene. In his *Ars amatoria* Ovid summed up the lesson to be derived from the story of Cephalus and Procris as follows:

Nec cito credideris: quantum cito credere laedat,
Exemplum vobis non leve Procris erit . . .

The story is a warning to women in love not to be too easily led into jealousy by evil gossip or the appearance of wrongdoing. This is likewise the moral of Lope's *El marido más firme*, and the whole episode in which Eurídice is led to believe that Orfeo is having an affair with a nymph, goes to spy on him and is thereby led to her death is an obvious imitation of Ovid's version of Cephalus and Procris.

In both plays Lope introduces a fourth major character, thus changing the love triangle into a quadrangle. Eurídice is given a jealous rival in the character Fílida; and in *La bella aurora* Prince Doristeo contends with Céfalo for the love of Floris. The name Doristeo seems to have been adapted from the Aristeo of *El marido más firme*. It is also perhaps noteworthy that the *gracioso* in both plays is called Fabio, though this was one of the names most commonly used by Lope for such characters.¹⁶ I have already mentioned that Lope sets the action of both plays in Thebes, though this was not the setting for either story in Ovid.

In some ways *El marido más firme* seems to have served as a sort of rough draft for the much more poetic and better realized *La bella aurora*. In the subplot of *El marido más firme* Prince Aristeo of Thrace, detained in Thebes by his love for Eurídice, is overthrown by his vassal Albante. While in Thebes Aristeo becomes a shepherd and works for Claridano, father of Albante and Fílida. When Albante comes to Thebes to murder Aristeo, he is led to believe that Aristeo has dishonored Fílida. Orfeo, immediately after his definitive loss of Eurídice, intervenes between the

two men, persuading Albante to restore Aristeo to the throne on condition that Aristeo marry Fílida. The *gracioso* Fabio then decides to marry the minor female character Dantea. The double wedding is an ending more appropriate for comedy than for tragedy. Though I agree with Diego Marín that Orfeo's intervention "viene a ilustrar el dulce espíritu armonizador de Orfeo al reconciliar a los contendientes y contribuir a la felicidad ajena, mientras él renuncia el amor de Fílida por guardar fidelidad a la esposa perdida,"¹⁷ I still think that this ending detracts from the play's pathos. Another serious flaw of *El marido más firme* is the *gracioso* Fabio's coarseness and cynical jokes, which occur in such unsuitable moments as Eurídice's death scene, robbing what should be one of the play's most poetic moments of its poignancy.

In *La bella aurora* Lope has avoided such jarring notes and has created a masterpiece of dramatic poetry. The *gracioso* is no longer ill-humored and sarcastic. He still offers an element of comic relief, but his interventions are more opportunely timed. The prince Doristeo is a much nobler and more admirable character than his counterpart Aristeo. When Aristeo's attempts at seduction failed, he did not hesitate to rape Eurídice. Doristeo realizes that he has a duty to give an example to his subjects and, besides, he truly loves Floris and can therefore find no pleasure in her pain and will not accept her love unless it is freely given. He rejects his servant Perseo's suggestion that he kill Céfalo. He is unselfish enough to be able at last to admire Floris' fidelity. He joins Céfalo in lamenting her death and orders her entombed "en oro y jaspé." Even Aurora, although she bewitched Céfalo in order to make him her lover, is unwilling to keep him with her against his will after he has learned the truth. "No hay mujer tan vil," she tells him, "ni de tan bajo sujeto, / Que quiera un hombre forzado" (p. 229).

In *El marido más firme* Eurídice's death resulted from the jealousy and malice of Fílida and Aristeo. In *La bella aurora* the shepherd Felicio, in an attempt to lure Floris to a meeting with Doristeo, tells her that her husband has been in love with a nymph. This is at least true. When Floris tries to learn the identity of Céfalo's paramour from Aurora's servant Belisa, Belisa kindly tries to put her mind at rest, advising her that:

Ya que has vuelto a ser esposa
De Céfalo, sin temor
Vive, que el pasado amor
De quien aquí le quería,
Se templó desde aquel día
Que conoció tu valor (p. 245).

Only when Floris continues to importune her does she finally part with the information that the nymph's name begins with the letters A-U-R. This of course leads to Floris' fatal mistake.

Donald Larson has written recently that the concept of love that governs Lope's late plays is:

very different from the concept of love that informs the early honor plays. No longer is love a mere temptation of the flesh, the yearning, normal to the young at least, for physical fulfillment. It has become in these late honor plays a ferocious passion, a force so powerful that the will is not simply inclined under its weight but totally subjugated. It is an emotion that arises spontaneously, grows with astonishing rapidity, and ends by taking control of the entire being. Once in command, it has but one desire: to perpetuate itself. To this desire, everything is sacrificed—convention, scruples, shame . . . Clearly, this kind of love is a disease, a disease whose symptoms the patient may not repress and whose advance he is only partially capable of checking.¹⁸

He adds that this view of love's irresistible power and involuntary nature causes Lope to show greater compassion for lovers—even those who behave wrongly and must therefore be punished—in the late plays.

These comments hold true in a general way for the two plays we are examining, but this is not to say that the concept of love in the two plays is identical. Images of love as disease, madness and poison occur with unusual frequency in *El marido más firme*. The tone of the play is generally cynical and bitter. Venus is an implacably vengeful goddess who delights in tormenting mortals. Love is powerless to resist the attacks of envy, jealousy and disillusionment. Honor, chastity, fidelity—all are empty words, frauds resulting from man's almost inexhaustible capacity for self-deceit. Under these circumstances Orpheus' phenomenal faithfulness is futile and gratuitous. The play as a whole tends to support Filida's judgment of Orfeo: "¿Puede haber locura igual,/ Puesto que ha sido firmeza?" (p. 202).

We don't know how much time elapsed between the composition of the two plays, but it is safe to assume that something happened in that time to renew Lope's faith in a gentler sort of love, a love which could ennoble and which offered rewards that amply compensated for the suffering it provoked. Perhaps this period saw a marked improvement in Lope's relationship with Marta de Nevaes, which had earlier caused him inhuman torments, documented in graphic detail in his well known correspondence with the Duque de Sessa. At any rate, as we have already seen, the characters in *La bella aurora* reflect a more idealistic view of human nature than those in *El marido más firme*. Even the antagonists—Aurora and Doristeo—are less selfish and violent than their counterparts in the earlier play. The play's conclusion, though tragic, is in a sense a triumph of love. Floris' jealousy was motivated by her love for Céfalo, and she can die happy in the knowledge that her suspicions were groundless. Céfalo blames her death on the envious goddess Diana. This self-righteous and hypocritical goddess set herself

up as a paragon of chastity while secretly lusting after Endymion. Céfalos vows to throw her out of heaven. It is perhaps not too speculative to see in these ardent words Lope's reply to the, in his view, sanctimonious hypocrites who dared criticize the elderly priest's scandalous liaison with the beautiful young Marta. Their motive, Lope seems to say, was not outraged virtue but envy of his happiness. The play may also be a veiled warning to Marta not to believe the gossip of Lope's detractors.

Whatever the biographical circumstances surrounding the play's composition may have been, *La bella aurora* is a triumph of the human spirit, a work whose passionate lyricism has not been dulled by the passage of more than three centuries. Ovid's tale of Cephalus and Procris seems quaint and primitive by comparison with the complex human drama which Lope created out of the same raw material.

Michael McGaha
Pomona College
Claremont

Notes

1. The other principal classical sources for these myths were Virgil's versions of Orpheus and Eurydice in his *Fourth Georgic* (453-566) and Ovid's alternate version of Cephalus and Procris in the *Ars Amatoria* (III, 685-746). In *El mito de Orfeo en la literatura española* (Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1948), p. 25, Pablo Cabañas has argued that Virgil's version of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice was much more influential than Ovid's in Spanish literature. However, Virgil's influence is seen almost entirely in his having introduced the character Aristaeus and described Eurydice's death as resulting from a snakebite incurred while she was fleeing from Aristaeus' amorous advances. The other details of the myth almost invariably come from Ovid.

2. See Morley and Bruerton, *Cronología de las comedias de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Gredos, 1968), pp. 599, 291.

3. *Libro del Metamorphoseos y fabulas del excelēte poeta y philosopho Ovidio noble caualler Patricio romano . . .* (s.l.: 1546), p. 131^r. All subsequent quotations of Bustamante's translation are from this edition and will be cited in the text by page number. For information regarding the various subsequent editions of Bustamante's translation see Theodore S. Beardsley, Jr., *Hispano-Classical Translations Printed Between 1482 and 1699* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1970), pp. 35-36.

4. *Obras de Lope de Vega*, ed. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1896), VI, 180. All subsequent quotations from the two plays by Lope are from this edition and will be cited in the text by page number.

5. As Edwin Morby has shown (in "Some Observations on *Tragedia* and *Tragicomedia* in Lope," *Hispanic Review*, 11 [1943], 196-97), Lope accepted the view that the characters of tragedy must be noble.

6. "Notes on the Cephalus-Procris Myth as Dramatized by Lope de Vega and Calderón," *Modern Language Notes*, 66 (1951), 239.

7. *Fama póstuma*; cited in Castro and Rennert, *Vida de Lope de Vega* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1968), p. 17.

8. Ed. Edwin S. Morby (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 294.

9. In the "Observaciones preliminares" to his previously cited edition of Lope's *Obras*, VI, xxiii.

10. *Ovid and the Renaissance in Spain*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 4 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1913), 211.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
12. *Estudios sobre Lope de Vega* (Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1967), II, 507.
13. *Op. cit.*, p. lxxv.
14. Albeit indirectly; Cervantes' immediate source was Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, Cantos 42-43, itself an adaptation of Ovid's version of Cephalus and Procris.
15. See Cabañas, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
16. See S. Griswold Morley and Richard W. Tyler, *Los nombres de personajes en las comedias de Lope de Vega*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology, 55 (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1961), 86-88.
17. *La intriga secundaria en el teatro de Lope de Vega* (Mexico City: Ediciones de Andrea, 1958), p. 145.
18. *The Honor Plays of Lope de Vega* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 119.