

Topic Page: [Vega, Lope de, 1562–1635](https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/vega_lope_1562_1635)

Summary Article: **Vega, Lope Felix de (Carpio) (1562–1635)**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Spanish poet and dramatist. He was one of the founders of modern Spanish drama. He wrote epics, pastorals, odes, sonnets, novels, and over 500 plays (of which 426 are still in existence), mostly tragicomedies. He set out his views on drama in *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias/The New Art of Writing Plays* (1609), in which he defended his innovations while reaffirming the classical forms. *Fuenteovejuna* (c. 1614) has been acclaimed as the first proletarian drama.

Life His early years are obscure, but many of his love affairs are well documented. He was born in Madrid but banished in 1588 for eight years for insulting his lover's family; he then married another woman and days later set sail from Lisbon as a sailor in Philip II's Armada. He returned, pardoned, to Madrid in 1590. His marriages and love affairs continued; in 1614, however, he became a priest. Celibacy did not last, as in 1617 he fell passionately in love with a married woman of 26, Marta de Nevares. Despite his vows, they lived together, and she apparently encouraged him to write the *Novelas a Marcia Leonardo* (the title was a thinly disguised reference to Nevares herself). But she gradually descended into blindness and madness, dying in 1632. Her death, which inspired Lope's eclogue 'Amarilis' (1633), was shortly followed by his own. He was buried with much pomp in the church of St Sebastian, Madrid, but his remains are untraceable, as they were later removed to a common grave.

Poetry Vega was a lyric poet who wrote sonnets, eclogues, and ballads, many of which were inspired by his love affairs. Of his sonnets, 200 were published in 1602; another 100 appeared in 1614, and an anthology of his poetry, *La Vega del Parnaso/The Parnassian Valley* (a play on his surname) was printed shortly after his death in 1637. In 1634 his comic poem 'La Gatomaquia', on the deeds of a wicked cat, was published in another anthology of his works, *Rimas divinas y humanas/Verses divine and human*.

Novels Lope wrote the obligatory pastoral novel, *La Arcadia/Arcadia* in 1598 (with the added interest that it was a *roman à clef*, closely based on real persons). In 1604 he produced a work in another fashionable genre, the byzantine novel, *El Peregrino en su patria/The Pilgrim in His Own Country*, which had a useful (for modern scholars) appendix listing Lope's 219 plays to date. He responded to Miguel de Cervantes's *Novelas ejemplares* with a series of *Novelas a Marcia Leonardo/Novels for Marcia Leonardo*, which appeared at intervals, published in different collections: the first, *Las fortunas de Diana/Diana's Adventures*, was included in *La Filomena/Filomena* (1621), and he published three more in *La Circe/Circe* (1624). Finally, the lengthy prose dialogues of *La Dorotea/Dorotea* (1632) recall *La Celestina*, although Vega's tale of his early loves is also interspersed with lyric poems.

Plays Ironically for one who was such a prolific playwright (Lope wrote some 501 dramatic works), there exists no completely reliable text of any of his plays. It was not until 1619 that he authorized publication of a selection of these; by then, however, there were numerous unauthorized editions in circulation. His plays drew their inspiration from earlier Castilian literature (ballads, chronicles) or historical events; from classical dramatists – particularly Plautus – from the Bible, or simply from popular sayings. Thus the tragic *Caballero de Olmedo/The Gentleman of Olmedo* (c. 1615–26, published 1641) alludes heavily to *La Celestina*, while *Fuenteovejuna* merges a line from a chronicle with 15th-century Castilian history. *Perro del hortelano/Dog in the Manger* (literally, 'the gardener's dog'), written 1613–15,

is a comedy of aristocratic intrigue and false identity which, in the style of classical comedy, is ultimately and ingeniously resolved to the satisfaction of the characters.

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