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"FUENTE OVEJUNA"**



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University College of Swansea

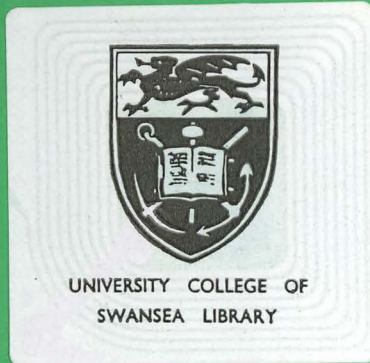
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**COMING TO TERMS WITH THE CIVIL WAR.
MODERN PRODUCTIONS OF LOPE DE VEGA'S
"FUENTE OVEJUNA"**

Inaugural Lecture

**Delivered at the College
on 22 February 1993**

by

**D H GAGEN
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Hispanic Studies**

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UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SWANSEA
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It seems to have become a commonplace on these occasions to refer to the bizarre nature of inaugural lectures as a genre or undertaking. To a Hispanist, however, what is bizarre is that the College's first Professor of Spanish should be delivering his Inaugural at so late a date, for South West Wales has produced many of Britain's most distinguished Hispanic scholars. I was taught as an undergraduate in Manchester by the legendary J W Rees, a loyal son of Pembroke, by Ian Michael, a native of Neath and now Alfonso XIII Professor at Oxford, and Reece Price, a Mumbles man to the core. And the list of South Wales Hispanists could go on. Legend has it - and Hispanism is peculiarly rich in legends - that in the 1940s the Spanish Sixth at the Grammar School in Neath consisted of a future HMI, Cellan Williams, a future Professor of Italian, Gwynfor Griffiths, and Roy Jones, who was to become Professor of Spanish first in London and then in Cambridge. So it can be seen that for an Englishman to be the College's first Professor of Spanish is less an act of neocolonialism than an inadequate step towards the repayment of a debt.

The subject of my lecture also reflects a personal debt. Lope de Vega's great play Fuenteovejuna has attracted the attention above all of two British scholars, Victor Dixon, another former colleague, and John Hall, author of the standard introduction to the play and for the last quarter of a century the Hispanist who kept the flame burning in the College. However, I do not intend, except in passing, to discuss Fuenteovejuna as a product of Spain's Golden Age but rather to examine its reception and influence in the twentieth century and to see what it seems to tell us about one of the many civil wars that have desolated Spain.

The continuing perceived relevance both of Fuenteovejuna and of the drama of the Golden Age in general is perhaps no longer a matter for debate. Over the last four or five years London has seen what amounts to a Spanish classic theatre festival. Plays and Players in April 1989 found space to review not only Adrian Mitchell's version of Fuenteovejuna, staged at the National Theatre's Cottesloe auditorium, but also Calderón's El médico de su honra at the Midland Arts Centre. ¹ I shall return to Martin Hoyle's review of Fuenteovejuna but my point of departure is that it is no longer surprising to see two such plays being noticed in such a journal. Indeed, Lope's play continued in repertory until the summer of 1992 and the Gate Theatre has in recent seasons staged a number of Golden-Age plays to critical acclaim. This, it may be added, reflects a similar revival of interest in Spain, notably since the creation of the Teatro Clásico Nacional in Madrid. The question poses itself, however, of how far the audience perceives Fuenteovejuna in the same light now as it did in the 1610s, or even the 1930s.

The question is a particularly significant one for Fuenteovejuna deals with a tricky subject - civil war, rape, murder and torture under interrogation - in a land noted for such conflicts and abuses. Writing of this play in 1899, Menéndez y Pelayo spoke of 'the overflowing fury of the anarchic tumults that shone their sinister light on the closing years of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the Modern' and went on to avow that 'the performance of such a drama now would disrupt public order and might end with shooting on the streets'. ² Despite such fears there was no gunfire on the South Bank, the performance in the Cottesloe went off quietly

enough and the play has come to be seen as bearing, if anything, a conservative message. Even so, Menéndez y Pelayo's perception of the anarchic savagery present in the text is shared by recent directors.

Fuenteovejuna is one of the some eight hundred plays that Lope de Vega wrote in a long and full life. (He was born in 1562 in Madrid and he died there in 1635.) Probably written between 1612 and 1614, it was published in the Dozena parte in 1618 or 1619³ and, although we know that copies were bought in Spanish America, no account of any performance before the nineteenth century has survived. The events of 1476 in Fuenteovejuna were however, very well known and were to be long remembered.

The middle years of the fifteenth century had been a time of civil conflict in both Castile and Catalonia. In Castile, the most populous of the states in the peninsula, the reign of Henry IV had been characterized by attempts on the part of the nobles to subvert the power of the monarch. On his death in 1474 Henry was succeeded by his half-sister Isabella, already married to Ferdinand, heir to the Crown of Aragon. When Ferdinand's father, John II of Aragon, died in 1479, the so-called Union of the Crowns was accomplished, Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon ruling jointly to all intents and purposes and becoming known as the Catholic Monarchs, the Reyes Católicos. This reign was to be seen by rightwingers in the present century as a symbol of that unity of Spain which was under threat from separatists in Catalonia, Galicia, the Basque Country and elsewhere.

Yet Isabella's succession had not been free from challenge. Henry IV, cruelly known as Henry the Impotent, was married and his Queen had borne a daughter, no less cruelly known as Juana la Beltraneja after the Queen's alleged lover Beltrán de la Cueva, presumed father of the young woman. Engaged to King Alfonso of Portugal, she challenged Isabella for the Crown and many of the nobles who had so disrupted the reign of Henry the Impotent now sided with Juana against Isabella the Catholic. Thus the reign of the Catholic Monarchs began with one of those turbulent periods of civil strife that so characterize the history of Spain. Ferdinand and Isabella were victorious and their version of events became enshrined both in the chronicles of their times and in the historical plays that figure as prominently in the repertory of the Golden Age as in the Elizabethan and Stuart theatre of England. The murder of the Grand Commander of the Order of Calatrava by the inhabitants of Fuente Ovejuna in the province of Cordoba was just one event in the turmoil of 1476. The Grand Master had captured Ciudad Real for the rebel forces of Alfonso of Portugal and Juana la Beltraneja. What happened thereafter was described by Francisco de Rades y Andrada in his Chronica de las tres Ordenes y Cavallerias de Santiago, Calatrava y Alcántara, published in 1574.⁴

All the elements of Lope's play seem to have stemmed from this account by Rades, to whom the dramatist turned as a way of pleasing the great Duke of Osuna, for Rodrigo Téllez Girón, the Grand Master who turns from rebel to loyal servant of Isabella, was the Duke's ancestor. To this horrific and potentially

scandalous tale - and it is basic plot of late medieval jacquerie that most attracts later generations - Lope added characteristic embellishments and a running theme, the triumph of order and love over disorder and unloving lust and selfishness.

It may be as well to lay out the basic plot of the play's three Acts. We are introduced to the Commander awaiting the arrival of the Grand Master of the Military Order and complaining at being made to cool his heels. His dominating and disrespectful character is established as, once the Master arrives, Fernán Gómez urges him to treason. In a contrasting scene we then see the two village girls, Laurencia and Pascuala, who debate both the practical question of how they might avoid the lustful attentions of the Commander and equally, when three village men arrive -- Frondoso, who is in love with Laurencia, Barrildo, and the comic gracioso Mengo -- the Platonic question of the role of love in a harmonious universe. Fernán Gómez's servant, Flores, now joins them and reveals that the rebels have captured Ciudad Real (literally the 'Royal City' of course) and the link between the erotic and the civil disruption is made evident. The third scene reveals the King and Queen, the exemplars of order and justice, seeking to inform themselves on the loss of Ciudad Real and the whereabouts of Fernán Gómez. Throughout the play Lope switches between the Royal Court and Fuenteovejuna itself, a characteristic of Golden-Age staging technique. In the village Fernán Gómez is greeted loyally by his vassals but repays their loyalty and their gifts by interrupting a lovers' tryst between Frondoso and Laurencia. To protect the girl's honour, Frondoso picks up a crossbow and forces the nobleman to flee.

The second Act begins with an idealized picture of the town's elders discussing their república. But the business of the blissful rural commonwealth is interrupted by Fernán Gómez seeking revenge on Frondoso and declaring, in the face of Laurencia's father, his designs upon her. A turning point has now been reached. News arrives of an assault by the troops of Ferdinand and Isabella on the town of Ciudad Real, so recently lost to their cause. The rebellion against authority seems destined to fail. Yet the Commander and his men learn no restraint. Another girl, Jacinta, is seen fleeing from the rebel soldiers, is caught and, we later learn, raped. Mengo, the comic of the piece, heroically seeks to defend the girl and is cruelly flogged for his pains. Against a background of increasing disaster for the cause of the rebels, Fernán Gómez and his men behave ever more outrageously. The marriage of Laurencia and Frondoso is disrupted by the Commander, who arrests Frondoso, mistreats Laurencia's father, the alcalde Esteban, and abducts the bride.

Despite its comic interludes - and Mengo, in addition to his heroism, has much comic business - the tone of the play is serious, its message exemplary and its action violent. There is no hint of the comic raillery against the droit de seigneur that we find in Beaumarchais or The Three-Cornered Hat of Alarcón and Falla. The resolution in Act III is extremely bloody. The Council of Elders meets to consider its response to the violation of the wedding ceremony but its debate on strategy is brought to an end as Laurencia bursts in, her hair dishevelled, and she taunts the men for their cowardice. She vilifies them as sheep, playing on the

name Fuenteovejuna (usually rendered as 'Sheepwell'), she characterizes them as maricones and - in what is a locus classicus of the 'world upside down' commonplace - says that the women will act if men are effeminate cowards. This leads directly to the assault upon the Commander and his men, who wonder at the temerity of the villagers. ('Love has moved them', amor les ha movido, as Frondoso explains when his captors release him.) The Commander, Fernán Gómez, is killed off-stage and his men are pursued. But the play is far from over. The King and Queen now hear of the tyrant's death from Fernán Gómez's henchman Flores. No detail is spared: the monarchs learn that the Commander's corpse had been flung from the window to the ground, the women had borne the body aloft on swords and pikes, they had torn his hair and cut the corpse to pieces. The King resolves to despatch a magistrate to investigate the murder. Here Lope now proceeds to recreate the proverbial collective response: each villager, down to the gracioso Mengo and a child, responds under torture that Fuenteovejuna itself did the deed. When the magistrate retires defeated, the return of order is depicted first with a somewhat sentimental encounter between the bride and groom, Laurencia and Frondoso, and then a complementary scene in which the royal couple receive the report of the magistrate on the collective solidarity of the villagers. Finally they receive the assassins themselves. Ferdinand concludes that, since there is no written evidence as to the identity of the perpetrator, the crime must be pardoned. The town will now come under royal jurisdiction and the play ends with the customary brief address to the 'discreto senado', as the audience are termed. We have seen, in John Hall's words, a play that is, despite its violence:

a work of art on the one hand lively, fast moving and exciting, and on the other rich in ideas, mentally stimulating and morally profitable. Fuenteovejuna thus fulfils the great demand of the time: that art should combine deleite with doctrina, as the Golden Age rendered the Horatian concepts of dulce and utile.⁵

John Hall and Victor Dixon have argued that the play is exemplary. The theme, Dixon insists, 'is the necessity of love, individual and collective, between all human beings'. Yet for most of us the dominant impression will remain that of the crowd in deadly, murderous action. This is also a legitimate reading. Angus McKay and Geraldine McKendrick have commented upon the naïve monarchism depicted here - the phrase is Jerome Blum's - while forcefully confirming that the account of events offered by Rades and, following him, by Lope was far from accurate in detail yet at the same time truthful in its ultimate interpretation of events.⁶ The substantial village of Fuenteovejuna (with 985 vasallos it could boast four and half thousand inhabitants) had been illegally alienated from the royal city of Cordoba during an earlier reign. The revolutionary crowd had on the night of 22 September 1476 been acting legally, entering into a sworn association, resorting to 'a traditional form of organization which had characterized other similar episodes in medieval Castile, including the hermandades, and which would be highly influential in the Revolt of the Comuneros of 1520'. The chronicles

cited by McKay and McKendrick describe the ritualistic procedures followed by the citizenry of Fuenteovejuna from the 'rites of violence' to the rituals of purification consequent upon the murder.

The events that took place that night were long remembered in the Hispanic world. Françoise Labarre cites an instance where 'in 1649 an obscure notable in distant Paraguay referred precisely to the example of Fuenteovejuna to exhort his fellow citizens to sack the College run by the Jesuits, with whom he was in dispute'.⁷ No wonder, then, that in 1899 that arch-conservative Menéndez y Pelayo should still see the play as potentially revolutionary, likely to lead to shooting on the streets in a land where the rites of violence now took the form of anarchist bombs in the Barcelona Opera and agrarian riots in Andalusia.

Yet in Spain itself no revival of the play had been staged by 1899, so far as we know. It had been reprinted in 1857 but it was outside Spain, as Menéndez y Pelayo observed, that the play was best known and performed.⁸ It should at once be added that this is in itself not a unique circumstance. The revival of interest in the ballad tradition and the rediscovery of Calderón had been the work not of Spaniards but of Herder, the Schlegels and the German Romantics. It was Grillparzer's advocacy of Lope and the translation of Fuenteovejuna by Friedrich von Schack in his Spanisches Theater of 1845 that sparked off the revival. There is every indication, however, that neither at that stage nor subsequently did most translators and adaptors reflect the message of harmony restored. The cases of Germany and Russia are significant in this regard since they show Fuenteovejuna to be a kind of litmus paper against which we may test, as it were, the political acidity or alkalinity of those translating or staging the play.

Until recently German adaptations of Fuenteovejuna tended to tone down the violence of the action and the vigour of the language.⁹ In the words of H W Seliger, Schack 'made many concessions to the taste of the period, avoiding any imitations of Spanish forms and metres and omitting passages that his contemporaries might deem too erudite, improper or even offensive'. Schack was thus following the characteristically conservative stance of German Romanticism. The bowdlerization of the text includes not only removal of the most innocent sexual references but also involves changes to the way in which the cast list is presented. Lope invariably lists the dramatis personae in the order of appearance. However, Schack preferred to reflect the social hierarchy, starting at the top with the royal couple, going on to the aristocracy and ending at the bottom of the social scale with the commoners, male preceding female. Schack's version of the play was not staged until it was further adapted by Günter Haenel in 1935 as Das brennende Dorf (The Village in Flames). Here already a characteristic feature of the process of adaptation appears: Haenel, a seasoned man of the theatre who did not read Spanish, felt free to adapt what was already a fairly corrupt text, seeking above all to emphasize the pace and violence of the action. The commonplace vision of Spain as a land of cruelty and passion appears to have been a particular feature of the premiere of this version in Hamburg in October 1935. Equally it seems to have been presented as a kind of operatic spectacle, a forerunner of the lavish productions that characterized Spanish cultural policy in the early Franco

period. The staging was clearly envisaged as an official contribution by the Third Reich to the celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of Lope's death. The dramatist was promoted as an example of a popular (völkisch) author while the Fascist literary critic Giménez Caballero argued that Lope was advancing the principle of caudillaje (Führerprinzip) and that he had written 'the first drama of National Socialism'. Clearly Fuenteovejuna had become in the Germanic world a piece of cultural property freely available for adaptation, ideological or otherwise. (Calderón's El gran teatro del mundo was to suffer a similar, if more illustrious, fate at the hands of Hugo von Hofmannsthal.) The most inflammatory example of this process was to be provided by Rainer Werner Fassbinder's version of Das brennende Dorf (1970) in which, as well as murdering the Commander, the villagers cook and eat the King and Queen. This version was performed in Geneva in 1992.¹⁰

The highly different versions of Haenel and Fassbinder clearly emphasize distinct and varying readings, the conservative and the radical, which are available within the text. The culture that has tended to foreground the radical reading is not German but Russian and the great difference lies in the fact that the pioneering and generally accurate translation by Sergei Iur'ev was actually staged successfully by the Maly Theatre of Moscow in 1876.¹¹ For Iur'ev the peasants of Fuenteovejuna were the collective hero of the play and society worked best when king and people acted in harmony. It seems likely that, in translating Fuenteovejuna to mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the original revolt, he was drawing parallels between the message of the play and the ideal state of cooperation between Tsar and peasant masses in Russia. Indeed he made additions to the text that further enhance the pro-monarchy stance of Lope's play. Other performances followed but the key event comes early in the Soviet period with a production by Konstantin Mardzhanov in Kiev. In this version the heroic popular collective effort was underlined and the text was cut, not - as with Schack - for reasons of propriety, but so as to remove the elements of naïve monarchism. The monarchs were to be presented in as unfavourable a light as possible, not least because of the remaining pro-monarchist sentiment in the Ukraine after it became part of the USSR in the final days of 1920. More than this, the Red commander seems to have asked a writer to raise the morale of his troops before they attacked the White forces, and it was Mardzhanov's suggestion that Fuenteovejuna be played for this purpose. The conflict in this Soviet version does not, therefore, involve the monarchs but the villagers and their feudal lord. The staging and the designs by Isaak Rabinovich emphasized the conflict, with the villagers wearing brightly coloured dress and the Commander and his henchmen in dark clothes. The effect was obviously inspiring. An account by the writer who had first approached Mardzhanov describes the performances in somewhat Biblical terms:

For us soldiers, this was a totally new spectacle. We saw in it that all the difficulties were overcome and that all present were overcome by an enormous feeling of civic duty, by great civic and human thought. And when we left the theatre we know that this performance renewed us. We were dirty and it cleansed us, we were hungry and it nourished us. And we knew that we were ready to fight.

Not surprisingly, this politically correct version was staged with great regularity in the Soviet period and its success was noted with increasing frequency in Spain, above all after the proclamation of the Second Republic in the spring of 1931. There can be little doubt that it was this emasculated Soviet version that led Lorca similarly to cut the text when he played Fuenteovejuna with his student theatre company La Barraca in 1933. (He may have heard of the Russian adaptation from Rafael Alberti who visited the Soviet Union in 1932 to study theatre and staging techniques.)

It is in the 1930s that the radical potential of Lope's play was most exploited outside the Soviet Union. Since scholars now regard it as axiomatic that the popular rebellion can without difficulty be accommodated in a pro-monarchy reading, it may be worth stating that performances in the 1930s that attempted to effect such an accommodation were on the whole unsuccessful. France offers a useful case study. Although all stagings that took place in France between 1938 and 1979 were the work of left-wing groups, Françoise Labarre has found evidence in every case that the message received by the audience was ambiguous or indecisive. Even the version of Jean Cassou and Jean Camp, Font-aux-Cabres, much influenced by Lorca's staging, was deemed by a commentator in 1938 to have 'exalted royalty', always a serious charge in France. A critic in Le Monde as late as 1979 was to accuse Lope of playing a double game. 'Fuenteovejuna est justement une chose curieuse à cause de son ambiguïté.' ('Fuenteovejuna is precisely a curious thing because of its ambiguity.')¹²

The French experience may suggest, then, that Lorca chose to excise the so-called secondary plot simply because it might blur for him what was the principal focus of the play. That this focus was in the context of the 1930s the popular revolt must be beyond doubt. And it is two radical readings that I wish now to consider since both take sides, as it were, in the Civil War. But both also have another significance, namely that they were to leave a deep mark on the later development of the theatre in Spain and Britain. I refer not only to Lorca's 'version' for La Barraca but also to the 1936 production of Fuenteovejuna (The Sheep Well in John Garet Underhill's translation) for Theatre Union, the predecessor of Theatre Workshop.

These two projects also serve to cast light on the marked difference in cultural development between Britain and Spain in the 1930s. Theatre Union in Manchester, led by Ewan MacColl and Joan Littlewood, had a clearly working-

class base: La Barraca in Spain was a student theatre group sponsored by the Republican Government. Ewan MacColl was a fiery son of Scottish Communist parents, his real name being Jimmy Miller. Federico García Lorca was the son of a father with land and a mother who was a teacher. Britain in the thirties was an industrial colonial power in the midst of a slump: L S Lowry, who offered to help Theatre Union in 1936, painted the Salford that Jimmy Miller was brought up in. Spain was a predominantly agricultural nation seeking during the Second Republic to reform its social and political structures. However, in neither culture did Fuenteovejuna seem to hold a message of naïve monarchism or of love and social harmony restored.

Of the two theatre groups, La Barraca had the higher profile nationally. In 1931 some of the students at the Residencia de Estudiantes in Madrid conceived the idea of creating a University travelling theatre that would perform the masterpieces of the Golden Age in the cities, market-places and villages of Spain. Such an idea was a characteristic product of the Residencia, a kind of British Hall of Residence just off the Castellana in Madrid, and a hothouse of liberal and artistic endeavour. Juan Ramón Jiménez, a future Nobel-prizewinner, Dalí, Buñuel and Lorca himself had all been residentes. Lorca was typically enthusiastic when the students put the idea to him and it soon attracted the support of the Republican Government, whose Minister of Justice, and later Minister of Education, Fernando de los Ríos, was a family friend and benefactor of Lorca. It should be added that from the outset the project equally attracted the hatred of right-wing elements, since it was included in the budget of the hated Ministry of Education, at that time engaged in pushing through educational reforms.

As with Theatre Union, La Barraca was to include works of high culture as a matter of policy in its repertory:

The University Theatre has as its aim the artistic renewal of the Spanish stage. It has used the classics for this purpose, as educators of popular taste.¹³

It was clearly set forth in the statement of aims that, as well as playing in the large provincial cities, the company would seek to spread the drama 'among those agrarian masses who from distant times have been deprived of the theatre'. This blend of naïveté and idealism was balanced by an enormous technical professionalism, another quality shared by Theatre Union. The student group included a number of future leading actors and directors, and figures such as the sculptor Alberto Sánchez and the painter Benjamín Palencia provided support.

La Barraca presented their Fuenteovejuna in the Teatro Principal, Valencia, on 31 May 1933 before an audience largely composed of workers.¹⁴ Suzanne Wade Byrd has published the text, described as 'versión de Federico García Lorca', confirming that the scenes in which the monarchs appear have all been cut.¹⁵ This censoring of monarchical references, two years after the flight of Alfonso XIII and the proclamation of the Second Republic, was deeply resented by the Right in

Spain. In the run-up to the autumn elections of 1933, Lorca's adaptation became a cause célèbre and was to remain so during the period of Rightist government that lasted until the Popular Front victory in February 1936.

We know a good deal about Lorca's staging of Fuenteovejuna and its reception. While in his view Calderón was the poet of heaven and Cervantes the poet of the earth - both La Barraca and Joan Littlewood's groups staged the interludes of Cervantes - Lope was the dramatist who turned the Calderonian symbols into flesh-and-blood figures. This immediacy was what he sought to recapture in the 1933 production. We are fortunate to have the benefit not only of Suzanne Byrd's edition but also the account by Luis Sáenz de la Calzada of what it was like to act in Fuenteovejuna with Lorca directing. Dr Sáenz was to become an important figure in the medical school of the University of Oviedo but in 1933 and 1934, while a student in Madrid, he played the figure of the Commander, Fernán Gómez. The setting of the play was transferred from Andalusia to Castile and the dress was modern and naturalistic - as opposed to the black and white symbolism of the Kiev production - with the characters largely in corduroy suits, dark brown for the Commander who bore the sort of metal badge worn by gamekeepers in Spain so as to denote the cross of the Military Order, while the commoners wore black. (The metal badge was obviously a neat solution to the problem encountered in modern-dress productions where characters are suddenly called upon to draw a sword or perform some equally anachronistic action.) The designer of the production was Alberto Sánchez, working in the somewhat folkloric manner typical of the twentieth-century Castilian style. His ochre, earth-coloured flats contrasted markedly with the bright and vivid sets designed for the Kiev production by Rabinovitch. Lorca's production did have colour, however, in the wedding scene.¹⁶ In the year of Blood Wedding it was only to be expected that he would work hard on such a spectacular theatrical moment. Both plays come to a climax at the end of the Second Act when a rustic wedding is disrupted. Lorca, who was an expert musician, arranged the wedding songs himself and they were performed by a trio of guitar, lute and vihuela (the Renaissance guitar) directed by Julián Bautista. It is claimed that Lorca arranged the dances himself, with help from Pilar López, the sister of the legendary La Argentinita, who was herself a frequent collaborator with Lorca. This wedding scene was one of the high points of the production, emphasizing the myth of the Arcadian peasant idyll, soon to be overturned by the lecherous Commander, who was caused by the Director to wear an improbable red wig and beard until Sáenz cast them aside. (The red beard is traditionally associated with Judas.)

The other high point came when Laurencia, hair and clothes awry, burst in on the assembly of elders and notables early in Act III. The student playing this part had been chosen less for her acting experience than for her strident voice and the vigour with which she taunted the shrinking males of Fuenteovejuna:

¡Vive Dios que he de trazar
que sólo mujeres cobren
la honra destos tiranos
la sangre destos traidores!
¡Y que os han de tirar piedras,
hilanderas, maricones,
amujerados, cobardes!

In Victor Dixon's translation:

I swear to God we women alone
shall make those tyrants pay
for our indignities, and bill
those traitors for our blood.
And you, you effete effeminate,
I sentence to be stoned as spinsters, pansies,
queens and cowards.¹⁷

At this point in Laurencia's speech, strangely not rendered by Adrian Mitchell in his version for the National Theatre, an indrawn breath was heard from the audience in Valencia since, in Sáenz's words, 'a woman did not in 1933 say maricón, however angry she had been made'.¹⁸

It was, however, no desire to épater le bourgeois - or indeed the workers - with strong language that gave rise to polemic. Lorca aimed to shake up the theatre audiences of his time as well as taking theatre to areas that had been starved of it since the Golden Age. The basic problem set forth in the play was still very much a feature of Spanish reality during the early years of the Second Republic, the problem of the local political boss, the traditional cacique prepared to claim the derecho de pernada, the Spanish equivalent of the droit de seigneur. As with the Soviet versions, by cutting out the so-called secondary plot, Lorca ensures that Fernán Gómez's crime is against the people of Fuenteovejuna rather than against the Catholic Monarchs, and the solution is violent, the murder of the Commander and the townspeople's solidarity under torture, rather than the legal solution, the royal pardon. Put more simply, popular violence against the class enemy rather than a legal or morally justified action against a tyrant. This is what led to the polemic, centred above all on the cuts introduced into Lope's text.

Spain has long had a tradition of refundiciones, that is adaptations or rehashes of the classics. In interviews Lorca denied that his version was a refundición. In 1934, speaking of his production of Lope's La dama boba, he stated:

I have not adapted; I have cut, which is very different. Masterpieces should not be adapted. It is a sin that I'd never have dared commit. You cannot remove scenes or anything that is essential to the plot or the central theme.¹⁹

This interview is often quoted since it develops the concept of the director having the right to prune the play of extraneous material. (It is not unknown in Spain for a playwright to publish his texts with the cuts already suggested: Buero Vallejo does this as a matter of course.) We may suspect, however, that Lorca came to realize that he was on slightly shaky ground for, in an interview given in Barcelona in 1935, he refers to his Fuenteovejuna not as a 'version' but as an 'anthology'. (The interview is less frequently quoted than others because it is in Catalan.) Denying that he had 'mutilated' two other plays of Lope, La dama boba and El caballero de Olmedo, he clarifies what he had undertaken with respect to the text of Fuenteovejuna:

I have taken out all the political drama and have limited myself to following the social drama. But I have pointed this out. I have not said: "Now you are going to see and hear Fuenteovejuna". I have announced: "I am going to present to you an anthology of Fuenteovejuna."²⁰

Lorca claims to be more honest than those who generally adapt classic drama, often toning it down so as not to offend contemporary taste.

This interview took place in 1935, the year in which the tercentenary of Lope's death was celebrated with notable productions throughout Spain, one being in Fuenteovejuna itself, as well as in Hamburg. The play's international prestige and contemporary relevance were to be emphasized the following year with the outbreak of the Civil War and nowhere more so than in Britain.

Although centred on London, the Workers' Theatre movement had in those years left its mark throughout the United Kingdom. There were, for example, a number of miners' groups in South Wales.²¹ In many ways the most flourishing and theatrically experimental groups were based on Manchester and Salford. It was there that the young Ewan MacColl joined with others in 1931 to form Red Megaphones, an agit-prop street theatre group.²² MacColl as a teenager corresponded with a Young Communist in Leipzig from whom he learned of 'groups of people doing political theatre on the streets with megaphones, and that was it. I got him to tell me everything he could about them, and he did.'²³ Nothing could be more different from the initiation of Lorca into the theatre with puppets and marionettes in Fuentevaqueros. Yet in the 1930s both felt similarly alienated from the commercial theatre. In MacColl's words again:

The West End theatre, or the formal theatre of that time, was not concerned with the lives of ordinary folk, and it had become stultified as a result. Its language was artificial.²⁴

MacColl and his fellow performers soon realized that they needed training, and above all they had begun to suspect that 'limitations in production ideas were a



feature of Agit-prop theatre'.²⁵ When they went to London to look at Workers' Theatre there they were bitterly disappointed by its amateurishness. Like Lorca and Alberti in Spain, MacColl and his comrades set off on a journey of discovery. Adolphe Appia, Ernst Toller, Stanislavsky and Meyerhold were all read and debated, especially after 1934 when Joan Littlewood arrived in Manchester. A working-class girl who had none the less studied at RADA, she collaborated in a group called Theatre of Action which performed in working-class districts and whose members were skilled workers. This was clearly an extraordinary time in Manchester, about which there is a tendency to become somewhat starry-eyed. D G Bridson was producing the first radio documentaries for the BBC in Piccadilly. Theatre of Action was performing at the Round House in Ancoats. At the Rusholme Repertory Theatre, Love on the Dole was staged and Ernst Toller arrived to direct his play Draw the Fires (Feuer aus den Kesseln). Toller's experience indicates the sorts of problems that arose when the canon or basic repertory of the stage was modified. He was appalled at the actors in the company who were supposed to play stokers in his play on the Navy revolt of 1917. Joan Littlewood brought in MacColl and his working-class actors 'who were quite used to handling a shovel and making themselves heard above the noise of machinery'.²⁶

In 1936 Littlewood, MacColl and others formed Theatre Union after producing Hans Schlumberg's Miracle at Verdun for the Peace Pledge Union in Manchester. The manifesto of the new group showed how much MacColl had developed from street theatre, supporting the cotton strike of 1931, via a study of modern techniques of staging, to an awareness that the theatre should seek to revive the hold that it once had on the people. It was therefore proposed to include classical texts in the repertory:

The theatre must face up to the problems of its time: it cannot ignore the poverty and human suffering which increases every day. It cannot with sincerity close its eyes to the disasters of its time. Means test suicides, wars, fascism and the million sordid accidents reported in the daily press. If the theatre of today would reach the heights achieved four thousand years ago in Greece and four hundred years ago in Elizabethan England it must face up to such problems. To those who say that such affairs are not the concern of the theatre or that the theatre should confine itself to treading in the paths of "beauty" and "dignity", we would say "Read Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Calderón, Molière, Lope de Vega, Schiller and the rest".²⁷

The manifesto went on, as the early statements of aim from La Barraca had done, to link these objectives with the intention to solve technical as well as ideological problems. Experiments in staging formed a central plank in the programme of

both groups.

The opportunity to put those principles into practice soon presented itself with the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain. MacColl described their response in the following terms:

Like many people we were horrified at the turn events were taking and at a meeting of the newly formed Theatre Union, it was decided that we should mount a production which would have the dual function of drawing public attention to the struggle of the Spanish people and raising funds for medical aid. Lope de Vega's Fuenteovejuna (The Sheep-Well) was the play we chose to produce.

Their reasons for lighting upon this play in the recently published translation by Underhill were easy to see:

In every respect Fuenteovejuna was the ideal play for the time. Its theme, the revolt of a village community against a ruthless and bloody dictator, was a reflection in microcosm of what was actually taking place in Spain.²⁸

This production in the Lesser Free Trade Hall, Manchester, was to be the forerunner of a whole series of Renaissance dramas presented by Theatre Union in Manchester, and later in the heroic years of touring, before the Theatre Workshop settled at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, just as Suzanne Byrd has argued that La Barraca's productions laid the foundations upon which Spain's National Theatre companies were built after the Civil War. And while it is common to note among the cast lists of La Barraca the names of a whole generation of directors and actors, it is worth noting who was involved in that 1936 production in Manchester. The dominant personality was of course Littlewood, who played one of the village girls, possibly Jacinta. Howard Goorney recalls attending a committee meeting of a young Zionist group and hearing terrifying screams from the hall next to the committee room. It was a rehearsal of Theatre Union. 'I had been watching a rehearsal of the rape scene from the Sheep-Well with Joan, then in her early twenties, playing the part of the peasant girl.' Others destined to be equally celebrated were taking part. The Business Manager of Theatre Union was Harold Lever, later to be Financial Secretary to the Treasury in the Wilson Government. He introduced Patience Collier, who was similarly entranced by Littlewood as director and actress.²⁹

Littlewood obviously put her characteristic stamp on the production, which was full of action, totally different to the tableau effects of Miracle at Verdun. MacColl recalled that 'the characters were men and women who laughed and wept and cried out in pain and made jokes'. He compared the crowd scenes in their liveliness to a mass of football fans watching Manchester United.³⁰ Here the

company were able to use their street-theatre techniques. Thus, accustomed to adding song to their productions, they set Lope's lyrics (in Underhill's translation) to Republican battle songs, and MacColl added songs of his own. Much more could be added about both the Theatre Union and the La Barraca stagings. I have extended my discussion of the Manchester production simply because I have never seen it mentioned by students of Lope, even though it was revived by Theatre Workshop in 1955. (Equally I know of no Lorca specialist who has studied Joan Littlewood's production of Don Perlimplín that so shocked the citizens of Kendal in 1945.)

Productions of Fuenteovejuna in Britain and Spain since the Civil War have shown great changes. To some extent these mirror scholarly and critical shifts. The re-readings of Lope's text increasingly insisted upon the need to interpret it within the context of seventeenth-century thought, seeing it above all as an exemplary demonstration of the progression to harmony from disharmony. In terms of performance, the formalist critics were echoed in Franco's Spain by the presentation of the play as a conservative tract. During the Civil War it was consistently proposed as a symbol of the Falangist Crusade, just as Giménez Caballero had termed it a national-socialist drama in 1935. José María Pemán was a particular supporter of a traditionalist performance at Christmas 1937 in Loyalist Seville. Naturally the King and Queen were restored to the text in these productions. In 1962 the fourth centenary of Lope's birth was celebrated by a particularly lavish staging at the Teatro Español in Madrid. This was advertised as 'by Lope in a version by Ernesto Giménez Caballero'. As in the 1935 Hamburg production, the cast list was set out not in order of appearance but in terms of hierarchy, although oddly enough the feudal lords preceded the monarchs and their court. The townspeople were themselves divided into: the Aldermen, the peasant women, and the peasant men. The programme insisted that 'we have reestablished the integrity of the text, which has been mutilated or deformed on a hundred occasions by political sectarianism, seeking as we do to be faithful to what Lope de Vega undoubtedly wished to compose, namely an anthem to Spanish unity in the person of the creators of that unity, the Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella.'³¹ Some critics suggested in their reviews that a more political reading was possible and Blas Pinar the Fascist leader wrote a stirring defence in the monarchist-Catholic daily ABC against 'every mistaken or malevolent interpretation' of the play.

By the 1960s Hispanists had already begun to ask why Fuenteovejuna presented the progression from social disorder to monarchist harmony and indeed why the townspeople's violence called for the sort of justification that it was accorded by Lope's text. Roy Jones pertinently affirmed the need to look at the historical and social context in which the play was written, and notably, in an age of economic crisis and decline, the need to examine the idealization of peasants, aldermen, Kings and Queens.³² Equally Jones and Díez Borque looked at the audience for whom the text was designed to be played. Challenged and refined, the

reinterpretations of the 1960s found their way not only into scholarly writing but into the minds of practical critics and directors. One thread was to become particularly dominant.

In 1988 Francisco Ruiz Ramón praised Lorca for his ability to get under a text, to read in the classic drama another text, a subtext, which, he claims, reads at times as a 'counter text' running against the grain of the more visible surface discourse. He claims that the English can 'unmask' Shakespeare, the French can reveal these 'countertexts' in Molière, Corneille and Racine, and asks why the Spanish cannot do the same with Lope, Tirso and Calderón.³³ What Ruiz Ramón has in mind seems to be the sort of argument proposed recently by Peter Evans regarding Fuenteovejuna. Evans sets out what he terms 'a project for reading against the grain, an attempt to allow the text to speak for itself, to place the author in crisis, caught in the unconscious drives of ideology and the conscious aims of private obsessions'. Lope thus comes to be seen as 'an ambivalent figure of simultaneously radical and conservative views'.³⁴ This reading confirms that the play, as the detailed textual analysis of the close-reading school of critics has shown, does affirm a need for strong leadership embodying well-known theories on kingship and tyranny. Equally, though, Evans shares the common experience when we see a performance of this play, namely that, as well as conveying forcefully a sense of the lust and violence of a feudal lord, it also depicts the capacity for savagery on the part of his vassals.

Fassbinder may go too far in having the subjects cook and eat their monarchs but we may suspect that those members of Lorca's audience who drew their breath at Laurencia's great speech were shocked at something more than her use of the insult maricón. It was rather, as Evans notes, that they saw a 'vivid dramatisation of the herd instinct in action, refusing independence of thought and action, controlled by the hypnotic power of a strong leader, here imaged as the Amazon Laurencia.' We are therefore increasingly driven to remind ourselves that the subject of this play is not a peasants' revolt but a women's revolt.

Something of this was captured in Declan Donellan's production of the play at the National Theatre in 1989. Adrian Mitchell's translation was at times cavalier and curiously emasculated: the acting was strangely muted, as Martin Hoyle noted in the review that I cited at the start of this lecture. But the production did hint at precisely what Ruiz Ramón and Peter Evans were calling for, namely the sense of conflicting patterns, of tensions within the text as staged. As Hoyle's review argued, Lope's drama 'opens with a jocular exposition of "self love" that might have been taken from that crucial disseminator of neo-Platonism, Marsilio Ficino's Libro dello Amore, and ends with an almost voluptuous abandonment to, and welcoming of, pain that evokes the ecstatic agonies of the Latin Counter-Reformation.'

In that production, despite the infelicities in text and diction, we often saw what Ruiz Ramón demanded, a reading of Lope 'as the English read Shakespeare', seeing that a play may indeed impose once more an idealized Tudor or Isabelline mythic view of the past whilst at the same time exploring those currents that are

for Ruiz Ramón 'contemporary'. And this is also a way of coming to terms with a variety of civil wars. You do not need to be a relativist to realize that, in order to fight feudal tyranny, the people - el pueblo - needed in 1476 to side with the new monarchy, or that in the 1930s in Spain that monarchy might have seemed the enemy, or even finally that, after the death of a dictator, in the 1970s that same monarchy might once again be supported. It may be possible to justify a cut in 1933 that would seem incomprehensible in the Spain of Juan Carlos, if one takes a certain view of the play. The Soviets and Lorca were simply substituting a different form of idealization, the heroic people rather than the royal people.

As Victor Dixon notes, 'in some historical contexts such adaptation may serve a political purpose, though the result should not in honesty be billed as Lope de Vega's work and the adaptor would in my view do better to retell the Fuente Ovejuna story in a completely new play.'³⁵ And yet the inherent message remains the same. We have now come to see that Lope's text asserts the need for a variety of freedoms, on the part of women and men. It also depicts the savagery of men and, it would seem, the threat to men of women.

In short, current productions, emphasize the violence at the expense of the legality of the actions of the people. The pendulum has swung far since the days of the Republic and the outbreak of the Civil War. Lope's exploration seems increasingly to be, like Shakespeare's in the history plays, more an exploration of the human condition than simply of the national character.

1. Plays and Players (April, 1989), 24-26.
2. Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, Estudios sobre el teatro de Lope de Vega (Santander: Aldus, 1949), pp 175-76.
3. Lope de Vega, Fuente Ovejuna. Text, translation, introduction and notes by Victor Dixon (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1991), p 48, note 151.
4. The relevant sections of the Chronica are reprinted and translated in Fuente Ovejuna, ed. Dixon, pp 218-23.
5. J B Hall, Lope de Vega, 'Fuenteovejuna' Critical Guides to Spanish Texts, 42 (London: Grant and Cutler, 1985), p 19.
6. Angus McKay and Geraldine McKendrick, 'The Crowd in Theatre and the crowd in History: Fuenteovejuna', Renaissance Drama, 17 (1986), 125-47.
7. Françoise Labarre, 'L'Énigme de Fuente Ovejuna' in Critique Sociale et conventions théâtrales (Domaine Ibérique) (Université de Pau et des Pays de L'Adour, 1989), 79-95.
8. The standard accounts of the reception of Fuenteovejuna are: Teresa J Kirshner, El protagonista colectivo en 'Fuenteovejuna' de Lope de Vega (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1979) and her earlier study 'Sobrevivencia de una comedia: historia de la difusión de Fuenteovejuna', Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos, 1 (1976-77), 255-71,
9. The account of reception in Germany is based on H W Seliger, 'Fuenteovejuna en Alemania: de la traducción a la falsificación', Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos, 8 (1983-84), 381-403.
10. José Monleón, 'Fassbinder, Fuenteovejuna en Ginebra', Primer Acto, 243 (March-April 1992), 112-13.
11. The following account is based on Jack Weiner, 'Lope de Vega's Fuente Ovejuna under Tsars, Commissars, and the Second Spanish Republic (1931-1939)', Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale (Sezione Romanza), 24 (1982), 167-223.
12. Labarre, 86.
13. For La Barraca see Luis Sáenz de la Calzada, 'La Barraca' Teatro Universitario (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1976). The quotation from the 'Propósitos' is reproduced between pp 42-43.
14. Ian Gibson, Federico García Lorca (Barcelona: Grijalbo, 1987), Vol 2, p 244.
15. Suzanne W Byrd, La 'Fuente Ovejuna' de Federico García Lorca (Madrid: Editorial Pliegos, 1984).

16. Details of the production by La Barraca are to be found in Sáenz de la Calzada, pp 65-75.

17. Dixon, pp 169-71.

18. Sáenz de la Calzada, p 67.

19. Federico García Lorca, Obras completas (Madrid: Aguilar, 1974), vol 2, p 953.

20. Federico García Lorca, Obras completas, vol 2, p1001.

21. David Bradby and John McCormick, People's Theatre (London: Croom Helm, 1978), pp 97-98.

22. The following account is based on: Howard Goorney, The Theatre Workshop Story (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981); and on Evan MacColl's own narrative 'Theatre of Action, Manchester' in Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl and Stuart Cosgrave, Theatres of the Left 1880-1935 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp 205-55.

23. Theatres of the Left, p 229.

24. Goorney, p 2.

25. Theatres of the Left, p 241.

26. Goorney, p 7. For an unexpected confirmation of the impact of Joan Littlewood on the drama in Manchester see Anthony Burgess, Little Wilson and Big God (London: Penguin, 1988), pp180-81.

27. Goorney, p 25. The quotation is from the Manifesto of Theatre Union.

28. Ewan MacColl, 'Preface' in Agit-prop to Theatre Workshop. Political Playscripts 1930-1950 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) pp xxxix-xi.

29. Goorney, pp 17-18

30. MacColl, 'Preface', p xl.

31. Adriano Domínguez, Memorias de un actor (Madrid: Dyrsa, 1984), pp 144-45. I am indebted to John London for this reference.

32. R.O Jones, 'Poets and Peasants' in Homenaje a William Fichter (Madrid: Castalia, 1971) pp 341-55.

33. Francisco Ruiz Ramón, Celebración y catarsis. Leer el teatro español (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1988), pp 20-24.

34. Peter W Evans, 'Civilisation and its discontents in Fuenteovejuna' in Conflicts of Discourse: Spanish Literature in the Golden Age, edited by Peter W Evans (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1990), pp 110-129.

35. Dixon, p 7.

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