COPLAS POR LA MUERTE DE SU PADRE

I. About the author- Jorge Manrique (1440-1479)

Jorge Manrique was the son of Rodrigo, Grand-Master of Santiago (maestre de la orden de Santiago), “the second Cid”, and was born at Paredes de Nava. From his birth he was in the midst of wars, and he joined his father in supporting Alfonso and Isabel of Castile in their claims for the throne. He was killed before the walls of García-Muñoz in his thirty-nine year.

His poetic works are fairly reduced, among the best being *Coplas* (Ode on the death of his father) written in 1476. Three major themes are contained in his poetry: courteous love, war, and the preoccupation/worry for the death. The poet has written 2300 verses, dealing with amorous, burlesque and moral affairs among which prevails the theme of love (in 3/4 of his poetry). What J. M. pursues is the beauty of the form, that is, not only the poem of love, but also a beautiful sonnet. Speaking of the poetry of love, it is written based on the taste of love in that period, with certain sincerity in the expression of amorous sentiment.

II. *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* (1476): structure, content, themes

**Copla**: es cualquier composición poética breve que, bien aislada, bien en serie, sirve de letra en una canción popular o que le remeda: así se llaman coplas a las soleares, a las seguidillas o a las especiales estrofas en que se escribe el *Martín Fierro*. En un sentido métrico más estricto se denomina hoy copla a una estrofa de cuatro versos octosílabos o de menor medida con rima asonante en los pares. El falso reconocimiento popular de cuatro versos como unidad en el romance- la llamada “copla de romance”- hace que se compongan textos seguidos en coplas, como el caso
de los corridos mexicanos. En la época medieval, copla es equivalente estricto de lo que hoy designamos como estrofa.

_Coplas por la muerte de su padre_ was composed upon the death of Manrique’s valiant father, Don Rodrigo, in 1476, and achieved immortality in Spanish literature. The entire poem consists of 40 stanzas (coplas de pie quebrado), and its meter is not habitual for an elegy. The work is composed of three symmetrical parts: 1) 15 coplas. 2) 9 coplas. 3) 16 coplas.

Structurally, the first part (1-13 stanzas) is to reflect in the abstract the concept of death. The second part (14-24 stanzas) is getting more concrete, the idea of death as phenomenon passing to the historical death. Stanzas 14 and 15 also serve for linking the second part. The final part (24-40 stanzas) illustrates in special the case of the death of Don Rodrigo. We have noticed from very beginning that death comes “softly stealing on, how silently! Swiftly our pleasures glide away…” And along with the poem, neither fear, exaggerations, nor the macabre element have been presented. This is a poetic work of meditation on the theme of death and its universal transcendence.

In the second part, the poet gives us numerous examples from historical figures of how they died, in spite of not naming all of them according to social hierarchy, some of them have been alluded. Thus, the reader has the chance to explore immediately the phenomenon of death which is not only the phenomenon of death itself, but also the way of dying. In the third part, the poet pays homage to the merits by don Rodrigo to be in memory of his father. Two themes have been concentrated on the praise of his father’s natural merits and his encounter with death. There is no description on the phenomenon of death, but a dialogue has been established between death and don Rodrigo, who accepts his final hour in resignation.
He is fully convinced after death has shown him three dimensions of life: the mundane affairs that leave behind, the glorious fame that endures for incoming generations, and the life of honor, specifically, the conquer against Moors that is almost lasting long. Nevertheless, nothing on earth is eternal, only after death, another life is better, richer and endurable: “The third- the better life on high shalt you possess.” With God’s will, don Rodrigo is ready to depart toward his final destination: “The will of Heaven my will shall be,-- I bow to the divine decree, to God’s behest. My soul is ready to depart.”

Many critics indicate that the originality of this poem lies on the wonderful usage of biblical topics and of medieval European literature, (for instance, the ubi sunt-- ¿dónde están? “Where is the king, Don Juan? Where each royal prince and nobles heir of Aragón? Where are the courtly gallantries?” pp. 57- 59 -- which is used to express the pain of death and the passing of time in general), furthermore, on the tone expressing between desperation and peace, which seems to summarize the feeling of the entire period of Castilian life. This sincere verse and the concrete images that portrays have been served as masterpiece for many Spanish poets, among them including Antonio Machado (1875- 1939) and Pedro Salinas (1892- 1951).