

***La Tramoyera: A New Role for Women in the Golden Age Comedia de Capa y Espada***

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THESIS

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illustrations. The pursuit of uncovering women's indispensable role in Spanish Golden Age theater and society has been, and continues to be, an amazing journey.

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## SUMMARY

This thesis explores female agency in seventeenth-century *comedias de capa y espada* [cape and sword plays]. I wish to identify and examine women's diverse contributions to a highly popular genre that constituted half of the dramatic production in Spain's Golden Age. Through socio-cultural, historical, and feminist approaches, I analyze the meaning of women's representations in these comedic plays. I intend to show how the emergence of actresses toward the end of the sixteenth-century impacted the development of variant female roles and the evolution of Spanish commercial theater. Skilled female performers brought to life fictional characters that showed relentless determination to shift patriarchal parameters and expand feminine spaces. Prolific writers seized the opportunity to blend illusion and reality, and portray evolving gender paradigms at a time of great urbanization in Madrid. In *capa y espada* plays, female protagonists skillfully engage in courtship, premarital sex, and marriage negotiations. In fact, real women also had more command of their lives than previously believed. Social, religious, legal, and medical discourses did not have such a strong influence on female identity formation as historians have argued in the past. I draw attention to the privileged position of self-assertive, unmarried female characters in the *capa y espada* genre. I aim to reinterpret the phenomenon of the *comedia de capa y espada* as female-centered and reevaluate the role of the single woman as subject in early modern Spain.

An important motivation to write this thesis has been to change the stigma of the *comedia de capa y espada* as one that is trivial in nature since this faulty perspective fails to recognize the importance of the plays in charting women's social history in early modern Spain. In my introduction, I scrutinize women's active contribution to this compelling historical period in

## SUMMARY (continued)

order to enhance my reading of these plays. I write about the need for a new classification of female lead characters. I have chosen to classify the female protagonists of the *capa y espada* plays as *tramoyeras* [scheming women], in order to make a new distinction for these intelligent characters of agency.

In the first two chapters, I establish the importance of cross-dressing and masquerade for female characters in their attempts to achieve a sense of freedom, voice, and command in their lives. By making connections between the implications of female cross-dressing in real life and in performance, I arrive at fascinating reflections on the fluidity of gender, the illusion of representation, and the power of deception. By analyzing the portrayal of the cross-dressed woman and the overly-feminized woman I am able to make assertions about women's concerns over their right to speak, to choose a husband, and to protect their dowries.

My examination of the *tramoyeras* who incessantly scheme challenges conventional notions about female characterization and agency. I show how some characters employ their gendered resources to acquire leverage in attaining their goals. In this part of my thesis, I establish how female characters manipulate and negotiate male attempts to subjugate their bodies and voices. I demonstrate how women in these plays invert the stereotypical weak conditions associated with the female gender into sources of power. I will show how many *tramoyeras* recognize illness and pregnancy, for example, as a means of empowerment to undermine patriarchal authority. I uncover fascinating reasons why several female lead characters defend their socially unfavorable status as widows or unmarried women in the face of danger. My analysis of these representations of female insubordination displayed in the action and the

## **SUMMARY (continued)**

dramatic discourse, in conjunction with the highly disconcerting marital unions at the end of these plays uncovers valuable proto-feminist assertions about women in early modern Spain previously ignored.





(Illustration by Ivan Markovic)

## LA TRAMOYERA

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## INTRODUCTION

### ***La Tramoyera: A New Role for Women in the Golden Age Comedia de capa y espada plays***

The *capa y espada* [cloak and sword] plays were the most popular dramatic genre in early modern Spain. Known for their parodic style, feisty women, swashbuckling love intrigues and formulaic theatrical conventions, they reached such unprecedented stage success that they challenged the predominance of tragedies, tragicomedies and other prevailing theater. Today, this genre remains a celebrated form on the national as well as the international stage, yet its meaning has not been studied by critics of the *comedia*. It is certainly unsettling to know that a dramatic genre demonstrating the theatrical genius of the most celebrated male and female Spanish playwrights of the Golden Age has been overlooked as worthy canonical theater. How can a comedic genre be ignored that elicited such enormous “box office” demand and even stimulated changes to the architectural interior of the theater in the early seventeenth-century?<sup>1</sup> Why should the overwhelming cultural resonance of Spanish women in society and as represented in these plays remain unaddressed?

The indifference towards such an influential genre by most scholars of the *comedia* has led me to pose several questions about literary, cultural and historical issues to uncover the reasons for its exclusion from serious consideration in contemporary studies of Golden Age theater.<sup>2</sup> My dissertation will serve to reinterpret the phenomenon of the *comedia de capa y espada* as a female-centered play and reevaluate the role of the single woman as subject in early modern society. By recovering this complex female

agency from relative obscurity, I hope to shed new light on the importance of the unmarried woman in theater and society. Recent scholarship on women's authority in early modern Spain, as rulers, estate guardians, proprietors, litigants, educators, patrons, writers, *autoras* [directors] and actresses demonstrates the value of a revisionist effort of women's roles and contributions to history.<sup>3</sup> In the introduction to her collection on the aristocratic women of the Mendoza family, Helen Nader speaks of "matriarchy" in early modern Spain: "Matriarchy empowers all women to control property they own and make decisions for themselves [...] Much of the matriarchal power in Castilian society derived from women's inheritance rights and married women's property law" (4). Considering that women had much more power in Spain than has been previously accepted, I plan to explore the intrigues of the single woman as protagonist in the *comedia de capa y espada*, whose undefeated pursuit of personal and economic agency makes her an empowered and transgressive character.

My intention is to demonstrate how the female protagonist of the *comedia de capa y espada*, evolves into a position of subjectivity, transforming into a vivid and fully-realized character whose image transcends the stage. The initial identity of the female lead is unveiled in the opening act, where she appears as a passive and victimized object. This leading *dama* or *doncella* (a single woman ready for marriage) is originally positioned as the forlorn unmarried woman - who is the victim of a sexual seduction, and has been abandoned, or is recently widowed, or under paternal control. Yet a useful way to think about this female character is to frame her as figuratively emerging or escaping from a patriarchal narrative. Instead of assuming the position as an object of desire, she enters into a female-centered play where it is *she* who is in pursuit of the male character.

The patriarchal concepts of “male” as “subject” and “female” as “object” are inverted in the *capa y espada* genre. Within this dramatic space the female character has the license to shift to an active subject position that now gazes at and controls the male as her object of desire. Female desire thus depends on the pursuit of the desired object. The notion of female agency is articulated in the ability to control and manipulate the men around her. In the *capa y espada* genre, there is a clear “play” on the expectations of the traditional gender discourses: male/subject and female/object. The transgressions of normative dominant paradigms serve as an outlet in which to politicize gender, class, and mores in the early seventeenth century.

I propose that the transfiguration of the female protagonist from object to subject in the *comedia de capa y espada* occurs on two levels: as a dramatic figure in the play and as a nuance of the historical subject in society. The female lead is the point of intersection between theatrical artificiality and historical authenticity. The role of the protagonist is rooted in dramatic developments and social changes affecting female identity. Emerging from a model or stock character, the female heroine is a product of the playwrights’ sensitivity to the vital shifting position of woman and depicts a likeness of the Spanish unmarried woman of a significant historical time in Spain. In his insightful book on Spanish comedies, William R. Blue underlines the historical integrity of early seventeenth-century plays: “Since the fundamental gags and situations [...] are constant, an author needs to make the situations and characters real and meaningful for the audience” (viii) in order to attain a deeper connection. I find these plays are textured with a deep understanding of women’s efforts to be decision-makers in a male ordered society. Women's issues such as the right to choose a husband, voice their will, protect their

dowries, and define their own identity are pervasive in these comedies. The female characters employ all their resources to break away from a prescribed life and achieve their immediate goals. These are proactive women whose resourcefulness and instinct enables them to weaken masculine authority, disrupt the traditional order of things, and challenge the defined norms of society in order to forge their own identity.

### **The Tramoyera**

I classify the female protagonists of the *comedia de capa y espada* as *tramoyeras*, the seventeenth-century epithet in the vernacular for a scheming woman, in order to make a new distinction for these cunning characters of agency and to set them apart from the similar yet different categories of *la esquivia*, *la mujer vestida de hombre* and *la mujer varonil*.<sup>4</sup> As early as 1629, in the comedy *La dama duende* by Calderón de la Barca, women who are “*artificiosas*” [cunning] are referred to in the slang of the day as “*mujeres tramoyeras*” (v. 515). The literary critic Angel Valbuena Briones explains its meaning as “amiga de enredos, ardides y malicias....la mujer ingeniosa, inventora de mentiras y amiga de presentar una falsa perspectiva” (68, n. 43) The *tramoyera* thus signifies an ingenious woman with a particular faculty for invention and deception. I have chosen the term “tramoyera” to make a direct association and identification with the object-subject transition of the female protagonists in the *capa y espada* genre. I conceive of the *tramoyera* as embodying the convergence of the historical and the fictional roles played out by women.

The label *tramoyera* is etymologically derived from the word *tramoya*, which in the early 1600s referred to a machine used on theater stages to change the scenery, the

décor, and to create special effects.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the machinations of the *tramoyera* involve controlling and manipulating the characters, the sets, and the illusions of the play. N.D. Shergold suggests that the word *tramoya* is linked to *trama* – the play’s narrative web or plot (557).<sup>6</sup> Another likely etymological root of the term is the Spanish verb *tramar*, meaning to scheme or deceive which also illustrates the women's dubious talents.

I use the label *tramoyera* to describe these dexterous female leads knowing its negative implications. In the same vein as Debra A. Castillo, who argues that women “appropriate the master’s weapon” (96) of misogynist language used to devalorize and subjugate Hispanic women, I also wish to take back a traditionally derogatory appellative. My use of the *tramoyera* is an effort to reappropriate male language and rebuild women’s own identity. By appropriating a term that holds sexist connotations of essentialist female traits such as deceit and perfidy, I mean to realign and invert the label to signify instead women’s tenacity and bravery.<sup>7</sup> This is a move towards subjectivity for the image of women in seventeenth-century Spain and beyond, for as Castillo explains,

the presence of women in what remains the social construct of a “man’s world,” therefore, has essentially no effect as long as the basic assumptions remain uncontested, as long as the protean and elusive hegemony of impersonal organization remains undisturbed. (131)

The appropriation of the *tramoyera* involves what Castillo describes as “...employ[ing] masculine assumptions against themselves” (101). The result of this inversion is a shift of blame from the female scapegoat to the generator of the defamatory term, man. In the *comedia de capa y espada* we find a revaluation of the culpability of women and of the origins of decaying social morals. The *tramoyera* evades punishment for her transgressions through the exposure of male self-centered interests, provoked by her

improprieties. Women choose to act in what seventeenth-century society considers an unethical and immoral manner due to their repressed mobility and individuality in the dominant culture. They deceive, disguise, lie, and cheat to acquire some sort of agency within the boundaries of their sex.<sup>8</sup> Their transgressions of imposed social behavior are given impunity because of their initial victimization by men.

What sets the *tramoyeras* apart from the rest of the female categories such as wives and maids is their evolution as the subject and motor of the play. I contend that these female characters are not simply stock characters. By demonstrating how the female characters' social and psychological transformation is an integral part of the plot, they represent another challenge to Alexander Parker's much-criticized description of Golden Age drama as one without character development ("The Approach to the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age" 42). Although the *tramoyeras* originate from the stereotype of the cunning female lover of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*, they possess individual personalities. Many female roles in Spain were also inspired by the strong women of classical and contemporary currents in the arts and in society. Carmen Bravo-Villasante, Barbara Matulka, Melveena McKendrick, and others have shown that seventeenth-century drama sought inspiration in the literary revival of the classical Amazons, in the shepherdesses of the pastoral novel, in the heroines of Spanish ballads and chivalric literature. They are noticeably unpredictable despite the contrived element of their initial blue print. They do not have a predetermined path to reach their goals. Their course of action in the drama is filled with twists and turns; they debate with their own ideals as well as those of others; they battle with their inner demons, social and cultural prescriptions imposed on their gender, and many other arguments along the way.



John Storey defines popular culture as a “mass-produced commercial culture, [as opposed to] high culture [which] is the result of an individual act of creation” (8).<sup>9</sup> This elitist view of popular culture sees mass production as lacking philosophical, social, or moral integrity. Popular theater of the *corrales* dramatized a wider range of female concerns than did cultured theater of the palace which concentrated on male interests and ideology. Yet the stigmatization of the *comedia de capa y espada* as trivial and gratuitous in nature fails to recognize the powerful role of the plays in charting women’s social history in the Spanish theater.

The predilection of the masses for comedy and overwhelmingly female-centered comedies is evident by the profuse number of *capa y espada* plays staged in the first half of the 1600s. The supremacy of tragedy versus comedy according to classical rules is denied by the loud applause of the public. In spite of this, the literary canon has posed an obstacle for the study of *comedias de capa y espada* and the role of women that is ingrained in this genre. The real image of women in seventeenth-century Spain cannot be readily uncovered because they were given predominantly comical roles.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the perception that the female comedic is comprised of inferior or second-rate attributes in comparison to those of the female tragic protagonist remains prevalent due to early male-centered criticism headed by Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo. He disputed the theatrical and cultural validity of comedic roles due to their lack of philosophical and universal substance, thereby alienating them from serious study (*Calderón y su teatro* 229).<sup>11</sup> More recently *Diccionario de la comedia del Siglo de Oro* - a reference handbook for students and professors boasting the contributions of 102 international specialists on the comedia - fails to mention under the entry *capa y espada* that current

critical approaches identify female characters as challenging conventional women's roles in society. The editors of this academic volume choose to solely comment on the main theme of courtship and the primary concern of entertainment. Evidently, the *capa y espada* genre and female lead characters continue to be stigmatized as inferior through the omission of recent scholarship in this area. The invisibility of women in the *comedia* remains. For this reason, I hope to show how many single women protagonists of the *comedia de capa y espada* transcend their classical and Italian roots through personal resolutions of conflict, and evolve into new paradigms of female agency in seventeenth-century Spanish theater.

This study will cover an assortment of noteworthy *tramoyeras* that surfaced in the first half of the seventeenth century: Leonarda in *La viuda valenciana* (1599-1603), Belisa in *El acero de Madrid* (1606-1612), and María in *La moza de cántaro* (1627) by Lope de Vega; Madalena and Serafina in *El vergonzoso en palacio* (1610) and Juana in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615) by Tirso de Molina; Rosamira in *El laberinto de amor* (1585-1615) by Miguel de Cervantes; Ángela in *La dama duende* (1629) by Calderón de la Barca; and Fenisa in *La traición en la amistad* (1628-1632) by María de Zayas y Sotomayor. The playwrights I have selected create paradigmatic women of substance endowed with an individuality, intelligence, and bravery far surpassing their male counterparts in the *comedia*. Further, my investigation of male and female-authored *comedias* enables me to compare *tramoyeras* created from gender-inflected perspectives so that I may achieve a more nuanced understanding of their roles.

Earlier *comedia* studies have generally resisted viewing these protagonists as women of agency or having any correlation to real women (Emilio Cotarelo y Mori 1906,

xix-xxx). Gender transgression by female characters is often misinterpreted as inconsequential due to the reinstatement of the stereotypical female role of wife at the end of Golden Age comedies. It is true that the *tramoyeras* differ from what Barbara Matulka defines as the staunch feminists of medieval literature, such as the character "Braçayda in Juan de Flores's fifteenth-century novella, *Grisel y Mirabella*; Gradissa of *Grimalte y Gradissa*; or Rodríguez del Padrón's female protagonists in his fifteenth-century exhortation to women entitled *Triunfo de las doñas*" ("The Feminist Theme" 231).<sup>12</sup> Matulka argues that the contentious rivalry between man and woman is the unresolved theme in these earlier feminist works, while love and marriage are the harmonizing themes in the comedies of the Golden Age. She also demonstrates convincingly how the feminist debate of the seventeenth century emerged from medieval and renaissance literature. The most important figure of the seventeenth century debate is María de Zayas y Sotomayor who defends the need for women's education in *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637) and *Desengños amorosos* (1647). Yolanda Gamboa-Tusquets states, "Several critics have argued that Zayas's novels could be considered within the "querelle des femmes," making her a Spanish early modern feminist (211). The playwright Ana Caro de Mallén de Soto as well defends female justice in *Valor, agravio y mujer* (1628-1653). Alicia R. Zeuse points out how both Ana Caro and María de Zayas participated in Madrid's literary academies, asserting their pro-feminist voices among male writers and moralists (193).

Yet, what I find problematic about Matulka's assertions are her concluding remarks that distinguish the two historical groups of female literary characters as "markedly" different. According to Matulka, the early feminists have an

"uncompromising attitude" (192) while the later feminists surrender their struggles to love. I insist that the validity of the feminist debate and the integrity of female characterization have to be examined in conjunction with the sociocultural conditions and the theatrical conventions of different genres in that particular time. It is unjustified to make a blanket statement about female characters in the early modern period as driven solely by love. In fact, what compels many female leads is desire and agency. My thesis shows that the *tramoyeras* are emblematic figures for their unwavering determination to procure a degree of individualism and a husband they themselves choose. Matulka laid the groundwork for future women's studies in this field but simultaneously seemed to invalidate them. Most feminist themes debated in medieval literature are present in seventeenth-century comedy, but they are addressed within the parameters of the socio-historical climate and the theatrical currents of that time. There was a disparity in the value of love and marriage in both these periods. In their extensive research on feminist discourses in literature, both Matulka and Bravo-Villasante demonstrate that the feminist themes prevalent in the *comedia de capa y espada* derived from classical, oriental, and medieval sources. The reintegration of the feminist themes and revival of female heroines in the theater of the early seventeenth-century resulted from the renewal of debates on gender and society in an extremely transformative historical period.<sup>13</sup> A long tradition of proto-feminist discourses inspired by the debate known as the *querelle des femmes*, frames the *tramoyera* in the *comedia de capa y espada*. The four-century debate was originally provoked by Jean de Meung's misogynist poem *Le Roman de la Rose* (1230-1275) and Christine de Pizan's critical response in *Le Livre de la cité des dames* (1403). Some of the Spanish writers that depicted women as spiritually and intellectually equal to

men, and challenged contradictions in the misogynistic attacks found in El Arcipreste de Talavera's *El Corbacho* (1438), for example, were Juan Rodríguez del Padrón, in his *Triunfo de las donas* (1445); Mosén Diego de Valera, *Tratado en defenssa de virtuossas mujeres* (1445); Álvaro de Luna, *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mujeres* (1446); Alonso de Cartagena, *Libro de las mujeres ilustres* (1500-1550?); Fray Martín de Córdoba, *Jardín de nobles doncellas* (1468); and Teresa de Cartagena, *Admiratio operum Dei* (1477-1478). The profuse gender discourses coming from both sides of the debate provided more opportunities for transgression in the theater.

I propose that a female-centered reinterpretation of the *comedia de capa y espada* offers an arena for discussing women's issues in the seventeenth century. As postmodern readers of Golden Age theater, we must remove the veil of the marriage endings<sup>14</sup> in order to uncover the variant representations of women as subjects in society. According to Catherine Connor, "closure as meaning is produced not only by the specific structural closing or end of the play, but rather by all the factors of representation and response implicated in the interactive process of dramatic production" ("Marriage and Subversion" 29). The message of the play does not reside in what may be interpreted as a "happy ending" or even a problematic ending with mismatched couples. As José M. Regueiro explains, an unstable ending is one where "the reader is confronted with the disquieting possibility that the [marital] resolution will not provide stability or will only in part and for a fleeting moment"(38). I suggest that the disconcerting marriages at the end of numerous *comedias de capa y espada* have subversive undertones since the fragile nature of the relationships implies a weakened patriarchal order. Although the ending and all the other components of a drama are significant, it is the images of female insubordination

displayed in the action and the dramatic discourse that emphasize possibilities and ruptures in the gender and social discourses of the dominant culture. I recognize that it is incongruous to study female subjects in the *comedia de capa y espada* as true portrayals of seventeenth-century Spanish women. However, the correlation between socio-history and theater is strikingly palpable in the *capa y espada* play, where a new venue from which to recover past female voices emerges.

The early modern *comedia* portrayed many contrasting images of Spanish women in hagiographic plays, uxoricide plays, tragedies, and tragicomedies. Although extensive literary analyses have been dedicated to these female protagonists, one image has consistently been excluded. The most understated performance is that of the *tramoyera*, as I refer to her. I have reappropriated the term that Felipe Pedraza, in La comedia de enredo (9), used previously in a negative light. This unmarried woman is unlike the single woman represented as *la pastora*, *la mujer esquivia*, *la mujer vestida de hombre*, or *la guerrera* in that she sets her unyielding goal from the beginning and controls the people and the surroundings of her reality. The *tramoyera* of the *comedia de capa y espada* surpasses her sister variants in many ways by embodying a combination of female agency, sexual mobility, theatrical masquerade and socio-historical substance. What we can learn from these dramatic characters is why and how women were represented on stage positioned as subject in this particular comedic genre. My thesis testifies to the construction and deconstruction of female identity in the seventeenth century by looking at women on the stage, behind the curtains, and in the audience.

There is one final point I wish to make before beginning my exploration of the *tramoyera* character. My philosophy of dramatic interpretation is founded on the belief

that theater sends diverse, variable and contradictory messages to its audience. Catherine Connor has advanced critical studies of the performance experience in this direction. She recently highlighted the Spanish dramatic theorists' perspicuity in acknowledging the reactions and responses to the complete theater experience:

The *preceptistas* recognized the powers of *comedia* to re-produce a variety of meanings among spectators, to teach them and to inspire pleasures. Their delight in the *nueva comedia* was accompanied by insecurities surrounding their inability to control it. ("Spectators making 'Meanings'" 425)

As I examine the multiplicity of meanings surrounding the *tramoyera* I will shed light on her implicit dialogue with the female spectators of the *corral*. This inclusive approach to the female subject affords a much wider arena in which to study the roles of women in the theater and society.

My ultimate goal is to forge a new classification of the female protagonist of *capa y espada* plays with the label *tramoyera* that describes women who take up subject positions in order to speak and become agents of their own desire. I will examine what specifically allows the *tramoyera* to have agency as I explore the topics of masquerade, transvestism, sex, language, voice, and property. I demonstrate that the *tramoyera* warrants particular attention because she forms part of the discourse of women's individualism in the early modern period. The *comedia de capa y espada* is a site of contestation for the place of women in society, which may in turn be recognized as a representation of the struggle to position women as subjects. The *tramoyera's* depth of characterization will prove to be an indispensable contribution to our knowledge of the female subject in the literature and culture of early modern Spain.

The world of women in seventeenth-century Spain remains a highly debated field. Rediscovering women's impact on society and culture has been a painstaking endeavor for many scholars, due to patristic histories and the exclusion of women from print. My aim is to contribute further to the nuances in female agency through the study of the emerging commercial theater known as *comedia de capa y espada*. This comedic genre parodies the courting customs of the Spanish nobility while providing a site where significant gender issues are played out and where women especially have a more controlling social role. Although the *tramoyera*, as is conventional in comedy, is a figure of excess, one must question the ubiquitous appearance of women asserting themselves in this genre. The plays show women challenging patriarchal values and attitudes in society, and reveal women redefining themselves through the individual choices they make. I examine the diverse characterizations of women who depart from literary conventions and contest cultural and political boundaries. My thesis will therefore contribute to society's growing consciousness of female empowered identity in seventeenth-century theater and society by exploring the skilled theatrical characterizations conjointly with the realities of female agency.

### **Seventeenth-Century Spanish Commercial Theater**

The creation of Spanish commercial theater came about during a time of serious political and economic trouble for Spain. According to Henry Kamen, the last quarter of the sixteenth century was a period of critical change, shaken by political, economical and religious crises (178, 223, 241). The Spanish crown struggled to bring stability to its vast territories during a time of military losses, financial recession, and religious schism



(Kamen 156-257). As Spain's imperial strongholds diminished around the world due to the excessive demands on military defense, the monarchy continued to focus on silver mining in America (Cohen 147). Despite the increase in profits from silver production, imperial expenditure and debt rose. A new Spanish consciousness began to emanate from within national borders, immersed in economic inflation, increased taxes on Castile, higher cost of domestic products, cheaper foreign goods, agricultural devastation and debilitating bankruptcies (1575 and 1596). The sixteenth century ended with an onset of natural disasters such as ruined harvests, famine, plague, rural exodus, as well as the delegation of government power to a *valido* [single favored minister] from a system of councils implemented by Felipe III (Elvira Vilches 219-224; J. H. Elliott 180-188, 198-200).

Walter Cohen argues that commercial Spanish theater emerged from the partial absolutism of Spain: as the crown "achieved only a limited degree of centralization" (123) due to several factors: the feudal liberties of the crown of Aragon, Navarra and the Basque provinces, as well as the limited control of the king in Valencia and the province of Salamanca in old Castile (Kamen 155). Noble and ecclesiastical jurisdiction in many areas limited the king's right to collect taxes or enforce police authority (151). Kamen agrees that real absolutism was an illusion: "the lack of a centralized state bureaucracy, either in judicial matters or in finance, made it impossible to secure firm control over the administration" (151). The Spanish monarchy was immersed in a period of quasi-medieval feudalism and a partial capitalism. According to Cohen, "the incompleteness of absolutist consolidation proved intellectually and emotionally liberating by leaving open economic, social, or political spaces that could provide the basis for the expression of

distinct perspectives” (149). Many independent ideologies existed, for example, the agrarian (concerned over the land crisis), the anti-imperialist (afflicted for the decay of the state), and the regionalist (against centralized power) (149). Cohen argues that the synthesis of divergent perspectives resulted in a unique fusion of popular and learned elements in society and drama (149).

The development of the theater in Madrid was unique for other significant reasons. The court settled in Madrid in 1561 with a brief return to Valladolid between 1601 and 1606. The capital experienced a rapid urbanization made up of Philip II's Flemish entourage; the Spanish aristocracy; the growing bourgeoisie; tradesmen; merchants; artisans; wage earners; and the impoverished (Elliott *El conde-duque* 115-116). The monarchy addressed the city's serious problems caused by the growing numbers of beggars by authorizing the religious foundation of charities, known as *cofradías de socorro*, which through public donations financed hospitals and shelters to aid the needy<sup>15</sup> - the Cofradía de la Pasión, for example, was founded in 1565. In Maureen Flynn's comprehensive survey of Spanish charities, she stresses how religious charities strove to maintain a private and decentralized welfare system as much as possible (Sacred Charity 160). With the increasing need for social assistance, the confraternity was granted a license by the Council of Castile to sponsor the evolving commercial theater for the funding of hospitals.<sup>16</sup> Cohen emphasizes that the council's aim was mainly to assist in the development and proliferation of the theater.<sup>17</sup> The Cofradía de la Pasión and later the addition of the Cofradía de la Soledad, monopolized the rental of the enclosed areas known as *corrales* either belonging to the hospitals or private homes.<sup>18</sup>

These provisional *corrales* did not have sections segregated by socioeconomic class or gender. It was not until the permanent edification of the Teatro de la Cruz (1579) and the Teatro del Príncipe (1583), that spaces were hierarchically assigned to the audience. Only in 1608 were *alguaciles* [sheriffs] introduced to secure this social order (Bernardo García García *Teatros y comediantes* 6). The interaction of men and women from different social strata was unique to Spain. The *Ayuntamiento* [city hall] of Madrid supported the theater contributing positively to its defense and productivity.<sup>19</sup> Due to the theater's charitable function, its licentious connotations were oftentimes ignored. Most of the dissenting criticism was proffered by clergy, who condemned what they considered commercial theater's contribution to the moral decay of a Christian society (Rennert *The Spanish Stage* 209-216).

The religious confraternities' monopoly over the theater business kept private entrepreneurs from profiting from this public phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> This was not the case in other Spanish cities such as Seville or Valencia, nor was it in the case in other countries such as England or France. Hence, theater production in Madrid was spurred by benevolent urban projects. The financial gain was not reinvested in business ventures to produce more profit and strengthen the power of the rich, but instead it was reinvested in the impoverished sector of society. The ramifications of the charitable administration of funds produced unique effects on the commercial theater in Madrid. Even though the main themes of love, honor, jealousy, and marriage presented on stage revolved around the bourgeoisie and aristocracy in *comedias de capa y espada* in Madrid, the impact of the religious confraternities seemed to have opened the way for the incorporation of divergent social perspectives of culture on stage and in the heterogeneous audience. A

higher degree of popular<sup>21</sup> elements are discernible. Included in the popular voice of the theater is the opposing view of those reacting to the elite and the aristocracy such as the Jesuits, the lower strata of society, and women of all social classes.

In 1615, the Council of Castile introduced a new system of management based on leases that meant to alleviate the financial crisis of the theater caused by Madrid's economic downturn. A private businessman known as an *arrendador*, paid a substantial amount to the hospitals for the administrative authority of the *corrales* and the right to receive the theater's profits (Shergold 383-385). Cohen contends that what initially was a "precapitalist conception of charity found its most efficient means in the bourgeois entrepreneur" (268). The growing dominance of the Spanish bourgeoisie in all aspects of life affected the tastes of audiences. The subject matter of the theater began to include more of the higher, middle-class aspirations, who essentially strove to mimic the aristocracy. Spanish theater provides sociological insights due to its diversified contributing agents.

The historian José Antonio Maravall emphasizes the significant differences between Spanish theater and other European theaters stemming from their social and economic condition. He points out that during the early modern period in Spain there came a propensity for renewal, advancement and alterity (14-15). As historical and cultural contexts shifted, classical aesthetics moved aside to encompass a more contemporary reality; a reality unique to the evolving experiences and the discriminating tastes of the Spanish people. Spanish academies, for example, reflected a diversified regionalism (Jeremy Robbins 34) unlike other European theater including England was controlled by private enterprise. The French and Italian theater up to the early 1600s,

were directed to an educated and cultivated audience in accordance with classical dramaturgy (Maravall 33-37). French theater and literary academies were strictly controlled by the state. In Spain however, many late sixteenth and seventeenth-century literary academies were founded by poets. *La Peregrina*, the previously named *Academia de Madrid* where Lope read his famous *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* (1609), was the home of the poet Sebastián Francisco de Medrano. These academies provided an arena for aesthetic theory and debate that had a powerful influence on the proliferation of the Arts. In my view, the fact that Spanish academies were not controlled by the crown or private enterprise suggests that there was a greater freedom to communicate artistic, social, and political thought in cultural production.

The polyvalent voices in Spanish popular theater are undeniable. It is imperative to keep in mind what I mentioned earlier, that early lay charitable sponsors emerged as a unique force in the evolution of Spanish commercial theater. It is my contention that many recurring themes of the *capa y espada* plays, such as extramarital sex, seduction and abandonment, pregnancy, and dowry embezzlement reflected some of the social ills ministered by the confraternities. These themes represent the transgressions that existed within a broad spectrum of society and reflect both popular and cultured voices in the *comedia*, a genre that incorporated both high and low elements.

### **Evolution of the *Comedia de capa y espada***

The Italian *commedia dell'arte* had a strong impact in the evolution of the theater in Spain. The lack of a pre-established script, improvisational aesthetics, Renaissance masks, and comical stock-characters earned Italian troupes unprecedented fame.

According to Randall Listerman, Italian players arrived in Spain as early as 1538 (195). They introduced women actors to play female roles previously acted by young boys (197). In the 1570s Italian companies as Muzio's or Alberto Ganassa's "established the direction and accelerated the organizational development of Spanish companies" (196). The Italian *commedia dell'arte* presented popular types like the greedy wealthy merchant father, the young lovers, the captain, and the comical *zanni* that captured the attention of the paying public in festivals, inns, and temporary stages. This highly entertaining mix of popular and cultured elements brought on the advent of commercial theater in Spain.

The evolution of the *comedia de capa y espada* can also be traced to medieval drama and Torres Naharro's adaptation of Roman comedy. His significant contribution hinges on the amalgamation of learned and popular elements. He achieves this by incorporating the shepherd (or rustic) into the urban context (Rennert *Spanish Stage* 13-15; Shergold *History of the Spanish Stage* 146-150). The role of the shepherd, "maintained the intimacy with the audience" (Yarbro-Bejarano "The Sixteenth-Century Drama in Spain" 141-155). This reflected the analogous relationship of the lower class poet with the noble patron. The playwright, like the shepherd bridged the two spheres. Torres Naharro also incorporated the urban servants to take the "social place of shepherds" (Cohen 133). Later on, Lope transformed the shepherd into the *gracioso* [comic servant] of the *comedia nueva*. The contrast and irony between the upper and lower classes, between class, honor and love gave impetus to his *comedias de fantasia*. The comical mixture of opposing experiences between the nobility and the lower-class open a discourse for the contradictory experience of men and women. Women slowly began to take center stage. The noblewoman in Torres Naharro's *comedia de fantasia*

*Ymenea*<sup>22</sup> is the first female protagonist to speak of her desire to choose a husband. Later on this theme would provide the central impetus for the *comedia de capa y espada*.

Lope de Vega cemented a contemporary philosophy of drama in his *Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias* (1609), one that changed traditional precepts into a new aesthetic form. His visionary contributions to the theater transformed the stage by placing the *vulgo* at the center of his dramatic convictions. This brilliant strategic maneuver to trust the Spanish audience's appetite for entertainment<sup>23</sup> and mixed themes was contested by Juan de Mariana in *Tratado contra los juegos públicos* (1609) and Ignacio de Camargo in *Discurso theológico sobre los teatros y comedias de este siglo* (1689) as hedonistic and decadent. The cleric Camargo, for example, expressed indignation at the audience's delighted response to plays that mocked the protection of women by their fathers and husbands (Gabriela Carrión xix).<sup>24</sup> Church doctrine had a defining role in the formation of the subject, since identity as fixed and predetermined by God was promulgated through the interpretation of the Bible and through the writings of Church scholastics such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and others. Criticism by theologians against the theater harshly attacked the entire notion of performance and role-playing arguing that the Bible clearly forbids cross-dressing in *Deuteronomy 22:5*: "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God." Despite the Church's efforts to protect women from sinful behavior demonstrated by Eve that led to original sin, cross-dressing became a crowd-pleasing convention in the theater since it offered a temporary escape from strict demarcations of class and gender.

The early seventeenth century was a period of zealous controversies over theatrical aesthetics. Ruth Lee Kennedy explains that the years between 1617 and 1620 were marked by feuding among writers, clerics, and moralists (174).<sup>25</sup> Lope de Vega and his followers, namely Tirso de Molina, fought against the criticism of the *comedia nueva* and the banning of plays which many detractors believed lacked decorum and verisimilitude, and ignored the separation of tragedy and comedy. The neo-Aristotelian poets and moralists Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa, known as the initiator of Lopean criticism in *El Pasajero* (1617) and Pedro de Torres Rámila in *Spongia* (1617) attacked Lope's unorthodox approach to his narratives, epics, lyrical works, as well as to his *comedias*'s lascivious nature and degrading effects on the public (Menéndez Pelayo 161-164).<sup>26</sup> In *La Filomena* (1620), Lope responded to Rámila's attacks with remarks about the antiquated neo-classical precepts (García Santo Tomás 144, n.1600). Kennedy states that Suárez de Figueroa is famous for his view of Lopean plays as "todo charla, paja todo, sin nervio, sin ciencia ni erudición" (176). She further mentions the anonymous author of *Diálogos de las comedias* as an example of the criticism that labeled "the theater as the annals of hell and [whose] goal is to either close the theater or pass rigid censure upon it" (*Studies in Tirso* 4). Lope was also embattled with the envious playwright Juan Ruíz de Alarcón<sup>27</sup> and author Diego de Agreda y Vargas (*Novelas morales* 1620) who agreed with Suárez de Figueroa with the *comedia*'s poor literary value, specifically the *capa y espada* plays.

Despite these critiques, a hybrid of high and low culture (tragedy and comedy) was popular. The perception of the seventeenth-century *vulgo* [the populace] as an ignorant and uncultivated entity<sup>28</sup> made up of a mixed class of people is an image partly



created by Lope's own apologetic reference to them in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, which helped set the tone for the performance of *capa y espada* plays:

...y escribo por el arte que inventaron  
los que el vulgar aplauso pretendieron;  
porque, como las paga el vulgo, es justo  
hablarle en necio para darle gusto. (in Chaytor v. 45-48)

In the 1590s, Lope incorporated many elements of the classical comic tradition (Plautus and Terence) to his *comedia nueva* as well. His early comic plays, classified as *comedias de costumbres* [comedy of manners], are based on the Italian novella<sup>29</sup> and focus on the struggle between parental honor and youthful desire. Lope was also influenced by the stock characters of the head-strong *innamoratis* [female and male lovers] and the greedy father *Pantalone* from the *commedia dell'arte*. The outspoken daughter of *Pantalone* refused her father's choices for a profitable marital union, a recurring theme of *capa y espada* plays. Lope cultivated secondary plots, including the *gracioso* and *graciosa* (a parodic simulacrum of the nobleman and woman) transforming these comedies into what became known as the popular *comedia de capa y espada*.<sup>30</sup> The *comedia de capa y espada* was considered a subgenre of the secular romantic comedies of the time.<sup>31</sup> Felipe Pedraza Jiménez comments on the high production of these plays:

Las comedias de enredo constituyen el cincuenta por ciento de la producción dramática mayor de nuestro Siglo de Oro. Parece que los grandes autores tienen el deliberado propósito de alternar los dramas historiales con los de enredo cómico. Así ocurre en lo que conservamos de Lope y Calderón, que dividen su producción, casi matemáticamente, entre los dos géneros. (8)

The *capa y espada* plays showcased beguiling women, lovers' trysts, cross-dressers and disguises, parallel plots, class and gender transgressions, traditional customs and contemporary mores, and complicated action set in Madrid and other urban cities. In

the *comedia de capa y espada* the spotlight now falls upon the highborn single woman before marriage and her trials to reconcile desire and honor. The argument of these *capa y espada* comedies centers on unmarried women of the Spanish nobility who flout the strict norms of conduct imposed on their respective class and gender to win over the husband they desire.<sup>32</sup> Love, selfishness, jealousy and vengeance motivate this desire. To secure their mate, women manipulate their identity and the reality around them. They use a network of people (servants and friends), places (domestic and urban), disguises (male and female clothing), and tactics (concealment, deceit and illusion). The position of the female protagonist remains within the popular tradition because she contests the dominant male elite, parallel to the *gracioso*. Peter Burke argues that “Perhaps one should see noblewomen as mediators between the group to which they belonged socially, the elite, and the group to which they belonged culturally, the non-elite” (28). Yet, however popular she may seem, she rises to a subject position in the *comedia* unlike the permanent object position wives or maids maintain. The evolution of female roles is intimately related to women’s shifting position in society.

### **Women’s Social History**

Henry Kamen attests to a ‘growing self-awareness’ emerging in Spain (252), one that typically defines the Baroque culture of *engaño* [illusion] and *desengaño* [disillusion]. The convergence of the Counter-Reformation and modernization created tensions between opposing realities concerning the formation of identity (253). Women found themselves at the epicenter of this identity crisis, one that oscillated between traditional ideals and modern realities. According to humanist thinkers such as Luis de

León, human society was believed to depend on women. The urgency of the evolving female role in a transforming society revived the debate on women that had begun in the early fifteenth century. Merry Wiesner-Hanks has written extensively about the effects of urbanization on women's lives in Europe ("Spinning Out Capital"; *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*). The large number of unmarried women in many cities, due to the influx of poverty-stricken rural areas, families saving dowries, a lower percentage of men due to wars and other trials, posed serious issues that were then debated by civic and religious leaders. In *Guardianship, Gender, and the Nobility in Early Modern Spain*, Grace Coolidge traces the considerable legal authority that noblewomen had as guardians of their children, wills, and estates. She cogently argues that "the preservation of family, power, and lineage was more important than the prescriptive gender roles of their time" (2). Weisner-Hanks states that "Catholic authorities became increasingly concerned with public order, propriety, decorum, and morality" ("Women's Work" 227). Stemming from the anxiety over female authority, liberties, and social transgressions, prescriptions for the formation of the pious female subject proliferated during the Counter-Reformation. According to Weisner-Hanks, the preoccupation with unmarried women intensified with the

Catholic Church's increased concern with immorality among clergy and laity, and the increased currency of certain popular and scholarly notions of women's nature and proper role. (...) Sweeping generalities about women's nature were made not only by moralists and preachers, but also by humanists and writers of popular satire. Many of these expressed or reinforced the notion that women suffered from uncontrollable sexuality and lacked the ability to reason. (228)

Historically, Christian, Hebrew, and Islamic texts all predicted that any freedom given to women, who were considered iniquitous by nature, would bring about the fall of man and

the destruction of civilization (*Misogyny* 90). These misogynist beliefs intensified at certain points of critical change and uncertainty; a time of such critical tension undeniably occurred at the beginning of modernization in Spain.

Not surprisingly, a paramount concern was the construction of the model Christian woman. The formation of the female subject was a highly contested issue, one that the church and state protected. Stephanie Merrim affirms that because “women, and particularly women’s bodies, safeguard[ed] the essence of societal structures and order: lineage, inheritance, class, the family,” they were blamed for much of the disorder that emerged with the ‘progressive forces of modernization’ (*Early Modern Women’s Writing* xxiv). In early modern Spain, reinscriptions of moral laws attempted to contain a growing female licentiousness exhibited in a range of new trends such as excessive leisure time dedicated to *galanteos*; entertaining in silk-screened carriages; the fixation on materialism, scandalous affairs, as well as improprieties of actresses and female playgoers in the *corrales* (Vigil; McKendrick 1974, 31-35). Sumptuary laws tried to control the changes of female identity by legislating strict delineations of class and decorum. These laws attempted to prohibit the use of the *tapado*, for example, a veil used to cover a woman’s face.<sup>33</sup> The legislation in 1589, 1600 and again in 1639 against the Spanish *tapado* arose from a significant social concern over the loss of modesty in women exhibited in the way they used this garment to hide their identity and take liberated actions:

Worn by almost all women regardless of their station, the dark mantle thwarted social legibility by making it difficult, or impossible, not only to see a woman’s face, but to determine what she was doing out in public, and thus the difference between virtue and disrepute became disturbingly blurred. (Bass 118)

The *tapada* was often associated with the prostitute. María de Zayas's tale *La inocencia castigada* introduces a prostitute covered with a *tapado* and it would soon make its way to the stage. Lope de Vega's *Audiencias del rey don Pedro* (1630-1620) presents two women identified as prostitutes for wearing the *tapado*. In Lope's *comedia de capa y espada Las bazarrias de Belisa*, the tramoyera Belisa plays the role of the *tercera* [go-between] wearing the *tapado a medio ojo* or covering one eye.

The *guardainfante* [farthingale], a dress with a widely-looped skirt originally designed to protect the unborn child, was considered a facilitator of sexual licentiousness:

El guardainfante llamábase así por ocultar ciertos estados orgánicos de la mujer, y su empleo permitía hurtos en el huerto del amor sin la publicidad de las consecuencias. Contribuía así a disimular y fomentar la típica inmoralidad de la época. (Deleito 1966, 153)<sup>34</sup>

According to Carmen Bernís, the *guardainfante* became quite the sensation after being first introduced to the public in a *comedia* in Madrid (*Velázquez y el guardainfante* 50).

The *guardainfante* was originally a French fashion that caused strong disapproval and criticism by moralists such as Alonso de Carranza (*Rogación en detestación de los grandes abusos en los trages y adornos* 1636).<sup>35</sup> It had formerly been the typical dress worn by prostitutes. The sartorial law of 1639 restricted the use of the *guardainfante* to prostitutes only, to no avail:

Manda el rey, nuestro señor que ninguna mujer, de cualquier estado y calidad que sea, no pueda traer ni traiga guardainfante u otro traje semejante, excepto las mujeres que con licencia de las justicias públicamente son malas de sus personas y ganan por ello, a las cuales solamente se les permite el uso de guardainfantes para los que puedan traer libremente y sin pena alguna, prohibiéndolos como se prohíben a todas las demás.” (Luján 72)

The law was ineffective because the *guardainfante* had become a social custom (Deleito: 1966, 154). Mariana of Austria, Philip IV's second wife, promoted the fashion by making it a staple of her wardrobe and by posing for many paintings wearing the *guardainfante*.<sup>36</sup> These markers of female self-assertion added nuances to the theatrical portrayal, since in many cases, women had had sexual relations and the dress insinuated the possibility of hiding a pregnancy and complicating the social dynamics of the plot.

The political strife over women's position in society produced further reinscriptions of female identity. Natalie Zemon Davis underlines the political intentions of the kings and the state theorists who viewed the subjection of women to men in the household as a fundamental criterion of social structure to ensure the development of the centralizing state ("Women on Top" 128). The monarchy responded to the changes in society by reinforcing the authority of the father, the husband or the male guardian as the head of the family, as a reflection of the king ruling over his subjects. The male head of the family was in charge of controlling and enclosing unmarried women who were posed a threat to social order.<sup>37</sup> According to Wiesner-Hanks, the household became an "instrument of social control," with the male guardian actively keeping watch over widows and unmarried women ("Spinning out Capital" 229). Mary Elizabeth Perry notes that contradictions between women's ideal conditions and reality reflected and further contributed to the tensions in society. Perry states that, "In fact, gender beliefs that women required special protective enclosure seemed to be even more strongly invoked as men's preoccupation with wars and colonizing required women to participate more actively in the life of the city" (9). This proves that women in fact had much more agency and that all these reinforcements did not work.

The sociological context of the early modern period played a pivotal role in the creation of literary images of women. Barbara Simerka remarks that “literary discourses often focus on those aspects of the dominant ideology that are most subject to dispute at a given historical moment” (199). The proliferation of conduct literature was normative but did not reflect a social reality. *La instrucción de la mujer cristiana* (1539) by Juan Luis Vives, *Diálogo en laude de las mujeres* (1580) by Juan Espinosa, *La perfecta casada* (1583) by Fray Luis de León, and *Tratado del gobierno de la familia y estado de las viudas y doncellas* (1603) by Gaspar de Astete were favored sources for female aristocratic indoctrination that promulgated the ideal paradigms for daughters, wives, and mothers.<sup>38</sup> These handbooks defined women in relation to their fathers and husbands, and delineated their roles as subservient, self-effacing, and in service to the greater needs of the family, church and state. In an effort to secure female identity, the court and the church, without success, attempted to propagate an ideal of behavior that supported a patriarchal and Christian structure of society (Perry 178-179). The Inquisition began to enforce sexual morality during the Counter-Reformation (Giles 7). However, the effort did not produce any major changes. Kamen contends:

The enforcement of the new sexual morality was rendered difficult by the persistence of popular attitudes which held that sex outside marriage was permissible (185).

The theater, the court, the palace and the *corral* became discursive arenas for debating gender behavior as much as identity. The juxtaposition of the ideal [*engaño*] and the reality [*desengaño*] of people’s behavior became emblematic of Spanish Baroque culture. While tragedy did contribute to this dichotomy (*La vida es sueño*, for instance), comedies

were escapist forms of entertainment. But like carnival, they were also meant to be short-term.

An emerging awareness of women in society brought about a profusion of female protagonists on the palace, court and *corral* stages. Many scholars have written groundbreaking work on the ways in which seventeenth-century dramatists found the *comedia* to be the ideal vehicle for examining the trope of self-construction and the masks imposed by gender roles.<sup>39</sup> Anthony Cascardi states that Spaniards looked to the theater to see themselves represented, just as in our time we depend on television and film: “the society of seventeenth-century Spain was grounded in the theatrical images it made of itself, and the idea of theatrical imaging was philosophically central to some of its most important works” (12). The theater was a reflection of the social construction of identity. Jeremy Robbins explains,

Baroque theatre presents no clear division between the individual and society, between the body and the body politic. The individual is always conceived of as a social entity and playwrights dramatize the alarming ways in which the body is never autonomous but rather, a space defined by the multiple and conflicting discourses of sex, religion, politics, and power. (119)

In my dissertation, I argue that popular theater in early modern Spain offers a provocative representation of the oscillating identity of early modern women that transforms them into female subjects on stage.

When I use the term popular theater, I am referring to the theater written for the masses; that is, the *corral*, or the public theater. I place popular theater within the perspective of popular culture stemming from neo-Gramscian hegemony theory:

...popular culture [is] a site of struggle between the forces of ‘resistance’ of subordinate groups in society, and the forces of ‘incorporation’ of dominant groups in society. Popular culture in this usage is not the



imposed culture of the mass culture theorists, nor is it an emerging-from-below spontaneously oppositional culture of ‘the people’.... it is a terrain of ideological struggle between dominant and subordinate classes, dominant and subordinate cultures. (Storey 13-14)

The *comedia de capa y espada* genre is particularly engrained in both rural and urban drama; it negotiates constantly between dominant and subordinate narratives. The corruption of city life, especially of Madrid – the birth place of the *comedia de capa y espada* - converged with traditional ideological discourses, such as marriage and honor, on the stage creating a culturally sophisticated drama applauded by the audience. Commercial theater had a heterogeneous and stratified public, varied patrons (*cofradías* [religious confraternities], the nobility, and the church); its consumerist goals which inevitably contributed to variant representations of women.

### **Female Transvestism/Cross-dressing**

The *mujer vestida de hombre* appears in many *comedias de capa y espada* and refers to the popular theatrical convention of the cross-dressed woman. The term “transvestism” is used by early modern critics to refer to roles in which women dress as men to assume male power. This female character disguised as a man, transgresses the strictures of society on female domesticity and the sumptuary laws to defend her honor and social standing, secure a love interest, sabotage a lover’s new conquest, or to feel empowered.

In society, transvestism is a powerful destabilizer of order challenging socio-cultural binary notions such as gender, sex, class, and desire. I apply the notion of transvestism<sup>40</sup> as cross-dressing or dressing in the clothes of the opposite sex to examine its socio-cultural significance in *comedias de capa y espada*. Marjorie Garber closely

links transvestism to theater through the notion of representation (*Vested Interests* 40). The art of illusion epitomized Baroque culture and engendered self-fashioning such as the female in masculine clothing. The appearance of cross-dressed women on the Golden Age stage rose shortly after the mid-1500s after Italian actresses entered Spain with the *commedia dell'arte*.<sup>41</sup> Transvestism in early modern Spanish theater figured as an inverted mirror-image of what was witnessed in the popular theaters of England: boys dressed as women. In her comparative study on transvestism in Spain and England, Ursula Heise states that Spanish law rigorously prohibited transvestite boy actors due to a heightened anxiety over sodomy in government and culture ("Transvestism and the Stage Controversy 356).<sup>42</sup> Condemned male transvestism included men playing women's roles and men playing women who cross-dressed as men for plot demands and then reverted back to women. After years of changing laws on female transvestism, actresses were finally granted the freedom to work on the stage in 1587 (Ruano de la Haza 2000, 98; Rennert 142; Romera-Navarro 269). The resolution allowed a plethora of opportunities for actresses, who were now permitted to play female roles, young male roles, and cross-dressing female roles. According to Heise, the profusion of female cross-dressing roles was due to the outlawing of transvestite boys (366, n. 40). These roles oftentimes elicited female homoeroticism that, contrary to male homoeroticism, was accepted, since as Sherry Velasco asserts, it did not pose a threat to the patriarchal order (*Lesbians in Early Modern Spain* 17).<sup>43</sup> The actresses themselves were usually married to *autores* or other actors hence there was some control of their actions. Furthermore, there was no fear of homoeroticism between women due to the fact that women did not replace men in their social or sexual role. Jacqueline Murray agrees with Velasco, "In the absence of either

penis, or a substitute, male writers minimized the seriousness of the sin. (...) Ultimately, female sexuality was not taken seriously except insofar as it threatened male privilege or the natural hierarchy of the genders ("Twice Marginal" 199). Female presence on stage and female subjectivity ironically gained impetus from the social fears of a homosexual subculture, particularly one that practiced pedophilia (Heise 360-364), which in turn led to the elimination of boy actors in the Spanish theater.

Some actresses and women of other walks of life, such as the soldier Catalina de Erauso, were documented as public cross-dressers in the early modern period (McKendrick, *Women & Society* 320).<sup>44</sup> Juan Pérez de Montalván's play *La comedia famosa de la monja alférez* (1625) was based on the life of Catalina de Erauso. In an effort to enforce moral behavior, the Council of Castile legislated ordinances, laws and edicts, prohibiting women or actresses from wearing male clothing in the years 1608, 1615, 1641, 1653, 1672, and 1675 to no avail (Romero-Navarro "Las disfrazadas de varón" 269; Cotarelo y Mori *Bibliografía de las controversias* 619-620). Women in male attire were also documented in London and in other European cities during the seventeenth century which gave rise to a lengthy discussion on cross-dressing. In England, a pair of pamphlets entitled *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* (1620), simultaneously attacked and defended the new fashion among aristocratic women, addressing the issue of transgressing both class and gender (*Crossing the Stage* 21). According to Lisa Jardine, the anxiety over cross-dressing was incited by the tension between classes, the old and new cultures, the mercantile and the aristocratic orders, and rank and wealth in the seventeenth century (*Still Harping on Daughters* 141-142, 150). Jonathan Dollimore

distinguishes two types of criticisms: “the one on the dress violations of the emergent (middle) class, the other on the insubordinate (female) sex” (*Sexual Dissidence* 288).

In addition, comedy’s inherent connection to carnival reifies the gender transgressions of the *mundo al revés*. According to Helen F. Grant, early modern society was familiar with gender role playing because it maintained close connections to the “world upside down” of the classical Roman Saturnalia and Kalendae traditions, through its carnivalesque festivities (114). These early festivities, dedicated to the gods of wine, sowing and harvest, celebrated uncontrolled debauchery, the excessive consumption of food and drink, the inversion of identities and uninhibited sexuality after the closure of the harvest season. By the Middle Ages, the pagan rites of inverted order had been assumed into the Christian tradition (Mikhail Bakhtin 5; Kenneth MacGowan 25).

The evolving roles of women in the growing metropolises of Counter Reformation Spain were at the forefront of secular and religious discussion.<sup>45</sup> Reacting in strong opposition to the celebratory freedom of expression of urban women were theologians and moralists who fervently renewed debates on identity, particularly on class and gender. Detractors of the theater such as Fray José de Jesús María (*Primera parte de las excelencias de la virtud de la castidad*, 1601), Juan de Mariana (*De Spectaculis*, 1609), and Fray Gaspar de Cordoba (*Dictamen*, 1600) wrote acerbic denunciations against immoral theatrical conventions but were ultimately unsuccessful in securing their permanent suppression. In *Theológico sobre los teatros y comedias de este siglo* (1689), the Jesuit priest Ignacio de Camargo criticizes the theaters’ exhibitionism of the female body and desire, and especially women’s uninhibited performances. Cross-

dressing and female actresses were feared to arouse the male spectators and lead to indecent public transgressions in the theater and society.<sup>46</sup>

The cross-dressed woman is a variation of what McKendrick labels as the *mujer varonil* - a “manly woman” one who departs from the norm. Amy R. Williamsen has pointed to many references in the *comedia* linking *Carnestolendas* [pre-Lenten festivities] and the *mujer varonil* (261) making the connection to Bakhtin’s definition of carnival, “the inversion of binary opposition” (268). Williamsen’s research underscores the seventeenth century’s proclivity for ephemeral carnivalesque sexual transgression in the theater. Cross-dressing and the inverted world *topos* are pervasive elements of the *entremés*, a one-act humorous interlude interpolated between the acts of a longer play. In Calderón de la Barca’s *entremés* entitled *Las Carnestolendas*, a character remarks on the outrageous trend of transvestism:

Al revés anda ya el mundo  
¡Por San Dimas! Que no falta  
sino andar de hombres las hembras  
y los hombres con enaguas. (*Las Carnestolendas* 252-255)

The anthropologist Victor Turner asserts that the temporarily-inverted disguise in early societies was a practice used to purge society of its gender-specific “sins” or conventional inhibitions (182-185). When the theater adapted the tradition of carnival transvestism however, its function on stage was different, since cross-dressing in the popular *entremés* was intended to distract the audience from the main play’s more serious topics.

It was the theater, as a site of convergence between art and life, and as a platform for imagining alternative subjectivities that opened a space for and encouraged the convention of cross-dressing - the stage reflected expressions of the self that were best embodied in the metaphor of transvestism. The comedic nature of the *comedia de capa y*

*espada* produced various effects that simultaneously subverted and reinforced societal norms. In regard to the female subject, these amusing plays afforded a safe forum from which to challenge the status quo by revealing the constructedness and performative nature of gender and by articulating the unfair treatment of women, particularly that of the upper-class. The aristocracy, envied for its privileged lifestyle and criticized for its hypocrisy, conveyed a fascinating portrait of contradictions for theatergoers. In the name of performance and humor, transvestism for the most part, was received enthusiastically by the public embodying a social reality that goes beyond surface appearances.

However, transvestism could also negatively portray women who had to act or be identified with men in order to have agency. Female characters that took on manly behavior - as *la mujer varonil*- oftentimes represented an objectionable transgression due to a lack of male control on women or a deterioration of both female and male identity in society. Secondary characters usually exhorted the transvestites to renege on their inappropriate masculine behavior, evoking the gendered view of society. Examples of this censorship are found in my chapters one and five where I analyze Juana's reproach of Serafina's cross-dressing role in Tirso de Molina's *El vergonzoso en palacio* and Lucía's reproach of Fenisa's promiscuous lifestyle in María de Zayas's *La traición en la amistad*.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to keep in mind the fundamental importance of the audience's reaction to cross-dressing. Because the public playhouses were dynamic spaces of interactive meanings and responses, a few brief comments on the implicit dialogue between all participants are required. It is crucial to consider the effect of role reversals on women in the audience. I agree with Catherine Connor's perspective on theater that

the spectator plays an equal role with the dramatist and the director in determining performance meaning ("Spectators Making Meanings" 426). Yet, exactly what influence the popular gender-bending trope had on its female spectators and vice versa is difficult to determine. Some critics commonly depict these transgressive characters as having had a minimal effect on their audience as well as lacking any historical validity. Melveena McKendrick has commented on the "limited transvestism and overt *varonilidad*" at the beginning of the seventeenth century stating that the popularity of these comedies was not based on an authentic depiction of women at that time even though a handful of cross-dressed and subversive Spanish women had been documented (*Women and Society* 320). McKendrick contends, "Indeed, art may have influenced reality. Most of the incidents involving [real] women in masculine dress, for example, belong to the period when their dramatic counterparts were already well-established stage characters. It is not impossible that the theatre inspired some real-life *mujeres varoniles* to action or at least suggested to them the form that action might take" (43). These types of comedies would seem to be exciting for women instead because they offered exaggerated images of freedom and rebellion. One could argue, however, that these *comedias* would have exposed and encouraged assertive behavior by women.

The idea that these cross-dressing roles on the stage awakened a restrained female desire, releasing the repressed feelings of the female theatergoers is a recent critical perspective. Mary Beth Rose explains the experience as a "temporary appeasement" for women (323). The assumption that women experienced a vicarious thrill from viewing cross-dressed females on stage is equally as valid as the possibility of a whole range of other reactions to the entire play. John Ellis argues that the experiences of the audience

are contingent upon viewing varying active and passive subjects within the *diegesis*: “Identification is [ ] multiple and fractured, a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectator’s own psyche paraded before her or him” (128). The notion that the performances of fictive subjects are as contradictory as the performances of subjects in society seems to pervade the criticism of all systems of representation. In line with deconstructive criticism, all systems of logic can be dismantled through their own inherent, yet contradictory binary oppositions. For this reason, the effects on the audience of the contradictions viewed onstage although difficult to measure, need to be considered.

Unlike many male critics, feminist critics recognize significantly greater social connotations and implications in women's appropriation of male clothing for personal gain.<sup>48</sup> The feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane explains that “The transvestite adopts the sexuality of the other – the woman becomes a man in order to attain the necessary distance from the image” (81). Doane sees this image as a “cultural construction of femininity.” Teresa Soufas contends that “cross-dressing enhances a woman’s relationship to the depicted sources of power” (*Dramas of Distinction* 113). A woman in masculine attire connotes conflictive cultural meanings to the audience. By granting women men's clothing and giving them the power to manipulate men, the *comedia* carries out a politicized act that utilizes cross-dressers for more than their entertainment value alone or as homage to men’s perfection. What is at stake is women’s ability to assume an empowered position in a society that viewed female agency as leading to disorder.

In the *comedia*, the woman dressed as a man had the potential to inspire endless *admiratio*. Natalie Zemon Davis explains that, in the theater, “In hierarchical and conflictive societies, which loved to reflect on the world upside down, the *topos* of the



‘woman on top’ was one of the most enjoyed” (152). The commanding position of women in plays that utilized transvestism produced multiple and varying meanings that may be explained in the following way: through the adoption by women of what society has identified as male clothing - male signifiers of power and authority - a sexual transgression occurs positioning the woman “on top,” which has the potential to psychologically arouse the spectators, as well as reflects shifting gender roles in society. Men and women might have been provoked by the suggestion of the phallic woman wearing breeches, wielding a sword, and subduing *her* man. In fact, the audacious role adopted by an actress excited and mesmerized playgoers and kept them coming back for more female licentiousness. A seventeenth-century advocate of the theater, Francisco Ortiz, recognizes the erotic appeal of the cross-dressed woman in his *Apología de la defensa de las comedias* (1614): “Pues ha de ser más que de hielo el algunas veces para este efecto vestida como hombre, haciendo cosas que moverán a un muerto” (cited in Heise 368). The harsh condemnation by clerics of male disguises is an obvious indication of the dangerous effects these powerfully seductive female characters were thought to produce on the audience. In 1600, Friar José de Jesús María wrote, “Si representar la mujer en su propio hábito pone en tanto peligro la castidad de los que la miran, ¿qué hará si representa en traje de hombre, siendo uso tan lascivo y ocasionado para encender los corazones en mortal concupiscencia?” (cited in Cotarelo 381). Another well-known example is Juan de Mariana’s censure: “...mujeres de excelente hermosura, de singular gracia, de meneos y posturas; salen en el teatro a representar diversos personajes en forma y traje y hábito de mujeres y aún de hombres, cosa que grandemente despierta a la lujuria y tiene muy gran fuerza para corromper los hombres” (cited in Cotarelo 431). Yet

another condemnation of women dressed as men comes from the Jesuit Ignacio de Camargo in 1689:

¿Qué cosa más torpe y provocativa que ver a una muger de esta calidad que estaba ahora en el tablado dama hermosa afeitada y afectada, salir dentro de un instante vestida de galán airoso, ofreciendo al registro de los ojos de tantos hombres todo el cuerpo ... .Verdaderamente que esta gente vil y soez pierde el respeto indignamente a la gente grave y seria que compra su deleite a costa de su desprecio... (cited in Cotarelo, *Bibliografía* 124).

Undoubtedly, the titillation of both men and women in the audience was a driving factor in the proliferation of transvestite roles for women. Male and female fascination over women in male garb was a guilty pleasure that even today continues to entice audiences. The assertive sensuality of the female transvestite inherently attracts spectators whenever the cross-dresser remains discernibly feminine. Even though the feminine ideals of the time are chastity and humility, these two ideals do not represent the entire spectrum of female attributes that are stimulating to men.

Women are traditional conveyors of sexuality because they are identified through their anatomical functions. The notion that gender is fixed, like sex, was a traditional belief that was contested in the *comedia de capa y espada*. Gender is shown to be mutable and unstable. These fluctuating and superficial characteristics correlate with Judith Butler's theory of gender "as a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific set of relations" (*Gender Trouble* 10). The female gender in the seventeenth century is determined by various contemporary political, cultural, and religious discourses. Butler's notion of gender as a performative act, influenced by John L. Austin's theory of speech acts, suggests that gender "is real only to the extent that it is

performed” (“Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” 278). She explains that there is a simulacrum of substance in the performance of “a set of repeated acts” constructed by specific sources of power for example, culture, religion, knowledge, or language, but certainly not an authentic identity. Butler asserts, that “In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself-as well as its contingency” (*Gender Trouble* 137). Transvestism or drag is a parody of “the very notion of an original” identity (*GT* 138). Butler argues convincingly that “Parody by itself is not subversive. [...] A typology of actions would clearly not suffice, for parodic displacement, indeed, parodic laughter, depends on a context and reception” (*GT* 139).

We may ask then, is there a female essence or body separate from the performance? According to Butler, “the body is not passively scripted with cultural codes” and neither is it free of previous cultural influence (*GT* 277). She compares social acts with theatrical acts and asserts that just as actors add nuances to a textual role so does a self infuse idiosyncrasies into its social role. The *comedia de capa y espada* is a site where the assumptions on the naturalness of gender identity are continually being challenged since this medium portrays gender as a fluid artifice of the “embodied self.” The cross-dressed *tramoyera* exemplifies the conflict of gender in her performance since she is a gendered character playing an opposite gendered role. The shifting performances are not isolated acts of defiance of one character; instead, they question the heterosexual gender paradigm. The male disguised *tramoyera* is particularly emblematic of gender performativity because she adopts external male signifiers represented by masculine clothing, speech and behavior; the recognizable components of male gender that facilitate her quest for empowerment and act out her female sentiments. Furthermore, according to

Butler, such a temporary transgression in the theatrical transvestite act not only questions “the distinction between sex and gender, but challenges, at least implicitly, the distinction between appearance and reality [...]. Indeed, the transvestite’s gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectations” (278).<sup>49</sup> Mary Anne Doane views sexual mobility as a cultural characteristic of being female. Doane underlines the fact that women oscillate between genders more easily than men and because of this ability are more likely to take on transvestite roles (“Film and the Mascarade” 20). This assumes that women really wish they were men, while men would never want to be women (20). As long as sexism exists and societies remain patriarchal, this sentiment will continue to be true – women will want the power that men have as well as their own. In addition to assuming male values and characteristics, the cross-dressed woman transforms into a spectacle of desire. Transvestism allowed women to wear tights, a visual transgression that, however assertive, plays up to men's voyeuristic sexual desire and to the objectification of women. The female cross-dresser also conveyed lesbian nuances that did not threaten phallocentrism and were easily nullified in the end. The erotic appeal of female transvestism understandably attracted high numbers of spectators who knew that it was a woman wearing the tights while it certainly exacerbated many dissenters of the theater who were concerned with the threat of sinful promiscuity.

The female desire to hold higher male values and characteristics also captivated audiences. In patriarchal dramas, those focusing on male dominant values in society, a cross-dressed female protagonist represented a deficient impersonation of man who was the paradigm of perfection, created in the image of God, of which woman is a lesser

version. The psychoanalytic theorist Robert J. Stoller, supports this idea, arguing that women who dress in male clothing do so because they yearn to *be* men (155). The traditional interpretation of the transvestite woman exemplifies Freud's theory of "penis envy": a young girl's castration anxiety and her eternal pursuit for a penis substitute ("Fetishism" 157). The assumption that transvestism is representative of a woman's desire to be as perfect as a man (Foster 20) is inferred in the philosophical drama *La vida es sueño* by Calderón. Here the cross-dressed Rosaura represents the avenger of patriarchal honor and is a paradigm of character nobility for the prince Segismundo (Whitby 109). In contrast, the aim of the *comedia de capa y espada* genre in incorporating the masculine disguise is seldom to mimic male virtues. Generally, women and men are portrayed as equally demonstrating or lacking moral and social values resulting in ambiguous demarcations of gender and social decorum. As I point out in my chapter one, both Juana in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* and Leonor in *Valor, Agravio y mujer* dress as men to avenge their honor through acts of violence. Unlike Rosaura, these transvestite *tramoyeras* use additional illicit means, for example forging a signature and blackmail, to restore their honor, ultimately achieving marriages and evading murders. The appropriation of male identity is inextricably linked to aggression, and deteriorated social values; a male paradigm of behavior is non-existent in avenging cross-dressers of *comedias de capa y espada*.

It is true that the *comedias de capa y espada* reinforce men and women's prescribed roles in society and the limits of their sex by following *comedia* conventions of gender, love, and marriage that reflect the dominant ideology of seventeenth-century Spain. Nevertheless, these theatrical conventions are flawed because of prevalent

discrepancies, and as such, are signifiers of a destabilized society. In other words, there are contradictions about presumable social truths that expose transgressive meanings in the play. Many of these plays begin with a disgraced single female protagonist and end with an unconventional marriage that she has chosen. Most of the weddings suggest imminent failure due to the coercion of the suitor into the bond of marriage. This comedic format is an unlikely space to debate prevalent social issues, yet, it is within this fluid and unstable format that different social, political, and literary perspectives are conveyed. Controversial topics, such as gender and class identity, moral values, premarital sex, economic agency, subjectivity, desire, honor, and arranged marriages pervade. What fascinates me most of all is the dominance of female characters - *tramoyeras* – that subvert patriarchal values and beliefs, in order to empower their lives. Moreover, these *comedias* reference the unfair treatment of women and undoubtedly serve to advocate women's rights or perhaps highlight the rights women may have had. Through careful examination and reflection of the female leads we are able to broaden our understanding of women's social reality in early modern Spain. In the following chapter I will explore the function of the cross-dressed woman in fostering female-centered discourses such as economic agency, inheritance rights, and gender autonomy in two *comedias de capa y espada*: *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615) and *El vergonzoso en palacio* (1610-1624) by Tirso de Molina.

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<sup>1</sup> Many additional seats were added to the women's section called the *cazuela* to satisfy the increase in ticket sales.

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle's views on tragedy are expressed in the *Poetics*, a paradigm from which literary criticism has evolved. Unfortunately his assessment of comedy never survived

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and for this reason McKendrick notes that comedies have been regarded as inferior to tragedies or high culture (*Theatre in Spain 1490-1700* 81). Everett Hesse notes that in the seventeenth-century many playwrights considered plays based on truth (historical, pseudo-historical or mythological dramas) to be inherently superior to those based on fiction (*La comedia y sus intérpretes* 87). The German Romantics also did their part to regenerate the tragedies of Calderón, by identifying with religious and metaphysical themes of the Spanish playwright (*Calderón in the German Lands* 242-243).

Commissioned by the Real Academia Española, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo's editions of Lope de Vega's plays became the canon for Spanish Baroque theater that would reflect a national history (Calvo 2, 6). His disregard for the need to create a taxonomy of Lope's comedies contributed to the underestimation of their value (Calvo 10).

<sup>3</sup> See *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun: Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain* (John Hopkins Univ. Press, 1998); "Re-visioning Gender on the Seventeenth Century Spanish Stage: A Study of Actresses and Autoras" (Diss University of Kentucky, 1998); *Power and Gender in Renaissance Spain* (The Univ. of Illinois Press, 2004); *Women, Texts, and Authority in the Early Modern Spanish World* (Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2004); *Women and Authority in Early Modern Spain: The Peasants of Galicia* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2006); *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Univ. of Illinois Press, 2009); *Widowhood in Early Modern Spain: Protectors, Proprietors, and Patrons* (Brill, 2010); and *Women's Literacy in Early Modern Spain and the New World* (Ashgate Publishing, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The literary genesis of the *mujer varonil* is found in the *novelle* and *commedie erudite* of sixteenth-century Italy. The transvestite trope reached enormous popularity in Bandello's tales and Bernardo Dovizi's *La Calandria*. The inception of this theme in Spain appeared in Juan de Timoneda's *Cornelia* (1556), and Lope de Rueda's *Los engañados* (1542). In the late 1580s Lope de Vega began to incorporate sexual mobility into his plays and soon after Tirso de Molina mastered the theme further, with Calderón close behind (Bradbury 571).

<sup>5</sup> *Tramoya* is defined in Joan Corominas' *Breve diccionario etimológico de la lengua castellana*, as: "la tolva del molino de donde pasó a designar una máquina teatral, 1617, y luego 'ardid, maña', 1625." Hugo Albert Rennert in *The Spanish Stage in The Time of Lope de Vega* explains that many different kinds of stage machinery called *artificios*, *invenciones*, *apariencias*, and *tramoyas*, had been utilized in "religious representations since very early times" (970). The historian Othón Arróniz writes, "La tramoya no es un adelanto, como pensaron algunos contemporáneos, sino más bien la expresión del gusto medieval halagado por estos efectos sorprendentes y milagrosos ("El escenario y su entorno" 232). Agustín de Rojas, in his *Viaje entretenido* (1603), comments on the fashion of the special effects on the stages of hagiographic plays. According to Rennert, these machines transported actors across the stage as well as made them disappear in front of the public (970).

<sup>6</sup> *Tramoya* appears as "fábula" and "maña" already in Ana Caro Mallén de Soto's play *Valor, agravio y mujer* (1621) (Soufas ed., v. 564, 169).

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<sup>7</sup> The subversion of the label *tramoyera* evokes what some feminists have accomplished today with the word “bitch.” In 1996, Lisa Jervis and Andi Zeisler founded the feminist magazine *Bitch* to serve as a feminist response to popular culture.

<sup>8</sup> Women have traditionally been interpreted misogynistically as being portrayed inherently evil in the Bible. Defenders of women’s virtues have also interceded in the women’s debate pointing to women’s scapegoat position in society. The root of female deceit and trickery has often been addressed in Spanish Renaissance literature by both male and female playwrights as deriving from male abuse and not female iniquity. In *La vengadora de las mujeres* by Lope de Vega, the female protagonist Laura reproaches men for women’s dubious nature:

Desde el principio del mundo  
se han hecho tiranos grandes  
de nuestro honor y albedrío,  
quitándonos las ciudades,  
la plata, el oro, el dinero,  
el gobierno, sin que baste  
razón, justicia ni ley  
propuesta de nuestra parte;  
ellos estudian y tienen  
en las Universidades  
lauros y grados; en fin,  
estudian todas las artes.  
Pues ¿de qué se queja el hombre  
de que la mujer le engañe?  
Si otra ciencia no le queda,  
...Pues en algo esta mujer  
si está ociosa, ha de ocuparse. (v. 616)

In Calderón’s play *Guárdate de la agua mansa*, Doña Eugenia points out that honor-obsessed men create rebellious women:

.....no hay cosa que tanto  
desespere a la más cuerda,  
como la desconfianza.  
¡Cuánto ignora, cuánto yerra  
en esta parte el honor! (v. 187)

.....si allí pudo  
la seguridad hacerme  
usar de algunas licencias,  
mi honor prisionera tiene  
su libertad ya, y tan otra



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habéis de ver que procede,  
cuánto hay de que otros me guarden  
a guardarme yo (II, 2340-2347).

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz also identifies the insolence of men as the source of women's negative reputation in her famous *Redondilla*:

Hombres necios que acusáis  
a la mujer sin razón,  
sin ver que sois la ocasión  
de lo mismo que culpáis.

Sin con ansia sin igual  
solicitáis su desdén,  
¿por qué queréis que obren bien  
si las incitáis al mal? (quoted in *Las mil mejores* 223)

<sup>9</sup> There have been detractors of this genre from the seventeenth-century, such as Miguel de Cervantes, to the twentieth-century including Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo and William Atkinson to name a few. The *comedia de capa y espada* is categorized today as popular theater or a discursive practice of popular culture. The Renaissance revival of female protagonism that takes place in the *comedia de capa y espada* has been ignored partly due to the genre's classification as substandard popular culture.

<sup>10</sup> The Spanish comic *comedia* has always held a secondary role in the world of criticism. C.A. Jones maintains that the *comedia* has suffered a type of black legend: "In the case of Spanish drama in particular, the neglect of comedy may partly be accounted for by the black legend of superficiality which has long lain over the Spanish theatre as a legacy from the days when Spanish plots, were plundered so extensively by English and by French dramatists" (332).

<sup>11</sup> José Antonio Maravall influenced the perception of the baroque culture as well by calling it kitsch: "Es más bien una cultura de baja calidad, que puede llegar a ser una pseudocultura, un pseudoarte, etc. Puede tratarse, incluso, de una cultura mala [...] (1975, 188) [...] la creación cultural se relaja a una producción mecanizada [...]" (n. 16, 189).

<sup>12</sup> In the medieval period, as Joan Kelly-Gadol and David Herlihy, among others, have shown, empowered women were clearly visible in politics, economy, society, and culture ("Did Women Have a Renaissance?" 175-201; "Land, Family, and Women in Continental Europe 701-1200," 13-45, respectively).

<sup>13</sup> The origins of feminist themes can be found in the plays of Plautus and Terence, the "Amazons" of mythology and other women warriors in history, oriental texts (*Las mil y una noches*), medieval noblewomen in history, Italian books of chivalry, and the pastoral novel.

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<sup>14</sup> In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp defines a narrative model of folktales and underlines that a crucial aspect of narrative closure is marriage (64). This folkloric convention influences narrative structures in future genres like *comedias de capa y espada*.

<sup>15</sup> A detailed study of the creation of the commercial theater can be found in Bernardo J. García García and Carmen Sanz Ayán's book *Teatros y comediantes en el Madrid de Felipe II* (2).

<sup>16</sup> Outside of Spain, protestant reformers did not agree with the Catholic acts of mercy as a way of achieving personal salvation consequently, they abolished confraternities and the government took over charitable organizations (Flynn 1999, 235). I contend that this is an important difference between Spain and England in regards to the confraternities' influence on culture since lay charities sponsored the evolving theater and therefore added to the polyvalent voices in Spanish plays. For example, raising money for young women's dowries was a service provided by the confraternities; this act of mercy is reflected in Camilo's provision of a dowry for the orphaned Celia in La viuda valenciana by Lope de Vega.

<sup>17</sup> "The council intervened in and adjudicated disputes between *cofradías* or hospitals over the division of stage earnings. It assigned duties-mainly involving money, public order, and the sexual segregation of the audience-to the commissioners appointed to regulate the theater, and it established the prices of certain seats. The council also licensed acting companies, determined the frequency with which they could perform, and decided and redecided on the legitimacy of professional actresses: "(...) It could close the theater [for any period of time]" (152).

<sup>18</sup> The Corral de La Pacheca (belonging to Isabel Pacheca) soon became the Corral de Comedias del Hospital de la Pasión and the Corral de Burguillos (property of Nicolás de Burguillos).

<sup>19</sup> Cohen explains that the city of Madrid did not have to face problems with private owners of the theaters as did for example, London (160). It is reasonable to assume that the city was very appreciative of the important role the confraternities had in offering social assistance to the growing number of needy in the evolving cosmopolitan city.

<sup>20</sup> Philip III was a patron of the arts and a lover of the theater especially. Palace theater consisted of *particulares*, private representations of *corral comedias* and spectacle plays famous for their huge special effects with machinery called *tramoyas* (Cohen 268). The homogenous court audience demanded neoclassical drama rather than popular themes.

<sup>21</sup> Some popular elements of the theater are incorporated through the main plot and subplot and consist of mainly "audience address, asides, proverbs, wordplay, disguise, dance, and the mingling of comic and serious moments." The low-comedy secondary plot

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may include “a choric interlude, the reception of comic figures into the ranks of the aristocratic main plot, or the assimilation of popular elements in the protagonist, the possibility was created of a fully integral, simultaneous elevation and mockery of the central action, of a perspective alert to the tensions as well as the harmonies of life” (Cohen 178).

<sup>22</sup> I will be attending the staging of the play *Ymeneá* by the Spanish company TeatroDran in the Corral de Comedias of Almagro, Spain, on July 22, 2012. My observations will focus on the portrayal of the female protagonist and her agency in the play.

<sup>23</sup> Juana de José Prades and José Bergamín among others have spoken of their marked role in the popularity of the theater. Many Golden Age writers had an unfavorable view of those lacking discriminating artistic taste. E.C. Riley explains in *Cervantes's Theory of the Novel*, Cervantes' definition of “*vulgo*” through the words of Don Quijote to Don Diego: “Y no penséis, señor, que yo llamo aquí vulgo solamente a la gente plebeya y humilde; que todo aquel que no sabe, aunque sea señor y príncipe, puede y debe entrar en número de vulgo” (*DQ* II.16, v.30; in Riley 109). Riley also cites the two characters Juan de Valdés and Pacheco speaking of ignorance as not exclusive to any particular class:

Pacheco: ...os suplico me digáis a quién llamáis plebeyos y vulgares.

Valdés: A todos los que son de poco ingenio y poco juicio.

Pacheco: ¿Y si son altos de linaje y ricos de renta?

Valdés: aunque sean cuán altos y cuán ricos quisieren, en mi opinión serán plebeyos si no son altos de ingenio y ricos de juicio. (*DQ* II. v.16, 74-75; in Riley 109).

<sup>24</sup> For some theologians like Francisco de Araujo, female transgressions on stage were true reflections of defiant women in society (Aparicio Maydeu 27). Although his treatise *Variae et Selectae decissiones morales ad statum Ecclesiasticum et Civiles pertinentes* (1664) exaggerates the parallel, it serves to highlight that many considered the women onstage an extension of women offstage. The intrinsic heterosexual tension that emanates from the gender feud in the *comedias de capa y espada* resonates in the “lifestyles” of unmarried women and the negotiation of female desire in contemporary life.

<sup>25</sup> Sullivan comments amply on Tirso's critics (*Tirso de Molina* 72).

<sup>26</sup> Lope's epic was criticized for presenting many actions instead of a single one, and of lacking a beginning, middle, and end (Rennert 1937, 267).

<sup>27</sup> Alarcón criticizes Lope's inappropriate lifestyle and hypocrisy in the comedia *Los pechos privilegiados*:

Culpa a un viejo avellando,  
tan verde que al mismo tiempo  
que está avellanado de martas

---

anda haciendo madalenas.  
(cited in Sánchez Jiménez, 180; III, 2168-71)

Lope's animosity for Alarcón is evident; he was arrested for throwing a foul-smelling flask on the stage during the performance of *El Anticristo* written by his arch-enemy Alarcón (Sánchez Jiménez 180).

<sup>28</sup> According to Porqueras Mayo and Sánchez Escribano in "La función del 'vulgo' en el drama didáctico del Siglo de Oro [The Function of the Masses in the Didactic Drama of the Golden Age]," the masses were portrayed in a more respectful and positive light by Tirso de Molina, Ricardo de Turia, and Guillén de Castro after Lope de Vega (142).

<sup>29</sup> Lope borrowed many plots from Italian writers Bandello, Boccaccio, and Giraldi Cinthio (Bleiberg 868; Zugasti 114).

<sup>30</sup> The label *comedias de enredo* appeared in the early twentieth-century to underscore the tangled plots of these comic plays (Zugasti 114).

<sup>31</sup> Secular *comedia* (romantic, historical plays and tragedy) became the most prominent drama on stage, while the religious *comedia* and *auto sacramental* were the least produced.

<sup>32</sup> There are also many famous comedies where men have taken center stage, for instance, *El fantasma galán* by Calderón de la Barca. This is a later male version of *La dama duende*, which coincidentally was written as a response to the popularity of the first. Overall, women dominate the protagonist roles in *comedias de capa y espada*.

<sup>33</sup> Deleito y Piñuela explains that this veil of Moorish origin was believed to be used for seduction and to incite desire in men instead of its original purpose as a signifier of modesty in public (63-66; Elliott 309). Bernís denies the Morisco influence, underscoring the difference between the white *almalafa* that revealed both eyes of Muslim women and the dark mantle that covered one eye of Spanish women (Bass 102).

<sup>34</sup> Deleito y Piñuela mentions an early source that presents a character acknowledging the use of the *guardainfante* to hide unwanted pregnancies: "En *Los discursos de la viuda de veinticuatro maridos* se lee, aludiendo a una dama de turbia conducta: *Y si se hacía preñada, había guardainfantes para su disimulación*" (*La mujer la casa y la moda* 153).

<sup>35</sup> (...) lo ancho y pomposo del traje que comienza con gran desproporción desde la cintura les presta comodidad para andar emvarazadas de nueve y diez meses, fin que desto puedan ser notadas, principalmente las que usan guardainfantes que de aquí dicen tomo el nombre esta diabólica invención, que junto con ella nos vino de Francia, donde es tradición que aviendo hecho preñada fuera de matrimonio

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una donzella de gran porte dio principio a este  
traje para encubrir fu miseria y que con esto le dio  
el nombre de guardainfante, por el efecto no podía  
cosa tan vil tener más alto precio, ni más infame  
nombre para ser denotada: combidando juntamente  
à libertad y sensual lascivia. (22)

<sup>36</sup> The Infanta Margarita María (1630) depicted in *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, and the portrait of doña Ana de Ipeñarrieta (1631) show the predilection among the aristocracy for this ubiquitous fashion.

<sup>37</sup> Perry writes extensively about women as a ‘symbol of disorder’ (69).

<sup>38</sup> Conduct literature for men included, Erasmus’s *Handbook of the Militant Christian* (1501), Tyndale’s *Obedience of the Christian Man* (1527), Machiavelli’s *The Prince* (1513), Castiglione’s *The courtier* (1528), Antonio de Guevara’s *Relox de príncipes* (1529), and Pedro de Luján’s *Coloquios matrimoniales* (1550) among others.

<sup>39</sup> Bravo-Villasante, Mckendrick, Mujica, Smith, Stoll, Voros, Williansen, Yarbrow-Bejarano.

<sup>40</sup> In 1910 Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term “transvestism,” derived from the Latin *trans* (“across”) and *vestis* (“dress”) (207). Marjorie Garber underscores the preference of the term “cross-dresser” instead of “transvestite” among those that wear clothing of the opposite sex since the former does not have connotations of a mental disorder (4).

<sup>41</sup> Shergold offers significant evidence to prove that there is a rise in actresses between the 1530s and the 1580s (505-43).

<sup>42</sup> Orgel argues that boys were preferred as impersonators of women on the English stage because heterosexuality was more threatening than homosexuality. Sexually transgressive drama was presumably avoided by utilizing male impersonators (7-29). The anxiety over the feminization of the boy actors however, was considered a threat. Bullough contradicts Orgel stating that the reason boys continued to play female roles was because theater was understood as an illusion and unreal: “If theater is visualized as pure fantasy, the sex of the actors might well be irrelevant in any performance. English actors played women’s roles merely because it had become the custom; once established, it became difficult to change” (77).

<sup>43</sup> “María de Zayas and Lesbian Desire in Early Modern Spain” (13-14); Perry (123); Rennert translates a portion of the decree of 1600 which attests to the fear of cross-dressed boys: “it appears to this Council that it is much less improper that women should act than boys should appear in female attire...” (213).

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<sup>44</sup> For more information on Catalina, see Mendieta's book *The National and Sexual Identity of the Lieutenant Nun*. Catalina recalls the heroic cross-dresser Joan of Arc (1412-1431).

<sup>45</sup> Some influential treatises on gender included - Erasmus' *De matrimonio christiano* and *Colloquia familiaria* (1527-1535) - Erasmus enjoyed great success in Spain, Isabel la Católica, her daughter Catherine of Aragon (first wife of Henry VIII of England) Juan Luis Vives in *De ratione studii puerilis* (1523) and *De institutione feminae christianae* (1524-1528). In *Formación de la mujer cristiana* (1539) translated by Juan Justiniano, Vives writes against gender indeterminacy invoking the Old Testament.

<sup>46</sup> Heise affirms that the law decreed in 1534 by Charles V is the first attempt to control disguises on stage. The *pragmática* is concerned with limiting audacious attire:

Item mandamos, que o que cerca de los trages  
Está prohibido y mandado por las leyes de este  
Título, se entienda asimismo con los *comediantes*,  
hombres y mugeres, músicos y las demás personas  
que asisten en las comedias para cantar y tañer....  
(cited in Cotarelo *Bibliografía* 619).

<sup>47</sup> Another example outside of the scope of my dissertation is Ribete's attempts to dissuade Leonor's aggressive male persona in Ana Caro's *Valor, agravio, y mujer*.

<sup>48</sup> Hesse interprets the female lead in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* with reference to her lover and not in her own essence (*Análisis e interpretación de la comedia* 43-46). James Parr interprets the transvestite of the same play as a misogynistic device that exemplifies women's deceitful nature, "Tragedia y comedia en el siglo XVII español: antiguos y modernos" (157).

<sup>49</sup> Garber agrees that transvestism and theater are interconnected, "not merely 'historically' or 'culturally,' but psychoanalytically, through the unconscious and through language" (40). She refers to male transvestism in English theater when she states that "Transvestite theater is the Symbolic on the stage. In other words, the phenomenon of cross-dressing within theatrical representation, whether in the Dame and Principal Boy of the English pantomime, or in the popularity of films like *Victor/Victoria*, *Tootsie*, and *Some Like It Hot* (all films about acting and making a living through transvestite disguise on the stage), or indeed in the mode-increasingly chic today-of female impersonation as theater, may be not only a commentary on the anxiety of gender roles in modern culture, but also-and perhaps primarily-a back-formation: a return to the problem of representation that underlies theater itself" (40).

## **1. UN/MASKING THE TRAMOYERA**

### **1.1 The Cross-dressing Woman: Avenging the Mayorazgo System in Tirso de**

#### **Molina's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes***

Tirso de Molina's *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* [Don Gil of the Green Breeches] is considered the quintessential *comedia de capa y espada* of the Spanish Golden Age. It has achieved international acclaim and remains highly popular among theater audiences.<sup>1</sup> At the core of its appeal is the unprecedented performance of the cross-dressed, swash-buckling female lead who manipulates her unsuspecting victims with her intricate machinations. Many critics have explored this play with regard to its performance, gender and power.<sup>2</sup> Despite these efforts, Tirso's ingenious dramatization of conventional topics including transvestism, love and jealousy has overshadowed the many significant commentaries on women's social, economic and political independence. I wish to undertake an analytical study of the cross-dressed *tramoyera* as a representation of change in the *mayorazgo* or entail system protected by first-born marital alliances.

Henry Kamen explains the promulgation of the *mayorazgo*:

To encourage peaceful succession among the great lineages, and also to preserve their economic assets, Ferdinand at the Cortes of Toro (1505) encouraged the use by nobles of the *mayorazgo* or entail, which prohibited sales of land and kept inheritances undivided. (*Spain 1469-1714* 22)

The seventeenth-century *arbitristas* criticized the deficient system of entail claiming that it was partly responsible for the disproportionate distribution of wealth that caused great harm to Spain (*Spain* 234). In his play, Tirso shifts the conventional male preoccupation over the *mayorazgo* system to a female concern reflected in Juana's fight to marry her love who is promised to someone else to preserve the family patrimony. A reevaluation

of Tirso de Molina's use of cross-dressing in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* will uncover women's defiance of primogeniture in patriarchal Spanish aristocracy.

*Don Gil de las calzas verdes* is a critique of the aristocracy's struggle to survive in a contentious period of social, economic and political change. From 1561 onwards, Madrid was the fixed location of the court and the center of power. J.H. Elliott notes that counter to the austerity and frugality of King Philip II, his son Philip III after his father's death in 1598 accepted the presence of grandees in the palace, ending the Habsburg custom of denying residence at court to the higher aristocracy (*Imperial Spain* 312). Anthony Close underscores that this change was meant to "strengthen the nobility's dependence on the crown" (218). According to Elliott, the early modern models of masculinity and femininity embraced a whole new set of principles and ideals that competed with the traditional, ascetic values (312). This new auspicious court attracted many indebted and desperate nobles to the city in the hopes of acquiring monies or titles from increased services to the king. Elliott states that despite the severe economic challenges facing the aristocracy, they continued to maintain lavish lifestyles.<sup>3</sup> The courtiers there took on a paradigmatic role for the rest of society. They aspired to ennoblement and power by soliciting positions and honorable titles, mimicking courtly manners and sophistication, and living leisurely lifestyles. The upper and middle classes desired to emulate the courtly image (Close 222).

In addition to the higher and lesser aristocracy rushing to court, there was a constant influx of ruined *hidalgos* that sought to regain their past riches. Many were dishonest and avaricious *pretendientes*, recognized by the court and eventually ordered in 1611 to return to their estates without much success (Elliott 315; Alcalá Zamora 106).<sup>4</sup>



The derided position of the *pretendiente* at court serves to expose the impotency of much of the male elite.

This devalued identity that prevailed at court is exemplified in the characters of *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* written in 1615. The coveted city of the elite was infamous for becoming a new Babel (1342-1343).<sup>5</sup> The cardinal sins also ran rampant in this ostentatious urban setting indelibly influenced by the court of Philip III and later that of Philip IV. Tirso presents this unleashed desire driven by greed and lust and accentuated in the struggle for wealthy patrimonies, family titles, illicit monies, opulent dowries, and licentious sex.

Women were deeply affected by the desire for class ascendance that many parents demonstrated when negotiating marital unions. In *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, Juana is a young *vallisoletana* (native of Valladolid) noblewoman, who discovers that Martín, her betrothed, and the man to whom she has surrendered her virginity, has abandoned her for a more profitable union in Madrid. Juana's economic background is highlighted several times in the play as the cause of the abandonment. She is noble and beautiful, but considered poor without an *hacienda*. She is a spurned woman, an example of the negative repercussions of the *mayorazgo* system. The inheritance among the first-born inheritors of *mayorazgos* (and these included women if there were no sons, or if sons had died) was a problematic tradition that placed money and territory in the hands of fewer people and created a monopoly that kept the nobility in power (Kamen 22). It was not just the aristocratic families who imposed marriages among the first-born who inherited the family titles but the marriages were often arranged by the monarchs. The

impoverished state of those who were not first born, including women, was denounced many times in the Cortes:

(...) muchos grandes de estos reinos casaban a sus hijos con otros grandes de los mismos reinos, y de dos casa se hacía una sola; de donde venía daño al reino, porque muchos caballeros e hijosdalgo, y escuderos y doncellas, y otras personas que se criaban en una de las dichas casa, no se podían sustentar, ni tenían quien les hiciese mercedes. (Zamora Vicente 128)

Among the victims of the entail system, many aristocrat *segundones*, or second sons, sought assistance through the post of *pretendiente* at court. The *pretendiente* solicited ecclesiastic positions, noble titles and many other kinds of courtly commissions. The dispositions were lengthy and oftentimes *pretendientes* spent years wandering the court and city waiting for their petitions to be granted (123, n.497-502).<sup>6</sup>

Habitually, women, unlike men, were powerless when faced with the repercussions of the biased entail system. Juana cannot marry Martín, her choice of husband, because he is the oldest son and is obliged to marry Inés, a woman who is a first-born heiress.<sup>7</sup> Juana begrudges Martín's father's aspiration to ascend socially and economically through his son's marriage to Inés, a wealthy aristocratic woman from Madrid. Juana's emotional biographical disclosure in Act One conveys Tirso's criticism of the victimization of women by aristocratic greed involving marriages driven by *mayorazgo*:

Diome palabra de esposo;  
pero fue palabra en fin,  
tan pródiga en las promesas,  
como avara en el cumplir.  
Llegó a oídos de su padre  
(debióselo de decir  
mi desdicha) nuestro amor;  
y aunque sabe que *nací*,  
*si no tan rica, tan noble*,  
el oro, que es sangre vil

que califica intereses,  
un portillo supo abrir  
en su codicia. (emphasis mine, I. 143-154)

For don Andrés de Guzmán (Martín's father), his son's ten thousand ducats of rent can be consolidated with Inés's *mayorazgo*, worth seventy thousand ducats, in a lucrative marital deal. He writes to Inés's father to secure the arrangement. In the letter, he tells a lie stating that instead of his son, he is sending don Gil de Albornoz, another available suitor with "sangre, discreción, edad y mayorazgo" (129). He explains that his son cannot recant his promise to Juana Solís due to the possible threat of a lawsuit:

Ha dado palabra a una dama de esta ciudad, noble y hermosa, pero pobre; y ya vos veis en los tiempos presentes lo que pronostican hermosuras sin hacienda. Llegó este negocio a lo que suelen los de su especie; a arrepentirse él, y a ejecutarle ella por la justicia. (129)

Don Andrés is referring to an accusation for *estupro* [loss of virginity in unmarried women], considered a sex crime in the seventeenth century. According to Renato Barahona, the accused could be forced by the court to pay damages to the plaintiff for the loss of honor that meant an inability to secure "as honorable an estate (marriage) as she could have done before" (*Sex Crimes* 2, 6). The fact that don Andrés includes the legal obligation that Martín has to Juana in the letter to Inés's father seems to serve the purpose of portraying himself as a law abiding and honorable man in his struggle to close the deal.

In defiance of this elitist system and in an effort to vindicate her noble standing equal to Martín's, Juana sets out after her promised husband. Her goal is to foil the father's and son's plan of economic and social ascension, and force Martín to keep his previous promise of marriage based on love and honor. To thwart her lover's attempts at a Madrid alliance, she disguises herself as a *pretendiente*, like Martín. When she enters

the public and mobile world of the *pretendiente* at court, she makes a social statement. Juana conveys her belief in women's equal rights to men's when she tells her servant, "vengo a pretender aquí / un hábito o encomienda..." (497-498). As she articulates these words, she claims her right to seek ascension and a legitimate position alongside men.

Juana's character is meticulously developed to mirror the political and social reality of the *pretendientes*. Her trip from Valladolid to Madrid follows the same historical path taken by many impoverished nobles. Juana chooses the name Don Gil to mimic her evasive lover's name, one that also connotes the ignoble lineage and aspirations of some *pretendientes*. Juana's performance name mocks the fact that honor is for sale. "Don Gil" is an oxymoron, since "Gil" is a typical name of shepherds and rustics that would never be preceded by the title *don*.<sup>8</sup> This is obviously an effort to poke fun at the abuse of titles and the low level of presumably noble lineage held by the *pretendientes* of the court.<sup>9</sup>

The alias "Don Gil de las calzas verdes" also comically makes reference to the protagonist's breeches instead of lineage in an effort to expose the debased character of the *pretendiente*. Juana is disguised as an adorned *lindo* of the time, contrary to the dark and sober attired aristocrat at court. The *lindo* is often made fun of in *capa y espada* plays, in Agustá Moreto's *El Lindo don Diego* (1662) for instance. These fashionable men were also known as *pisaverdes*. According to Néstor Luján, the nickname derives from "la metáfora tomada del que atraviesa un jardín y para no pisar las labores o no mojarse va andando de puntillas" (61). The chromatic symbolism of Juana's green breeches is highly significant. In the fourteenth century, Boccaccio's enamored women always wore green, and by the seventeenth century, the color green had evolved into a

symbol of sexuality, desire, and lust (Chamberlin and Weiner 345).<sup>10</sup> In *Don Gil*, the appearance of green signifies both debauchery and desire. The green-attired Juana mocks her rivals, those obsessed with money, by chromatically reflecting male impropriety and greed, as well as by affirming her own desire for Martin. Women and men in the audience must have found humor in watching a female character play a *pisaverde* who charms the ladies. Yet ultimately for women, the laughter stimulated by this image conveys a temporary sense of female catharsis from male oppression.

Most importantly, Juana's transvestism should be understood as the interplay of class and gender woven into her male disguise. As Marjorie Garber argues, Renaissance sumptuary laws were "overwhelmingly concerned with wealth or rank, and with gender largely as it was a subset of those categories" (*Vested Interests* 20). Garber explains that "transvestism was located at the juncture of 'class' and 'gender,' and increasingly through its agency gender and class were revealed to be commutable, if not equivalent" (32).<sup>11</sup> The meaning of the transvestite role and of female subjectivity needs to be examined by discerning the significance of the social position Juana takes on as the character "don Gil de las calzas verdes." It is not fortuitous that Tirso creates a shrewd transvestite tramoyera who understands money and occupation as the leverage with which men negotiate their surroundings. Juana's role serves to expose the dubious *pretendiente* and the double-marginalization of women in a competitive and exclusionary social and economic system.

The lack of virtuous models at court becomes critical in Tirso's theatrical commentary on the decay of the social fabric.<sup>12</sup> Libertine behavior characterized by the courting and seduction of women in parks and gardens, sexual escapades, and society

gossip and scandals became the favorite past time of the men and women of the upper classes. The popularity of strolling through parks and riding in carriages although denounced by moralists, was a highly appealing social trend. Many such as the Jesuit Pedro de León criticized this behavior as flagrantly unmanly conduct (Perry 126-127).

Critics such as Eugenio Asensio, Elizabeth Leffeldt, José Cartagena-Calderón, and Claude Chauchadis have addressed the transformation of valiant, strong men into the frivolous dainty men of the court of Philip III and Philip IV and what this meant culturally.<sup>13</sup> In the theater as in society, playwrights, moralists and intellectuals questioned the foundations of identity. In *Don Gil*, Tirso comically lampoons the new type of Baroque man, the courtly figure, who seeks noble ascension through the conquest of women instead of countries. Zamora Vicente notes the problems the court faced with many noblemen who carried a title and, dressed the part, yet had no possessions or business at court, but passed their time gambling and seducing women (128, n. 536). This type of victory is seen as weak, fallacious, and deficient of honor or valor. The altered image of masculinity is now feminized or “afeminado.”<sup>14</sup> Susana Paun de García defines the term “effeminate” as follows: “[it] could signal and signify widely divergent phenomena, from male physical weakness to love excessive pleasure (especially sexual pleasure with women), or an antiheroic military ethos” (266). To be effeminate includes possessing defective qualities stereotypically associated with women, such as a preoccupation for trivial conversations and a frivolous lifestyle, and having a deceitful and scheming nature. The cosmopolitan dandy’s classical masculine strengths weakened as his pursuit for access to new sources of economic power increased. In the play, Juana adopts the effeminate persona of the *pretendiente* at court as well as the material ambition

represented by this male stereotype. The social appeal of male effeminacy and money offers Juana the transvestite, greater agency and control of the other characters. Furthermore, Juana seems to revel in a gratifying transvestite experience; she exemplifies male licentious behavior as she seduces Inés and her cousin Clara. The importance of money figures prominently in the game of seduction. Dressed as a man, she bribes people for personal information; spies on her victims from a nearby rented home, pawns jewelry to access liquid funds, and brazenly takes money from female adorers. Juana-Gil and Martín compete over women and *mayorazgos*. However, Juana is always one step ahead stealing a *libranza* [an order of payment] of one thousand *escudos* that he has accidentally dropped. Tirso appears to punish greed through the financial predicaments in which his character Martín finds himself.

Juana-Gil's pursuit of money, dowries, and properties opens a space for women's assessment of their financial worth. Tirso advocates for women's involvement in the negotiation process of marriage by giving them a voice. There are significant instances where the discussion of female assets and female taste in men dominate the conversations between Juana-Gil and the other women. Clara, for example, insists on stressing her ownership of a house, her surplus of suitors and her taste in men when she discloses her feelings to her love interest, Juana-Gil:

CLARA	También tengo casa yo Como doña Inés; también Hacienda el cielo me dio. (2366-2368)
JUANA-GIL	..... ...más ni sé donde vives, .....
CLARA	¿No? Pues sabed que mi casa es a la Red de San Luis. Mis galanes más de mil;

más quien en mi gusto alcanza  
el premio por más gentil. (2389-2393)

Clara's articulation of her financial worth as compared with Inés's is a reflection of Juana's own struggle to prove herself to be as valuable in society. Both Clara and Juana demonstrate authority in marital negotiations in the following agreement:

CLARA	[...] dadme esa mano.
JUANA-GIL	De esposo os la doy: tomad, que, por lo que en ello gano, os la beso. (2458-2461)

Juana acquires agency from socially transgressive actions that go beyond the exploits of conventional crossed-dressed women to acquire a lucrative proposal of marriage. At this point, Juana has transgressed legal parameters. She usurps the male persona of the *pretendiente* through the spoken promise of a profitable marriage. The notions of class and gender as well as the exchange of *mayorazgos* are the primary issues contested in the play through the performance of Don Gil.<sup>15</sup> In Clara, Juana sees herself reflected and empowered by symbolically acquiring material gain and linguistic authority in marital negotiations, a right that was previously denied to her due to a lack of economic means.

The topic of women's financial interests in marital alliances also appears through the name pointedly taken by Juana as her alias since the name also refers to an exemplary woman of the thirteenth century named Teresa Gil de Aragón. In the play, the mention of a central street named Teresa Gil is not only a reminder of Juana's city of origin, Valladolid, but more importantly it evokes the historical figure after whom the street is named. Around 1251, Teresa Gil de Vidaure married Jaime I in a clandestine marriage, and became Teresa Gil de Aragon, Valencia, and Mallorca.<sup>16</sup> According to the historian Robert Burns, she was forced to litigate to have the marriage legally recognized by Pope



Clemente IV. She succeeded in securing her lands and rights as wife of the king of Aragon, for herself and her children. She could not, however, retain her husband who eventually abandoned her for a more desirable match. Despite these trials, Teresa Gil continued to demonstrate her power by founding several Cistercian convents in Valencia, most notably La Zaida in 1265: “She is cherished in the annals of Cistercian Europe as one of their great and holy women, ‘the Blessed Teresa, queen’” (Burns 227). She became legendary for her generous and vigorous religious patronage and acquired saintly status upon her death in the Monastery of Gratia Dei around 1278.

This historical and powerful female figure strengthens the image of Juana. Teresa Gil’s crusade for marital rights and political, financial, and religious empowerment referentially imbues the *tramoyera* with proto-feminist overtones. Juana’s connection to the historical Teresa Gil would have been recognized by the audience, granting her fight greater authenticity and legitimacy. The *tramoyera*’s quest for economic and social security in a world driven by greed surpasses the pursuit of love. Tirso juxtaposes women’s financial ambitions with women’s awareness of moral and social obligations. For example, Juana’s transvestism serves to probe other destructive ramifications of male greed. Society is ultimately harmed by opportunistic men, whose aspirations of economic and political ascension result in their seduction of women, which leads to illegitimate births and women’s abandonment. Women were often persuaded to engage in sex in exchange for empty promises of marriage; they were dishonored through abandonment; and were left with fatherless progeny. In Juana’s case, she uses pregnancy as a negotiating tool. In order to appeal to Martín’s conscience, Juana writes a letter to him fabricating that she is carrying his child and has found shelter at the San Quirce

Monastery in Valladolid, founded by Teresa Gil of Aragon. Once again, Tirso ties Juana to the influential and powerful patroness. The link to San Quirce represents a growing awareness of woman's concerns about reproduction, space, autonomy, and legal rights. In the letter to Martín, Juana conveys a picture of monastic support and protection for women. The audience would have been familiar with the convent of San Quirce renowned for its economic ties to the community. According to Lehfeldt, San Quirce "owned property throughout the region, rented houses in the city, collected various annuities, made loans and sold wine" (642). Convents, particularly in Valladolid, multiplied in the early modern period due to the notable support of the *vallisoletanos*. Lehfeldt explains that these convents were recognized as financially and litigiously powerful. They maintained permanent financial liaisons with familial patrimonies, even pursuing secular lawsuits when monetary obligations to cloistered daughters were not met (645). Juana's pregnancy stratagem sends a resolute message of moral and of financial obligation to Martín, and a threat of possible litigation by the nuns of San Quirce. Although Juana has no intention of entering the convent, she invents the story to worry and manipulate Martín since the reference to San Quirce underscores female economic power.

Juana's final scheme to secure Martín's original promise of marriage involves the judicial system. She writes an anonymous letter to her father falsely claiming that her wanton husband Martín has stabbed her to death. Juana plans to have her father seek justice in the courts for her presumed murder. This final issue concerning the victimization of women emerges in the final scene. Juana's father demands that the authorities arrest Martín for presumably stabbing his daughter to death. Tirso

incorporates the reality of judicial punishment for uxoricide cases in early modern Spain. Don Diego threatens, “Quitársela [la vida] el verdugo, / levantando en una escarpia / su cabeza enredadora antes de un mes en la plaza” (3173-3176) The mention of a public hanging within a short period of time underscores that secular law extends its protective arm to women.

Tirso dedicates the entire first scene of Act Three to Martín’s admission of guilt in Juana’s death:

Muy justa venganza cobra  
el cielo de mi crueldad,  
de mi ingratitud y olvido.  
El que su homicida ha sido  
soy yo, no su enfermedad. (2049-2053)

As a scathing criticism of parental cruelty, Martín later blames his father’s greed over *mayorazgos* for Juana’s demise. The character, Don Gil de las calzas verdes, emerges as the avenger of female victimization: “El espíritu inocente / de doña Juana / (...) / y que en castigo y venganza / del mal pago que la dí, / se finge don Gil, y aquí / hace guerra a mi esperanza” (2099-2105). Tirso poignantly conveys his view about the immoral and unjust treatment of women by parents and suitors.

Many critics have simply chosen to interpret Juana’s transvestite performance as a misogynist parody of the *mujer vestida de hombre* or as a sexual stereotype, but these interpretations are exceedingly reductive.<sup>17</sup> The parody is not of women but of men. As I have shown, the feminization of Juana-Gil serves to criticize the newly-devalued identity of the men obsessed with *mayorazgos*; and, to recognize women’s legal rights in marital negotiations. While the transvestite, Don Gil de las calzas verdes, personifies the disillusionment over contemporary male identity and behavior, she/he more poignantly

stands as an avatar of women's financial and marital authority. Tranvestism facilitates Juana's entry into social interactions and financial negotiations previously denied to her. Men's clothing permits Juana to seek an appointment at court as a *pretendiente*, enamor women and negotiate marriage, steal money, rent lodging, and write letters that threaten the social and financial stability of several families. In *Don Gil*, the *tramoyera* personally sabotages her lover's betrothal to a high-born woman, in order to oppose the disproportionate distribution of wealth propagated through arranged unions between first-born inheritors of *mayorazgos* and to draw attention to women's voice in financial mediations.

## **1.2 The Cross-dressing Actress as Female Icon of the *Comedia Nueva* in Tirso de Molina's *El vergonzoso en palacio***

Set in the late fourteenth century, Tirso de Molina's play *El vergonzoso en palacio* [The Bashful Man at Court] presents an intricate web of interpolated love intrigues among several courting couples of the Portuguese nobility.

The converging plots deal with most of the same issues of class and gender that concern the female protagonists in his play *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*: social mobility; arranged marriages; "homosociality;"<sup>18</sup> the reconciliation of love and marriage; deceitful seduction and abandonment; and the disdainful woman. The dramatic convention of blurring the lines of reality and appearance, seen earlier in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, is also relayed through transvestism in *El vergonzoso en palacio*. However, in *El vergonzoso en palacio*, female transvestism most distinctly serves to exemplify the artistic skill of women performers while functioning as an emblematic representation of

the *comedia nueva*. By exemplifying the art of illusion through the female protagonist penchant for cross-dressing, Tirso exposes gender as a performance.

*El vergonzoso en palacio* tells the story of two high-born sisters who undermine their father's marital arrangements in order to follow their own desires: Madalena loves her tutor and Serafina loves to act. Madalena tries to reconcile honor and desire while she secretly pursues Mireno, a poor shepherd turned secretary who, unbeknownst to everyone, is really a duke. Serafina meanwhile concentrates on directing and performing her own play while she fends off the unwanted advances of a perfidious courtier. In contrast, their father, the Duque de Averro struggles with his own problems including the king's urgent orders of marriage for Madalena and Serafina, his daughters' resistance to their aristocratic betrothals, and a treasonous secretary.

Leading the comedia production is Serafina, whose dramatic endowment facilitates her mastery of a diverse number of roles in the comedy. Serafina is an unprecedented, polyvalent figure, who functions as a female subject on two levels in the play. The first level is diegetic and involves her characterizations as daughter, sister, *mujer esquiva*, *mujer vestida de hombre*, as well as writer, director and actress of her play. Serafina's characterizations of different roles demonstrate the process through which gender identities are created and thus, challenges the category of gender. The second level is extradiegetic and encompasses her role as a personification of the *nueva comedia* aesthetic – *el gusto* (the entertainment of the public) over *lo justo* (a moral-didactic aim); a blending of comedy and tragedy (illusion and truth); imitation as a likeness of life (Sullivan *Tirso de Molina* 72). The metadiegetic component - the play-within-the-play - depicted in Act Two through Serafina's staging of *La portuguesa cruel*,

a play she both writes, acts in, and directs serves to express the perceptions on art and life that were articulated in the polemics of the theater in the early seventeenth century. Tirso was an exponent of the Lopean school of poetics and followed the principles stated in Lope's doctrine of art which introduced liberal criteria for the theater. This new approach centered on the public's predisposition for contemporary themes and a reworking of the concept of mimesis; it was a creative act derived from poetic inspiration (Wardropper 1983, 14).

*El vergonzoso en palacio* is an intricate play for the varied social and political themes it presents as well as for the well-developed psychological characterizations of women. Renowned as one of Tirso's finest comedies, it is nevertheless seldom recognized as a platform for the playwright's homage to female performance and for his aesthetic agenda. I reconsider Serafina by analyzing this *tramoyera* as representing female theatrical artistry and also as a character imbued with theoretical substance in the play, one that represents a poetic theory, while at the same time alludes to the controversial feud over female actors and theater poetics. I argue that a key to understanding the full significance of the transvestite Serafina in *El vergonzoso* is to scrutinize Tirso's artistic motivation for her creation. Serafina should be examined as a significant constituent in Tirso's greater literary, canonical and political project.

As I explained in my introduction, the controversy over theater aesthetics peaked between 1617 and 1620. Feuding writers, clerics, and moralists criticized Lope's *comedia nueva* for the lack of decorum and verisimilitude, and the conflation of tragic and comedic elements. Neo-Aristotelian writers and poets such as, Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa, Pedro de Torres Rámila, Juan Ruíz de Alarcón, and Diego de Agreda y Vargas

wrote acerbic remarks to degrade the literary value of the *Arte Nuevo* and all those who espoused its ideas – namely Tirso. The poet and playwright Luis de Góngora y Argote directly criticized Tirso’s poetic style and language in his *Polifemo* (1612) and *Soledades* (1613-1617) (Kennedy *Studies in Tirso* 262).

Moreover, the moralist Diego de Agreda y Vargas was staunchly opposed to priest-writers and playgoers, and fought to ban certain lascivious *comedias* (175). The *regidores* [town magistrates] were scheduled to pass a law concerning the theater. The decriers of the theater had their agenda to “include among the *premáticas* of 1620 a decree that would restrict dramatic fare” (*Studies in Tirso* 176).<sup>19</sup> Despite these threats, Tirso’s and Lope’s *comedias* continued to receive popular reviews and support. Through the publication of *El vergonzoso* in his book, *Los cigarrales de Toledo*, Tirso protected Lope’s theater “against its critics of 1620-1621 who were making an all-out attempt either to close the theatre or to make it a didactic instrument such as they felt the theatre of classical tradition to be” (Kennedy 182).<sup>20</sup> Tirso was intent on demonstrating that these plays could “enseñar deleitando” [teach while entertaining].<sup>21</sup>

*El vergonzoso* was published in 1624, within the miscellany entitled *Los cigarrales de Toledo*.<sup>22</sup> In *Los cigarrales*, Tirso himself admits to the staging of the play and the audience’s positive reaction:

...celebrada con general aplauso (años había), no solo entre todos los teatros de España, pero en los más célebres de Italia y de entreambas Indias, con alabanzas de su autor, pues mereció que uno de los mayores potentados de Castilla honrase sus musas, ennobleciese esta facultad, con hacer la persona del Vergonzoso él mismo, quedándolo todos los que la profesan de verle aventajar, en un rato de este lícito entretenimiento, sus muchos años de estudio. (218)

The play's nexus with this more complex work known as Tirso's exposition of aesthetic conceits concerning artistic freedom, originality, and audience participation, calls for a sophisticated reading of Serafina.<sup>23</sup> As the controversy over the theater escalated, so did Tirso's discursive intentions for this central character.<sup>24</sup> It is Kennedy who first deems this feud as having started with the publication of *El vergonzoso* in 1624: "He would, in the *Cigarrales*, take on Lope's battles with Alarcón and Agreda y Vargas, with the Gongorists, with the Aristotelians" (178). Tirso's aim in *Los cigarrales* was to respond to the attacks which personally affected his fame and pride as a playwright due to his espousal of Lopean precepts. Blanca de los Ríos is also convinced that *El vergonzoso* ignites an argument over *comedia* theory. This is especially pertinent to the points I make on Serafina's function as a representation of professional female actors and of *comedia nueva* poetics.

In *El vergonzoso*, Tirso creates Serafina to represent and exalt the virtues of the *comedia*.<sup>25</sup> Through her characterization as a transvestite actress she embodies the new poetics of the theater. I concentrate my study on Serafina's performance of the play *La cruel portuguesa* in Act Two, where the emphasis lies on Tirso's notions on the theater. This self-reflexivity is intended to defend his poetics and refute his critics. Serafina functions to argue several fundamental precepts of the *nueva comedia* in the play: *ingenio* above historical integrity, decorum and social status; theater as a mirror of customs; art over nature; theater as entertainment; and the preeminent role of the cross-dressed actress (Kennedy 178). Tirso rejected neo-Aristotelian norms and promoted innovative structures such as simultaneous actions; contrary spaces (urban and rural); the mixture of comedic and serious themes, and the proliferation of *cuadros* (formerly known as *escenas o*



*salidas*), and the development of subsidiary action. Ultimately, Tirso argues that the theater meets the Aristotelian requirement that this genre should “teach while delighting” (179).

Of all the various characters in *El vergonzoso*, and by extension in *Los cigarrales*, why is it that Tirso selects the cross-dressed woman to defend the merits of the theater? It was the rise in appearance of actresses on stage from the mid-sixteenth century on, and especially in the early seventeenth century, that brought about a new female subjectivity in the theater and in society. The high demand for plays in the *corrales* ultimately resulted in a better economic and social change for women performers. Rennert offers evidence of a large number of actresses in the seventeenth century (*The Spanish Stage* 181-206). Ferrer Vals explains that many women entered the theater as actresses by way of their fathers or husbands, or, in the second half of the seventeenth century, as directors of their own companies (2009, 5). Hence women were involved in an array of roles, from female and cross-dressed characters, to administrators and directors. One reason for the huge popularity of the *capa y espada* plays was the attraction of the *mujer vestida de hombre* character. In this light, the woman disguised as a male becomes a hallmark figure. She represents the centrality of women in the theater, through their contribution to illusion, mutability, and theatricality. Furthermore, she reflects a shifting society made up of contentious cultural, economic, and political realities.

Although historical authenticity in the theater was a fundamental precept for Neo-Aristotelians, María del Pilar Palomo explains that for Tirso, historical truth is replaced by poetic truth according to genre. Many Aristotelians criticized his ability to do this skillfully (*Estudios Tirsistas* 226). Serafina’s role as part of the representation of this

precept begins to unfold before *El vergonzoso* is even performed, on the first pages of *Los cigarrales*, where Tirso shows his exasperation at the encroachment of classical authority on the *comedia*. In the first *Cigarral*, Tirso refutes this stringent concept of history just prior to the representation of the play *El vergonzoso*: “¡Como si la licencia de Apolo se estrechase a la recolección histórica y no pudiese fabricar, sobre cimientos de personas verdaderas, arquitecturas del ingenio fingidas!” For Tirso, the “licencia de Apolo” signifies a “functional poetics” according to Palomo (227). In the *comedia*, history does not usurp the action; on the contrary, it serves as a background for the protagonism of the playwright’s *ingenio*.<sup>26</sup> Serafina and Madalena, the Avero daughters in the play are defiant and licentious women. The satirical depiction of these historical women as Tirso himself comments in *Los cigarrales*, occasioned the Aristotelians’ criticism.<sup>27</sup> Tirso presents both women transgressing the social norms of the aristocracy. In the play, they both arrange to have forbidden sex with their chosen lovers as a stratagem to liberate themselves from the fate of their arranged marriages. Gerald Wade believes that the satirical representation of these highborn women is a technique that follows the popular genre of the *burla* [a satire] and *vejamen* [a poetic satire] (6). A popular activity among poets and playwrights of the literary academies was poking-fun at the nobility through the *burla* and *vejamen*. However, the double dose of sisterly sexual transgression is unique in Golden Age Theater. Despite Tirso’s decision to entertain the audience through the satirical behavior of these women, the abundance of parallel plots and characters and the mirror theme embedded throughout the play beg for a more sophisticated reading of the female *tramoyera*. The mirrored subversion of patriarchal norms by both historical women seems to imply more than entertaining theater. If one

recognizes the intertextual defense of the theater that Tirso carries out in the miscellany *Los cigarrales* and the play *El vergonzoso*, then it is reasonable to interpret the sisters as discursive reverberations of both a social and a poetic nature. I propose that Tirso's social message is to expose gender as a performance and an illusion, as is theater. His poetic message is also one of detachment from the classical norms concerning history and verisimilitude in which many playwrights of the time were criticized. The female characters in the play address performing gender and acting theory. Intimately connected with the endeavors of Serafina and her sister to free themselves from the antiquated and self-effacing exigencies placed on them by patristic authority is Tirso's aim to liberate himself from the intrusive classical establishment of the time.

It is well documented that Tirso felt he was not being recognized as a notable playwright and by 1621 had censored his enemies, the most powerful being the Count-Duke of Olivares, Philip IV's *privado* (Bruce Taylor 393). This was a significant year in that Tirso submitted *Los cigarrales* to the printer. His strained relationship with the Count-Duke due to political criticism brought about many problems for the playwright (Taylor 46).<sup>28</sup> On 6 March 1625, the Council of Castile's Committee of Reform [*Junta de Reформación*] recommended that Tirso be transferred from Madrid and away from the theater due to his scandalous plays (McKendrick 1989, 115). Tirso was ordered to cease writing plays and poems. Tirso communicates both his political and poetic ideas to critics through the nonconformity of his female leads, but most markedly through Serafina who abhors the traditional notion of marriage, reveres the transgressive art of cross-dressing, and directs plays as an *autora*.

Serafina empowers herself by using assertive speech. Her outspoken words express strong positions on gender issues. She refuses the rules of social decorum that efface a woman's identity. Serafina disdains traditional mores and scoffs at those who attempt to impose social and gender constraints, an attitude that evokes Tirso's own views on the classical aesthetics of the theater. When the Count of Estremoz expresses his interest in marrying her, Serafina sneers, "Conde: esas filosofías, / ni las entiendo, ni son, / de mi gusto" (947-949). As a woman, she is a departure from the norm in that she doesn't understand the desire to marry. Tirso undermines the idea of categorizing women in terms of constructed female behavior and status. In Serafina's defiance of the artificial, prescribed, and performative nature of gender, she forges a new space for female marginalized identities. She challenges the repressive social boundaries dictated to her, by creating her own world within the confines of her home; one that involves cross-dressing and theater production.

In extradiegetic terms, Serafina exalts Lopean dramaturgy and communicates the merits of the *nueva comedia*. The cross-dressed Serafina, acting as representative of female performers and as the embodiment of the theater, recites a poetic defense of its gratifying essence: "En la comedia, los ojos / ¿no se deleitan y ven/mil cosas que hacen que estén/olvidados tus enojos? /... manjar de diversos precios, / que mata de hambre a los necios / y satisface a los sabios. / Mira lo que quieres ser/de aquestos dos bandos" (II, 751-782). Serafina intelligently speaks of a banquet divided between the fools and the wise - the two bands or schools of poetics. Her female companion, Juana, speaks on behalf of both herself and Serafina, when she affirms her position: "Digo / que el de los discretos sigo" (784-785). Their outspoken intellectual commentary on the theater

emphasizes their subjectivity. Tirso identifies himself as belonging to the ‘discreet’ group through Juana as well. Both Serafina and Juana voice the Mercedarian’s principles on aesthetics and his alliance with the new thinkers who considered the *comedia* as the perfection of *imitatio*.

It has been widely commented that Serafina challenges *comedia* critics in Act Two, in her famous speech about the theater. What I wish to underscore is that by verbally confronting its detractors, Serafina rhetorically positions herself in the theoretical debate reserved for men. Wearing male attire, and with intense passion and rhetorical wit, she speaks confidently on the virtues of the *comedia*:

¿Qué fiesta o juego se halla  
que no le ofrezcan los versos?  
En la comedia, los ojos  
¿no se deleitan y ven  
mil cosas que hacen que estén  
olvidados tus enojos?  
La música, ¿no recrea  
El oído, y el discreto  
No gusta allí del conceto  
Y la traza que desea?  
Para el alegre, ¿no hay risa?  
Para el triste, ¿no hay tristeza?  
Para el agudo, ¿agudeza?  
Allí el necio, ¿no se avisa? (749-762)

Serafina’s speech is an emphatic affirmation of the revolutionary theories of the *comedia nueva*. It differs from Lope’s defense of the theater in that it is not delivered as a sarcastic apology to the academy (Francisco Ayala 14), nor does it display, as some critics argue, “dramatic hesitancies” (Sullivan 1976, 71).<sup>29</sup> Serafina’s rhetorical style is persuasive and confident to convince her immediate audience (Juana, the hidden Antonio, and the painter in the garden), and Tirso’s theater public, of the legitimacy of the *comedia*. She uses a calculated and intelligent method of argumentation by posing rhetorical questions and

guiding the listener through a process of recognition of the theater's emotional and intellectual fulfillment. As the central actress in the play, and as an allegory of the theater, she provides an artistic wonderment that engages and mesmerizes the audience. Serafina/theater cleanses, purifies the audience through a catharsis in which both the *discreto* [educated] and the *necio* [fool] find sustenance and release. The comment that the *necio* learns something from the *comedia* certainly seems to insinuate Lope's reference to his audience, "Como las paga el vulgo, es justo / hablarle en necio para darle gusto" (17). However in Serafina's case the question "*Allí el necio, ¿no se avisa?*" is a bold insult aimed at degrading the intelligence of the *comedia* detractors.

(...) ¿Quieres ver los epítetos  
que de la comedia he hallado?  
De la vida es un traslado,  
sustento de los discretos,  
Dama del entendimiento,  
de los sentidos banquete,  
de los gustos ramillete,  
esfera del pensamiento,  
Olvido de los agravios,  
manjar de diversos precios,  
que mata de hambre a los necios  
y satisface a los sabios..  
Mira lo que quieres ser  
de aquestos dos bandos. (771-784)

The epithet "de la vida es un traslado" brashly stresses the notion of the *comedia* as a transference of life.<sup>30</sup> Tirso seeks to demonstrate to his "judges" that the theater/art is an imitation or transmutation of life, which it ultimately engulfs.<sup>31</sup>

Serafina's defense of the *comedia* reinforces the theater as a public space for female empowerment. Serafina labels the theater "*dama de entendimiento*", revealing her own intellectual understanding as well as reflecting Tirso's own *ingenio*. If, according to my claim, Tirso grants Serafina the privileged role of projecting his aesthetic views, then

he makes women more convincing as new agents in the theater at a time when they were taking on more substantial roles on and off the stage. Several outstanding and invaluable resources in recent years have been published revealing surprising numbers of women who worked in the theater legally as wives, widows, and daughters of male actors and *autores*. The biographical information on thousands of male and female actors, musicians, and directors of the early modern period are available in *Genealogia, origen y noticias de los comediantes de España* (Shergold and Varey 2005) and *Diccionario biográfico de actores del teatro español* (Ferrer Valls 2008). The high number of working women involved in the theater opens new considerations on their vital role in the evolution of the commercial theater in Spain. Mary Blythe Daniels cogently maintains the greater economic freedom women (and men) exercised compared to their non-thespian counterparts (74). The fact that there were 42 *autoras* between 1596 and 1717 is impressive:

Given that there were 10000 actresses during this time, the percentage that became *autoras* is indeed small (4.2%); however, when one considers that only two hundred and seven men became *autores* out of approximately 1500 male actors (13.8%), and that out of two hundred forty nine *autores* forty two were women (16.9%) the number is significant. (75)

The early modern *autora*'s work is reflected in Serafina's efforts to stage *La portuguesa cruel*. Furthermore, Tirso allegorizes the theater as a "woman." He juxtaposes the struggle of being a woman and an actress with his artistic challenges. Ultimately, he embraces the women's contribution to the theater by transferring authority and subjectivity to the cross-dressed actress.<sup>32</sup>

Verses 771 to 783 depict the theater as a feast at which the *discretos* survive and the *necios* starve; whoever writes *comedias* according to the classical precepts will go

hungry and never gain fame. The reference to *necios* in these verses changes from *vulgo* to an allusion to his critics, and *sabios* to those who espouse Lopean poetics. If a poet was a *discreto* he then demonstrated great ‘*ingenio y difusión*.’<sup>33</sup> In the play, Juana inadvertently plays the roles of both audience and actress. She offers her side of the controversy over the theater by clearly voicing Tirso’s position: “digo, / que el de los discretos sigo, / y que me holgara de ver / la farsa infinito” (784-787).<sup>34</sup> According to Ruth Kennedy, Juana is “making alliance with the defenders of the Lopean theatre against those who were attacking it in 1620” (*Studies in Tirso* 174). Tirso is hence labeling the Aristotelians as a band of starving *necios*, a likely association with the lack of nutritive sustenance in their unyielding classical poetics. In the same light, by using the prolific Juana as a mouthpiece, he is presenting the category woman in new ways that challenge and broaden the category itself.

Serafina consistently defends her individualism against the current sexist views. The unfavorable, negative attitude towards actresses and cross-dressers reverberates through Juana’s recommendation: “A mí más gusto me diera / que te holgaras de otros modos, / y no con representar” (742-744). Tirso now lends Juana the voice of the opposition in an attempt to represent both sides of the debate on theater. Juana’s judgment is Tirso’s way of responding and protecting himself from the attacks against the lack of moral teachings in his work. Tirso was feeling the threat of a religious and political backlash at this time when the poetic license given to friars was being reexamined. In 1624, the Junta de Reformación prohibited that friars be permitted to attend plays and bullfights (Taylor 393).



Juana's function in criticizing the *tramoyera*'s behavior serves to recognize the chastisement of moralists, to bring them into this narrative and to face Serafina's challenge. Through Serafina, Tirso gives women an opportunity to respond to the criticism by Aristotelians and churchmen of women in the theater and in the audience. Suárez de Figueroa a well-known rival of Lope and his followers reiterated the theater's corrupting influence on women: "¿qué se puede seguir de ver un enredo de amores lascivos y deshonestos? ... ¿qué han de aprender allí las doncellas que en su vida tal vieron ni oyeron?" (cited in Kennedy *Studies in Tirso* 176). Most contemporaneous critics were moralists who, as Sherry Velasco asserts, continually attacked actresses' lascivious nature and denounced their role in the deterioration of the moral fabric of society. One such moralist was Father José de Jesús María:

...no se desnuden públicamente las mujeres, como lo solían hacer en la gentilidad las ramera en los juegos abominables de la torpísima Flora, de que abomina Plutarco y otros autores gentiles [...].

Que vestirse la mujer traje de hombre o al contrario es de suyo cosa ilícita y viciosa, contraría a la condición de las personas y ocasión evidente de lascivia; y no sólo se debe evitar por estar prohibida tan particularmente en la ley, más también porque los gentiles usaban de esta mutación de hábito para la superstición de la idolatría. (Cotarelo y Mori, *Bibliografía* 380-381)

In contrast, Tirso creates a theatrical space to pay homage to Serafina's dramatic abilities. Serafina stages the action-packed *farsa*<sup>35</sup> [farce], *La portuguesa cruel* for the occasion of Carnival and to raise her sister's spirits. As director of her play-within-a play, Serafina usurps the passionate role of Prince Pinabelo sharply attired with sword, black cape, and hat. When Juana asks for an explanation to her inappropriate choice of gender role, she retorts, "Fiestas de Carnestolendas / todas paran en disfraces. / Deséome

entretener / deste modo; no te asombre / que apetezca el traje de hombre, / ya que no lo puedo ser” (733-739). Her desire to wear men’s clothes both in and out of character, brings to mind the actress/*autora* Barbara Coronel, niece of the famous actor Juan Rana, who managed her own troupe dressed as a man “en los caminos y a caballo,” from 1676 to 1691 (Shergold and Varey 1985, 422). Serafina, as actress/*autora*, becomes a symbolic representation of life and art. It is Tirso’s decision to set the play during the celebrations of *Carnestolendas* to bring out the nexus between life, popular festivities, and the *comedia*.<sup>36</sup> Although she cannot become a man, she experiences an exhilarating freedom of expression vicariously through her masculine costume. She continues to portray many roles in her play with ingratiating abandon, presumably aware that two men are watching her rehearsal from behind the garden bushes. Her male and female performances are convincing because she is aware that gender is an act, and that it is conveyed by what one does repeatedly and not by what one is, as Butler asserts (“Performative Acts” 270). Serafina feels powerful by performing in a play what she observes men and women doing in life. However, Butler argues that unlike gender performativity, theater performance insinuates an embodied and voluntary subject, an actress such as Serafina, who precedes the act of impersonation; the subject is created by impersonation instead of through performativity (271). The audience is fully aware that Serafina has agency over her role, whereas gender identity is created through repetition of acts and gestures of which we have no control. Critics have found fault in Butler’s rejection of theater performance as a site for examining gender subversion.<sup>37</sup> I agree with Elin Diamond who explains:

performance [...] is the site in which performativity materializes in concentrated form, where ‘the concealed or dissimulated conventions’ of which acts are mere repetitions might be investigated and re-imagined. (47)

In my opinion, Serafina's performance in the play-within-a-play, as in her own story, contests heteronormative constructions of gender by generating awareness, reflection, and subversion.

### **Serafina's mirror**

Reflective objects imbue the play with further inquests into performance and identity. Michael Schlig states that in Antiquity the mirror was used as a "metaphor for artistic, and more specifically, literary representation" (1). In the Renaissance, this ubiquitous object was inextricably linked to the notion of mimesis or of representation. Serafina's long gaze into the mirror is a stellar moment in the play that investigates further notions of representation. It also represents a gaze into the eyes of the playwright since, in the Renaissance, the round mirror became associated with the eye of the artist. Given the early modern's fascination with identity, the mirror became its preferred means to reflect an original, and later, as a reflection of life itself. In *The Mutable Glass*, Herbert Grabes explains that in the seventeenth century, the preferred view of the mirror was that knowledge emanates from the reflection, imitation, and reification of an ideal.<sup>38</sup> Renaissance visual symbols dealing with reflection and imitation were widespread metaphors.<sup>39</sup> In the Baroque period, Cicero's metaphor of theater as "the reflection of nature, the imitation of life, the mirror of custom and the image of the truth" developed into one of the favorite slogans used to defend the dignity of the theater (Arata 177, n. 1367).<sup>40</sup>

In many ways, Serafina's connection to the reflective props on stage represents symbolic intertextual discourses on mimesis. Tirso reworks the concept of mimesis into one founded on invention. Serafina's reflection in the mirror and later in the painting

showcases the actress while it lauds the idea of invention. In Act Two, a cross-dressed Serafina preparing for her role, asks her maid Juana to hand her a mirror so she may admire her masculine appearance. This reflection conveys an inversion of gender:

SERAFINA. El espejo, doña Juana;  
Tocaréme.

JUANA. (*Trae un espejo.*) Si te miras  
en él, ten, señora, aviso,  
no te enamores de ti.

SERAFINA. ¿Tan hermosa estoy así?

JUANA. Temo que has de ser Narciso.

SERAFINA. ¡Bueno! Desta suerte quiero  
Los cabellos recoger,  
Por no parecer mujer  
Cuando me quite el sombrero.  
(801-810)

This scene has been widely interpreted as a critique of female narcissism and licentiousness. Gail Bradbury has commented on the Platonic origin of the Narcissus theme and neo-Platonists' inclination for assimilating this mythical argument to their own poetics of the "like-to-like principle" (575). She explains that the transvestite in the theater is inherently connected to the Narcissus theme for its evocation of homosexual love, incestuous love and overall aberrant sexuality. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a young boy shuns the love of another due to his love for his own reflection. In the play, Serafina is branded as Narcissistic by Juana. McKendrick interprets the female look in the mirror as an emblematic symbol of vanity. For this critic, Serafina's climatic gaze in the mirror, is a narcissistic act that has punitive consequences – an abhorred marriage to Antonio (*"Retratos, vidrios y espejos"* 280). The mirror and portrait as metaphors have been eloquently studied by McKendrick who exposes how these props are frequently used to

reflect antithetical images of women as both subject and object in Golden Age theater (267).<sup>41</sup> Laura Bass disagrees with branding Serafina as narcissistic stating that the portrait is not the mirror, and, although there is a resemblance between her reflection in the mirror and the man in the portrait, Serafina recognizes that the man is to be found elsewhere (*Drama of the Portrait* 60). Bass interprets the female mirror scene in psychoanalytic terms, as the moment when “human subjectivity emerges when the “I”/”eye” first recognizes itself in the reflective surface of the mirror.” It is split as subject and object.

In my opinion, the protagonist’s gaze represents several other notions. Serafina’s long gaze in the mirror seems emblematic of Titian’s *Woman with a Mirror*. A source for the exaltation of female beauty is the traditional Venetian theme of the nude Venus with the mirror that is masterfully conveyed in this painting, as well as the *Toilet of Venus*, and the *Venus of Urbino*.<sup>42</sup> *Woman with a Mirror* depicts a woman in a self-adoring stance holding her hair up with one hand and an ointment jar with the other. The beautiful woman is positioned between a round convex mirror and a squared mirror held up by a man in the dark. Rona Goffen explains that this scene is voyeuristic as the man and the viewer both stare at the woman’s beauty and the eroticism in her loosened clothing (*Titian’s Women* 86). Goffen draws attention to the classical association of the beautiful nude with beautiful art (17): “The Renaissance artist represented his own genius” (*Titian’s Venus of Urbino* 13). She differs from most critics in that she identifies nude and dressed women as representations of Titian himself (*Titian’s Women* 8). The woman is pointing at her face with one hand and is holding the ointment jar with the other as a painter would hold a brush or finger to a canvas (Pardo 82). Similarly, Serafina is a

representation of Tirso. Serafina holds a round mirror while a squared canvas reflects her image on the other side. Tirso's dramatic muse has also undressed, like Titian's model, and redressed as a man however holding a sword; she has shed her constructed appearance as a woman and assertively gazes at herself in the mirror. Antonio, her admirer, is in the garden figuratively representing the man in Titian's painting, Cupid, and the audience. Serafina excitedly contemplates her obscure inner self and her transgressive identity as a cross-dressed woman. Serafina enjoys the empowered image she sees in the mirror, meaning her liberated inner self, and is now fully in command of her body. The voyeuristic appeal she has on her audience in this transvestite scene evolves from an alluring dichotomy just as Titian's captivating pinkish/white skinned woman is a powerfully seductive image of a woman self-possessed and assertive toward those gazing upon her. In Serafina's case, she places herself in her own way – cross-dressed – in front of the mirror, hence challenging traditional notions of beauty. The art historian Whitney Chadwick explains what it means for women artists to reflect upon their own image through the canvas, lens, or mirror:

Every woman who paints a self-portrait, or sculpts a likeness, or places herself in front of the lens of a camera whose shutter she controls, challenges in some way the complex relationship that exists between masculine agency and feminine passivity in Western art history. I like to think that in taking up brush or pen, chisel or camera, women assert a claim to the representation of women (as opposed to Woman) that Western culture long ago ceded to male genius and patriarchal perspectives, and that in turning to the image in the mirror they take another step towards the elaboration of a sexualized subject female identity. (9)

Just as Chadwick speaks to women's control of their representation, Serafina's stare into the looking-glass in men's clothing is a counter-discourse of patriarchy that subjectivizes women in the theater. In her performance as male, Serafina gazes in the mirror, a

ubiquitous symbol of the theater and of the artist, to perfect the look of Prince Pinabelo. She diligently transforms herself, pinning her hair up to secure her male appearance from every angle. Serafina's exposed neck adds to sensuality of her character and brings to mind the eroticism in the pinkish-white neck that Titian's model proudly shows the viewer as she pulls aside her red hair. Serafina observes herself as subject and as an audience to herself. Her performative artistry shines during the rehearsal. Dressed in the contemporary fashion of black breeches, cape and sword, she aggressively attacks Juana who has assumed the role of the count, the prince's rival. Not only does Serafina transform herself physically and mentally she also forces her maid to participate in the dramatization. Serafina vivaciously performs the role of the jealous prince, waving a sword and threatening death to the count. Juana reacts in astonishment at Serafina's acting acumen, as her emotional and physical exertion frightens Juana, who screams to be released from her designated role. Serafina's acting is so realistic that a short pause is required. Tirso effectively portrays Serafina as an empowered actress, cognizant of her performative stature and potency.

The wonder of the audience at the artistry of female acting is evoked through Juana's question: "¿es posible que quien siente / y hace así un enamorado / no tenga amor?" (948-950). Juana indeed states that Serafina acts so well that she should have a lover- she is taken in by her acting. These words foreground Tirso's aesthetic views about acting as a creative expression of reality as well as the dramatic dexterity of female actresses. The same theory about representation is found in the royal painter Vicente Carducho's seventeenth-century treatise on art. He explains that like a painter, an actor must transcend the mere copy of a subject in order to captivate the audience (193-194).

As in the earlier parallel between Titian and Tirso's muses, both artists represent women as empowered and self-possessed. The model who holds the figurative brush and the actress who holds the sword convey individuality and substance that set them apart from superficial imitations.

Tirso succeeds in extricating the moral judgment traditionally attached to women in the acting profession and draws attention to their acting technique. His appreciation of women on the stage challenges the negative opinion of actresses held by moralists. For example, Father Ignacio Camargo ignores any shred of talent an actress may possess and criticizes the virtues she upholds to ultimately brand her as a sexual object for men:<sup>43</sup>

¿Qué harán representadas con vivísima expresión por mujeres mozas (...) en quienes es propio el encogimiento, gala la disolución, desgracia la modestia, cuidado el garbo y el donaire, primor la desenvoltura, estudio el artificio, oficio el dejarse ver y profesión el agradar a los hombres? (cited in Cotarelo y Mori, *Bibliografía* 123)

Tirso sees beyond this essentialist position. Actresses seemed to possess a depth of dramatic skill that defied conscriptions of gender, class and experience. Amy Tigner, in reference to English plays, argues that actresses slowly evolved into central figures on the stage due to their "facility in improvisation, their technical skills, and their performance as women. ... the actress could not be simply replaced by a boy dressing as a woman"(2).

I contend that the words of Serafina in the role of Prince reveal a subtext that conveys Tirso's high regard for women's excellence in the dramatic arts. If the *comedia nueva* is considered metaphorically female in the epithet *dama del entendimiento*, then conversely an actress would naturally find herself in a familiar environment of performance and with the label *dama de la actuación*. The actress is intimately connected to the notion of mimesis as invention. Tirso identifies himself figuratively with Serafina



as transvestite in the sense that transvestism signifies the mutability and the performativity of the *comedia* as well as of the actress. At the end of her play's rehearsal, Serafina oscillates between roles, masterfully transforming from narrator to Prince Pinabelo, to Count Fabio, to the priest, to the father of the bride Hernán Alonso, to wedding guests, and finally, to Celia. The climactic wedding scene showcases the virtuosity of the actress. Serafina becomes a revolving figure of male and female characters thus exemplifying gender performance:

SERAFINA/PRINCE.	¡Hola! ¡Ah necios!
SERAFINA/GUEST.	¿Yo necio? Mentís
SERAFINA/PRINCE.	¿Yo miento?
SERAFINA/GUEST.	Tomad ( <i>Dase un bofetón</i> )
SERAFINA/PRINCE.	¿A mí bofetón?
SERAFINA/GUEST.	Muera ( <i>echa mano</i> )
SERAFINA/PRINCE.	Téngase. ¿Qué es esto? (...)
SERAFINA/GUEST.	Ya es hora del desposorio; todos están en pie puestos;...
SERAFINA/PRIEST.	Fabio: ¿queréis por esposa a Celia hermosa?
SEAFINA/FABIO.	Sí quiero.
SERAFINA/PRIEST.	Vos, Celia: ¿queréis a Fabio?
SERAFINA/CELIA.	Por mi esposo y por mi dueño.
SERAFINA/PRINCE.	¡Oh, perros! ¡En mi presencia! ( <i>mete mano</i> ) El príncipe Pinabelo soy, mueran los desposados, el cura, la gente, el pueblo. (996- 1030)

The acting versatility needed to project such emotional variations requires a premiere actress. The talented performance impresses among the diegetic spectators despite its farcical tone.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, Serafina's oscillating roles in this farcical play speaks to the way in which subjects perform categories badly thus challenging and expanding the assumed essential characteristics of the categories.

The entire second act pivots on the powerful and awe-inspiring art of Serafina, a parallel reflection and model of Tirso's poetic genius to incite wonder.<sup>45</sup> Tirso's argument in support of the actress who play difficult parts and in defense of the theater as a source of entertainment, and not exemplariness, resonates in Serafina's final words, "Entreternerla [a Madalena] deseo" (1056). It highlights the main goal of the subject performer and of early modern theater - to entertain the public. In the end, Serafina stands out as a defense of the *comedia nueva* and against Lope's and Tirso's own critics during a time of deep opposition. Tirso's play is representative of early modern cultural and artistic concerns, when the threat of theater closings and of actresses on stage caused controversial debate. Through close readings of Serafina's performance as *esquiva*, cross-dresser, and actress I have shown the integrity and subjectivity of the *tramoyera*. Tirso was certainly sympathetic to women and represented them as empowered and assertive in their relationships with men; in their questioning of gender construction and cultural proscriptions; in their contributions to the theater; and as a voice to extol his own artistic genius.

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<sup>1</sup> The Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico (C.N.T.C) has toured Spain and South America for several years offering the production of *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*.

<sup>2</sup> Important studies on gender and control in this play are McKendrick, *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A study of the "mujer varonil";* Friedman, "‘Girl Gets Boy’: A Note on the Value of Exchange in the *Comedia*;" and, Stroud, *The Play in the Mirror: Lacanian Perspectives on Spanish Baroque Theater*.

<sup>3</sup> Alcalá-Zamora stresses their disdain for physical work and their obsession to live beyond their means - *vivir noblemente* - doing nothing but living off of the rent and pursuing the king’s generosity (105-106). Elliott asserts that “Life at Court might be expensive [ ], but the grandees expected to make up for their losses by plundering the royal treasury, just as their ancestors had plundered it when another favorite ruled Spain, in the reign of John II” (*Imperial Spain* 314).

<sup>4</sup> Zamora Vicente comments on the negative opinion commonly held of these gallivanting courtiers, “...Lo cierto es que la figura del *pretendiente en corte* aparece muchas veces y, probablemente es la raíz del *paseante en corte*, ya del XIX, para designar a las personas de oficio y vida desconocidos que pululaban por Madrid” (123). He cites Fernández de Navarrete’s condemnation of these parasitic figures: “Si algún camino podría haber para extinguir en las Cortes el medio de los favores e intercesiones venales, había de ser el de la brevedad en el despacho de los pretendientes” (cited in *Don Gil*, n. 501-502, 124).

<sup>5</sup> Many playwrights of the time referred to Madrid as Babel. See Tirso de Molina, *La fingida Arcadia*; Gracián, *Criticón*; Lope de Vega, *La dama boba*, *El mejor alcalde el rey*, *Milagros de corte son*; and, Antonio Viñán y Verdugo, *Guía y avisos de forasteros que vienen a la corte*.

<sup>6</sup> Valbuena Prat also reiterates the marked presence of these wandering characters: “Madrid es también el lugar de los pretendientes de palacio siempre esperando, y oyendo siempre ‘mañana’: ‘El patio de palacio, archivo de novedades, ya mentiras ya verdades, donde todos pasean despacio’” (*El teatro español en su Siglo de Oro* 144).

<sup>7</sup> Zamora Vicente asserts that the arrangement of marriage between doña Inés and don Martín is in fact an example of an effort to consolidate two *mayorazgos* (*Don Gil* 128-129).

<sup>8</sup> The character doña Inés comments on this contradiction: “¿Quién creyó que un *don* fuera guarnición / de un *Gil*, que siendo zagal / anda rompiendo sayal / de villancico en canción” (I, 803-807).

<sup>9</sup> Philip II issued several royal pragmatics to limit the concession of titles such as “don” and other higher honorific labels (*La vida cotidiana en la España de Velázquez* 106). Through the issuance of a title, the king received close to five percent of the yearly salary of an aristocratic family-a total of 4,000 ducats a year. I have estimated this amount based

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on the average salaries at the beginning of the 1600's of the highest aristocratic families given by Elliott (*Imperial Spain* 313) and the amount Alcalá-Zamora gives for the monies received yearly by the crown-50,000 ducats (107). Elliott explains that during the reign of Philip III there was an "inflation of honours": "This addition of new titles played its part in keeping a large share of the national wealth in aristocratic hands, in spite of the relative diminution of the wealth of the old grandee families (314). Unfortunately, the overwhelming presence of impoverished *pretendientes* in the court aggravated the abuses and deterioration of the government. For example, the Duke of Lerma, Philip III's favorite, made the decision to move the Court to Valladolid supposedly to escape the corruption of the courtiers and to stimulate the economy (Alcalá-Zamora 103). Magdalena Sánchez disagrees, attributing the move to Valladolid as Lerma's effort to reduce Emperatriz María's control of Philip III (94).

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Bernis notes that green was usually worn for travel attire (*El traje y los tipos sociales en el Quijote* 20). Green has also been interpreted as the color of the hunt (313). Percas de Ponseti analyzes green as a symbol of deceit and disguise in her study of *Don Quixote* (217). Márquez Villanueva has also examined the use of green as the color of madness (32).

<sup>11</sup> Goldberg agrees that "gender difference is also class difference" ("Making Sense" 461).

<sup>12</sup> The bad reputation of the courtier has been widely commented in the literature and historical studies of the seventeenth-century. María de Zayas famously protests the decay of contemporary masculinity:

¿Es posible que nos veis ya casi en poder de los contrarios, pues desde donde están adonde estamos no hay más defensa que vuestros heroicos corazones y valerosos brazos, y que no os corréis de estaros en la Corte, ajando galas y criando cabellos, hollando coches y paseando prados, y que en lugar de defendernos, nos quitéis la opinión y el honor, contando cuentos que os suceden con damas, que creo que son más invenciones de malicia labándoos de cosas que es imposible sea verdad que lo puedan hacer, ni aun las públicas ramera, sólo por llevar al cabo vuestra dañada intención, todos efecto de la ociosidad en que gastáis el tiempo en ofensa de dios y de vuestra nobleza? !Qué esto hagan pechos españoles! !Qué esto sufran ánimos castellanos! (*Desengaños amorosos* 505-506)

<sup>13</sup> Asensio notes that "los lindos afeminados pululaban en el Madrid de los Felipes III y IV" (232); Cartagena-Calderón scrutinizes the emasculated lindos (323); and also, Chauchadis examines how the interlude *El Marión* illustrates an unfavorable shift in masculine identity within the cultural context, "la pérdida del valor del hombre español que conduce a España a la decadencia" (172).

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<sup>14</sup> Concomitant with the feminization occurring on stage is the emasculation of the male audience. The connection between emasculation and theatergoing is frequently addressed by moralists and intellectuals of the early modern period. Juan de Mariana believed that theater was a stimulator as well as a product of society's deterioration (Blue 15). Courtiers were believed to be at risk of being "castrated" by turning away from bellicose pursuits and dedicating all their time to female activities such as the theater. Cotarelo y Mori quotes the theologian and theater deprecator Jesús Ferrer, who warns against the feminizing symptoms of the *corral de comedias*:

(...) con la ocasión de estas representaciones la gente se da al ocio, al deleite y regalo, y se divierte de la buena disciplina, y del trabajo y ejercicios de guerra; y con la *zaranbanda* y otros bailes deshonestos, con fiestas, banquetes y comedias, se hacen los hombres muelles, afeminados e inútiles para todas las empresas arduas y dificultosas... los mismos romanos perdieron gran parte de su vigor y esfuerzo después que conquistaron la Asia, enflaquecidos y afeminados con los regalos y lujurias... (Cotarelo *Bibliografía* 375-376)

<sup>15</sup> Tirso's heroines have often been interpreted as exhibiting a latent lesbianism. However, after investigating the play from different angles, I am convinced that the cross-dressed heroine does not "allegorize one's search for sexual identity" as Stroud contends in his study of Juana (*Play in the Mirror* 175).

<sup>16</sup> Her relentless demands as wife of Jaime I, earned her the following territorial possessions: the palace and city of Jérica, Alcublas, Liria Andilla, Bejís, Altura, and the palace and city of Flix.

<sup>17</sup> Parr makes a blanket statement that Lope's position is misogynist in his *comedias* and *tragedias*, and that any attempt to demonstrate otherwise is an "exaggeration" ("Tragedia y comedia en el siglo XVII español: Antiguos y Modernos" 157). Margaret Wilson finds that Juana-Gil is nothing more than an entertaining stereotype of the cross-dressed jilted lover (50).

<sup>18</sup> Sedgwick coined the term "homosociality" to mean "the desire to consolidate partnerships with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females" for the purpose of securing their hierarchical position in society (38).

<sup>19</sup> Tirso has also been known to criticize Lope. In *La fingida Arcadia* (1621-1622), the playwright parodies Lope's *Arcadia*, a critique that probably resulted from Lope's decision not to mention Tirso at the literary competition of *Isidro el Labrador* in 1622. *El amor médico* is a satirical imitation of *La portuguesa y dicha del forastero* in which he takes jabs at Lope's relationship with Marta de Nevares (Elvezio Canonica 375-407).

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<sup>20</sup> Sullivan states that Tirso responds to his critics and expands on his theories in several works including *La fingida Arcadia*, *Celos con cellos se curan*, *Amar por arte mayor*, *Amor y celos hacen discretos*, and *La celosa de sí misma* (1976, 71).

<sup>21</sup> This is made clear in *Los cigarrales*, after the presentation of another play. Tirso explains,

Censuren los Catones este entretenimiento, que por más  
que lo registren, no tendrán las costumbres modestas  
ocasión de distraerse. Aquí pueden aprender los celosos  
a no dejarse llevar de experiencias mentirosas; los maridos,  
a ser prudente; las damas, a ser firmes; los príncipes, a cumplir palabras;  
los padres, a mirar por la honra de sus hijos; los criados, a ser leales; y  
*todos los presentes*, a estimar el entretenimiento de *la comedia* que en  
estos tiempos, expurgada de las imperfecciones que en los años pasados se  
consentían a los teatros de España, y limpia de toda acción torpe, deleita  
enseñando y enseña dando gusto. (*Los cigarrales II* 256-257)

<sup>22</sup> *El vergonzoso en palacio* was reprinted in Barcelona in 1631. Modern readers of *El vergonzoso*, are by and large, unaware that the edition is extrapolated from the work *Los cigarrales de Toledo. Los cigarrales*. As Benjamin Parsons Bourland underlines in his introduction to *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, it is divided into three *cigarrales* and follows a style similar to “Boccaccio’s *Decamerone*, but includes, besides the tales and the connecting narrative, three comedies, and numerous short lyric poems”(x). The play *El vergonzoso* was apparently performed in Toledo, in the absence of the playwright around 1620 according to Kennedy after having achieved fame across Spain in other commercial *corrales*. Tirso gives his *Los cigarrales* to a printer in 1621 but due to several frustrating problems with the printer, difficulty in finding a new printer in Madrid and economical delays, it is published in 1624. Kennedy and other experts on Tirso, such as Alan K.G. Paterson, conclude that the Mercedarian could have made changes to his text during these three years since he was known for his revisions (Kennedy 1974, 155, n.12).

<sup>23</sup> Scholarly contributions to the study of the *mujer esquivia*, and the cross-dressing woman have furnished notable psychological and cultural insights. McKendrick’s views of Serafina in *El vergonzoso* through the reading of the metaphorical mirror and portrait in the play expose a female character victimized by her own narcissism and objectified by her own subjectivization (“Retratos, vidrios y espejos” 268-283). Conlon demonstrates women’s sexual desire as equal to that of men, but also marriage’s command over passion (“Sexual Passion and Marriage” 8-13). Tigner’s engaging analysis of Serafina offers a means of understanding the early modern actress’s function in the play vis-à-vis the construction of gender in society (1).

<sup>24</sup> Cervantes’s views against the *comedia nueva* are revealed in *Las Novelas Ejemplares* (1613); *El viaje del Parnaso* (1614); the prologue of *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses* (1615); and *El Persiles* (Kennedy *Studies in Tirso* 433).

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The most commented attacks against Lope's new precepts are those in *Don Quixote*, Part I (1605). Cervantes condemns the dramatic innovations through his model of idealism in *Don Quixote*, "espejos de disparates, ejemplos de necedades e imágenes de lascivia" (ch.48). Close indicates that it is Sansón Carrasco who reveals Cervantes' absolutism: "Through Sansón Carrasco, he praises the inoffensive entertainment offered by the first part of *Don Quixote* (17; *DQ* II. 62 ii.509)." According to Close, it is in the reconciliation of the fundamental values of "appropriateness, discretion, wit and inventiveness" (19) that Cervantes achieved admiration from his contemporaries.

<sup>25</sup> Tirso espouses his notions of drama in other texts among them, *Deleitar aprovechando* (1635), and *Historia General de la orden de la Merced* (1639), and in several dedications included in the *Partes* of his comedies.

<sup>26</sup> Palomo acknowledges the heavy criticism that Tirso received for denigrating history and mocking the noble Averro family (*Estudios Tirsiastas* 225). It is important to note that while there is a slight departure from the historical truth of the central, the social station of the male characters in *El vergonzoso* their social station always remains the same. Tirso often introduced popular historical figures in his plays to awaken his audience's curiosity. In this comedy, he chooses as background narrative the early fifteenth-century Portuguese history of the aristocratic family of Juan I. The sons Don Duarte, Don Pedro, Duke of Coimbra and the Duke of Averro along with his daughters are transformed following the *nueva comedia* aesthetics. Don Pedro escapes the King's prison for wrongfully being convicted of treason and lives for twenty years with his son Mireno disguised as a shepherd in the countryside. The conventional ending with a felicitous marriage of the comedy requires that Mireno fall in love with the daughter of the Duke of Averro which leads to the fateful discovery of his hidden aristocratic lineage. The historical tragic ending of don Pedro and don Duarte, is altered by Tirso's creative imagination.

<sup>27</sup> Wade has given evidence of Madalena as based on the real daughter of the Duke de Averro although he has doubts about the authenticity of Serafina ("Character Names" 6). Kennedy, in contrast, is convinced that Serafina was a member of the Silva family a powerful Toledan clan (*Studies in Tirso* 172, n. 34).

<sup>28</sup> More details are presented in McKendrick (*Theatre in Spain* 115); Penado Rey (44-46); Wade (214); and Hernández García (97).

<sup>29</sup> The criticism initiated by Menéndez y Pelayo (*Historia de las ideas estéticas en España* 1896) and Menéndez Pidal ("El arte nuevo y la nueva biografía" 1935) surrounding Lope's *Arte Nuevo* tends to focus on the contradictions between theory and practice (Sullivan 1976, 71, n.1).

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<sup>30</sup> I find Amy Tigner's reading of Serafina the actress to be simplistic because she does not see the character's significance beyond her role. She interprets, "*de la vida es un traslado*" as signifying a transference or mutation of gender (7).

<sup>31</sup> This notion is similarly expressed by the Baroque prose writer Baltasar Gracián:

Es el arte complemento de la naturaleza y  
un otro segundo ser, que por extreme la hermosea  
y aun pretende excederla en sus obras.  
Préciase de haber añadido otro mundo  
artificial al primero. Suple de ordinario los  
descuidos de la naturaleza, perfeccionándola  
en todo; que sin este socorro del artificio quedara  
inculta y grosera. (Rosales et al. 672)

<sup>32</sup> Sullivan similarly agrees that there is a design in Tirso's *comedias de enredo* "to maintain a subtle but strong chain of conspirational intimacy between author, [female] protagonist, and audience" (1976, 77).

<sup>33</sup> Cervantes, *Novelas ejemplares* (315, n. 62).

<sup>34</sup> Cervantes often laments the underpaid work of poets, *El Licenciado Vidriera* (1613) ends with this criticism: "¡Oh Corte, que alargas las esperanzas de los atrevidos pretendientes y acortas las de los virtuosos encogidos, sustentas abundantemente a los truhanes desvergonzados y matas de hambre a los *discretos* vergonzosos!" (*Novelas ejemplares* 332-333).

The distinguishing labels of *discretos* and *necios* are well known in the early modern period when poets feuded over poetic theory. In 1622, Lope de Vega challenges all poets, those famed and those unknown, in his famous speech delivered at the beatification of San Isidro: "Reto cuantos poetas tienen fama/y reto los donados y pobretes/ con los que Calepino monas llama / y los estafadores de concetos; / reto de Apolo la rebelde rama,/ tusona Daphne; a *necios* y *discretos* sus versos reto" (Kennedy 1949, 5).

<sup>35</sup> Shergold explains that the term *farsa* "...became the ordinary word for drama in the early sixteenth century, before *comedia* had established itself" (1967, 50).

<sup>36</sup> Williamsen believes that *El vergonzoso* was written for the Carnival the same year it was composed and therefore functions as a ritual play (1977, 62).

<sup>37</sup> Aston suggests this shortcoming in her article (25).

<sup>38</sup> ... the prevailing epistemological attitude, according to which the acquisition of knowledge was the result of a receptive process and the imitation of an existing



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order..., and in which the world itself was conceived of as a Platonic 'reflection' of the ideal. The persistence of the metaphor of an image-reflecting mirror from the Middle Ages to the seventeenth century ... can therefore be explained as a sign of a largely continuous world-picture based ontologically on the model of the analogy and oriented epistemologically and aesthetically towards *imitatio*. (113)

<sup>39</sup> Attributed to Cicero was the description of comedy as a mirror of human behavior, an image of truth: *Speculum totius vitae humanae, imago veritatis, imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis* (cited in Arata, 177, n.1367).

<sup>40</sup> According to William M. Whitby, "La definición de la comedia como *speculum vitae* fue atribuida por Elio Donato a Livio Andronico y confundida por algunos autores (como Cervantes y Lope de Vega) con la que el mismo Donato erroneamente atribuye a Cicerón: "Imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis" (248, n.19).

Lope often makes use of the mirror metaphor when referring to the *comedia*: "No en balde se inventaron las comedias, / primero en Grecia que en Italia y Roma. / Allí se ven ejemplos y consejos, / Porque son de la vida los espejos" (*El acero de Madrid* 1364-1367).

<sup>41</sup> She finds Spain's predilection for themes dealing with reflection and recreation are a product of the times, as the country was immersed in portraying an elusive self-image (268). McKendrick demonstrates that in the *comedia*, mirrors and portraits are weighted images with metaphorical meaning that contribute significantly to the play's thematic coherence (1995, 268). Grabes asserts that the mirror also symbolized a *vanitas*, or "excessive absorption of worldly things" (136).

<sup>42</sup> In the sixteenth century, Titian mastered the theme of the self-adoring Venus with Cupid at her side holding up a mirror, inspiring all Renaissance painters, including Velázquez. *The Worship of Venus* (1518), *Toilet of Venus*, *Venus and Cupid*, and even *A Woman at her Toilet* (1512-1515), depicted female beauty and the artists' struggle to capture on canvas the radiance of the female ideal.

<sup>43</sup> See Ignacio Camagro's *Discurso teológico sobre los teatros y comedias de este siglo* (Cotarelo y Mori *Bibliografía* 21-28).

<sup>44</sup> Certainly, Tirso must have intended to showcase his profound creativity when he wrote this scene. Tigner asserts that "Spanish dramatists particularly, highlighted the virtuosity of the actresses in their plays" above the male actors in the theater (3). It is likely that in the seventeenth century, María de Riquelme and María de Córdoba may have played the role of Serafina, as both were lauded for their acting virtuosity (Rennert and Castro 310). Another actress who may have played Serafina, Angela Dido acquired her stage name

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after her riveting portrayal of the Queen of Carthage Doña Dido, lover of the Trojan hero Aeneas (Díez Borque *Actor y técnica* 49). However, there are no documents that indicate which actress played the Serafina role. All that is known from the story-line in *Los cigarrales* is that a group of courtiers watch their Toledan friends perform *El vergonzoso en palacio*.

<sup>45</sup> Antonio orders a portrait of Serafina as a man to cause *asombro* (“wonder”) in the onlooker, “por que se asombre / el mundo, que en traje de hombre / un serafín ande así” (832-834). Juana recognizes the entertainment that Madalena will experience at seeing the performance, “A fe, / que se ha de holgar en extreme / tu melancólica hermana” (1054-55). There is continual reaffirmation of the female subject’s astounding effect on an audience. Those critics in opposition to female actresses and Tirso’s aesthetic ideals understood the intertextual message clearly.

## **2. UNMASKING THE TRAMOYERA**

### **2.1 Masquerade**

Masquerade is another means of achieving the gender fluidity that is characteristic of the *comedia de capa y espada*. Like female transvestism, masquerade deals with the construction of female roles in plays. But, distinct from cross-dressing by women, it exemplifies the notion of femininity as a physical and behavioral “disguise” imposed by a heteronormative culture. While in transvestism there is a back and forth exchange between femininity and masculinity, in masquerade there is an exaggerated exhibition of the social construct of femininity. Although a person can recuperate his/her position in transvestism, this is not true in masquerade since it is femininity itself that is the disguise (Doane 1982, 80). Critics have debated about the varying theories of masquerade, initially described as "the mask of femininity" by Joan Rivière in "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929). Rivière theorizes that women theatricalize femininity to cover up what society establishes as masculine attributes. By playing a role identified as feminine, they do not interfere with the male order and they shield themselves from retribution for their masculine transgressions. While Rivière finds that the masquerade of femininity is a form of subordination to male desire, she also recognizes the empowerment that women may assume from this duplicitous conformity in a male-dominated society (38). Luce Irigaray also views masquerade as dichotomous. To her, the artificiality of femininity is self-effacing unless women perform it in a calculated manner. Women who unquestioningly perform what are sanctioned as feminine characteristics erase their self and therefore demean their existence in society. Only when women consciously and assertively act out femininity on their own terms do they transform it from a "form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus begin to thwart it" (Irigaray 1985, 76). By carefully examining the femininity intentionally manifested by the

*tramoyeras* of the *comedias de capa y espada*, I show that the plays clearly manifest the power associated with performing femininity. The female protagonists play the game of femininity knowingly through the mask of modesty or vulnerability in order to become empowered and achieve some form of control over their lives. I note that exaggerated female behavior is an assertive performance that allows the *tramoyera* to acquire individuality and authority.

In society as in the theater, a fundamental element of masquerade is its correlation to social class. In her studies of Renaissance women, Valeria Finucci sees femininity as a powerful demarcation of class that can be more threatening to a hierarchical society than transvestism (64). Feminine beauty and chastity were perceived in direct alignment with male lineage and power. Because femininity was considered to be inherent and innocuous, men did not fear women's manipulation of their womanliness, even when it was deployed toward the purchase of luxurious goods that enhanced their beauty.<sup>1</sup> The "mask of femininity" could enhance the phallogocentric image of men - their power in society – by serving as a reflection of male perfection. However, that masquerade could also become a real threat to male honor, if men lost control of the woman behind the "mask." In the theater, actresses masquerade as female characters - who, in turn - masquerade as other female characters and subsequently destabilize the patriarchal social system. Many *tramoyeras* in the *comedias de capa y espada* acquire agency in the conscious performance of femininity through masquerade. In this chapter, I analyze Cervantes's *El laberinto de amor* [The Labyrinth of Love] (1615) to reveal how the female masquerade proves to be an empowering tool for the female character Rosamira that enables her to thwart male-centered negotiations of marriage. I also examine how Calderón's female protagonist Angela in *La dama duende* [The Phantom Lady] (1629) finds redemption through the erotic spectacle of masquerade.

## **2.2 The Masquerade of Silence in Cervantes' *El laberinto de amor***

Cervantes wrote about twenty plays, two following the generic convention of the *capa y espada*: *El laberinto de amor* (1615) and *La entretenida* [The Diversion] (1615). According to some critics, he decided to publish these two comedies in his *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses* [Eight Comedies and Eight Interludes] in 1615 after various failed attempts to have them staged.<sup>2</sup> Some interpret this decision as his having abandoned any hope of spectator response. There was a debate surrounding *El laberinto de amor* and its similarity to another Cervantine play titled *La confusa* [Confusion], now considered lost.<sup>3</sup> The question of whether *El laberinto* is the published version of *La confusa* was finally put to rest by the critic Vicenta Esquerdo Sivera with her discovery of a document dated March 13, 1627. In it, the theater company owner Juan de Acacio offers a repertoire of comedias as collateral on a loan of 150 *libras* to the Hospital General de Valencia (Esquerdo Sivera 246). Among the list of seventeenth-century plays by various playwrights is *La confusa*, proving that this play was performed and hence could not be *El laberinto de amor*.

Most critics believe that due to ill feelings between Cervantes and the *autores* [theater company owners], his *comedias de capa y espada* have remained for the most unedited and unstaged through the centuries.<sup>4</sup> Cervantes's opinion about his *comedias de capa y espada* in the year 1615 is expressed in his prologue to *Ocho comedias*, "[*La confusa*], la cual, con paz sea dicho de cuantas comedias de capa y espada hasta hoy se han representado, bien puede tener lugar señalado por buena entre las mejores." He goes on to say, "Compuse en este tiempo hasta veinte o treinta comedias, que todas ellas se recitaron sin que se les ofreciese ofrenda de pepinos ni de otra cosa arrojadiza; corrieron su carrera sin silbos, gritas ni barahúndas" (*Teatro Completo*

457). Cervantes then recognizes *El laberinto* and *La entretenida* as substandard plays and seems to find contentment in offering them in printed form to his readers. I believe that false-modesty is behind his self-effacing critique. By contrasting his own unworthiness with an impressive display of ingenuity in his *Ocho comedias* – Cervantes aims to generate an admiring objection from the reader who in turn extols the author's artistic virtues.

*El laberinto de amor* has received mixed reviews by Golden Age scholars Francisco Ynduráin, Valbuena Prat and others, whose unfavorable opinion of this *comedia* is based on conventional themes such as cross-dressing and male honor.<sup>5</sup> Critics such as Armando Cotarelo Valledor interpret the protagonist Rosamira as a generic figure of chivalric romance encased within the *capa y espada* genre. In the last few decades however, there has been increased interest in Cervantes's theater and a new appreciation for his assertive female characters and his contribution to female-centered themes. In my analysis of Rosamira, I seek to demonstrate that this character is not a two-dimensional figure in a vacuous pursuit of the object of her desire, but is instead an intelligent tramoyera who orchestrates a calculated masquerade designed to empower herself and secure the husband of her choice. Rosamira's masquerade, her artificial performance of gender, is not intended to incite men's desire or fulfill their misogynistic needs. Her role-playing is premeditated to appear unthreatening and passive to male authority by allaying any suspicion of female defiance. The male characters are unaware of Rosamira's agency because of their myopic interpretation of female silence as an authentic virtue.<sup>6</sup> Rosamira places herself at the center of the patriarchal conflict in order to forge her own social and political position, thereby negotiating her own marriage. Through her self-imposed silence she paradoxically provokes male anxiety by threatening class structure and political alliances. In

*El laberinto*, Rosamira exposes women's silence as a masquerade that covers up women's intelligence, reason, and love.

Cervantes seems to have a progressive view of women in that he defends women's right to select their status; if that of wife, they are free to choose a husband of their preference. This liberal perspective figures prominently in many of his works, such as his play *La gran sultana* and the episode of "Las bodas de Camacho" in *Don Quixote*. There are ample studies on Cervantes's disapproval of abusive parental authority in forcing undesired marriages on young women.<sup>7</sup> His advocacy of freedom of choice in marriage was not, however, based on unbridled love. It was of vital importance for the spouses to marry with the approval of the parents so as to effectively occupy a legitimate space in the social order. Cervantes believed in the responsibility of the parents to shield young women from possible disastrous mistakes due to their inexperience and vulnerability. Don Quixote's conversation with Sancho would seem to support Cervantes's opinion on the importance of parental guidance:

(...) si a la voluntad de las hijas quedase escoger los maridos, tal habría que escogiese al criado de su padre.(...) el amor y la afición con facilidad ciegan los ojos del entendimiento tan necesarios para escoger estado: y el del matrimonio está muy a peligro de errarse, y es menester gran tiento y particular favor del Cielo para acertarle. (*El Quixote* II, XIX 167)

Don Quixote claims in this comment that *entendimiento* and *tiento* are the essential traits needed to choose appropriate marital partners. According to María Moliner, *entendimiento* is "la facultad con que se entiende y se razona; la inteligencia" (1140). She defines *tiento* as "[el] cuidado o habilidad con que se obra o habla" (1312). It seems that Cervantes gives the ultimate responsibility of choosing a proper husband to the father assuming he possesses *entendimiento*. However, in cases of weak fathers, Cervantes supported women's ability to reason, speak out,

and assume the parental role. This is contrary to Fray Luis de León's indictment of women's mental and verbal limitations: "Porque, así como la naturaleza, (...) así les limitó el entender, y por consiguiente les tasó las palabras y las razones" (*La perfecta casada* XVI 124). Cervantes's most famous representation of female *entendimiento* and *tiento* is the character Marcela in *Don Quixote*, whose powerful feminist statement resonates loudly: "Yo conozco, con el natural entendimiento que Dios me ha dado (...)" (DQ I, XIV 196). Marcela wisely and eloquently defends her right to decide her own future even in the face of social rejection.

In *El laberinto*, the *entendimiento* and *tiento* of parental authority are absent. Rosamira's father, the Duke of Novara, selfishly agrees to consolidate his territories with those of Manfredo, a narcissistic suitor. Cervantes demonstrates parental deficiency in a self-serving father and son-in-law, and transfers the attributes of *entendimiento* and *tiento* to a more deserving and unassuming person, Rosamira, who possesses these qualities in order to select a proper husband. Her capacity for clear reasoning, conventionally identified as male, distinguishes her as an assertive and intelligent female character. Cervantes consistently contrasts Rosamira's sound judgment to that of the men in the play. Her father, and the leading men in the play Manfredo, Dagoberto and Anastasio, repeatedly comment on the notion of reason in critical circumstances. Reason is thought of as an inherent male attribute by the male aristocracy in the play. Yet it is instead Rosamira who legitimizes female reason and judicious nature, above theirs, through the sage masquerade of her willful silence.

Rosamira's silent resistance to a negotiated marriage is disclosed in the opening conversation between Duke Anastasio, disguised as a laborer, and two citizens of Reggio, Italy. They comment on the long-awaited news of the Duchess of Novara's betrothal to Manfredo, the Duke of Rosena:



ANASTASIO	Y Rosamira, la duquesa vuestra, Pone de voluntad el yugo al cuello?
CIUDADANO 1	Nunca al querer del padre fue siniestra; cuanto más que se ve que gana en ello, siendo el duque quien es.
ANASTASIO	Así parece, aunque con todo, algunos dudan dello. (13-18)

Cervantes's criticism of forced marriages is revealed in Anastasio's skepticism over the duchess's willing agreement to the nuptials. There is an unsettling tone about the anticipated wedding and an indication of women's silent disagreement with parental authority. The notion of Rosamira's silence as masquerade surfaces from this tenuous exchange. The ostensibly female attribute of silence is questioned when Anastasio mentions that others suspect she is not content with the duke's marriage plans. This quickly develops into a perilous situation for everyone when she is asked to either admit or deny the truth of an accusation.

Rosamira stands at the center of the labyrinth of love, as a model of chastity<sup>8</sup> and honor. She is the coveted prize, the virginal bride who represents her father's pristine honor and his opulent patrimony. While she publicly exemplifies the female ideal of obedience, she secretly defies the prescribed norms of modesty by her amorous relationship with Dagoberto, the Duke of Utrino's son. This contradictory behavior calls to mind Rivière's theory of aggression and conflict resolution. As mentioned earlier, Rivière argues that women play up their femininity in order to protect themselves from negative reactions to their ostensibly masculine behavior. Rosamira fears her father's chastisement for appropriating his right to choose her husband and for interfering in patrimonial negotiations. Therefore, Rosamira strategizes to excel in her feminine masquerade. One of the characters describes this fetishized femininity desired by all men:

(...) las trenzas de oro y la espaciosa frente,  
las cejas y sus arcos celestiales,  
el uno y otro sol resplandeciente,  
las hileras de perlas orientales,  
la bella aurora que del nuevo Oriente  
sale de las mejillas, los corales  
de los hermosos labios... (692-698)

Petrarchan metaphors depict her physical beauty, recited in the conventional Renaissance form of the *blason*, a poem enumerating the beloved's individual parts. The celestial features reflect her famed inner beauty, exalting her chastity, obedience, and silence. Most significantly, is the direct correlation between beauty and riches. Rosamira's image is described through metaphors of gold, pearls and coral to illustrate the duke's wealth. When her good name is attacked, Rosamira's radiant image immediately diminishes as do her father's financial and political investments.

Behind a mask of ideal femininity and filial obedience, the nonconforming Rosamira gives her love to another man named Dagoberto. Moments before the wedding ceremony to Manfredo, Rosamira schemes to prevent her prearranged marriage with the help of her true love. She knows her father would not consent to her own choice of husband. Unbeknownst to the audience, Rosamira and Dagoberto plan to publically slander her name so that he can then save her from punishment and win her hand in marriage. In the next scene, the notion of female insubordination through masquerade is further exposed in an unsuspecting manner. Dagoberto confronts the Duke of Novara with slanderous accusations against Rosamira. He denounces her lack of chastity, alleging that she has dishonored her family by taking a lower-class lover. Cervantes overturns chivalric convention by allowing a female response to the medieval theme of the innocent woman accused.<sup>9</sup> Rosamira is summoned and questioned by her father over the scandalous accusation against her virtue. She responds both non-verbally by remaining silent,

and then physically by suddenly fainting. Rosamira's seemingly passive reaction to the attack on her honor is reminiscent of Catalina's collapse after her father's reproach in *La gran sultana*. It resembles even more Luscinda's performance in *Don Quixote* when she faints during her forced wedding ceremony to Fernando, thus allowing him to discover a note in which she confesses to a previous marriage. At the end of *El laberinto*, a note will also materialize revealing Rosamira and Dagoberto's love affair, establishing their equal lineage, and ultimately averting any bloodshed. Similar stories surface in several of Cervantes's narratives, but the love story in the play *El laberinto* conveys female agency in silence differently, by not giving Rosamira any dialog. Through the dramatization of silence, Rosamira gains considerable power to manipulate others, thus producing a telling contrast between her authority and that of the men who supposedly control the marriage alliances.

Rosamira's silence is much more compelling than any statement she could possibly make in response to her arranged marriage to Manfredo, Duke of Rosena. She has the legal right to reject the marriage arranged by the father who traditionally negotiates and selects a son-in-law based on political and financial gains, and she does so through her silence. Moreover, she knows that once a woman's honor has been defamed publicly it can only be cleared in public. Had she spoken, Rosamira would not have been able to have public support for her choice, which is the only realistic option. It would have been futile to be assertive and implore her father in private to break a marriage contract with the undesired Duke of Rosena. She plans to use the leverage of public opinion to influence her father to accept another suitor of her choice.

What is significant about Rosamira's actions is that she successfully maneuvers within the confines of traditional gender roles. The Duke of Novara dictates his actions according to his social position. When his honor is jeopardized and when his political and financial pledge to his

future son-in-law, Manfredo, is threatened by accusations of his daughter's illicit affair, he responds by imprisoning Rosamira in a tower.

Culpada estáis; indicio es manifiesto  
*Tu lengua muda*, tu inclinado gesto.(...)  
Llévenla como está luego a esta torre,  
Y en ella esté en prisión dura y molesta,  
Hasta que alguna espada o pluma borre  
La mancha que en la honra lleva puesta. (131-145; emphasis mine)

Ellen M. Anderson lucidly describes Rosamira as performing "the role of a female Minotaur in Cervantes's play the first inversion of the original myth's masculine and feminine roles" (168). Rosamira represents the mythical monster that has dishonored the father. I would add that while the innocent Minotaur is condemned for his sacrilegious conception, she is sentenced for her self-imposed silence over the issue of her chastity: "Tu lengua muda". Agapita Jurado Santos calls it "un silencio interpretado como prueba de culpabilidad" (142). Cervantes brilliantly exposes this silence as a female paradox. While "the feminine qualities of chastity and silence...were inextricably linked in the misogynist tracts of the period" (Cruz 2000, 28), so was the connection between silence and guilt. Manfredo stresses that Rosamira's silence can be considered perjury: "Será bien que vuestra lengua / descubra lo que hay en esto, / porque su silencio ha puesto vuestro crédito en mengua" (2297-2300). Manfredo and the guard also mention the possibility that Rosamira does not speak out of fear. Silence is expected of a chaste woman yet conversely, it is coded as hiding immorality or deceit. Therefore silence can be simultaneously read as signifying two contrary terms – modesty and immodesty. A similar example is Mencía's predicament in Calderón's *El médico de su honra*. She desperately attempts to mediate the incongruous demands on her identity: "Silencio /, que importa mucho.../ Va mi honor en ello" (I, 106-108); and, "yo agora, / por si acaso llevó el viento / cabal alguna razón, / (...) / responder a tantos agravios quiero" (I, 277-285). The dangerous contradiction of silence

consumes her and contributes to her eventual death: "callando, pues callando muero!" (I, 153-154).

In Cervantes's play, Rosamira shifts her masquerade of silence from a presumed acquiescence at the start, to a seditious refusal to speak. By not responding to the serious accusations of dishonor ("yace con quien pudiera declarallo" [I, 55]), she is undermining male authority to stabilize order, as well as rejecting the female obligation of compliance. For some critics, Rosamira's silence is not a masquerade but the conventional ruse of the accused woman in chivalric romances. Yet in contrast to the chivalric characters, Rosamira is her own defamer; she carries out the accusation, her silence, and her own rescue.<sup>10</sup>

Unbeknownst to the audience until the end of the second act, Rosamira takes full advantage of the law. She deploys the option of a judicial duel to liberate herself from the bonds of an undesired marriage to Manfredo. The key to resolving the labyrinth of love (Daedalus's puzzle) lies within Rosamira. She knows that the success of the production of femininity, in her masquerade of the silent and defenseless woman, depends on how deeply the concepts of masculinity are entrenched in the men. Unnoticed by many critics, her disguise of the vulnerable and shamed duchess paradoxically offers the men around her an opportunity to perform and showcase their masculinity. Her silence obligates her father to fulfill his legal obligations: "...me obliga, / (...) el ver que Rosamira, en su disculpa, / el labio no lo ha movido ni lo mueve" (I, 989-991). He demonstrates his nobility by justly imposing Italy's cruel law that requires a battle to be fought by those who wish to save Rosamira from defamation and execution. Dagoberto, Manfredo and Anastasio immediately step into their knightly roles, obliged to defend the threatened duchess whose honor is inextricably connected to their own. Rosamira's masquerade

of silent guilt has a strong hold on everyone: "Que el silencio desta dama / tiene a Novara suspenso" (III, 2433-2434).

Cervantes uses the masquerade of silence to examine women's power within the socially imposed parameters of gender and class. He transfers control from masculine speech and mobility to female silence and enclosure. Rosamira's manipulation of her identity through silence is an effective counter-discourse that protects and defends her from the oppressive phallogocentric system. I agree with Jurado Santos who perceptively interprets Rosamira's silence as "una acción, un acto ilocutorio ..." (143), as her inverse illocutionary act is not to speak and therefore not to accept the duke as her husband.<sup>11</sup> I would add then, that Rosamira's silence is a deafening silence; it is a political and social stance, it is a judicious attack against male law, reason, speech, and force because it is consciously intended to undermine and destabilize the patriarchal system. Her statement of silence has a significantly greater impact on her agency due to its subversive nature. If for instance, she would have voiced a "yes" or a "no" to her father's questions, then the man she loved would not have had the opportunity to fight for her hand in marriage in the chivalric combat in Act Three.

In *El laberinto*, Cervantes contrasts female and male action. The men act according to their class, as prescribed by laws (knightly conduct and the law of knightly shelter), reason, speech, and the sword (trial by combat). The women are driven either by desire or by love and reason. Cervantes modifies the norms of the chivalric romance's main plot by integrating elements of comedy into his play. He ridicules chivalry by exposing noblemen who deceive, lie, and appear in lower class disguises (as peasants and students) in the pursuit of selfish aims such as social ascension and political power. The male suitors seem to take over the play, absorbed by

their race to defend their honor in battle, while Rosamira sits close-mouthed in the tower. Ironically, Rosamira, who possesses the most power, awaits silently, “en ciega oscuridad.”

The audience is unaware of Rosamira’s sagacity until the end of the second act when Porcia – a *tramoyera* from an interpolated story in the play - secretly visits the duchess. Cervantes underscores Rosamira’s *entendimiento* and *tiento* through the interjection of light into the tower, and by Rosamira’s removal of her *manto* [veil] and her speech in a sunlit room. The surprising transformation from a woman of silence to one of speech when Porcia arrives demonstrates that her masquerade is only for men. Rosamira is undeniably assertive about her future. In response to Porcia’s news about a valiant suitor seeking to win the right to marry the duchess in the field of combat, Rosamira declares, “puesto que él venciese,/ con él no me casaré” (2005-2006). After switching clothes and promising to return for Porcia she reiterates the power of her words: “de mi palabra fia” (III, 2126). With this statement Cervantes also signals to the audience to pay attention to Rosamira, that her words hold the truth and the key to resolve the conflict. In the next scene, Porcia, who is masquerading as Rosamira in the tower, explains to Manfredo, “mi silencio nace / de considerada astucia” (III, 2347-2348). Cervantes chooses Porcia to reveal Rosamira’s scheme because only a woman can recognize the masquerade of silence and its ultimate sources: wisdom and reason. The author, furthermore, breaks away from *capa y espada* norms by introducing the theme of female solidarity in the play, since typically the *tramoyera* is pitted against other women.

Cervantes turns the final trial into a parody of male honor as Dagoberto, Manfredo and Anastasio all claim to be Rosamira’s rightful husband. According to the law of combat, the duchess has the legal right to choose her husband. When asked by her father to decide a winner, Rosamira unmask herself, and breaks her long-standing silence. She interrupts the phallocentric

debate and voices her own selection assertively claiming: “Dagoberto es mi bien” (2886-2887). With these words, Rosamira affirms her equally noble standing to Dagoberto and proves her *entendimiento* in choosing an appropriate husband. Rosamira’s *lengua*, her words, resolve the predicament, and not the “*espada o pluma*” as her father had originally predicted.

Cervantes’ convictions on marriage are evident in this final scene. He expresses his belief in women’s freedom to select a husband for love and a father’s obligation to be understanding. Her father accepts his new identity showing paternal compassion, the judges concur and Rosamira accomplishes what she set out to do. Rosamira demonstrates an integrity and fortitude that set an example for the men around her. She bravely accepts self-abasement and punishment when imprisoned in the tower, and she remains resistant to self-centered male demands even when threatened with burning at the stake. This *tramoyera* leaves an indelible mark in the play as an intelligent and self-empowered figure that uses *entendimiento and tiento* to challenge patriarchal authority, social prescriptions, and class ambitions. Through Rosamira’s exemplary display of the masquerade of silence, Cervantes conveys his conviction that women must articulate their choice of husband and that reason and love are at the center of that choice.

### 2.3 **Eroticism in Calderón de la Barca’s *La dama duende***

*La dama duende* written by Calderón de la Barca in 1629 is considered to be a classic of *capa y espada* plays.<sup>12</sup> The standard version is the one published in Madrid in 1636. As mentioned in the opening lines of the play, *La dama duende* was written in celebration of Prince Baltasar Carlos’s baptism. Calderón staged many of his works in the Salón Dorado of the Madrid Alcázar and later in the Coliseo of the Buen Retiro (Arellano 1990, 38).<sup>13</sup>



*La dama duende* introduces the *tramoyera* doña Ángela, a recently widowed young woman confined to her family home, and under the vigilance of her brothers don Juan and don Luis in order to protect the family honor. Her cousin Beatriz is a confident woman who often visits to escape her father's excessive control. Determined to experience some sort of independence, Ángela sneaks out of the house to enjoy the leisure activities of the city wearing a veil to hide her identity. One day, she briefly meets don Manuel as she tries to avoid being discovered by her brother. Don Manuel is in Madrid to collect a royal reward for his brave military services and accepts an invitation to stay at his old friend, don Juan's house, after meeting him on the street. Ángela becomes intrigued by the out of town guest staying in the adjacent room that happens to be connected to hers by a secret cupboard. She and her servant Isabel play tricks on don Manuel by secretly entering his room and snooping through his personal possessions and leaving mysterious clues. Ángela assumes different masquerades – that of a *tapada* [veiled woman], a *dama duende* [a phantom lady], a damsel in distress, and a chivalric lady - in the hopes of luring him into a promise of marriage to escape her brothers' confinement and control.

Ángela exploits her femininity as in a theatrical masquerade, creating a highly decorative and artificial surface that will ultimately subvert male identity and power. This performance is believed to be contrary to the ideals of a modern feminist agenda. For example, the impersonation of femininity is believed to be self-deprecating for women because it is created in reference to masculinity and within a male system of cultural signification. Jacqueline Rose argues that "masquerade is the very definition of femininity precisely because it is constructed in reference to a male sign" (43). As we have seen, Rivière reasons that wearing the "mask of femininity" objectifies women in order to prevent any threat to male subjectivity. Doane also

agrees that masquerade is a hollow disguise of femininity that covers a layer of non-identity underneath. Nonetheless, and despite the predominant notion of female masquerade as self-effacing by feminists, as I have shown in my analysis of *El laberinto de amor*, I contend that women themselves can harness this power by consciously exploiting the illusion of femininity. The female disguise is accomplished both through the performance of dictated gender traits and through the adaptation of material accessories, such as veils, jewelry, and clothing. Female frills frequently carry sexual connotations; this fabricated mask of femininity is oftentimes an erotic image that arouses male fantasies and that women may exploit to their benefit. Men suffer from a delusion of femininity, an eagerness to believe the woman they see is genuine and an unwillingness to see beyond the mask of female gender. This relationship between the image and reality and its connection to the viewer has been examined in different academic disciplines.

Feminist film theory has applied psychoanalysis to explore the connections between the individual subject and the production and reception of erotic images in film. Its formulations contribute valuable insights into other consumerist forms of representations, theater being one of them. Feminist film theory maintains that cinematic constructions of erotic femininity hinge on “an economy of fetishism,” meaning a commodification of the sensualized female (Mulvey 1993, 7).<sup>14</sup> Fetishism in film involves the desire to deny what one knows is real, and instead, believe what one sees as real. The fetishist is delusional because he seeks pleasure in the imaginary woman and in “imaginary systems of representation” (11). He understands that the woman on the screen is an illusion, but would rather enjoy the fantasy than see a more realistic depiction of a woman. Octave Mannoni illustrates this paradox of the fetishist’s denial in his catch phrase “Je sais bien, mais quand- même...” (9-33). I find that the construction of erotic femininity in film is parallel to an “aesthetics of fetishism” found in theatrical texts and

productions.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the comedia often commodifies male constructions of women and disavows the actress or woman behind the mask; female characters serve the sole purpose of entertainment, and are not meant to convey depth of character.

What I wish to explore is how Calderón de la Barca's *La dama duende*, as one example of the comedia de *capa y espada* genre, creates and challenges this aesthetics of fetishism.

Ángela is a *tramoyera* who commodifies her self-representation in order to acquire a new husband. As an eroticized female she has two functions in the play: first, to ridicule the surface value of imaginary women; second, to claim an empowered "real" womanhood. I reveal the power of the erotic feminine spectacle by interpreting the play's female protagonist as a *tramoyera* who redeems herself through her own intentional fetishization. In other words, Ángela appropriates this mechanism to her own advantage, manipulating her objectification in order to assert her agency.

Mulvey theorizes that the images on stage, as on the screen, are created for the gaze of the male protagonist and the male spectator (1988, 62). She asserts that woman is portrayed as an erotic object: "Woman displayed as sexual object is the leitmotif of erotic spectacle (...) she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire" (62). Although a female character offers visual pleasure for men, ironically, she also threatens his masculinity. Mulvey argues that men fetishize women (as being beautiful and innocuous) in order to allay the castration anxiety represented by them (64). This occurs in many *capa y espada* plays: for example, Tirso de Molina explores the fetish for women's beautiful white hands in *La celosa de sí misma*.<sup>16</sup> However, Calderón reveals a departure from male control of fetishism by portraying a woman who exploits fetishism. In *La dama duende*, Ángela controls the male gaze by intentionally assuming seductive disguises (the *tapada*, the damsel in distress, the *dama duende*, and the chivalric lady) for two fundamental

reasons: first, to satisfy her own narcissism and curiosity of life, and second, to seduce a man of her choosing into marrying her in order lead a self-possessed existence.

The complexity of Ángela's characterization suggests that Calderón is sympathetic to assertive women. The recently widowed Angela lives a strictly cloistered life under the vigilance of her two brothers so that her reputation, which represents the family's honor, is sheltered from public threat and scrutiny. Although in the seventeenth century widows had a legal right to live independently, Ángela is unable to take advantage of this freedom due to her financial difficulties. She is hidden from the king, since she has inherited her deceased husband's considerable debt.<sup>17</sup> Edward Friedman has described widowhood as a state that liberates Ángela from the chains of marriage yet ironically places her into a more restrained space guarded by her two brothers ("Girl Gets Boy" 79). Ángela alludes to her new "prison:"

Vuelve a amortejarme viva (...)  
¡Válgame el cielo! Que yo  
entre dos paredes muera,  
donde apenas el sol sabe  
quién soy, pues la pena mía  
en el término del día  
ni se contiene, ni cabe. (...)  
sin libertad he vivido,  
porque enviudé de un marido,  
con dos hermanos casada. (371-392)

She laments that she is 'emparedada' [walled-in] and is now married to her brothers.

In one telling moment, when Luis asks about her day, Ángela reveals her pain in an acrimonious and sarcastic manner: "me he estado, entretenida en llorar" (526-528). Ángela repeatedly uses images of death, such as "fingida sombra" and "sepulcro vivo," to describe her own state. The function of the persuasive self-degradation is to extract compassion from the listener. It is however, a false self image, and her agonizingly guarded life is another masquerade - a deceitful invention to assume greater leverage and detract any scrutiny. It seems unreasonable to surmise

that Calderón intentionally criticizes the harsh social injustices committed against widows being that there is no historical evidence to suggest that this abuse actually existed.

Ángela's expresses her assertive individualism through a lavish masquerade. She constructs a seductive femininity so she may succeed in capturing the male gaze, playing out and sexually deploying alluring literary models in order to overcome her unfavorable situation. Ángela's strategy to reinvent herself according to male tastes evokes Rivière's contention that femininity is created in relation to male expectation and desire. The protagonist does not simply masquerade with feminine accoutrements but instead fetishizes herself by transforming into cultural symbols, such as the images of eroticized women: the *tapada*, the damsel in distress, the *dama duende*, and the chivalric lady. These models are not outright erotic. Yet Ángela's performances make use of a range of devices - from veils to darkness – in order to exploit the seductive potential that these constructs have on the male imagination. Catherine Larson interprets Ángela's oscillating persona as a “constantly shifting process of signification” (*La dama duende* 35). However, I believe she mimics more than the conventional dichotomous depictions of woman as angel or devil commonly observed by critics.<sup>18</sup> Ángela has a clear ownership of her revolving identities; her masquerade draws scopophilic and voyeuristic gazes by means of the female signifiers she assumes to objectify and fetishize herself, inventing herself in the process. Mulvey explains fetishism as “the attribution of self-sufficiency and autonomous powers to a manifestly ‘man’ derived object. It is therefore dependent on the ability to disavow what is known and replace it with belief and the suspension of disbelief” (7). Through her disguises Ángela orchestrates a belief in disbelief for men or what Freud labels as an element of sexual fetishism “to know, but all the same...” (“Fetishism” 6). Men know that what they are seeing is not real, but they ignore the truth because the pleasure of the illusion surpasses reason.

According to Pat Califia, “rather than being part of the sexual repression of women, fetish costumes can provide the women who wear them with sexual pleasure and power” (“Feminism and Sadoomasochism” 235). Scopic stimulation is based on partialism defined as a fetishistic attachment to a fragmented body such as feet or hair (Giles 90). For example, strippers in spiked heels are said to wield power over their patrons and even experience feelings of empowerment.<sup>19</sup> I am not suggesting that Ángela is similar to a stripper, yet there is a parallel in women’s intentional appropriation of an eroticized disguise to acquire agency. In fact, Ángela acquires a sexualized subjectivity by performing certain types of women that are not really recognizable by clothing but by behavior.

Ángela’s strategy depends on being watched. Feminist film theory explains that the phenomenon of scopophilia, or the ‘love of watching’, is a human trait, an integral element of systems of representations, such as theater and film. In seventeenth-century theater’s system of representation women adhere to strict delineations of gender and class in the public light and are acutely aware of their value as object for the male gaze. The men’s pleasure in gazing at the female character turns into a fetishistic fixation when she adorns herself with objects that possess socially determined sexual values. In *La dama duende*, Calderón’s scopophilic action observes female agency in controlling the fetishistic desire of the unconscious male mind.

The first disguise Ángela wears that carries fetishistic associations is the *tapado*. Male fascination with the erotic *tapada* erases any real identity and allows her an independent subjectivity previously denied. The *tapado* was a contradictory symbol of both modesty and female sexuality (Charo Iglesias 83). According to historian Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, the *tapada* desired to be noticed: “su derivación de costumbres musulmanas es discutible, puesto que no utilizaban el velo para pasar desapercibidas sino para distinguirse, con escándalo de los

puritanos” (1992, 308). Carmen Bernís insists that contrary to Muslim women, Christian women covered their faces to transgress social norms: “Taparse para ellas no era un signo de pudor, sino de provocativa coquetería” (*El traje y los tipos* 258). This head covering became an extremely popular accessory in Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, giving women the freedom to venture out in public unaccompanied and uninhibited.<sup>20</sup> The freedom of mobility that the *tapado* afforded women was censured in decrees between 1586 -1639 (Fuchs 71). It is the need for self-empowerment, female curiosity and desire that propel Ángela to temporarily escape the constraints of her widowed status, assume the *tapada* disguise, and roam anonymously, albeit noticeably, through the streets of Madrid in search of the male gaze.

Prevalent societal concerns about the *tapada* and the decline of moral values in Madrid surface throughout the play. The moral decline is represented in part through Ángela's unorthodox behavior and in part through her brothers'. Calderón shows the disapproval of transgressive widows in the maidservant's comments on their improprieties at court:

(...) porque este estado es el más ocasionado  
a delitos amorosos; Y más en la corte hoy,  
donde se han dado en usar unas viuditas de azar,  
que al cielo mil gracias doy cuando en la calle las veo  
tan honestas, tan fruncidas, tan beatas y aturdidas;  
y en quedándose en manteo, es el mirarlas contento;  
pues sin toca y devoción, saltan más a cualquier son,  
que una pelota de viento. (I, vi, 93)

Critics have misinterpreted Ángela as tormented and helpless from the initial chase scene of the play where her brothers pursue her in the streets. They have depicted her as a representative figure of persecuted widows due to the fact that she is locked up by her brothers. Despite this tendency to interpret widows as helpless, I contend that Calderón exemplifies quite the opposite; he shows widows's acuity and agency through their expert control of men in reducing them to mere pawns. According to Gabriela Carrión, “Writers during this period tend to portray widows

as women who possess privileged information regarding sex (...) there is an underlying assumption that her conjugal experience represents powerful currency in the fluctuating economy of social relations" (98). We see this exemplified in Angela's seductive agency.

For example, the initial purpose of the *tapado* is entirely centered on Angela's desire for self-affirmation. Ángela's desire to see and be seen, to be in control of her identity, and to be a part of society are notions that appear as topics in themselves. In *Don Quixote*, Governor Sancho offers his wisdom in a proverb to the daughter of Diego de la Llana when she escapes her enclosed existence because she is curious to see the world: "La que es deseosa de ver, también tiene deseo de ser vista" (DQ II, L). In *La dama duende*, Ángela enters the public space of the city to participate in the festivities celebrating the baptism of Prince Baltasar Carlos, Philip IV's son. The *tapado* allows her to encroach on the masculine public domain, and to gaze at men and interact with them from behind a screen that acts like a partition. Her excursion to the theater mimics the trend of the time. It is well documented that the designated seating area for women [*la cazuela*] in the theater was always crowded. In *Día de Fiesta por la tarde* (1654), Juan de Zabaleta describes how the *cazuela's* *apretador* [doorkeeper] was in charge of ordering the women to sit closer together to make more room (*The Spanish Stage* 337). Many additional seats were added to the *cazuela* to satisfy the increase in ticket sales to female theatergoers (Shergold 1967, 399). Alison Findlay remarks that "for Renaissance women, the very act of going to the theater was, according to moral commentators, a singularly selfish pleasure or pastime and an opportunity for self-display outside the home" (*A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama* 87). This historical information supports Angela's actions as credible and influences my interpretation of her by contextualizing the gendered spaces she occupies. By secretly going to the theater wearing the *tapado*, Ángela appropriates the male gaze without being noticed.



Calderón seems to give a certain privilege and valorization to a woman's look. To mention the fact that Ángela sees a play is to reaffirm the subjectivity of the female gaze and women's authority in the theater, since after all, women represented a significant part of the *corral* spectators.<sup>21</sup> I find that this act represents her effort to capture men's attention and to negotiate power within social spaces.

The *tapado* acquires power through its service to female transgressive behavior. It represents an eroticized image that attracts and gratifies the male gaze through the threat and erasure of the female identity. It is the allure of the invisible beauty associated with the veil that intrigues us even today. The veil acts as a sexual stimulant that combined with Ángela's intelligent and witty discourse appeals to her audience. Once the veiled *tramoyera* draws attention to the male gaze, the *tapado* also offers men a type of screen or reflective surface on which they may project their own sexual fantasies. Farzaneh Milani supports this fetishistic view of the veil, comparing it to a Rorschach test: "We project upon it what we want to see in it." In the play, the *tapado* enables Ángela to attain subjectivity by her witty and intelligent, albeit anonymous speech, and thus arousing the men around her. She flirts unabashedly with the men in the city square, at court, and at the theater. Her own brother Luis sees her at court and becomes intrigued, "todos celebraron / lo que dijo, y alabaron / de entendida y sazónada" (478-480). Her ingenious rhetorical display distinguishes her from the speechless and adoring male onlookers. Mesmerized by the words pronounced by this mysterious silhouette, Luis chases her through the streets unaware that she is his own sister. Frustrated by her evasiveness, he bemoans, "De [mala] suerte que una tapada / me huye." The fetish can only exist as long as Ángela maintains a distance between the imaginary image she has created and avoid being recognized.

Ángela continues to develop the masquerade in an effort to remain anonymous. She seeks out a man that displays markers of honor on the street to aid in her escape. Her erotic *tapada* disguise is not useful in order for her to attract the man, Manuel's gaze. Ángela realizes that she needs to assume a different posture to engage him. By appearing to be a helpless damsel in distress, she incites him to act in her favor: "Si, como la muestra / el traje, sois caballero / de obligaciones y prendas, / amparad a una mujer" (101-104). The classical theme of damsel in distress, originating in the myth of Andromeda, became an inspirational source for chivalric romances such as Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot ou le Chevalier de la charrette* and of legends such as St. George and the Dragon. This theme was popular in the Middle Ages; the French votive order Enterprise of the Green Shield with the White Lady (1399) was organized by a group of knights who sought reprisal for a rising number of oppressed maidens and widows who suffered financial injustices at the hands of male authority. Ángela's representation of the damsel in distress would seem to have been inspired by the women in Spanish sources such as *El Cid*, and *Don Quixote*. Contrary to her earlier counterparts, takes control of her situation.

The ubiquitous figure of the defenseless woman appears linked to romance in the *comedia de capa y espada* as part of Ángela's performance in the play. Larson considers "This Calderonian woman knows the most successful approaches for appealing to male vanity, seeking compassion based on a position as a weak and unhappy woman" (40). Manuel is proud of his noble status and is driven by the principles of his lineage. Ángela awakens Manuel's desire to be a heroic knight in shining armor. She presents him with an opportunity to live up to chivalric ideals. She seduces him by assuming the role of the eroticized damsel in distress. Up to this point in the play, Ángela's musings satisfy her desire to temporarily escape her brothers' persecution and enjoy the freedom that other unmarried women had in Madrid.

The function of the female masquerade in Calderón's play as a means for Ángela to transform her life begins when Manuel becomes a house guest. Ángela's awareness of Manuel's noble propriety and etiquette drives her to explore his chivalric desires. She continues to use to her own advantage the mechanisms of fetishisation by adding erotic courtly elements to the *dama duende* [invisible mistress] character. Frederick de Armas's study of the invisible mistress theme in Golden Age literature shows that it originated from the myth of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* (II AD) but it is in the twelfth-century romance *Partonopeus de Blois* that it developed as a popular tale (1976, 19). Later in the Italian Renaissance, Masuccio and Bandello renew the theme of the mysterious veiled lady. According to de Armas, Spanish Renaissance playwrights used variants of the theme (30-31): he finds that Calderón borrowed the invisible mistress theme for *La dama duende* from the second part of Gonzalo de Céspedes y Meneses' picaresque *El soldado Píndaro* (1626). Céspedes's female lead lacks moral integrity closely resembling Masuccio's mistress (33). Unlike Céspedes and Masuccio, Calderón creates a proto-feminist character who takes on the role of the *dama duende* in order to assume greater authority in her future. The epistolary tradition of chivalric romance becomes a ploy that jumpstarts the masquerade. Ángela, still pretending to be a damsel in distress, writes a letter in archaic Spanish to Manuel inquiring about his health and urging discretion. The letter implicitly functions on three different levels: it spikes his curiosity as to its author; it triggers his fetishistic fantasies for chivalry; and it obliges him to serve her according to the principles of chivalry. Similarly to the ladyloves in chivalric romances, Ángela manipulates Manuel by inspiring him to act like a knight-errant. In response to Ángela's romantic letter he eagerly and playfully adopts the role of the hero and in courtly language responds with his own letter which he signs, *El caballero de la Dama Duende*<sup>22</sup>.

The parodic allusions to Cervantes's *Don Quixote* create a discursive subtext that imbues *La dama duende* with humorous references to chivalric romances, as well as to seventeenth-century society and politics. In her characterization of *la dama duende*, Ángela embodies aspects of *Don Quixote*'s trickster duchess and other masquerading women who enjoy the pure entertainment of tricking their innocent victim.<sup>23</sup> However, Ángela and Manuel have different roles from their counterparts in Cervantes's novel; both share an obsessive curiosity to discover one another, but only Ángela controls the process and holds the answers to the mystery.

Before Ángela can immerse herself in the preparations of her final masquerade, she invades Manuel's room one last time to steal the portrait of the lady he stores in his suitcase. This miniature painting of his love interest is a fetishistic distraction for him. Ángela wants to destroy it in order to entrance Manuel completely. Returning unexpectedly, Manuel is instantly mesmerized by what he believes is a ghostly figure in the dark room. Calderón is ingenious in intersecting two different perspectives in this particular scene. The audience is aware of Ángela's purpose for invading the bedroom and of Manuel's voyeuristic and deluded gaze. As soon as he sees her, he instantly begins to fetishize her figure by transforming it into an ethereal male fantasy:

Ya es  
esto sobrenatural; (...)

¡Vive Dios, que dudo y creo  
una admiración tan nueva! (...)

Y no vi en toda mi vida / tan soberana mujer. (...)

Imagen es  
de las mas rara beldad,  
que el soberano pincel  
ha obrado. (...)

Mas que la luz resplandecen

sus ojos. (...)

Cada cabellos es un rayo  
del cielo de Lucifer. (...)

Una estrella es cada rizo. (...)

¡No vi mas rara hermosura! (...)

¡Un asombro de belleza,  
Un ángel hermoso es! (2013-2060)

Manuel objectifies Ángela by perceiving her as the feminine fetish he desires. He is sexually aroused by the conventional Petrarchan female ideal through which he filters her, his scopophilic stimulation is based on partialism, fetishizing parts of the body (Giles 90). His gaze closes in on Ángela's eyes, and curls. This scopophilic scene may be analyzed through Mulvey's feminist film theory since it evokes the idea of woman as surface, as cosmetically artificial, that foregrounds the constructedness of woman. The stereotypical notions of woman as angelic and demonic sexualize Ángela's image; yet they also parody men's desire.

Although Ángela's angelic vision allays Manuel's castration anxiety it also reminds him of the horrors of castration. His voyeuristic gratification is interrupted by an overwhelming fear of death: "Nunca me he visto cobarde, / sino sólo aquesta vez. / [ ] / y cada suspiro es, / para mi pecho un puñal, / para mi cuello un cordel" (2069-2075). Embarrassed, Manuel musters the courage to act like a knight-errant and break the enchantment of the phantasmagoric lady. Blissful adoration transforms into aggression as he lunges at her in what he believes is self-defense. Manuel's aggressive attack is meant to impose reality on what he considers unreal, the ghost. Ángela almost breaks the spell and destabilizes the male gaze by revealing herself as a real-live woman: "¡Detén la espada, / sangriento el brazo detén! Que no es bien que des la muerte / a una infelice mujer. / Yo confieso que lo soy. / [ ] / No manches pues, no desdores /

con mi sangre el rosicler / de ese acero. / [ ] / porque soy / mucho más de lo que ves” (2149-2168). Despite the momentary slippage, she manages to disappear just in time in order to maintain the necessary distance from the image, protect the illusion, and continue to hold the power of the gaze.

In the play-within-a-play that she devises, Ángela employs an elaborate sartorial strategy in her final disguise as the literary *belle dame sans merci*. I find this final luxurious disguise to be highly meaningful since the performance brings to mind Ángela’s own desire for economic empowerment at the time when she is deeply in debt.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Ángela plots her last trick alongside her cousin Beatriz in an example of female friendship and solidarity seldom seen in the *capa y espada* genre. Yet, although Beatriz conceptualizes the idea of the play-within-a-play, it is Ángela who is the director and dictates the character role of each person. Ángela demonstrates authority and command of the performance in her instructions to Beatriz: first, she is to play the part of a servant (“ser ...mi criada”); and second, she is to watch Ángela like an understudy (“ver retirada”).

The purpose of this courtly masquerade is to give Manuel a noble role that will encourage his behavior as a chivalric knight. In this way, Ángela will incite the *servicio de amor* of the courtly lover. The performance of femininity through the exhibition of expensive accessories conceals Ángela’s debt. The imaginative use of space is also a significant part of the feminine masquerade. After being led through a make-believe cemetery, Manuel arrives at a magical room. Ángela’s bedroom is the chosen stage that complements her masquerade of exalted femininity. Manuel is instantly seduced by the exotic and luxurious décor: “¡Qué casa tan alhajada!... / ¡Qué sala tan adornada!” (2278-2280). Beautiful maidservants embellish the room as well, carrying towels, jars, sweets and water. The allusion to bathing creates a sensual

atmosphere that attracts Manuel even further. Ángela is at one with the room. She adorns and ultimately accentuates her body with rich clothing and accessories, transforming herself into an object of desire. Her iconic image easily lures the male “prey” into a prescribed chivalric code of behavior, one that he wishes to fulfill enthusiastically.

Ángela has a moment of insight recognizing the importance of a more permanent self-realization. Thus, she begins to reveal her true self after seeing that she has gained control of Manuel. His demonstration of servitude and adoration affirms that he is entrapped by her fetishized illusion. Within the intimate space designed to reflect her enchanted figure, she begins to deconstruct the embellished persona that she has created: “solo sé que no soy / alba, aurora ó sol; / [ ] / una mujer soy y fui” (2350, 2355). But first, Ángela challenges Manuel to solve a final riddle pertaining to her identity.

Una enigma á ser me ofrezco,  
que ni soy lo que parezco,  
ni parezco lo que soy.  
Mientras encubierta estoy,  
podreis verme y podré veros;  
porque si á satisfaceros  
llegais, y quien soy sabeis,  
vos quererme no querréis,  
aunque yo quiera quereros. (2374-2382)

Ángela’s decision to end the masquerade surprises all the characters in the scene and the spectators in the audience. She asserts her subjectivity and recovers her true identity as a woman. Ángela tests the strength of Manuel’s intelligence and honor by revealing the real identity of the highborn lady in a riddle. The function of the riddle is two-fold. First, Ángela challenges and tests Manuel’s knightly integrity by suggesting that he will be unable to live up to his ideals once he discovers who she is. Second, she wants to confront her fate honestly by exposing her femininity as a masquerade, all the while keeping it.

Ángela's self-realization positions her face to face with Manuel, no longer playing up to the male gaze in order to reaffirm her subjectivity. At this moment, Calderón grants Ángela the longest speech in the play: she bewails her phantasmagoric existence as one that transformed from a "sepulcro vivo" to a "prisión ...de seda en mis vestidos." In Ángela, Calderón depicts a speaking female subject that deserves Manuel's compassion: "Mi intento fue el quererte, / mi fin amarte" (2997-2998). Manuel is faced with a difficult choice, either to protect Ángela's honor and be considered a traitor by her brothers, or, to abandon her and be labeled a villain. He responds by behaving chivalrously instead of abiding by his social obligation to his hosts: "si es hacerme traidor si la defiendo; / si la dejo, villano; / si la guardo, mal huésped; inhumano. / [ ] / [Ángela] noble soy, y conmigo estás ahora / [ ] / Yo la he de poner en salvo / a riesgo de mi vida y alma" (3024-3026). In the end, Manuel is cornered into choosing marriage since he unwittingly surrenders to Ángela's marital entrapment. Calderón suggests a gender paradox in that although men are free to choose their paths, they are ultimately slaves of their social class. Yet, women who live enclosed and follow strict decorum are more uninhibited in acting out their desires because they have nothing to lose. Calderón creates a self-empowered widow who becomes an eroticized spectacle of the feminine as a means to an end, ultimately rejecting her earlier image and taking control of her own life.

Calderón's characterization of Ángela is that of a nuanced and commanding individual, the antithesis of the one-dimensional male characters driven by honor and social status. Calderón shows his proto-feminist position by aligning female subjectivity with the agency of the gaze. Ángela's elicitation of male visual pleasure and psychological understanding of the male mind allows her to create a masquerade that provides individuality and agency. Although Ángela



doesn't permanently overthrow the patriarchal order, she manages to destabilize the dominant dichotomies of male subject and female object.

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<sup>1</sup>Transgressions of sumptuary laws were not usually pursued by the state since the statutes were directed at moderating excessive aristocratic expenditure and distancing the upward mobile bourgeoisie from Court (Hughes 83).

<sup>2</sup> Cervantes states his reasons for publishing instead of staging his plays in the prologue of *Ocho comedias y ocho entremeses nuevos nunca representados* (1615):

Algunos años ha que volví yo a mi antigua ociosidad, y pensando que aún duraban los siglos donde corrían mis alabanzas, volví a componer algunas comedias; pero no hallé pájaros en los nidos de antaño; quiero decir que no hallé autor que me las pidiese, puesto que sabían que las tenía, y así las arrinconé en un cofre y las consagré al perpetuo silencio. En esta sazón me dijo un librero que él me las comprara si un autor de título no le hubiera dicho que de mi prosa se podía esperar mucho, pero del verso nada... Torné a pasar los ojos por mis comedias y por algunos entremeses míos que con ellas estaban arrinconados, y vi no ser tan malas ni tan malos que no mereciesen salir de las tinieblas del ingenio de aquel autor a la luz de otros autores menos escrupulosos y más entendidos. Aburríme y vendíselas a tal librero, que las ha puesto en la estampa como aquí las ofrece. (Godzich 93-94)

<sup>3</sup> Cervantes states in both his *Viaje del Parnaso* and *La adjunta* (part of *Viaje del Parnaso*) that *La confusa* is his favorite *comedia de capa y espada* and one of the best of this popular genre ever written. Cervantes writes, “Soy por quien *La confusa* nada fea / Pareció en los teatros admirable / Si esto a su fama es gusto se le crea” (*Viaje*, c. iv.); “Mas la que yo más estimo, y de la que más me aprecio, fue y es, de una llamada *La confusa*, la cual, con paz sea dicho de cuantas comedias de capa y espada hasta hoy se han representado, bien puede tener lugar señalado por buena entre las mejores” (cited in Sevilla Arroyo xii, “La adjunta a Parnaso”). Schevill, Bonilla (xvi) and Cotarelo y Valledor believe *La confusa* to be the original title of the play written around 1580 and later changed to *El laberinto de amor* when it was published thirty years later (Cotarelo y Valledor 61-77). Valbuena Prat disagrees, unable to identify the resemblances between the two plays due to the divergence in versification and convention (1969, 35-37); and María y Campos disagrees as well, insisting that *La confusa* was in fact staged in 1585 and very well received according to Cervantes himself (10-13). He finds this information in Pérez Pastor’s posthumous “noticias y documentos relativos a la historia y literaturas españolas.” Cervantes was generously paid for this play by the *autor de comedias* [the theater company owner] Gaspar de Porres. Cervantes received 440 reales for the manuscripts of two plays, *La confusa* and *El trato de Costantinopla y muerte de Celín* (María y Campos 13). The success of *La confusa* is evident by its appearance in the repertoire of Juan Acacio in 1627 (Sevilla Arroyo xiv, n.10).

<sup>4</sup> Florencio Sevilla Arroyo and Antonio Rey Hazas, in the introduction to their edition of the complete dramatic works of Cervantes, find that the playwright was indeed successful and underscore the staging of a play and the enthusiastic reception of the spectators as the criteria for a valuable artistic contribution to theater (xvi).

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<sup>5</sup> Ynduráin (50); Valbuena Prat, “Las ocho comedias de Cervantes” (261); Alonso Cortés (841); and Marrast (23). Both Joaquín Casaldueiro and Jean Canavaggio have studied Cervantes’s theater. Canavaggio’s study of *El laberinto de amor*, concentrates on the fundamental aspects of Cervantes’ theater: dramatic technique, character development, exemplariness, and relation to Lope de Vega school. Other favorable studies have been undertaken by Carrasco Urgoiti, Friedman, Anderson, and Jurado Santos.

<sup>6</sup> Rosamira may be compared to Alcina in *Orlando furioso*. Valeria Finucci writes about masquerade in *Orlando furioso* and how Alcina uses a passive, female performance to manipulate men without their knowledge, “The Female Masquerade: Ariosto and the Game of Desire” (61-88).

<sup>7</sup> El Saffar, McKendrick, and Piluso.

<sup>8</sup> In *Cervantes’ Women in Literary Tradition*, Sadie Trachman argues that Cervantes viewed virginity as the most valuable female virtue accompanied by an honorable reputation (7-9). I disagree, since some of his female protagonists who initially are dishonored due to rumors of promiscuity, seduction or rape, in the end recuperate their own dignity by speaking up against injustice, take for example, Marcela and Dorotea in *Don Quixote*, and Rosamira in *El laberinto de amor*.

<sup>9</sup> Unlike Ginevra in Cantos IV and V of Ariosto’s *Orlando furioso*, Rosamira negotiates her situation and gains agency. The tramoyera represents an empowered version of the female character in the romance.

<sup>10</sup> In *Orlando furioso*, Ginevra is defamed by her brother-in-law Lurcanio.

<sup>11</sup> In *How to do Things with Words*, John L. Austin defines an illocutionary act as doing or accomplishing something by making a statement (92).

<sup>12</sup> Calderón published two versions of the play in 1636; one in the Madrid *Primera Parte* of his works, and one in Valencia and Zaragoza with a different third act. See Margaret Rich Greer, “The (Self) Representation of Control in *La dama duende*” (87).

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan states that *La dama duende* is the first of Calderón’s plays performed abroad in a French version of the 1640s (*Calderón in the German Lands* 56-60). In 1944 Luis Saslavsky directed the award-winning film *La dama duende* based on the screenplay adaptation by Rafael Alberti and María Teresa León. A Spanish film made for television was aired in 1979. Today, the play continues to be a favorite among theater goers in Spain and abroad.

<sup>14</sup> Theorists see a relationship between the Marxist idea of commodity fetishism which theorizes that there is a spectacle value in workers’ labor stemming from the nullification of their work, and the commodification of ‘the erotic spectacle of the feminine’ in film which also depends on negating the existence of a real woman (Mulvey “Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture” 19).

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<sup>15</sup> Mulvey has identified three forms of looking in cinema: the look of the camera as it records events, the audience's look at the image and the looks between characters within the diegesis. The look of the camera is, wherever possible, denied or suppressed in the interests of verisimilitude. But it is always apparent due to the confines of the frame ("Visual Pleasure" 62).

<sup>16</sup> See Charles Victor Ganelin's analysis of a fetishized female accessory in "A Glove by Any Other Name: A Fetish in Lope de Vega's *El guante de doña Blanca*" (*Essays on Golden Age Spanish Literature in Honor of James A. Parr*, Eds. Barbara Simerka and Amy R. Williamsen. Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2006: 110-125).

<sup>17</sup> Ángela's husband failed to pay *una grande cantidad de hacienda* [land grants] when he was the *administrador en puertos de mar de unas reales rentas* [administrator of sea towns]. Instead of reclaiming all of her dowry at the onset of widowhood as stipulated by law and living independently, Ángela is forced to seek family support. It is not clear how much of her dowry, if any, is left.

<sup>18</sup> Larson, "*La dama duende* and the Shifting Characterization of Calderón's Diabolical Angel."

<sup>19</sup> See Katy Pilcher, "Empowering, Degrading or a 'Mutually Exploitative' Exchange For Women?: Characterising the Power Relations of the Strip Club" (*Journal of International Women's Studies*. 10.3. March 2009, 73).

<sup>20</sup> Social commentators of the time such as Pellicer and Pérez de la Sala recorded this fashion trend (*La dramaturgia del disfraz* 297) while others such as Angel Stor and Fray Juan de la Puente strongly critiqued it. Bass and Wunder show that seventeenth-century painters often illustrated images of courtesans with the *tapado*, for example "Two Women at a Window" by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and "Cortesana española" by Tobias Oelhafen von Schollenbach, ("*The Veiled Ladies*" 118).

<sup>21</sup> "Las mujeres mostrábanse aficionadísimas al teatro, y el frecuentarlo era una de sus ambiciones mayores" (Deleite y Piñuela *También se divierte el pueblo* 176).

<sup>22</sup> Manuel, like Don Quixote, masters courtly language: "Fermosa dueña, cualquier que vos seais / la condolida deste afanado caballero, y / asaz piadosa minorais sus cuitas, ruégo-/ vos me queráis facer sabidor del follon / mezquino, ó pagano malandrín, que en / este encanto vos amancilla" (1122-1125). Initially Manuel uses archaic verbiage jokingly but later he is made to look foolish by believing in the chivalric illusion and questioning his own sanity.

<sup>23</sup> Like Don Quixote, Manuel slowly becomes enraptured by Ángela's magical fantasy, demonstrating an obsession for the invisible woman: "Que soy en mis opiniones / confusión de confusiones. / ¿Válgame Dios por mujer!" (1492- 94). Ángela's goal is "que pierda / el juicio" with erotic curiosity. Manuel laments "Todos por loco me tienen." Calderón depicts a male protagonist who, in many aspects, is a simulacrum of Don Quixote.

<sup>24</sup> Ángela's deceased husband's squandering of finances has put her in debt.

### 3. IN PURSUIT OF THE *ESQUIVA* TRAMOYERA

#### 3.1 The *Esquiva*

McKendrick defines the *mujer esquiva* [the disdainful female character] as a woman who is unnaturally averse to the idea of love and marriage. She is usually, but not invariably, averse to men as well (1974, 142). Yet the type also dictates that the *mujer esquiva* will ultimately self-correct and dutifully embrace her role in an amatory relationship. McKendrick attributes the *esquiva*'s path to neo-platonic theories of love as the harmonizing element of the universe, which dictates the reconciliatory destiny of the *mujer esquiva* in seventeenth-century Spanish theater:

In the eyes of the dramatist the *mujer esquiva* is not, ultimately, rebelling against man-made rules [...] Her defiance, whatever the motive, whatever the incitement, is directed against the natural order of things as decreed by God.

This natural order may be briefly explained thus: woman was created out of man in the Garden of Eden to be his help-meet; on the temporal level he is therefore her first cause and final end; love and marriage are her birthright; towards them her entire nature is directed, and in them she finds her fulfillment. To this natural law no woman unless she has a religious vocation, is an exception, and the misguided woman who considers herself immune to love, who claims to dislike men or who prefers to avoid matrimony, must therefore be led, or driven, back to the path of sanity, reason- and true happiness. Such sentiments are repeated time and again throughout the body of plays [...]. (1974, 142-143)

The *mujer esquiva* does not have a justified reason her *esquivez*, which is framed as a moral flaw. According to McKendrick, there are five motives for the *esquiva*'s scorn of love and marriage: vanity, pride, reason, whimsy and narcissism (162). Her reading of the *esquiva* is, as these qualities make clear therefore, negative because it centers on a woman's inner weakness. Upon careful examination, however, I find that the label "esquiva" is more than merely a conventional qualifier for the arrogant single woman, as

McKendrick contends. It is important to understand that the *esquiva* evades love because she considers it tied to the structures of marriage which threaten her agency and the affirmation of subjectivity. More to the point, it is not love in itself that she rejects; it is the institution of marriage. The *esquiva* harbors an antipathy against marriage since it is typically based on material gain and lies. If the reader or spectator should look beyond the supporting characters' stereotypical perceptions of the *esquiva* as selfish and vain, he or she will find evidence of her financial, emotional, and physical preoccupations in her pursuit of subjectivity. I will explore the actions of several female characters that circumvent the realities of undesirable marriages in *La viuda valenciana* [The Widow from Valencia] and *La moza del cántaro* [The Woman with the Water Pitcher] by Lope de Vega, and in *La traición en la amistad* [Friendship Betrayed] by María de Zayas y Sotomayor. I demonstrate that the merit of the *esquiva* is found in her personal story of courage and agency embedded within the play and not in her apparent function as a self-absorbed character whose role it is to be reprimanded and find a “natural” space within a patriarchal social system.

### **3.2 “Esquivez”: The Tramoyera’s Stake in Protecting Dowry and Body in Lope de Vega’s *La viuda valenciana***

The theme of violence against women pervades all genres of Golden Age literature. Noteworthy studies of female victimization in both *novelas* and the *comedia* have been undertaken by scholars such as Lisa Vollendorf and Margaret Rich Greer.<sup>1</sup> Despite their convincing arguments, I contend that in the *comedia de capa y espada*, the *tramoyera* resists being victimized thereby exposing the biases of the *esquiva* stereotype

and establishing an empowered image of this heroine in Lope de Vega's *La viuda valenciana*.

The following analysis attempts to give insight into the depth of women's challenges and their assertive responses to the problem of wife battery and dowry theft. Physical abuse in the home due to the relegation of the dowry to an abusive husband was a real problem that many humanists addressed. Erasmus's Coloquio VII, in his *Coloquio Memsiga*, presents two female characters Xanthibe and Eulalia, who discuss the vices of husbands and wives. Xanthibe criticizes the misappropriation of dowries "mi buen hombre, tan escaso para con su mugger, gasta muy largamente el dote que conmigo ovo, que no fue pequeño [...] en beuer con putas e tambien en juegos" (202). Vives in his *Instrucción de la mujer cristiana* tells a story of a husband who kills his wife because she does not allow him to squander her dowry (188). The historian Edward Behrend-Martinez has studied marriage litigation documents from Northern Spain that date from 1654-1715 and which shed light on the prevalence of abuse in early modern Spanish marriages.<sup>2</sup> He states that the courts' main concern in divorce cases was to prevent "the abuse of its canon law for alternate purposes" such as dowry theft and the victimization of women (2003, 163). Marriage in Spain was considered a "communal institution" and not a private matter (163). In 1545, the Council of Trent decreed that a couple that wished to marry needed to have a marriage ceremony officiated by a priest and witnessed by two people. Given that marriage was a public act, the community became actively involved in marital discordance cases. Despite the cultural expectations of marriage as a union based on the foundation of affection and respect, the reality was much different; "spousal abuse was undoubtedly commonplace, [and] Spaniards still lamented it as a serious public

problem” (162). Not surprisingly, Behrend’s research shows that most divorce cases were petitioned by women who accused their husbands of wife battery; which included physical, verbal and emotional abuse (147-154). The Council of Trent allowed divorces in cases of physical and emotional battery, and dishonor; “adultery did not create grounds for divorce, separation with no right of remarriage was the only option for spouses who no longer wished to live together. Annulment was still a possibility, but only in a very few cases such as total impotence or barrenness” (Wiesner-Hanks 107). Women sought a permanent and legal release from abusive marriages through the ecclesiastical courts and with the support of family, neighbors, and friends.

Divorce on the stage is practically non-existent except for the failed attempts of four married couples in Cervantes’s *entremés* or interlude *El juez de los divorcios* (1615). What does appear to be an alternative onstage is the *esquiva*-widow tramoyera who defends herself against spousal maltreatment in *comedias de capa y espada*. Most early modern writers, such as Cervantes, Tirso de Molina, and Calderón, depict *esquiva*-widows as young, beautiful, and financially independent. In *La viuda valenciana*, Lope de Vega gives voice to women’s domestic struggles and demonstrates an acute awareness of the many risks they faced when entering forced marriages since he witnessed, first-hand, abuse in his lover Marta de Nevares’s marriage. Carrión explains that despite the Council of Trent’s condemnation of coerced marriages, “the right to freely contract marriage remained in question until much later (xiv).<sup>3</sup>

In 1598, Lope lived in Madrid with his second wife Juana de Guardo, who gave birth to four children. He had been promised a rich dowry of twenty-two thousand three hundred and eighty-two double *reales* of silver by her rich father but he never received



the money (Rennert 117; Lázaro 40). It is during this time that he wrote the comedia, *La viuda valenciana*.<sup>4</sup> Teresa Ferrer Valls speculates that he probably wrote the play at the end of 1599 and sold it to the *autor* Gaspar Porres who owned El teatro de la Olivera in Valencia (26). The *esquiva* Leonarda was likely played by the leading actress in La Olivera, Mariana Vaca (27). His second wife Juana, to whom he had never been faithful, died in 1612 from childbirth complications. For the next twenty years, Lope continued relationships with several women, one of them being Micaela Luján the mother of four of his children, lived between Toledo, Sevilla and Madrid, and lost his wife and son, and was ordained a priest. Lope later reworked *La viuda* for publication in 1619 along with other comedias in *Parte IV*.

Ferrer Valls asserts that Lope most probably made changes to the final edited copy of *La viuda valenciana*:

...es posible que Lope revisase con mayor atención que en otros casos la copia sobre la que trabajaba, y que además, ... enmendase. Su interés personal en el asunto de la comedia, que tanto tenía que ver, sin haberlo pretendido, con sus circunstancias personales en el momento de publicación, o el deseo de halagar a su amante, a quien se dirigía la comedia, y que de seguro la leería con idéntico interés que su autor... (68)

If Lope reworked *La viuda* and introduced personal and professional concerns into the play that absorbed him during the time of its publication it should be revealed in the play's subtext. The classical convention of framing a text with a dedicatory letter offers modern readers today many valuable insights into the possible meaning of the work through the author's remarks and admonitions. Lope included a dedicatory letter to Marta de Nevares when he published *La viuda valenciana*. He created a pseudonym Marcia Leonarda for Marta who was his lover and the mother of his daughter Antonia Clara.<sup>5</sup> At the time he was preparing his play for publication, around 1618, Lope faced

extremely difficult challenges in his life partly stemming from his hostile relationship with Marta's ex-husband, which would have marked repercussions on his family, his finances, and his work. Lope shared Marta's struggles from the inception of their love affair. He was not a bystander in her abusive relationship, but was instead deeply embroiled in it (*Cartas XCIII*). Lope's letter offers a window into Marta's oppressive marriage. The playwright's audacious ebullience in the dedicatory letter over the death of the husband - his adversary - is indicative of Lope's indifference for the man's life:

¡Bien haya la muerte! No sé quién está mal con ella, pues lo que no pudiera remediar física humana, acabó ella en cinco días con una purga sin tiempo, dos sangrías anticipadas y tener el médico más afición a su libertad de V.M que a la vida de su marido. (*La viuda* 95)

In a letter written to his long-time patron the Duke of Sessa, Lope describes the husband as “un buey” and “un fiero Herodes.” Embedded in this biblical metaphor of violence, is Lope's own confession of wanting to murder him (de Armas 1973, 74). I study *La viuda valenciana* from this biographical perspective to argue that Marta's turbulent marriage and Lope's deep involvement in a triangle of tumultuous love and abuse play a crucial role in his depiction of Leonarda, the play's *esquiva* as her role deserves critical attention for both its artistic value and its biographical allusions.<sup>6</sup>

*La viuda valenciana* is well known for Lope's erotic rendition of the theme of the imaginary mistress and for the stereotypical censorship of the arrogant female *esquiva*. According to de Armas, Renaissance playwrights each used variants of the theme that originated from the myth of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* (II AD) (1976, 30-31).<sup>7</sup> I wish to show how Lope's concern about the issue of domestic abuse and women's rights overshadows the conventional themes. Instead, Lope's portrayal of this mistreated *tramoyera* sharply de-centers the Platonic theme of love that has been

considered central to the play (de Armas; Fucilla; Rennert). Lope presents the notion of *esquivez*, not as a symptom of female pride but as a position of self-defense against the material and physical spousal abuse. Women who refuse to be victimized any longer masquerade as *esquivas*, a role that enables them to take control of their lives while challenging social norms.

*La viuda valenciana* shows a non-conformist lead character. The play offers a subtext that advocates female self-protection through deceit and *esquivez*. In the introductory letter to the play, Lope postulates that through guile women may escape from oppressive marriages. Lope addresses the letter to Marcia, who is now widowed, and offers his fictional character Leonarda to her as a gift of entertainment and as a model of behavior. Under the pretext of *exemplum*, Lope in effect encourages the reader to learn the art of dissimulation, in order to achieve fulfillment of one's sexual desires while maintaining a pristine reputation in society:

Después que supe que vuesa merced había enviudado en tan pocos años, que aunque las partes y gracias de su marido la obligaran a sentimiento, la poca edad la escusara, pues es aforismo en los discretos mirar por lo que falta, y no por lo que dejan, me determiné a dirigirle esta comedia, cuyo título es *La viuda valenciana*: no maliciosamente, que fuera grave culpa dar a vuesa merced tan indigno ejemplo. Discreta fue Leonarda (así lo es vuesa merced y así se llama) en hallar remedio para su soledad, sin empeñar su honor; que como la gala del nadar es saber guardar la ropa, así también lo parece acudir a la voluntad sin faltar a la opinión.  
(*La viuda* 91-92)

Critics such as Marina Scordilis Brownlee have stated that the irony in the epithet *discreta* ["discreet"] is palpable in Lope's contradictory recommendations, since his play offers *indignos ejemplos* ["undignified examples"] (32). The liberty insinuated in "*nadar*"

[“swim”] must be protected by guarding her own reputation “*guardar la ropa*” [“protect your clothes”]. Female honor hinged on society’s opinion of women’s sexual behavior, real or imagined. In the play’s dedication, Lope implicitly addresses the widow’s need to protect her honor from society and recommends deceptive tactics to escape society’s repressive prescriptions for women. The widow in the play openly declares her piety yet in secret pursues her desires. The maintenance of a dual identity –public and private - in order to safeguard one’s honor was not a new idea. For example, Fray Antonio de Guevara in his *Epístolas familiares* had recommended that women who engaged in illicit affairs conceal their relationships, “es menos dañoso para la honra en que sea la mujer secretamente deshonesto, que no que sea públicamente desvergonzada” (1850, 161). Even moralists considered the illusion of chastity as more important than true chastity. Cervantes also expresses this view in *La fuerza de la sangre* through the father’s advice to his daughter Leocadia: “Y advierte , hija, que más lástima una onza de deshonor pública que una arroba de infamia secreta. Y pues puedes vivir honrada con Dios en público, no te pene de estar deshonorada contigo en secreto” (*Novelas ejemplares II* 84).

The issue of violence against women is also introduced in the opening commentary to the addressee. The development of the literary *esquiva* in early modern Spain may have deeper social connotations than the popular - critical terms such as *melindrosa* [fickle], *liviana* [superficial], and *terca* [stubborn] – assigned to women in plays. As I mentioned earlier, Behrend’s study of divorce trials in the seventeenth century demonstrates that many cases of spousal abuse were brought before the ecclesiastical courts by women who wished to be released from the marital contract, gain control of their dowry, and receive a portion of marital earnings and to be left alone (2003, 147). In

order to show that this reality is depicted in *La viuda*, we need to trace the social context of violence that informs the *esquiva tramoyera* and draw parallels to Marta's historical experience.

The tramoyera of Lope's comedia is Leonarda, a young widow educated, and well versed in conduct literature. She follows the social paradigm of the widow whose virtues are discretion, piety, and enclosure. Leonarda assumes the disguise of a self-effacing pious widow in order to become invisible in society and escape from the pressures of remarriage. As mentioned earlier in Chapter Two, Irigaray develops the idea of masquerade by explaining that the intentional self-fashioning as a female construct "means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it" (76). We see a similar logic in Lope's portrayal of the pious widow. The sudden onset of new suitors thrusts Leonarda into a position in which she must choose her future: either she remains a widow or she becomes a wife once more. One of the strongest feminist statements of the play is Leonarda's choice of widowhood, as she defines it:

No procuro ser nombrada,  
ni comer, como Artemisa.  
.....  
ni ser la que el nombre toma  
.....  
porque a ver no se asomó  
el monstruo que entró por Roma;  
ni la que con el carbón  
pintó la sombra al marido,  
.....  
Quiero ser una mujer,  
que, como es razón, acuda  
al título de viuda,  
pues a nadie he menester. (81-84)

Leonarda refuses to be categorized as a conventional literary female martyr. “Quiero ser una mujer” is the moment of self-assertion, free will, and reason. This quote reflects the considerable agency that widows possessed in the period. She will not follow the path of remarriage, “no me he de casar,” deciding to wear the widow’s mask on her own terms:

No hay ya de qué tratar  
que servir a Dios no sea;  
bien aquí la vida emplea  
quien ve lo que ha de durar.  
Terror es que perseguida,  
en esta edad, guarde un muerto,  
fe tan cierta, amor tan cierto,  
verdad viva y casta vida.  
Pero en la dificultad  
escriben que está la gloria,  
y eso se llama vitoria,  
resistir la voluntad.  
Dejadme aquí, pensamientos;  
no hay más, no me he de casar. (101-114)

Lope’s notion of the *esquiva*-widow is patently informed by Bandello’s twenty-fifth *novella* (De Armas 1976; 61). Despite the obvious parallel to the Bandellian character, the fact that Lope chooses to represent the widow in the 1619 revision certainly seems to be inspired by Marta Nevares’s situation and Lope’s support of woman’s rights in legal and economic relationships with men. The widow Leonarda follows St. Paul’s dictum concerning carnal lust, “I say therefore to the unmarried and the widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I but if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn” (Corinthians VII, 8-9). Leonarda contends that she prefers to see herself “antes muerta que encendida” (68). This signifies that, like St. Paul, she would choose to remain unmarried rather than burn; she will neither marry nor become a nun. She will not conform.

Her uncle Lucencio also divulges his deep fears of the power of society to ruin the honor of a vulnerable young widow if she refuses to submit to its control by refusing a second marriage. Despite the dangerous rumors of promiscuity, Leonarda demonstrates her unwavering will and her solid determination to protect her independence in the face of adversity.<sup>8</sup> She points out the misogynist contradictions in society.

¿A este daño me acomodas  
Si todos que han escrito  
Han reprendido infinito  
Siempre las segundas bodas?  
La viudez casta y segura  
¿No es de todos alabada?  
Si es de la envidia infamada,  
Este engaño poco dura;  
Que al fin vence la verdad  
Y vuela la buena fama,  
Que es fénix que de su llama  
Nace para nueva edad. (241-252)

Leonarda's resolution is steadfast even though her public self-assertion and rejection of male control will not only infuriate her suitors but also might provoke a wider societal backlash against her.

Leonarda is a woman who is acutely aware of her body as a religious, social, and economic signifier. She recognizes her body as an asset with her physical beauty as one of the most captivating resources. She is conscious of what Laura Mulvey calls woman's "to-be-looked-at-ness" ("Visual Pleasure" 11) that is the fundamental source of her power in a patriarchal society. Julia, her maid, and Lucencio, her father, repeatedly remind Leonarda that she possesses such coveted beauty that society will find it impossible to ignore her. The combination of her attractiveness and her moral and intellectual beauty exceeds the norm and provokes hostile behavior. Lucencio foresees

violence “has hecho a Valencia Roma.”<sup>9</sup> His statement informs the audience that trouble is imminent.

The notion of excessive female beauty as a danger to society is a recurring theme in the theater of the Golden Age.<sup>10</sup> Marlene Smith states that excessive female beauty is considered to be the main cause of social disorder because of its grave threat to male honor (158). Excessive beauty is that which is recognized, talked about and envied by all. Typically, the father, brother or male relative in honor-driven *comedias* desperately seeks to negotiate a marriage for the beautiful single woman in the home who is attracting many suitors.<sup>11</sup> Once they find an acceptable husband they free themselves of the threat of her beauty to the family honor. Given the imminent social repercussions of her physical beauty, such as false rumors of promiscuity and the loss of an honorable reputation for the family, Lucencio admits his vivid fear of Leonarda’s threatening beauty to his honor: “Mírate, y guárdate Dios; / [ ] / cuanto tú te has visto, advierte” (177-179). He reproaches Leonarda’s indifference and pride, knowing society will feel menaced by her powerful beauty and seek reprisal:

¿Cómo piensas conservarte, (...)  
tantos años sin casarte? (...)  
¿Adónde te esconderás  
de la envidia y vulgo vil, (...)  
La envidia astuta tiene lengua y ojos largos.  
Dirán que con el esclavo  
que dentro de casa tienes,  
a ser Angélica vienes,  
soberbia y infame al cabo. (197-228)

Stemming from classical Patristic theologians such as St. Augustine, who posited Eve as temptress (Letters 243, 10), the link between sexual prowess and female beauty must be controlled in order to maintain social order. Because beauty was also correlated with



fertility, there was a greater threat to society if it was not contained in marriage (Smith 170).

Leonarda's financial wealth ascribes to her body an even higher level of currency. The active role of wives increased during widowhood, given that women could legally head households, become guardians, and make independent decisions about their property (Coolidge 41). Lucencio describes her material worth: "Es verdad que te han quedado / tres mil ducados de renta" (201-202). As a widow, Leonarda thus controls these assets. However, if she were to marry, the dowry would legally remain hers but the authority to manage it would automatically be transferred to her husband (Alcalá-Zamora 170).<sup>12</sup> Leonarda views submission to a man as life-threatening. She protests the unfair exchange of her body for the protection of her uncle's honor: "¿es mejor / a peligro de un error / poner mi vida por ti?" (238-240). She refuses to surrender her renewed economic freedom as a widow and her individual identity as a woman. For this tramoyera there is no man who is her social equal. Leonarda is disgusted by the absence of magnanimous men and rebukes the ignoble masculinity of the day:

¡No, sino venga un mancebo  
.....  
lo de fuera limpio y sano,  
lo de dentro sucio y viejo!;  
.....  
y con sus manos lavadas  
los tres mil de renta pesque. (253-270)

By incorporating the convention of the perfidious dandy Lope makes reference to the fame these men had for defrauding women in marriage by usurping their dowries. The allusion to Pontius Pilate - "*sus manos lavadas*" ["his washed hands"] – adds several connotations: first, it implies men's lack of consciousness in spending women's dowries;

second, it connotes the idea of marriage as a financial threat for women. Leonarda fights to protect her dowry from further misappropriation by shunning all men and sickened by the fraudulent nature of men and marriage: “Asco me ponen los hombres; / no me los nombres jamás.”<sup>13</sup> Leonarda voices the female disillusionment over useless marriage contracts:

¡Fiad de los juramentos,  
de las palabras y votos!  
Pero son papeles rotos  
que se entregan a los vientos. (2072-2075)

The metaphor for broken promises, torn agreements, includes the notarized letters that dealt with the dowry. By emphasizing the men’s lack of compliance to legal contracts, Lope reveals his preoccupation for women’s economic rights. This is a concern that he understandably acquired through his own negative experiences with the misappropriation of Marta de Nevares’ dowry by Roque Hernández, who forced Marta to relinquish her dowry to his management in order to carry out shady business ventures: “nada escrupuloso y poco refinado, que sin amor y sin dinero la maltrata para obligarla a ser su cómplice en tratos faudulentos” (Marín 35).<sup>14</sup> A fascinating parallel can be drawn between Leonarda’s 3000 ducats and the amount of money that, according to Lope, was confiscated by Roque from Marta before she escaped from their house: “...tiene esta noche en dinero más de tres mil ducados” (Carta 101). Roque runs from his creditors, who then pursue Marta for repayment of her husband’s overdue loans. Marta entered her own case for dismissal alleging that her signature on the debts was acquired under duress. The first trial resulted in a verdict of not guilty and she was permitted to retain her dowry and mortgaged home (Marín 223, n. 222). Later, the final verdict, which forced Marta to relinquish her dowry and property to repay Roque’s debt was a huge financial blow to

Marta and Lope who were struggling materially at the time of the publication of *La viuda valenciana*.<sup>15</sup> Understanding the context in which Lope wrote the play is vital in order to recognize the difficult challenges women fought to overcome. Behrend-Martínez asserts that, “women in reality were protected by the legal system and could bring charges of physical abuse against their husbands” (2003, 147). What I find important to highlight is the assertiveness and determination it took women to initialize the litigation, petition the court, present an accusation, argue, provide witnesses, and counter-petition until a decision was finally made by the court. When a couple contracted matrimony, a husband was legally responsible for the assets of the marital home and as such felt justified in managing the finances which included the administration of his wife’s dowry (Alcalá-Zamora 170).<sup>16</sup> Motivated by this attribution of power, a husband was often in a position to abuse what he possessed. A woman was a victim of violence when she resisted her assignment as object and demanded to control her dowry. The husband’s anger is expressed indirectly in an unsettling scene in the play:

.....dará mi hacienda;  
comenzará la contienda  
desto de si fue o no fue.  
Yo esconderé y él dará;  
buscará deudas por mí;  
entrará justicia aquí,  
voces y aun coces habrá.  
No habrá noche, no habrá día,  
que la casa no alborote...  
“Daca la carta de dote.  
--Soltad la hacienda, que es mía.  
--Entrad en esta escritura.  
--No quiero.--¡Ah, sí! ¿No queréis?  
Yo os haré, infame, que entréis,  
si el brío de ahora os dura”.  
Y que mientras más me postro,  
me haga muy más apriesa  
de dos títulos condesa,

A husband's motives for battery often arise at intervals of identity shifts when the wife positions herself as his equal and disputes financial decisions. While Leonarda is imagining the possible exploitation by a future husband, she reveals what seem to be repressed memories of past domestic abuse in her first marriage. Leonarda's speech is the most noteworthy feminist disclosure in the play. It clearly reveals that her verbal assertiveness - "*no quiero*" - had defied her husband, provoking his abuse. She projects these memories on to the present, which bring on her *esquivez* and refusal to commit to anyone: "No me tengo de casar / si el mundo está de por medio" (631-632). Her vivid description shows that women were appraised by the utility and profit they provided men. Leonarda's speech has a metatheatrical component that reenacts a violent dispute from the past between herself and her husband over the usurpation of her dowry. The effect lends credibility to this prevalent social problem. Lope's awareness of Marta de Nevares's fight to protect her dowry against Hernández gives a marked authenticity to Leonarda's defiant speech. In this scene Lope calls attention to the repeated harassment by her husband that his own lover experienced. Nicolás Marín's description of Marta's husband establishes a parallel with Leonarda's ex-husband, "... nada escrupuloso y poco refinado, que sin amor y sin dinero la maltrata para obligarla a ser su cómplice en tratos fraudulentos" (*Cartas* 35). In the play, as in real life, a woman was seldom victorious in her resistance since the husband was the legal administrator of all personal belongings and was authorized to take control of the household. In her observations on the defense of women subgenre in renaissance literature, Constance Jordan insightfully notes the wife's incongruous situation: "The irony is of course that she has bought the person who then

owns her” (256). No wonder then that widows who realized the absurdity and paradox of paying a man a dowry to be his subordinate oftentimes refused to remarry, preferring to remain autonomous and comfortable in their own home.

Leonarda’s highly charged speech evokes more than “marital discord” in society, as Ferrer Valls explains (122, n 67). The sharp undertones criticizing violence against women, however, are undeniable and extremely unsettling as male power is tangible through its enforcement on the female body. The two aristocratic titles Leonarda confers on herself “*dos títulos condesa, Concentaina* [rural town outside of Valencia] y *Puñoenrostro* [fist in face]” embody a semantics of battery. Lope seems to want to expose the underlying reality of physical abuse. These noble titles identify her as a worthless battered body instead of the wife of an honorable noble man. Moreover, Leonarda evokes Lope’s description of Marta as prisoner in the play’s epilogue when she recalls her confined identity as property, “Yo he sido como río detenido” (814). Her lament highlights the classification of the married woman in terms of guarded property. Now widowed and liberated from the confinement of marriage, Leonarda pursues her desire for sexual freedom. On the street, she takes on the inverted role of the hunter where she hand-picks her prey Camilo. She gives Urbán instructions to inform Camilo that he has been chosen and that a woman wants to engage in sexual relations with him and to come in secret and blind-folded to her bedroom. Lope alludes to the medieval *topos* of the hunt as a symbol of sexual pursuit in the *tramoyera*’s search for of a sexual partner.<sup>17</sup> However, while in *La Celestina*, *Fuenteovejuna*, *La Estrella de Sevilla* and *El caballero de Olmedo* the hawk represents the lustful man who attacks its prey, the theme is reversed in *La viuda valenciana*.<sup>18</sup> Ferrer Valls points out that Lope applies the hunt

theme as a metaphor of inverted sexual roles to reinforce the symbolism of the carnivalesque celebration of the *máscaras* [masquerades] (47).<sup>19</sup> However, as Natalie Zemon Davis notes, carnival festivities were more than the symbolic inversions of order. The theme of woman on top not only functioned to simultaneously subvert and reinforce the authority of men over women, but most significantly, to provide a discourse for hierarchical change (“Women on Top” 154-155). That is, it opened the possibility of women ruling. Davis further contends that in popular festivals of inversion the role of the dominating woman crossed over into real life inspiring women to decry abuses and demand social changes: “Sexual inversion [ ] gave a more positive license to the unruly woman: her right as subject and as mother to rise up and tell the truth” (177). In *La viuda*, Leonarda’s desire to blind-fold Camilo has several layers of meaning. First, it connects theater to carnival celebrations. Second, it calls attention to the uneven distribution of power based on gender. Third, it criticizes the abuse of male authority and challenges social order.

Leonarda, like Camilo, is also forced to hide her real identity in public and wear a social mask since she needs to be protected from gossip. Her honor depends on social opinion as Erasmus of Rotterdam states in his *La viuda cristiana*: “No basta que el domicilio de la viuda carezca de crimen; debe carecer de toda sospecha de crimen” (119, n. 52). He stresses that, “No es suficiente haberse abstenido de todo mal, sino que, según la doctrina de San Pablo, hay que precaverse de toda apariencia de mal: pero la fama es un mal precoz y ni aun a la misma inocencia perdona” (119, n. 53).

Although Leonarda is certainly not innocent, society’s callousness in its obsession to control her is repeatedly communicated through the harassment of her suitors in the

subplot. The three suitors, Lisandro, Valerio and Otón, represent a misogynist society and its role in the control of women as property. She is referred to as “nuestra viuda” and as the plot develops they start a vigil at her doorstep. Lope again conjoins proprietorship and violence through these volatile characters who seek to tame the *esquiva* Leonarda. Leonarda’s rejection provokes in them feelings of emasculation and dishonor that will lead to an attempted murder. Her arrogant indifference to their misogynist actions initiates a combative offensive on their part; a fight for control of Leonarda’s future. In this confrontation of wills, Lope is criticizing society’s view of women as property as well as the aristocracy’s misuse of its bellicose efforts. The reign of Philip IV and his favorite the Count-Duke of Olivares is a period when the function of noblemen changed from that of military knights to idle dandies who pursued noble titles and court offices in Madrid (Elliott 1963, 314-315). The negotiation of a lucrative marriage contract was yet another means to gain wealth for them.<sup>20</sup> Lope’s three perfidious stalkers aptly characterize this pervasive new trend in aristocratic greed. Otón speaks for all of them when he states,

Ahora, yo no he de dormir  
 cien coces, y he de acudir  
 todas a su calle y puerta  
 y si alguno la despierta,  
 ¡vive Dios, que ha de morir!  
 (...) Piedra soy de su portada,  
 como si fuera Medusa (...)  
 ¡Oh, casa del mayor peso del mundo!  
 Ya os arriman gigantes a la puerta. (1201-1210)

Lope compares Leonarda’s body to an impenetrable castle that is surrounded and threatened by the three suitors and by society described as “*gigantes*” forcing down her door. Lope depicts society as a mythical monster relentlessly pursuing an incarcerated

damsel. Leonarda's unyielding chastity embodies the virtuous strength of stone; she has no lover at this point. Lisandro's interest in her wealth is patently clear as he states, "¡De noche guardas a las puertas! ¡Bueno! / A fe que a donde tantas guardas ponen, / Que hay escondido algún tesoro rico" (1620-1622). The metaphor of treasure for her body and her dowry is clearly understood. Yet, in contrast to mythological tales in which a hero vanquishes the giant, it is the *tramoyera* who defeats the threatening enemy through a *burla* or trick.

Leonarda conceives of a mystifying plan to satisfy her desire for male company while guarding her honor and dowry. The intricate *burla* of the "invisible mistress" in the play is labeled as a military feat - "*industria greciana*" – that yields victory. Leonarda is acutely aware of her passive social identity and yearns to break away her designation of object. The notion of woman as object is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's view that a woman's body "is not perceived as the radiation of a subjective personality, but as a thing sunk deeply in its own immanence; it is not for such a body to have reference to the rest of the world" (157). Despite their chronological difference, Beauvoir's theories of the body may be applied to Leonarda because the character is also aware of society's desire to objectify her and disavow any female autonomy. The *tramoyera* sees her body as an encasement from which she needs to escape. She succeeds by erasing her corporal identity and becoming the 'invisible mistress' of classical mythology.<sup>21</sup> The plot in medieval literature offered an inversion of gender roles with curiosity overtaking the male protagonist. As the invisible mistress, Leonarda assumes agency in a space outside of society's watch. Her haven is the world of darkness where she finds refuge from her connection to her body, material manipulation and physical abuse.<sup>22</sup> In the dark, her



physical body no longer has any value. It is only through the intellect that she will now communicate with the other to embrace love. Lope elaborates on the Neoplatonic notion of the imagination as an enhancer of love.<sup>23</sup>

Leonarda's *esquivez* is a guise through which she protects herself from men's psychological and physical abuse. She decides to marry Camilo because she is convinced that he is not a violent or fraudulent man. Leonarda recognizes her natural desire for male company and the financial security of Camilo's patrimony. She finds financial stability in his noble position and she sees that her dowry is no longer threatened. Lope communicates to the audience that Camilo respects the dowry system, as he becomes a surrogate father to his ex-lover Celia, offering her a generous dowry for her marriage:

Celia, yo pienso  
que el cielo te ha mirado piadoso,  
pues a tu vida ha dado tal remedio,  
como es Floro mi amigo, y no criado;  
padre tendréis en mi y amparo todo;  
y el día que os caséis te daré, Celia,  
sin vestidos ni alhajas, mil ducados. (2785-2791)

In my opinión, the fact that Camilo pays for the young woman's dowry is important. It is the evidence that suggests Camilo will honor Leonarda's dowry as well if they choose to marry. Camilo's monetary generosity and benevolence regarding the dowry for the orphaned Celia also reflects the charitable service of mercy provided by lay confraternities (Fink De Backer 212). I argue that Camilo's actions represent a Christian model for charitable service that the public should emulate. The public's aid in providing assistance to donate money for dowries of poor, orphaned, and destitute women in Madrid would allay the enormous economic responsibilities that fell on the shoulders of these confraternities. As I mentioned in the introduction, and demonstrate through Celia's

case, these lay confraternities sponsored the evolving commercial theater and had a strong influence on culture.

In the end, as in the beginning, Leonarda reiterates the self-assertive statement of subjectivity, “yo quiero ser su mujer.” Camilo’s alliance and support of his new wife is evident in that he will act as her servant. Leonarda again usurps the patriarchal authority and marries off her servants. The *tramoyera*’s word is supreme in reinstating order at the end of the play.

*La viuda valenciana* is a feminist metaphor for the vindication of female victims of abusive marriages. Leonarda’s independent stance is not born out of pride but bravery in defending herself from the physical aggression of male proprietorship. The purpose of my analysis has been to remove the veil of literary convention and reveal the *comedia*’s discourse of female subjectivity. I have found enough evidence to support Lope’s representation of legitimate female defiance in the face of domestic abuse. I surmise that the author’s aim in his 1618-1619 reworking and subsequent publication of the manuscript was to denounce the physical and material abuse that women suffered in marriage. My search for the connection between the dedicatory letter to Marcia Leonarda, the words and actions of the *tramoyera* Leonarda and the historical figure Marta de Nevares reveals a strong feminist subtext in Lope’s portrayal of the *mujer esquiva*. Lope dramatizes the repercussions of domestic violence and dowry embezzlement through the triumph of the *tramoyera*. The play provides yet another example of what I call “*esquiva* agency:” women who by rejecting men impose their will upon a masculine order.

### 3.3 María as Discursive Agent in Lope de Vega's *La moza del cántaro*

*La moza de cántaro*<sup>24</sup> is an unusual *comedia* in that it portrays a *tramoyera* who must protect the family honor in the absence of her brother, a soldier stationed in Flandes. María kills a suitor for striking her father, forcing her to escape to Madrid. María is a *mujer esquiva* who performs versatile characterizations under the guise of *tapada*, soldier, servant, and chambermaid. Her multiple masquerades attract men of different social ranks: the noble don Diego and don Juan, the rich foreigner *indiano*, and the servant Pedro. Although female-centered studies tend to focus on conventional themes of *esquivéz*, female arrogance, *la mujer varonil*, and the inescapable power of love I find the most striking element of Lope's play to be María's agency shown through her assertive speech and noble convictions.<sup>25</sup>

The recurring marker that links *esquiva*-widows is their marriage to abusive spouses: in *La dama duende*, Angela owes the king because of her husband's shady financial affairs; and, in *La viuda valenciana*, Leonarda speaks of the physical and financial suffering brought on by her husband. In *La moza del cántaro* there are two widows who are both relieved to escape their husbands' financial and psychological abuse. Ana has suffered in the past from her husband's indiscretions and, now a widow, is pursued only for her wealth. María, who identifies herself as a widow throughout the play, murders her dishonorable fiancé for physically affronting her father in public. She knows that the breakdown of a lucrative marriage agreement triggered the violence; her criticism of male greed is emphatically articulated in Act One: "Cásese, y déjeme a mí / mi padre, que yo no veo / dónde apliqué mi deseo / de cuantos andan aquí / codiciosos de su hacienda" (65-69).

Lope is one of the few male playwrights to recognize the dramatic gain of introducing two *tramoyeras* as mirror reflections of each other in a *comedia de capa y espada*.<sup>26</sup> Only María de Zayas, in her play *La traición en la amistad*, is as well known for this type of feminist narrative strategy. However, where Zayas focuses on women's relationships with each other and with men, Lope interpolates many adventurous subplots and genres that conflate the stories of an incarcerated *dama* and two cross-dressing friends.<sup>27</sup> In *La moza del cántaro*, María is an *esquiva*-widow who contrasts sharply with the seductive widow, Ana. These are cunning *tramoyeras* who seek self-empowerment in different ways: María fights to liberate herself from the hypocrisy and greed that drives the noble class; and Ana uses her high status and power to manipulate men in her home.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Ana acquires subjectivity through the command she asserts over them, while María, on the contrary, commands only herself and exemplifies female agency by leaving her home and adopting the unassuming identities of the lower social classes. Lope makes a social argument about subjectivity by presenting an inverted reflection, so to speak, of two women with social agency from opposite classes who demonstrate their control over others within opposite social spheres.

María is the daughter of a knight of the Order of Santiago who searches for greater meaning in her life beyond the traditional path of courtship by self-interested suitors. She scorns men who write love letters in *culterano* style, embellished with meaningless rhetorical figures. Her critique is directed to the penmanship, organization and form of male writing. She later also scoffs at the allegorical *conceptista* style: “¿Esta es lúcida invención?”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the conventional notion of beauty is another elitist standard that María repudiates. This notion linked to virtue in books of chivalry, derives

from lineage and wealth in the *comedias de capa y espada*. María undermines the ideal of beauty based on wealth when she rejects the high-ranking and rich don Pedro for being inarticulate and ugly, as her notion of beauty is based on sincerity and kindness. María laments women's shortsightedness in choosing a husband: "Muchas se casan a prisa, / que a llorar despacio van" (107-108). She sneers at the expensive gifts her suitors offer her in exchange for marriage. She longs only to remain in her house, alone, and without a husband, "estarme sola en mi casa," in order to separate herself from a world of inverted values and remain under her own rule of independence and bravery.

Yet, she is forced to vindicate her father's honor, tarnished by a public slap in the face and an accusation of tenuous lineage, owing to her brother's absence. Don Diego is the envious suitor who slaps her father Don Bernardo for accepting the Duke of Sanlúcar's marital proposal. Disguised in a black widow's cloak, María runs to the prison to kill Diego in revenge for his having defamed her father. María's brave actions to vindicate patriarchal honor are similar to those taken by the biblical heroine-widow, Judith, who saves her people from being conquered by the Assyrian general Holofernes by seducing and beheading him.<sup>30</sup> María enters the prison, seduces Diego by promising herself to him in order to gain his trust, and then kills him with a dagger at the moment she embraces her new husband: "¡Muere infame! / [ ] / En canas tan venerable / pusiste la mano, perro? / Pues estas hazañas hacen / las mujeres varoniles" (366-370). Although José María Díez Borque praises Lope's brilliant creation of dramatic tension conveyed through the alliance of marriage and death in María's symbolic embrace with Diego, I prefer to focus on the author's commentary on women's self-assertiveness in taking honor into their own hands. Her cry for justice evokes Laurencia's reproach in

*Fuenteovejuna*: “¡dadme unas armas a mí! / [ ] / ¡Vive Dios, que he de trazar / que solas las mujeres cobren, / la honra, de estos tiranos, / la sangre, de estos traidores!”

After killing Diego, María conceals her identity by cross-dressing in a humble *gabán* [topcoat] and hat, carrying an *arcabuz* [harquebus] as she heads for Madrid. Once at court, she accepts the role of maidservant to an *indiano*, a wealthy traveler recently returned from the Indies. While the ruse of dressing-down an aristocratic character is not uncommon in the *comedia*, lowering speech is. Speech is a powerful marker of social class and wealth and, like clothing and mores, it functions to maintain a stratified society. It codifies gender and social class through special signifiers. Conventionally, the speech of a disguised character is what gives real identity away. María’s shifting gender and social identity creates ambiguity in the play; yet, unlike other *tramoyeras*, within the range of identities her unrestrained colloquial speech remains fixed. For example, in Cervantes’s *El laberinto de amor*, the transvestites Julia and Porcia cannot mask their aristocratic language; they maintain their use of cultivated speech and continually arouse suspicion. María uses language devoid of recognizable high-class markers. She expresses her thoughts honestly and candidly, whether it is with her father, her promised suitor, Diego, or Juan, the man she desires. Her speech is in marked contrast to that of Ana’s who competes with men through the mastery and manipulation of cultivated language. By reciting Góngorian style sonnets, Ana positions herself on the side of elitist male rhetoric. She uses the appropriate gendered language when communicating with Count Alonso, but only to manipulate him. She masquerades through language. She also enters and exits the language of courtesy, for example, to assert herself and seduce his cousin, Juan:

CONDE	....Sólo suplico me deis licencia de visitaros, si fuere parte a obligaros, confesar que me debéis no dineros, sino amor.
ANA	Yo quedo tan obligada, como deudora, y pagada de vuestro heroico valor,
CONDE	Bésoos las manos.
ANA	El cielo os guarde.  ( <i>vase el Conde</i> ) ...
ANA	Bien sé yo que todo esto es mentira. (653-666)

Ana hosts *saraos* [literary soirées] for her male aristocratic friends only, no women are invited, at which she recites sonnets, critiques poetic aesthetics and enjoys music. She acquires discursive agency by challenging and compromising men through her elitist demands: “¿Un caballero discreto / escribe a tan vil sujeto? / No lo creyera jamás” (1122-1124); “[ ] estuviera disculpado; / pero un caballero, un hombre / como vos” (1160-1162). Ana requires elevated musings from her entourage. Her sense of identity therefore depends on other views of her. She is driven by social mores and opinions and fights to maintain control over her life by attempting to dominate the male gaze. By ascribing María and Ana distinct voices, Lope is clearly comparing and contrasting high and low speech as a false indicator of intelligence and honor in women.<sup>31</sup>

María uses language, whether publicly or privately, to articulate her inner thoughts and emotions as an individual; she is not pretentious, nor superficial, nor insincere. In contrast to Ana’s recitations of cultivated poems, María’s discursive powers are shown through her narration of tales. Female characters in the *comedia* are often

ascribed the role of intermittent narrators of tales and personal tragedies. The anecdotal stories told by women serve to complicate the plot and to give voice to women's personal experiences. Female characters recount authentic or fictional stories depending on the narratee. Distortions or untruths are intended either to protect the identity of the narrator or to awaken deep emotions in the listener. María tells a story to an *indiano* she encounters on the road to Madrid. She narrates a picaresque tale of her struggles by embellishing her story with details of being an impoverished orphan who has recently suffered the loss of her master, a priest. In the role of the female *pícaro*, she draws attention to other picaresque female characters in *La Celestina*, *La pícaro Justina* and *La Lozana andaluza*. Like them, she is a transgressor, a wanderer, and a story-teller; in contrast, she is not a prostitute. María, dressed in the priest's topcoat and carrying his harquebus, accepts the wealthy *indiano*'s offer of maidservant work by reasserting her gender: "Soy mujer." Lope cues the audience to imminent trouble. In her study of the female picaresque, Cruz argues that "woman's sexuality threatens constantly to disrupt the male order. As such, women's sexuality is a social factor to be repressed, bartered, and controlled by the male structures of power" (1999, 158). María, however, cannot be dominated by the *indiano* who tries to sexually assault her. Instead, she severely beats him. Contrary to the repression of female *pícaras*, Lope relegates his protagonist the freedom to express her will and subvert male-defined boundaries.

In Act Two, Juan attempts to make advances at María. She mocks his approach, as he attempts to seduce her with a lower-class lexicon. Her negative reaction to his speech is a critique of the social and gendered rules of language.

MARIA           ¿Adónde bueno, Isabel? [...]  
                       ¿Pensáis que no tengo yo



mi poco de entendimiento?

.....  
¿Sois pobre? [...]

.....  
Porque si os falta dinero  
para pretensiones altas, [...]  
que para últimos empleos  
de las damas, fondo en ángel,  
no hay plata en el alto cerro  
del *Potosí*, perlas ni oro  
en los orientales reinos.  
Más pienso que os costarían  
las randas de un telarejo  
que una legión de de fregonas. [...]

.....  
¿Espejo y despejo?  
Ya con cuidado me habláis,  
porque, en efecto, os parezco  
mujer que os puede entender;

.....  
Pues levantad el lenguaje,  
que, como dicen *los negros*,  
el ánima tengo blanca,  
aunque mal vestido el cuerpo.  
Habladme como quien sois. (*my emphasis*, 1283-1359)

María describes herself as possessing “*entendimiento*” [intelligence] on several occasions in the play. More importantly, María’s words illustrate her self-identification with the other; in this case, with the black male slave of Potosí. María emphasizes that the goodness of the soul, and not physical appearance, determines nobility. The protagonist communicates her inner thoughts in an effort to enlighten don Juan. This antithetical imagery offers a site of resistance to and reinscription in the world around her. María voices her condemnation of male superiority and demands to be recognized as an individual in society.

The colonial subtext woven into the play emerges unexpectedly in María’s self-representation. The protagonist defines herself through contradictory worlds. The use of

slave imagery transfers the theme of oppression to María. She voluntarily assumes the abject identity of the black race and the black male as an act of resistance and rejection of a hierarchical society; one where those in power abuse the weak.

Juan is a noteworthy character that shows depth in contrast to the other one-dimensional men in the play. For Juan, love transcends social determinants of value. His strength of character shines through in his desire to meet María's notion of virtue. He carefully expresses his respect based on inner beauty and not class. He waits for her critique of his words; her valorization of his thoughts:

Yo, Isabel, así lo creo,  
pensando en tu oficio,  
tal vez el respeto pierdo;  
pero en mirando a tu cara,  
vuelvo a tenerte respeto ...  
¿Qué dirás deste lenguaje? (1360-1364)

María appreciates the honesty but chides his intentions: "...no seremos amigos / en no siendo el trato honesto" (1385-1385). Juan is driven to rethink his words to describe his real love for her. His discourse emphatically responds to her ideal of beauty, based on the goodness of the individual, not social class:

JUAN            Porque más estimo y precio  
                     un listón de tus chinelas  
                     que las perlas de su cuello;  
                     más precio en tus blancas manos  
                     ver aquel cántaro puesto,  
                     .....  
                     que ver cómo cierta dama  
                     baja en su coche soberbio.  
                     .....  
                     Yo me contento que digas,  
                     dulce Isabel, "yo te quiero",  
                     que también quiero yo el alma,  
                     no todo el amor es cuerpo... (1399-1424)  
                     .....  
                     cómo pensar mi amor que la belleza

no puede haber nacido en viles paños,  
si pudo la fealdad en la nobleza? (2392-2394)

Juan compares María to Ana and chooses the woman who reveals herself as virtuous. The message of love between two identical souls – Juan and María - emerges as a transcendental theme. María transforms Juan into the perfect lover; one whose love for a woman grows out of respect for her mind and soul. María is a unique character in that she is the agent of her own marital bliss. She educates her man on the new principles of love. This female character continually reiterates the values required for true love: “Quien siente bien no habla mal.” Her teachings test Juan’s intentions and honesty. She challenges his loyalty by revealing her role in a crime of murder, meeting him in indecorous places, taunting him by dancing by the river with other maids, and pretending to love another.

María’s exigency of a husband’s respect recalls another memorable *tramoyera*. Leonor, the heroine of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s *Los empeños de una casa*, finds true love in a man who loves her for her inner beauty and intelligence. Both Leonor and María teach their love interests to vocalize their thoughts and feelings carefully, and the importance of unconditional respect. In *Los empeños*, Pedro admires Leonor’s qualities of “primor y cordura;” while in *La moza*, Juan loves María for her “entendimiento ...y valor.” Lope and Sor Juana present spiritual love that stems from the attraction of the combined heart and mind; love that is unselfish. However, Lope creates a male lead imbued with noble qualities that are lacking in Sor Juana’s male protagonist. In *La moza*, Juan is steadfast in exemplifying four virtuous characteristics: patience, chastity, courage and justice. In *Los empeños*, Pedro’s weak inner strength yields bursts of anger, jealousy, and dishonesty. Pedro struggles with his negative emotions instead of focusing on higher

ideals and unconditional love throughout the play. In both plays, the *tramoyeras* demonstrate assertiveness and intellect despite temporary exhibitions of jealousy.

María exemplifies the female subject in the *comedia de capa y espada* through her transformation. She subverts the social affirmation of the status quo so popular in honor plays stated by the phrase “soy quien soy”, and reinvents herself: “mejor es ser lo que soy, / pues que no soy lo que fui./ [ ] / sóbrame a mí / el ser mujer.” These words elucidate the new principles to which she adheres; intelligence, honesty and free will. María’s virtuous substance inspires Juan to become nobler by publicly announcing his love for the peasant María and espousing her values. María, who has become a legend, “a quien deban / respeto cuantas historias / y hechos de mujeres cuentan,” unveils the truth, “Pues yo soy María.” The conventional unifying ending occurs when María reveals her social class and valor by publicly admitting her crime of murder and her true identity as a member of the Medina family. Despite these injurious admissions, Juan accepts and marries her unconditionally. Yet, it is María herself who decides her fate and establishes her equal status to Juan:

No está la boda tan hecha  
como os parece, señor;  
porque falta que yo quiera.  
Para igualar a don Juan.  
¿Bastaba ser vuestra deuda  
y del duque de Medina? (2663-2669)

María exemplifies female independence and freedom of thought within a circumscribed male society. Her soul is as unpretentious as her speech. As real love is humble in essence so is her linguistic expression of love. Lope legitimizes a woman’s desire for marriage founded on honesty, communication and love. Unlike most *capa y*

*espada* plays, this marriage ending is promising. María represents a new ideal of the wife who has a voice and requires love and respect from her spouse.

### **3.4 Seeking Pleasure: Fenisa as the New Female Paradigm in María de Zayas's *La traición en la amistad***

The play *La traición en la amistad* (1628-1632) [Friendship Betrayed] by the female playwright and novelist María de Zayas y Sotomayor also forges an alternative image of woman, yet in her example the *tramoyera*'s identity is not dependent on her physical and economic attractions to male suitors. Zayas is rightly recognized for her provocative stance on sex, gender and violence in her collection of novelas, *Desengaños amorosos* [The Disenchantments of Love]. Critics have focused on the erotic, violent, and grotesque narrative that examines the dynamics between gender, race, and class.<sup>32</sup> Marina S. Brownlee has researched the feminist perspectivism in Zayas's prose narratives, a point of view that continues to provoke alternative readings. She describes Zayas's discourse as "contradictory, eminent[ly] nonlinear. It is, moreover, supremely Baroque in its conception" (*The Cultural Labyrinth* 22). Zayas's incursion in the *comedia de capa y espada* genre extrapolates many sensationalist themes found in her *Novelas*, such as desire, jealousy, revenge, promiscuity, female rivalry, transvestism, and witchcraft. There have been several recent studies interpretations of her play. Matthew D. Stroud, for instance, focuses his attention on the connection between Zayas's subject formation and Lacan's theory of the Subject. Matthew A. Wyszynski claims that Zayas uses an Aristotelian model of male friendship to develop a more progressive "conceptual model for female friendship" and, in turn, finds that she anticipates the views of later

theorists on this issue (21). Additionally, Constance Wilkins views the comedic form as a medium through which the female playwright criticizes social and political ideas.

Zayas's only *capa y espada* play that we know of is *La traición en la amistad*, a multilayered comedy of pro-feminist contentions and social reprobations. Its deeply ironic and slippery plot requires careful interpretation. I take a close look at Zayas's sophisticated style and unique spin on female agency from a new perspective in order to address the *esquiva*'s vital role in empowering herself and in precipitating the subject construction of three other *tramoyeras* in the play. I show how Zayas converts the *esquiva* into a new female exemplary role for *tramoyeras*. My position is that Zayas uses an open-ended style in her *comedia*, constantly undermining the dominant ideology it claims to uphold and challenging patriarchal ideas on gender by manipulating the text and the audience. I will examine the characters' false assumptions and contradictions to illuminate Zayas's feminist views.

In *La traición en la amistad*, Zayas breaks with the stereotype that ascribes the law to males and desire to females, ascribing the simultaneous potentiality for law and desire in the realm of women.<sup>33</sup> What is unique about Zayas's play is that the dramatic structure encompasses antithetical female postures in the text: three women who abide by the honor code and desire to marry – Marcia, Laura, Belisa –, and one woman who circumvents the code and delights in *esquivar* – Fenisa. It is precisely this representation of female oppositions, the marrying kind versus the non-marrying kind that organizes the dramatic content and the *tramoyeras* as the central characters in Zayas's play. Both cultural constructions of women, the chaste martyrs and the lascivious sinner, are pitted

against each other. The playwright's advocacy for women's rights manifests itself throughout the play in the women's different issues.

Zayas presents various pro-feminist arguments. The first argument is that women consolidate their strengths in order to create what I call a "united front" by which they secure female honor and right to express their desire in a male-dominant society. This play explores the collective female image - whose transformation from chaste martyrs into nonconformists is vividly exemplified by Marcia, Laura, and Belisa. All three characters subvert and usurp the cultural associations of order and solidarity ascribed masculinity. The conventional figure of protector played by the father or brother in most comedies is replaced here by these three women who collectively take on the role of imposing order on the wanton Liseo and other suitors by arranging marriages in their favor. Individually, they are vulnerable to the male deceit. United these women of moral and intellectual integrity are able to empower themselves in order to determine the fate of their male counterparts.

In *La traición en la amistad* the women band together through an intricate plan of disguises, falsified letters, and nightly trysts to subjugate the sexual and moral transgressions of men in the absence of male protection. This threesome outmaneuvers their male opponents and brings a feminized order to their wayward men. The story of Marcia, Laura, and Belisa intersects with and reacts to Fenisa's story. Zayas creates a female figure of disorder in Fenisa, the *esquiva*. She is a paradoxical female character functioning both as nemesis and as collaborator to the others in their struggle to secure husbands. I label Fenisa as a collaborator because she provokes and challenges her jealous friends, most of all their leader, Marcia, who sacrifices her own desire for Liseo

in order to help restore Laura's tainted honor by the same man. After Laura reveals that Liseo has betrayed them both with Fenisa, Marcia prepares a plan for revenge against Fenisa: "ya he pensado el remedio, / tal que he de dar a Fenisa / lo que merece su intento" (1032-1034). A scheme to punish Liseo is not mentioned until several scenes later. Belisa is likewise betrayed by Juan who has been enticed by Fenisa. Rather than pursue or castigate her unfaithful suitor, Belisa crafts a web of lies to overpower her female rival: "Más porque Fenisa pierda / la Gloria que en ti tenía, / vuelvo de nuevo a engolfarme" (1270-1273). Fenisa's sexual power over men is what pushes the women to design an ingenious plan of action and consolidate their strengths to secure their choice of husbands.

While Zayas comments on the positive elements of female solidarity as a means of self-empowerment and social order through the alliance of Marcia, Laura, and Belisa, she also creates a space for the autonomous Fenisa. Zayas denounces the prevalent perception of women reduced to the status of sexual objects and devalored as mere sources of pleasure. Her actions both articulate the dynamics between men and women and the relationship among women as they choose male company. She is bold in her criticism of the normalized immorality and hypocrisy of Madrid aristocracy, a theme that surfaces throughout the majority of the *comedias de capa y espada*.<sup>34</sup> Zayas, known for dramatizing the violent, dysfunctional and self-indulgent society of seventeenth century Spain in her notorious *Desengaños amorosos* provides a filtered yet provocative social criticism in her single play.

Zayas presents pro-feminist arguments for women's right to independence, freedom of speech and sexual expression for the female characters.<sup>35</sup> In the play, Fenisa



represents a claim for women's freedom in selecting their social status and their space within a gendered society. She is the nemesis of the other women because she exercises her rights as an individual; rights that are beyond the reach of the other women and men because they are constrained by strict gender and social rules. Because she lives alone, Fenisa is depicted as an autonomous woman who enjoys the leisurely life of socializing with the opposite sex and exists outside the social rules, similar to the character Ana in *La moza del cántaro*. Fenisa reminds us of a female *don Juan* who is sexually attracted to many men. She lives by an inverted set of rules, governed by her *gusto* and sexual desire. Rejecting societal rules, she has the freedom to indulge in many love affairs. Her narcissism provokes strong hostility from the opposing female front that considers her a threat in securing faithful husbands under their established feminized order. Zayas brilliantly contrasts these female stereotypes to create a space to discuss and critique women's identity in society; an identity that is not fixed. I find that Zayas is not attempting to reconcile these diverse female images or to homogenize women. What Zayas brilliantly accomplishes is a range of female characters and desires.

Conventionally, the title of the play, *La traición en la amistad*, is understood as a reference to Fenisa's offense – her betrayal of friendship. Fenisa represents the double-crossing friend who indiscriminately seduces all men and causes the outcry of her female friends. Her unleashed desire mimics those of the libertine men in the play, but it differs in that her emotional investment is greater – she loves them all. Yet Fenisa is the only character who is strongly vilified for pursuing these men. Yet, the fact is that she isn't aware that they are promised to other women until later in the play. I find the title's apparently misogynist accusation to be, on the contrary, a deliberate feminist stratagem in

order to denounce the unfair discrimination of women. This play goes beyond creating a didactic model for female friendship, as Wyszczynski and others contend. Zayas brings to the fore the paradox of female betrayal in a chaotic environment instigated by the betrayal of men. My position is that the author's title and intentions are multi-layered and should not be interpreted at face value considering there are more serious and pervasive underlying themes: sex, the objectification of women, independent women, and alternative lifestyles. In one instance, for example, the playwright presents the sexist perspective in Liseo's comment to León: "Marcia ha sabido / la gran traición de Fenisa" (2170). The characters persecute Fenisa significantly more than they do Liseo when it is he who abuses the promise of marriage for sexual conquests, a breach of the societal contract that markedly contributes to social decline.<sup>36</sup> Zayas first validates and then subverts the thematic primacy of female friendship in the play, in order to expose the misogynistic cultural agenda of women's dishonesty as the culprit of social evils instead of men's betrayal of their promise to marry. If the foundation of early modern Spanish society is marriage, and the men are the desecrators of the sacrament by their unfulfilled promises and "stolen virginities" (Barahona 2003, 6), then they themselves are the cause of social disorder and decline. In early modern Spain, women, their families, and their guardians brought to court many cases of *estupro* [defloration or rape] which accused a man of stealing a woman's virginity by deceptively promising marriage (6). Sexual coercion and abandonment produced serious legal and social ramifications. Barahona states that litigation was expensive and time consuming, multiple witnesses testified, and if the abuser was found guilty he was ordered to financially compensate the victim for her loss of virginity (44). The title *La traición en la amistad* refers to disloyalty between the

women. Yet after analyzing the play from this perspective, I contend that the title should be scrutinized since Liseo's breach of marital promise and philandering overshadows Fenisa's sexual misconduct. The title should also allude to the greater male crime or reflect unfaithfulness in broader terms. Zayas may be implicitly criticizing double standards by making Fenisa the scapegoat through the title.

My aim at this point is to replace Fenisa's infamous image as a sexual temptress with that of the independent woman who challenges societal norms and values. Zayas's claim for female solidarity in subverting masculine control and deceit is ingeniously juxtaposed with her contention that women be assertive individuals and assume command of their bodies. Fenisa is depicted as a promiscuous *esquiva* existing outside prescribed norms of behavior. She owns her house and lives by her own set of rules, which she calls commandments. A close examination of these commandments sheds light on Fenisa's iconoclastic philosophy. Fenisa lives by the principle of free will and pleasure that clashes with the self-denial demanded of women by the honor code. She also undermines religious mandates, since she breaks at least one of the ten commandments by obeying her own rules. Fenisa believes in living a life of "*ociosidad*" [leisure] and "*gusto*" [pleasure]. She promotes a maxim of "*entretenimiento*" [entertainment].<sup>37</sup> She is criticized for asserting her sexuality and for eluding marriage. Yet through her, Zayas draws attention to a woman with fearless unorthodox convictions about men: "tener uno solo es cobardia; / naturaleza es vana y es hermosa" (1475-76). Fenisa believes that women have a predisposition and a right to love many men at once: "Gallarda condición, Cupido, tengo, / [ ] / Diez amantes me adoran, y yo a todos / los adoro / los quiero, los estimo" (1463-1519). Brownlee astutely points out that Zayas

“acknowledges the complexity of human subjectivity” (2000, 161) in her prose; I find the same is true in *La traición*. In Act Three, Fenisa enjoys a picnic in the gardens of the Duke of Lerma with two of her lovers, Lauro and Liseo. Despite how offensive her life may be to some, Fenisa abides strictly by her principles of attaining happiness and love; she finds personal happiness in manipulating men: “no hay Gloria como andar / engañando pisaverdes.” Zayas succeeds in creating an *esquiva* that does not fit neatly into McKendrick’s model. Fenisa is an *esquiva* who does not reject men, but rejects marriage to men; she refuses to be confined in the oppressive institution of marriage yet wishes to experience the love of men. Breaking from societal constraints, she freely indulges in many love affairs in her own home. In my opinion, Zayas is reclaiming the derisive label of *esquiva* in an attempt to afford it a malleable meaning, open to interpretation. In the play, Fenisa’s irreverence towards the prescribed gender behavior and social expectations provokes strong hostility from the opposing female front that considers her a threat in securing worthy husbands. As an *esquiva* who is also a seductress, Fenisa is an iconoclast who destabilizes the social order by interrupting the symmetry of the couples. Marcia, Laura and Belisa judge Fenisa by traditional standards that equate the ideal woman with modesty and self-effacement. Belisa describes this female image, “ninguna mujer, / si se tiene por discreta, / pone en opinión su honor, / [ ] / no es buena / la fama con opiniones” (1764-1774). In contrast, Fenisa ascribes to a feminist set of values delineated in her commandments that completely ignore discretion or modesty as female qualities. For her, a real woman should demonstrate vanity, beauty, and love, as well as enjoy leisure time and various lovers; only weak and foolish women have one lover, while men have many (1476-1525, my translation).

As seen earlier in *La viuda valenciana*, women's *esquivez* or rejection of traditional expectations of decorum and marriage oftentimes drives the men to acts of violence caused by their feelings of emasculation. Fenisa's seductive power over men and their loss of control eventually engender violence. Her lovers, Liseo, Gerardo and Juan, begin to mention their own imminent death because of the ruinous effect Fenisa has on them. In an act of cowardly vengeance driven by jealousy and the reputed loss of his honor, Juan stabs Fenisa with a knife at her front door. A prevalent response to the violent incident by male and female characters is that justice was served. The conventional ending shows the three *tramoyeras* Marcia, Laura, and Belisa triumphant in subordinating their mates, insuring their material and social gain, and interrupting Fenisa's sexual agency. However, the recalcitrant Fenisa does not reconcile with society and therefore seemingly appears, to the audience, to be chastised by remaining unmarried.

A closer reading of certain gaps and discontinuities in the text discloses that there is no implicit criticism revealing a polarized depiction of women as either 'good' or 'bad.' Zayas's inclusion of assertive female voices existing within the confines of the dominant discourse undermines a homogenous interpretation of the characters, and instead reflects an incongruous paradigm for women in society. Marcia, Belisa, and Laura display different degrees of dishonesty, selfishness, and promiscuity. I find the solidarity they display to be rooted in their personal interests, not a caring friendship. The *gracioso* León voices his predilection for Fenisa several times. He rejects the ideal standard of women as the coveted image. León finds Fenisa superior to Marcia. He desires Fenisa, labeling her "la hermosa Fenisa;" moreover, he remarks, "Ah, sirena,

cómo encantas!" After listening to his master Liseo's exaggerated adulation of Marcia, León replies,

Parece que estás loco.  
Para qué quieres castas ni Dianas?  
Anda señor, pareces boquirrubio;  
para qué quiero yo mujeres castas?  
Mejor me hallara si castiza fuera  
[...] que si fuera mujer  
que había de ser tan agradable  
Que no había de llamarme nadie *esquiva*;  
dar gusto a todo el mundo es bella cosa. (I, 357-370)

León's admiration of the free-loving woman throughout the play heightens to the point of imagining himself as a woman who bestows pleasure. He seems envious of and fascinated with the sexual power of women. Sharon D. Voros makes an important point when she explains that León criticizes "the *exempla* tradition for making women believe in chastity to the detriment of men [ ] [Zayas] shows men as holding the images of strong women [like Marcia's] up to ridicule" (128). Marcia, however, is not lacking in hypocrisy since she wears a mask of female purity while herself betraying her suitor. Zayas requires the audience or reader to ask the following question: how does this character escape punishment throughout the entire play if she herself dishonors her betrothal to Gerardo through her indiscretions with Liseo? Furthermore, Marcia abandons her pursuit of marriage to Liseo after she discovers that he has already promised to marry Laura, hence Marcia is following the law not displaying female solidarity as oftentimes is suggested. According to Allyson Polska in her discussion of the legal repercussions in breached marital promises, "Once a man made that marriage promise, he could not marry someone else unless his former lover legally agreed to end their relationship" (90-91). Laura could accuse Liseo of bigamy if he were to marry Marcia. Marcia's resolve shifts from

acknowledging a marital commitment and obsessing over a desired husband to crusading for the fulfillment of her friends's marital promises to Liseo, don Juan, and Gerardo. After much consideration, Marcia figures prominently in Zayas's effort to criticize social hypocrisy and traditional ideals. I suggest that León's admiration of Fenisa's liberated ideals throughout the play, along with the attraction of the other men, bespeaks the sexual power of women. León also comments on the marvel of female love: "dar gusto a todo el mundo es bella cosa" (370). In the closing scene after all the characters have been coupled off to marry, León enviously solicits the men in the audience to call on Fenisa, "Señores míos, Fenisa, / cual ven, sin amantes queda; / si alguno la quiere, avise / para que su casa sepa" (III, 2911-2914). This aside from the fool is commonly interpreted as a mere sexist joke since the attraction between a servant and noblewoman is socially unacceptable.<sup>38</sup> However, the placement of the sexually empowered Fenisa at the front of the stage to be admired by all the men in the audience upstages her female rivals. Zayas presents an inverted *comedia* ending with a servant and an *esquiva* noblewoman facing the audience. Yet again the author subverts convention by de-centering the feminine ideal based on social and religious values, and evincing the sexual agency and *esquiva* status of women as both attractive and disruptive.

The constant displacements and reinscriptions of dominant values in the play should be interpreted as a dramatization of the heterogeneity of women, performativity of gender, duplicity of high society, and the hypocrisy of societal values such as honor and constancy. Due to Zayas's highly subversive style of writing, *La traición en la amistad* readily lends itself to a multiplicity of opposing readings that reflect a socially diverse portrayal of women in early modern Spain. Fenisa stands as a refreshing representation of

*mujer esquiva*, within the confines of a male-ordered society. In the end, she is not suppressed or forced to modify her actions, but instead heads off to find other lovers. Fenisa's *esquivez* both informs her power and autonomy, and foments subjectivity in Marcia, Laura, and Belisa by provoking them to achieve greater control of their lives, an empowerment they wouldn't have assumed without her.



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<sup>1</sup> Vollendorf's discussion of the topic in "Reading the Body Imperiled: Violence against Women in María de Zayas" and Greer's conclusions in "The (Self)Representation of Control in *La dama duende*" are insightful studies. Critical studies of rape and uxoricide in the *comedia* have mainly focused on honor plays such as Lope's *Fuenteovejuna*, Calderón's *El médico de su honra* and María de Zayas' *novelas, Desengaños amorosos*. Cristopher B. Weimer's article "Desire, Crisis, and Violence in *Fuenteovejuna*: A Girardian Perspective" (*El Arte Nuevo de Estudiar Comedias: Literary Theory and Spanish Golden Age Drama* Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996: 162-86) is an excellent exploration of the theory of mimetic desire and violence towards women. In her book, *Persephone's Girdle: Narratives of Rape in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literature*, Welles highlights provocative images of violence and rape in Golden Age literature. Vollendorf's research has contributed valuable insights into María de Zayas' writing on women and physical abuse in her book *Reclaiming the Body* and her article "Reading the Body Imperiled." See also Anne J. Cruz's article "Dorotea's Revenge: Sex and Speech Acts in Don Quixote, Part I" (*Bulletin of Hispanic Studies, Special Cervantes Issue* 82 [2005]: 615-632).

<sup>2</sup> Behrend-Martínez has contributed welcomed research in this topic: "An Early Modern Spanish 'Divorce Court' and the Rhetoric of Matrimony (1654-1715)," and, *Unfit for Marriage. Impotent Spouses on Trial in the Basque Region of Spain, 1650-1750*. Barahona's book *Sex Crimes, Honour and the Law in Early Modern Spain* is another valuable resource.

<sup>3</sup> Carrión states that "The Constitution of Cádiz of 1812 continued to protect a parent's right to arranged marriages" (ixv).

<sup>4</sup> According to Ferrer Valls, there is no substantial evidence to indicate that the play was ever staged, although on the manuscript in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, there are notes detailing the payment given to actors and the sales earned from a theatrical production (*La viuda valenciana* 57). Dixon and Profeti have tracked Lope's effort to recover, edit and publish his plays (1996, 45-63; 142-145, respectively). Their findings indicate that at the beginning of his career, Lope sold his originals to the *autores* (directors) which were copied and sold in the *comedia* market. Later on, when he decided to publish his works it became extremely difficult and practically impossible for him to recuperate his original work.

<sup>5</sup> When Lope began recovering and publishing his comedies, he decided to dedicate many of them to wealthy noblemen in the hopes of receiving financial compensation for the poet's gift of accolades (*Las dedicatorias de Partes XII-XX de Lope de Vega* 13). The case of *La viuda valenciana* is different since it is dedicated to his lover.

<sup>6</sup> Marta de Nevares Santoyo, born in 1591, was only thirteen when her parents married her off to Roque Hernández de Ayala, a Madrid merchant. Her marriage was sealed based on the exchange of her dowry for his financial security. She was forced to endure a loveless and abusive marriage until the age of twenty-six when she met Lope, according

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to research conducted by Marín, Vázquez Cuesta and Ferrer Valls. In Marta's efforts to separate and achieve independence, she continued to suffer significant physical and financial abuse from her husband. Even after Marta unexpectedly became widowed, her husband's exorbitant debt remained a debilitating and destructive source of pain for her (Vázquez Cuesta 101-107; Ferrer Valls 30-31). Lope assumed Marta's struggles from the inception of their love affair. He was not a bystander in Roque and Marta's abusive relationship, but was instead deeply embroiled in the turbulent interactions (*Cartas* XCIII).

<sup>7</sup> In the novella, the lady's independent attitude and strong will is softened by the god of love (de Armas 1993, 64).

<sup>8</sup> De Armas has demonstrated that Leonarda's decision to remain unmarried is firm, even after the earliest challenge where her maid Julia gives her a mirror to see her beautiful youthful reflection; the *carpe diem* motif is one that Fucilla had previously suggested ("Some observations" 4).

<sup>9</sup>

Quién no se goza  
de ver que, tan bella moza,  
tan santas costumbres crías?  
¿Ver hablar en la ciudad  
de tu mucho encerramiento,  
cordura y entendimiento,  
fama, honor y honestidad?  
Dicen que el Siglo Dorado  
nuevo estado ahora toma;  
que has hecho a Valencia Roma. (46-55)

<sup>10</sup> Other female characters whose beauty incites male aggression are Laurencia in *Fuenteovejuna* and Marcela in *El acero de Madrid*.

<sup>11</sup> The fear of a beautiful single woman's negative influence on a family honor is dramatized in *La corona merecida*, *La estrella de Sevilla*, and *La prueba de los ingenios* among many other plays.

<sup>12</sup> If the woman became widowed, her dowry would return to her control (Perry 17; Weisner 226, 229; Fenichel Pitken 208).

<sup>13</sup> In other plays, for instance in *La dama duende*, the playwright highlights the same financial abuse of women as I mention in my Chapter Three. Angela lives a clandestine life due to her deceased husband's considerable debt. Rodrigo, a friend of her brother, discloses her financial situation:

(...) su esposo era  
administrador en puertos

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de mar de unas reales rentas  
y quedó debiendo al rey  
grande cantidad de hacienda,  
y ella a la corte se vino  
de secreto, donde intenta,  
escondida y retirada,  
componer mejor sus deudas. (330-338)

<sup>14</sup> Marín finds that which is well-known today that Lope was deeply involved and affected by his lover's tormented marriage to Roque: "largos sufrimientos derivados de las desventuras de Marta y las necesidades de los hijos" (37).

<sup>15</sup> In a letter to the Duke of Sessa in 1618, Lope despairs "ni he comido, ni dormido, ni sabido si estaba en mí o en el proceso" (Carta 100). More information on the financial troubles of Roque Hernández and Marta de Nevares can be found in Vázquez Cuesta. Marta files for divorce and after long proceedings is granted a posthumous legal divorce from her husband the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1621, and one year after the publication of *La viuda valenciana* (101-107).

<sup>16</sup> If men traveled abroad or went to war, women were left in charge of marital finances and guardianship (*Guardianship, Gender, and the Nobility in Early Modern Spain* 48).

<sup>17</sup> Larson, (*The Honor Plays of Lope de Vega* 201, n. 78); see Marvin Bennett Krims's *The Mind According to Shakespeare* (Greenwood Publishing Group. 2006, 112); see Carl Jung's *Man and His Symbol* (Random House Digital, Inc., 1968, 97).

<sup>18</sup> McCrary and Weinberg have studied the hunt theme in early Spanish literature.

<sup>19</sup> According to García García, the Royal Court began to host *máscaras* on Fat Tuesdays during the carnival celebrations ("Carnaval y mascarar" 204). During the reign of Philip IV, the use of disguises and masks in carnival celebrations for the aristocracy was a conventional way to commemorate special occasions such as baptisms, birthdays, marriages and to welcome foreign royalty (Deleito y Piñuela 1988, 15). Lobato states that the function of these courtly *máscaras* was to immortalize important royal events in the history of Spain and Europe:

...tienen como objetivo salvaguardar para la historia lo ocurrido con motivo de una fiesta determinada, en la mayor parte fiestas cortesanas, pero también organizadas por ayuntamientos y entidades eclesiásticas, todas ellas vinculadas al poder político y religioso y deseosas de propaganda, además de ser las que recibieron suficientes medios económicos como para poder dejar testimonios escritos (245).

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<sup>20</sup> María de Zayas famously denigrated this practice. She accused Spain of being a nation of frivolous aristocrats who sought to augment their patrimony not by conquering new lands but by the conquest of women's lucrative endowments (*Desengaños amorosos* 505-506).

<sup>21</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup>-century French romance, *Partonopeus de Blois* first breaks the misogynist depiction (*Invisible Mistress* 19). In 1476, the twenty-sixth *novella* of Masuccio Salerniatone's *Il Novellino* (1476) revamps the storyline. A century later Bandello's twenty-fifth tale in *La quarta parte de le novella del Bandello* (1573) develops the plot (*Invisible Mistress* 24). According to de Armas, in the *comedia de capa y espada* genre, *La viuda valenciana* is the first comedy to apply the plot of the invisible mistress. Lope borrowed the theme from the Italian tale, not from 1513 Spanish translation of *Partonopeus de Blois* circulating in Spain nor from Book Two of Céspedes y Meneses' *El soldado Píndaro* (1626) from which Calderón fashioned his disappearing mistress in *La dama duende* (*Invisible Mistress* 47).

<sup>22</sup> The darkness in the *tramoyera*'s scheme is connected to the myth of Cupid and Psyche included in Apuleius' *Metamorphosis* (de Armas; Enrique Rulls; J. M. Aguirre; and Honorio Cortés) and to the reworking of the "invisible mistress" theme from Bandello's *novella*.

<sup>23</sup> The mind as a stimulator of love is identified in Lope's epistle "Belardo a Amarilis" in his collection of poetry *La Circe* (1624): "Yo os amo justamente, y tanto crece / mi amor, cuanto en mi idea os imagino / con valor que vuestro honor merece" (*Invisible Mistress* 34-36).

<sup>24</sup> Griswold Morley and Buerton's in-depth study of *La moza de cántaro* concludes that Lope wrote this play before 1618 and partially revised it in 1625 (222). Díez Borque and Wagner contend that the play must have been performed at court between 1625-1626 given its poetic eulogy to King Philip IV and Queen Isabel in Act Three (63; 98, respectively). Shergold and Varey have documented a performance in 1627 (1-5).

<sup>25</sup> McKendrick, (*Woman and Society* 155-157); Jaime Fernández, "Esencia del amor y valoración de la persona en "La moza de cántaro" de Lope de Vega"; and, see Georges Guntert, "El arte dramático de Lope Vega: división de la fábula y estructura del discurso" in *El siglo de oro en escena. Homenaje a Marc Vitse*. Eds. Odette Gorsse and Frédéric Serralta. (Université de Toulouse II-Le Mirail, France: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2006: 449-465).

<sup>26</sup> Other plays by Lope that focus on the agency of two *tramoyeras* are *La prueba de los ingenios* and *Las bazarrias de Belisa*.

<sup>27</sup> This technique is much like Miguel de Cervantes's in *El laberinto de amor*.

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<sup>28</sup> In the *comedia de capa y espada* genre, many unmarried, noble women appear as supporting characters who live an independent life without a male guardian, for example, Beatriz in *La dama duende*; Marcela in *El acero de Madrid*; and Fenisa in *La traición en la amistad*.

<sup>29</sup> A subtext of Lopean literary criticism comes through in her disparaging remarks. María, like Serafina in *El vergonzoso en palacio*, indirectly attacks acclaimed writers, such as Góngora and Quevedo, who were Lope's adversaries.

<sup>30</sup> In Act Two, she herself expresses how her role as Judith was a divine calling: "Pero la mano piadosa / del cielo quiere que espante / a un Holofernes gigante / una Judit valerosa" (821-824).

<sup>31</sup> The author questions the notion of speech as a value marker through the servant Martín, who, like León in Zayas's *La traición en la amistad*, expresses his preference for the rustic female: "tal vez agrada un prado / que un jardín cultivado" (1202-1203). León tells his master Lisardo, "Parece que estás loco; / ¿Para qué quieres castas ni Dianas? (...) / ¿Para qué quiero yo mujeres castas? / Mejor me hallara si castiza fuera. (...) / Perdona si te digo / que tú eres el tonto, / si de castas te aficionas" (357-381).

<sup>32</sup> Agustín de Amezúa and Eduardo Rincón view Zayas's writing as a true reflection of a harsh seventeenth-century Spanish society, while Matthew Stroud recognizes her grotesque style as a literary tool to depict the contradictions and tensions of a defining period in Spanish history in *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (Vol. 8 of *Biblioteca Selecta de Clásicos Españoles: Serie 2*. Madrid: Aldus, 1948); and in "Prólogo" *María de Zayas y Sotomayor. Novelas ejemplares y amorosas o Decamerón español*. (Madrid: Alianza, 1968: 7-21) respectively. Maravall interprets Zayas as employing "spectacle" fiction as an instrument of control and therefore an advocate of the dominant ideology (cited in Brownlee *The Cultural Labyrinth of María de Zayas* 19).

<sup>33</sup> Sullivan, ("Love, Matrimony and Desire 83-99).

<sup>34</sup> In Act One, Lisardo's servant León makes a detailed reference to the duplicity of the court of Madrid regarding the salacious relations between the courtiers and the *fregoncillas* [promiscuous women] that entertain their *gusto* [desire]:

¡Pese a quien me parió! ¡Que no hay tal cosa,  
como las *fregoncillas* que estos años  
en la corte se usan.[...]  
de las *fregoncillas* cortesanas  
no hay que decir, pues ellas mismas dicen  
que son joyas de príncipes y grandes, [...]  
Con éstas se regala y entretiene  
el gusto, y más cuando se van al río,  
que allí mientras la ropa le jabonan,

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ellas se dan un verde y dos azules;  
y no estas damas hechas de zalea  
que atormentan a un hombre con melindres  
y siempre están diciendo: “dame, dame.” (298-349)

<sup>35</sup> Wilkins has observed Fenisa’s “freedom of sexual expression” in her reading of the play (114-116).

<sup>36</sup> Luna comments on the decay of society due to an increase in promiscuity in Spain (30).

<sup>37</sup> Fenisa evokes the successful, confident and uninhibited Samantha, from the long running HBO television series (1998-2004) “Sex in the City.” Like Fenisa, Samantha does not apologize for her power, sexual or otherwise, over men. The two boast about their insatiable sexual appetite, and for this reason are perceived as behaving like men.

<sup>38</sup> In contrast, Campbell interprets this final scene as an insult to men:

In her function as *lo varonil*, the males who deride Fenisa’s behavior and demise, laugh at hegemonic patriarchal hierarchy and masculine desire itself. In point of fact, they laugh at themselves. Either way, it seems that the parting joke at Fenisa’s expense may be, in truth, on the men of the audience. (486)

#### **4. SEX AND DESIRE THROUGH THE EYES OF THE TRAMOYERA**

##### **4.1 Sex and Desire**

The ubiquitous portrayal of sexually active women who flout social norms of discretion and chastity informs the subversive nature of *capa y espada* plays. The genre examines female desire and sexuality in a number of plays that offer valuable insight into female identity: 1) female desire stimulated by common intellectual and moral pursuits with men; 2) female expression and correspondence of sexual desire; 3) feminine embrace of sexual desire; and 4) female sexual seduction and abandonment and the quest for retribution. Contrary to women's contained sexual expression in many canonical works, *comedias de capa y espada* offer a broader scope of women's sexual experience in society. In this chapter, I explore to what extent the depiction of sexually active *tramoyeras* in these *comedias* corresponds to the real, historical experiences of women in early modern Spain.

Seventeenth century treatises on women and sexuality primarily analyze legislative, judicial and medical issues. Given the scarcity of documentation on the history of women's sexuality, only a patchwork of women's actual sexual knowledge, attitudes and experiences is recoverable. Despite these challenges, there are insightful historical studies that have enhanced our understanding of women and their attitudes toward sex. In *Sex, Crimes, Honour, and the Law in Early Modern Spain*, Renato Barahona offers a fascinating study of the criminal lawsuits of Vizcaya's Royal Chancellery from 1528-1735 concerning sex crimes that reflect early modern litigations throughout all of Europe. His work provides striking information on courtship customs, sexual practices and attitudes, and sexual abuse toward women. What makes his research

valuable to this study is the documentation of women's sexual attitudes and experiences documented through the lawsuits that they brought forth against men and the trial records that were in turn produced. According to Barahona,

Accusations for *estupro* [defloration] were invariably brought before the authorities by women, their families, and guardians (*curadores*) -when the victims were legal minors or orphans- and occasionally by the authorities on the women's behalf. Ravishment or defilement, then, was a male crime; as victims, females became plaintiffs; as offenders, males became defendants. (7)

Extrapolating from these female litigants' accounts, Barahona is thus able to determine generally consistent courtship patterns:

Typically, the woman details that *before* seduction and sexual relations had occurred, the man for some time – for months or even years – had made a series of explicit amorous advances known to many in the community. These actions could be good-natured in the form of affectionate expressions, both oral and written (*palabras amorosas, cartas de amor, recados*); physical displays of affection (*besos, abrazos, caricias*); presents or tokens of friendship (*regalos, dádivas, prendas*); and flattery (*halagos*). The advances could also be presented as serious requests (*ruegos, solicitudes*), more insistent persuasions and inducements (*persuaciones, inducciones*), and, finally, patently unwelcome and ominous pursuit and harassment (*perseguidimientos*) (9).

During lengthy courtships, and most significantly after the man's promise of marriage, engagement or betrothal, couples often had premarital sex (*Sex, Crimes* 14). According to Barahona, seduction was yet another form of behavior even if more private and hidden. The reasons for seduction often were selfish and fraudulent, and remained essentially prohibited sexual affairs:

The world of seduction, therefore, was one of carefully calibrated promises and assurances of means to ends; of calculated deceptions and duplicities; of subtle guile and cunning; of numerous secrets (...); of secret vows, pledges, and promises (...); of secret rendezvous and meeting places; of surreptitious entries into victims' homes; of secret hours; of lies and misrepresentations



to entice, persuade, and trick; of go-betweens and proxies to carry messages, money, and gifts to elude the ever-alert public eye; and of poignant silences out of fear of parents and families and out of justifiable concern for reputations in the court of public opinion.  
(14)

Human sexuality as it was presented in early medicine has its roots in humoral theory stemming from the Greek physician Hippocrates's theory of bodily fluids (blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm) as determinants of human physiology. He believed physical illness or weakness was due to an irregular distribution of humoral fluids and erotic desire was connected to the blood humor (Traub 83). His ideas on the bodily humors were later supported and expanded by the Greek physician Galen (131-200 AD) whose system of anatomy became the foundation of early modern medicine. The Renaissance physician Juan Huarte de San Juan's treatise on human psychology and physiology, *Examen de los ingenios* (1575), developed Galenic humoralism even further. According to Huarte, the distribution of the four humors: choleric (heat), melancholic (dryness), sanguine (coldness) and phlegmatic (humidity) constituted the physiological difference between man and woman (406).

Since women were naturally cold and humid while men were hot and dry, they sought the heat of men through sexual intercourse.<sup>1</sup> Like Galen, Huarte claimed that a woman was the inversion of a man, possessing testicles and a uterus inside the body (492). Huarte refers to Aristotle, when he claims that women must be cold and humid in order to menstruate and be fertile. Yet a woman's lack of heat and her dryness also causes her lack of *ingenio* [wit] and her proclivity toward *bobería* [feeble-mindedness] (493, 496, 497). Huarte's misogynist theories reiterate the idea of women's identity as

directly tied to a perverted misconception of their fertility, sexuality, and simple-mindedness.

These medical theories influenced the proscriptions that theologians and moralists imparted to control sexual impropriety and premarital sex. Despite the effort to cultivate modest and virtuous behavior attitudes about sex in early modern Spain were lax. Some moralists began to take a pragmatic approach to safe-guarding social beliefs and values. A case in point is the humanist Fray Antonio de Guevara. In his didactic work *Epístolas familiares* (1539), Guevara preached *vergüenza* [shamefulness] and not *honestidad* [chastity] as women's primordial virtue, since he was aware that sexual activity was a reality. Instead of urging abstinence, he emphasized the concealment of sexual activity: "Yo confieso que es más peligroso para la conciencia, empero digo que es menos dañoso para la honra, en que sea la mujer secretamente deshonestas, que no que sea públicamente desvergonzada (*Obras Completas* 322). Family honor needed to be protected at all costs. Sociological studies show an increase in *niños expósitos* [foundlings] in the seventeenth century (*Casadas, Monjas* 165). Reasons for the hike in child abandonment include plagues, poverty and the stigma of illegitimacy (Perry 161-162). Women who became pregnant often abandoned their infants in *Cofradías de niños expósitos* or in convents.

The feminist exploration of dramatic representations of courtship, seduction, love and desire yields substantive insight into early modern women's sexual experience. Judicial sources such as those studied by Barahona, inform us that women, like men, often disregarded official social norms:

there is evidence of widespread benevolent tolerance and laxity on premarital sex, especially when linked to the promise of marriage and other assurances. More to the point, while some couples seemingly skirted ecclesiastical

teachings while engaging in premarital sex, they appear to have done so in accordance with long-standing accepted local customs and views. (1996, 54)

In the following study of *El acero de Madrid* [The Steel of Madrid] by Lope de Vega, and *El vergonzoso en palacio* [The Bashful Man at Court] by Tirso de Molina, I will show how the female characters express desire and sexuality, one through the appropriation of the codes of an illness, and the other through the appropriation of language.

#### **4.2 *La falsa opilada* Theme and Women's Sexual Experience in Lope de Vega's *El acero de Madrid***

*El acero de Madrid* by Lope de Vega is a spin-off *comedia* of *La discreta enamorada* staged in 1606, months after the Spanish court returned to Madrid from Valladolid.<sup>2</sup> The Hispanist Stefano Arata dates the composition of the play to be approximately between 1607-1609, and most probably petitioned by the city for the celebrations of the Festival of Vera Cruz in May (20).

The play is often overlooked as generic *comedia*, given its conventional treatment of themes, such as love intrigues, secret trysts, and love and honor. This *capa y espada* play, however, not only addresses women's sexual pleasure and sexual agency, but is most strikingly different from the other plays in that its topic is pregnancy. Pregnant women are noticeably absent from the Golden Age stage despite the fact that many female leads have sexual relations with their lovers. In *El acero de Madrid* the real risk of sexual intercourse outside of marriage materializes in a pregnancy. Lope's rendition of the literary motif *la falsa opilada* [the fake anemic girl] addresses fascinating issues of

female sexual experience that are normally excluded from *capa y espada* plays. In what follows, I examine closely the female protagonist's choices and actions as she role-plays as *la falsa opilada*, and how Belisa's agency serves to present sexuality and pregnancy as central issues for women.

The title of Lope's play alludes to Madrid's famous water, which was said to contain high quantities of *ferrum* or iron, considered beneficial for one's health and delivered through the city's beautiful fountains. Many people traveled to the city for its curative and reproductive powers. As documented by Close, women of means arrived in Madrid "to take the iron mineral water as a cure for the fashionable woman's disease of opilation" (221). The main plot of *El acero de Madrid* treats the story of Belisa, an astute young woman in love who deceives her father and aunt into thinking that she is sick in order to take curative strolls in the park and secretly meet her lover. *El acero de Madrid* includes a play within a play in which Belisa pretends to be suffering from anemia in order to circumvent social norms of enclosure, freely moving within a society delimited by strict moral boundaries and, as a result engages in premarital sex.

The *tramoyera*'s accomplices are Beltrán (her lover's uninhibited servant) who plays the role of the doctor; and, her lover Lisardo who performs as his intern. Daily exercise for Belisa takes place in the gardens of El Prado de San Jerónimo<sup>3</sup>, La Huerta del Duque, and the Manzanares river; at the time, these were popular meeting places for trysts. It is in this paradisiacal landscape of blooming flowers and intoxicating natural aromas – a *locus amoenus* - that she fulfills her sexual desires. From the beginning, Belisa assumes an empowered position by dictating roles and performing the *opilada* in her pursuit of sexual freedom. What the reader does not realize until the end is the truth

behind Belisa's role-play that is her illness as an *opilada* is intended to hide her pregnancy. Lope de Vega brilliantly creates a female character that pulls-off a double deception: first, her father is unaware that she is engaged in a sexual affair; and second, both her father and the audience are clueless to the fact that she is pregnant until the last Act, at which point, the audiences surmises that she has been pregnant in Acts One and Two as well.

As previously mentioned, the play's central theme is anchored in the poetic motif of *la falsa opilada*, popularized in the anonymous ballad or romance "Niña del color quebrado" [Girl with the Pale Complexion] collected in the songbook *Flor de varios romances nuevos y canciones* (1589) (Arata 31). This popular literary motif mocked the medical disorder classified as *opilación*, a form of chlorosis or greensickness.<sup>4</sup> Greensickness is also related to womb hysteria, it is a disorder or "a frenzie of the womb" produced by a strong sexual desire.<sup>5</sup> According to the physician Gregorio Marañón, the word "opilada" signifies "stopped up" "which refers to a retention in the flow of menstrual blood" (59-60, my translation). Young unmarried women were generally diagnosed with *opilación*, which was classified as a type of anemia. There were numerous theories as to the exact cause of *opilación* and much debate over its very existence.<sup>6</sup> Some Renaissance medical writers explained its etiology in a lack of iron brought on by blood loss in menstruation.<sup>7</sup> Women were told to marry and have children, or to intake iron. Prudencio, Belisa's father, voices this theory when he states "casarla es buen acero" [marrying her is good iron](1420). Other physicians believed the illness was brought on by ingesting clay. The consumption of pottery or *bucarofagia* resembles the modern disorder known as geophagia- a craving for earth or clay among pregnant women

due to a lack of minerals (Helen King 103).<sup>8</sup> Another interpretation of the popular practice in consuming clay in early modern Europe was that eating clay produced a whitening effect on the skin. Porcelain or marble-like looking skin exemplified the female ideal of beauty, and women aspired to attain this coveted appearance. The female obsession for a pale complexion impelled women to use extreme methods. In the introduction to Lope's play, Arata addresses this bizarre behavior:

Entre las jóvenes de clase noble comer barro se convirtió en una de esas actitudes patológicas de extremado refinamiento (como la manía de ir en coche de caballos o la pasión por los chapines altos) que suscitó la burla de los escritores y la condena de los moralistas. El barro se podía comer en pastillas confeccionadas con azúcar y ámbar, o directamente se consumía la arcilla en trocitos rompiendo las vasijas de casa (las más preciadas eran los búcaros portugueses de Estremoz).(30)

In Act One, Belisa hides a pot of clay in her sleeve (*Sáquele de la manga un barro*) (v. 883) to appear as if she has an appetite for clay. She performs the role of the *opilada* to trick her father Prudencio: “Yo voy fingiendo, (...) / que estoy descolorida y opilada / para engañar un padre tan celoso...” (175-177); her father believes that Belisa has really fallen ill from this common female disorder: “de haber comido / del barro portugués / (...) / sospecho que está opilada” (298-300). Belisa is able to convince the theater audience that they are her accomplices through the use of asides. However, the truth about Belisa's pregnant condition is hidden from everyone, including the spectators.

In the seventeenth century there were opposing theories on the causes of *opilación*. Some physicians contended that *opilación* was an obstruction of the humoral passages that caused intestinal problems and loss of menstruation (King 83). The swelling of the belly was symptomatic of the illness. Many young women were given clay to eat in order to slow down hemorrhaging during the menstrual cycle. This was also

considered a form of birth control since the lack of menstruation prevented ovulation (King 9).

Conversely, a woman who showed physical symptoms of *opilación* was sometimes taken for being with child (King 8). Therefore, *opilación* was often used as a guise to hide an unwanted pregnancy, as in Belisa's case. The ballad mentioned above alluded to the duplicity of young women, "Niña del color quebrado, / o tienes amores o comes barro. / (...) / dice la gente, / que aunque comes yeso, / lo echarás con hueso / su tiempo llegado" (cited in Arata's introduction 31). The audience is first informed of Belisa's pregnancy when Beltrán, the make-believe doctor, makes a candid observation of her swollen belly: "Es gran cosa: / aquella hinchazón acuosa / va gastando y deshaciendo. / Dale la vida ver gente." (1163-1165). The implicit meaning of "dale la vida ver gente" suggests that being out in public, that is, leaving the house to secretly meet Lisardo, has given her new life – literally, that of a child in her belly.

In the play, Belisa initiates her performance as the *falsa opilada* by revealing her melancholic symptoms:

Siento una gran soledad  
de hablar y tratar con gente, (...)  
Aquí sobre el corazón  
se me ponen unas cosas  
que me quitan, enfadosas,  
la vital respiración. (...)  
...no me deja mirar, (...)  
Tras esto, la opilación  
que esto me suele causar,  
tampoco me deja hablar  
y apriétame el corazón. (345-368).

Melancholy was typically known as the lover's sickness or *mal de amor*. It developed as a popular literary motif that inspired the courtly love poetry of French medieval

Provençal jongleurs and following amatory traditions as it evolved in the Italian Renaissance. For example, the Italian philosopher Marsilio Ficino wrote extensively about the Neo-platonic model of heroic melancholy, famously theorizing that the melancholic humor (black bile) was the physical stimulus for imagination and genius (Angela Voss 41). In the Baroque plays melancholy weakened lovers and resulted in tragedy (*Diccionario de la comedia* 169-170). An imbalance of the melancholic humor was said to produce negative emotional, physical and mental symptoms: insomnia, sadness, fear, jealousy, loneliness, desperation, hallucinations, anger, and obsession. In the early modern period, women suffering from melancholy were thought to suffer from chlorosis or the green-sickness.

The play poignantly reflects and filters these theories on women's physical and psychological conditions, and the social practices that surrounded females entering womanhood. I argue that Lope contests the labeling of natural sexual desire as the "disease of virgins." Instead, his focus on female desire and sexuality clearly recognizes women's healthy sexual identity. In an effort to cure his ailing daughter, Prudencio unaware of the deception, calls a doctor. The servant Beltrán plays a satirical role as the doctor that produces much comedy, he also serves to highlight women's medical concerns through his allusions to important figures and their ideas on the female body and sexuality: the ancient Greek physician Galen, the Persian physician Avicenna (who taught about the importance of eroticism for a healthy body), and the Spanish sixteenth-century physician Andrés Laguna (father of modern psychiatry who sought organic causes to explain mental illness). Laguna explored the relationship between material substances, the humoral body, sexuality and psychology. Similar to Laguna's medical



treatment of patients, Beltrán prescribes medicine that has strong sexual connotations to treat Belisa's melancholy.<sup>9</sup> The love doctor recommends three treatments, all of which contain sexual allusions. Belisa must receive *jarabe* [syrup], consisting of iron, celery, and herbs before going to sleep (336-342; 2318). According to Arata, *jarabe* is a sexual euphemism for sexual intercourse (170, n.342).<sup>10</sup> Beltrán describes this syrup as “es tan blando y suave, / alegra la sangre bien” (II, 1239-1240). Then he recommends that Belisa take water with *acero*<sup>11</sup> [steel] every morning for four days and digest it by taking long strolls – *pasear el acero* - along the city parks (115, n.385). Beltrán prescribes these actions to Belisa in accord with early modern medical techniques. Arata explains that the ingestion of water with steel was believed to fortify those suffering from *opilación* (115). The Spanish doctor Andrés Laguna, referenced in the play, was known for his research on curative effects of steel water (Covarrubias).<sup>12</sup>

Outdoor activities such as promenading in the fresh air, as Beltrán recommends, were also believed to enhance sexual desire: “[...] a beautiful woman becomes ardent, she takes great pleasure in coitus [...] after she has walked or ridden a horse for a great distance [...]” (Solomon 35). The doctor's cure includes improving Belisa's sight, speech and activity outdoors in social environments; essentially fulfilling all of her desires in order to overcome the *opilación*. Strolling and socializing in Madrid was a popular pastime. In *La mujer, la casa y la moda*, Deleito Piñuela summarizes the impressions of many foreign travelers on audacious female behavior and speech in public:

Por la extraña mezcolanza de cosas opuestas que reinaba en aquella sociedad, el recato exigido a las jóvenes, lindante con la adustez y con la gazmoñería, era compatible con el lenguaje crudo y aun desvergonzado que empleaban no solo las mujeres, incluso las solteras, entre sí, sino en sus charlas con los hombres. En las

tertulias de ambos sexos era frecuente recitar versos, a veces indecorosos, de los que se oían en coplas por las calles; y, según en sus *Navidades* nos cuenta la Carabajal [*sic*], lo hacían más ellas que ellos. (104)

Belisa is further sexualized by the symbolic healing ring she is given to wear. There is an *uña de alce* [a sliver of moose hoof] mounted on the ring. In medieval lore, the hoof is said to have curative and aphrodisiac powers. Reay Tannahill notes that “The lady of courtly love was often shown in association with a unicorn, a fierce beast which instantly became meek at the sight of a virgin” (260). She underscores the animal’s artistic value as a symbol of chastity. By contrast, in the play, the medieval beast symbolizes virility and sexuality. Legend says that if a person inserts the nail in one’s ear he will be cured (Arata 116, n.409). Arata notes that popular culture often confused the moose with the unicorn as we see happen when Beltrán points out that the ring carries the nail of a unicorn, “No (...) / esta es de cierto animal / que a las mujeres adora” (423-424). There is powerful sexual imagery in the invocation of Belisa’s ear representing the vagina and Lisardo’s mouth touching her ear. For example, the sexual allusion appears while Belisa lies on the lawn at the park after a fainting spell and Lisardo attempts to revive her with water and words, “quiero decirle al oído / unas palabras notables” (889-890). Her guardian aunt curses her niece’s questionable behavior through a figurative reference to her ear: “tu oreja ociosa.” Lisardo is represented as the unicorn that cures Belisa’s illness. The association of the phallus with the unicorn is inevitable. Medieval legend says that only a virgin can capture a unicorn (Odell 26). In the upside-down world of the *capa y espada*, Belisa, a woman who has willingly lost her virginity, instead lures Lisardo.

In the early modern period, depression in women was commonly diagnosed as an awakening of female sexuality. Oftentimes, the treatment recommended by doctors for melancholy was sexual release (King 63). The German physician Johannes Lange (1485-1566), considered chlorosis (melancholy) to be psychosomatic or a disorder provoked by forced chastity in women. He referred to the disease as *morbus virgineu* [virgin's disease]; or *febris amatoria* [lover's fever]. Many physicians of the period recommended "therapeutic intercourse" (Groneman 346). It was in marriage where a woman could experience morally and socially acceptable sexual intercourse. For this reason, many parents precipitated wedding arrangements to cure their ailing daughters (Traub 84).<sup>13</sup> In *El acero*, Belisa's father, seeks this age-old remedy after every other treatment has failed to relieve his daughter's anxiety: "Yo quiero,... / casar mi hija, que es el mayor medio / para desopilalla" (1380-1382). Unbeknownst to him, Belisa has already been *desopilada* willingly and driven by her own will, out of wedlock.

The female erotic experience was a fundamental teaching in Arabic texts such as *The Canon of Medicine* (1025) by the Persian medical authority Ibn Sīnā also known as Avicenna in Latin (Traub 86). Lope de Vega espouses female eroticism by creating a love doctor who cites Avicenna on several occasions. The health benefit of sexual pleasure was a widely shared medical view opposed by the Church. It was the Italian surgeon Realdo Colombo in *De re anatomica* (1559) that reiterated the Greek discovery of the existence of the female clitoris (Traub 88). Medical treatises taught that orgasm caused the discharge of toxic humors that cleansed the body (83). To achieve orgasm, men were advised to learn how to give women pleasure through erotic talk and sensual touch. In Arabic and Latin medical treatises, men are taught to learn how to speak to

women in order to arouse them sexually. In *Speculum al foderi* [The Mirror of Coitus], the anonymous fifteenth-century Catalan treatise on sexual intercourse for men, the author reveals how women are seduced: “[...] first, by sight, and second, by hearing what is said” (trans. Solomon 31). These ideas surface in the play through the sweet words of Lisardo that serve to seduce his love interest. In the park, he speaks secretly into Belisa’s ear revitalizing her weak body and mind. Belisa describes Lisardo’s expertise through insect imagery:

Parece que una abejita,  
cuyo tierno pico adoro,  
con un susurro sonoro  
que todos mis males quita,  
un panal de miel sabrosa  
en el oído me hacía. (901-906)

Sexual desire stimulates Belisa’s imagination transforming Lisardo into a buzzing bee, as earlier it made him into a unicorn that heals her. The sweet honey, just like the earlier syrup and water, are metaphors for orgasms. His sensual words are associated with the sweetness of nature’s honey. The metaphor “tierno pico adoro” is a sexual innuendo both as a reference to his verbal eloquence and his affectionate lovemaking, a sensation of pleasurable pain as that of the sting of a bee. She ends the romantic encounter by ordering him to leave: “Vete agora,” to which Lisardo retorts, “Bien le ha sabido el hablar,” confident of his rhetorical ability. Later on Belisa voices her cure, an allusion to her fulfilled sexual desire, “Hállome muy aliviada / de aquella melancolia” (1245-1246). The characters continually employ and deploy speech that has sexual connotations. Through her words Belisa suggests that she and Lisardo have had sexual relations in the park. This is later confirmed when the news of her pregnancy is revealed in the last Act: “¡Nunca a Manzanares fuera! / (...) / allí honor, manchado fuiste” (2744, 2747).

The association of an illness to sexual longing has been clearly shown with psychic and somatic suffering that derives from *opilación* and *melancolía*. There is yet another interesting reference that follows this imagery in the play. Belisa emphatically communicates the pain of repressed desires and feelings to her aunt just before fainting:

Yo me moriré por ti.  
Enciérrame con mi mal,  
mátame melancolia.(...). (836-838)

¡Plega a Dios que crezca el mal  
y reviente el corazón,  
y que en aquesta ocasión  
me dé una gota coral! (849-852)

She ends her painful cry by stating her desire to experience epileptic seizure (“gota coral”), a metaphor for sexual pleasure that the Golden Age audience would have understood. The historian Thomas Laqueur underscores the ancient analogy of orgasm to epileptic attack, propagated by Galen and first theorized by Democritus (46); it was commonly depicted as a variation of epilepsy in Christian tradition since Clement of Alexandria’s association in *Paedagogus* (63, n. 258). The alterations in a person’s sensations, state of consciousness, and uncontrolled bodily movements experienced in sexual fulfillment mimic those evidenced in an epileptic attack. Through the metaphor of epileptic seizure, Belisa is able to implicitly express her sexual longings.

The subtle details that Lope incorporates in the representation of female sexual pleasure further convey an important departure in the conventional depiction of women in the *comedia*. An example is Belisa’s somnolence, an odd detail to include in a play but yet significant in this case. The recurring theme of female sleep begs further exploration as both an indicator of sexual activity and pregnancy. Sleep was highly recommended in medieval guides on health and sex such as the *Speculum al foderi* (97). In the play, the

physiological need to sleep is alluded to on several occasions: Beltrán takes notice of Belisa's slumber on a house visit: "¿No está, señor, levantada esa niña?" (1157). When she finally appears, Belisa is still waking up and says, "Más aliviada me siento" (1208). Once again, her words underscore the physical and emotional wellbeing that sexual climax produces. Moreover, Belisa narrates her sexual experience to Beltrán through metaphorical references in a dream she had at the park when she fell asleep for one hour:

Fui hasta la Casa del Campo,  
en cuyas flores me estampo,  
y un hora me duermo allí;  
parecióme que soñaba,  
al son de una fuente pura,  
que un ángel en hermosura,  
talle y discreción me hablaba;  
que mil cosas me decía  
jurando tenerme amor,  
y por Dios, señor doctor,  
que el alma me enterneecía;  
quiso abrazarme también,  
y desperté. (1225-1238)

She proudly describes her sexual experience in terms of a dream vision. In line with the earlier mentioned sexual imagery, the beautiful angel that whispers in her ear represents Lisardo and his amorous speech: "discreción me hablaba; / que mil cosas me decía/ jurando tenerme amor." Belisa reveals Lisardo's seductive dialogue that aroused her being: "el alma me eternecía." His masterful sensual discourse has an intense effect on her, to the point of stimulating the depths of her soul. Given the context I would argue that Belisa mentions her soul not because of her spiritual or platonic relationship to her lover but because of her sexual connection to him. If we follow this logic, the allusion to her soul may carry with it significant associations of sexual intercourse and orgasm. My reasoning is based on the belief by some thinkers of the time that the extreme pleasure of

sexual experience was intimately linked to a person's soul. Lacquer mentions, for example, that the early Christian author Tertullian and his "traducianist" theory of the soul's genesis claims this to be true (46). For Tertullian and his followers, man and woman re-engender both the soul and the body at the time of impregnation and in this way pass it on to their offspring. Conception was widely believed to occur during the orgasmic experience of the lovers. Tertullian explains the phenomenon:

I cannot help asking, whether we do not, in that very heat of extreme gratification when the generative fluid is ejected, feel that somewhat of our soul has gone out from us? And do we not experience a faintness and prostration along with a dimness of sight? This, then, must be the soul producing seed, which arises from the outdrip of the soul, just as heat fluid is the body-producing seed which proceeds from the drainage of the flesh (47).

To recapitulate, the function of Belisa's account of her dream in the park is threefold. First, it stands as a metaphoric revelation of her sexual relationship with her lover therefore exposing an illicit involvement between the two. Second, the chimerical illustration recognizes female erotic dreams and thus enhances the depiction of active female sexuality. Third, it foreshadows Belisa's pregnancy, thereby increasing the threat to her family's honor and compromising the family patrimony through imminent progeny. It may be noted incidentally, that the ancient physician Rufus of Ephesus, a contemporary of Hippocrates, recommended diminishing sexual desire in virgins by avoiding erotic talk and dreams (Shaw 163), precisely the pleasures that Belisa explores. Belisa asserts herself subjectively in the way she engages in erotic talk with her lover, experiences sexual dreams and publicly narrates her private daydreams to Beltrán, Octavio and her aunt. It is essential to recognize the substantial social transgression of

feminine modesty committed by this *tramoyera* in the implicit revelations of her unchaste thoughts.

Moreover, Lope's pervading ridicule of renowned physicians' methods of treating women is intriguing. He criticizes unsound diagnoses and remedies for female illness through several characters. Prudencio expresses this opinión when he denounces his daughter's worsening medical condition: "...con más opilación que antes la veo, / que no está sana de sus males creo. / De qué ha servido el médico, el jarabe, / el paseo, el acero y las mañanas / de todo un mes?" (2145-2149). The playwright offers alternate causes of *opilación* by suggesting that female repression provokes psychological and physiological disorders; for example, Belisa angrily accuses her aunt of mental abuse, "riñe, riñe, no repares / en que me das mil pesares, / yo me moriré por ti / (...) / enterrada, aún no dirás / que estaré bien recogida!" (835-848). He also intentionally seeks to inform his audience about healthy sexual desire in women and dispel erroneous beliefs about female illness. Women were not predisposed to illness by nature of their deficiencies, but instead by social and cultural conditioning. Hence, in a symbolic move, the playwright gives Belisa's father the voice that reveals the secret of his daughter's pregnancy. This is the single instance in a *comedia de capa y espada* where a pregnant woman been found out, let alone by her own father. This seems to suggest various meanings: one, the parent is ultimately responsible for the daughter's health and should be receptive to women's general well-being; and the other, male honor loses to female desire. It is the parent who conforms to female reality; male authority submits to female will. Prudencio confides his discovery of the truth to his sister Teodora:

... no están jamás en rostros colorados.  
¡Opilada y color! (...)



Hablemos declarados:  
yo he sospechado destas estaciones,  
sotos, huertas, paseos, quintas, prado  
que alguna vez que te dormiste, hermana,  
dejó Belisa el coro de Diana. (2164-2170)

Later, Belisa herself reveals her pregnant condition to Teodora in the following parallel scene: "...que mi opilación / creció / de manera / que jamás me he visto / tan pesada y necia./ (...) / este bulto / que bien habrá cuatro [meses] / que pisé las hierbas" (2359-2374). Teodora offers advice on how to resolve the precarious situation of an unwanted pregnancy: "...en pariendo, en un convento / tu libertad recoger, / adonde sirviendo a Dios / hagas penitencia desto" (2393-2396). Convents were shelters for pregnant young women who needed a safe place until childbirth and then give up the child without jeopardizing their honor. Unwilling to follow this advice and confronted with a surely dire situation, Belisa ingeniously schemes a way to reach her lover. Both she and Beltrán use cross-dressing as a means to escape Prudencio's ire. Belisa dresses with a cape, sword and *vaqueros* ( *un sayo de falda larga* or a long skirt for herdsman) and her sidekick dons a *manto* in order to leave the house in search of Lisardo. Once again, Belisa epitomizes female self-empowerment on the stage by taking on the role of cross-dresser while she is with child. She protects her rights even through risky behavior. Lope's tramoyera is unparalleled in her versatility and self-assertion.

In the final Act, Belisa's predicaments escalate. Her love affair is threatened by an unlikely male rival Riselo, Lisardo's closest friend. Lisardo and Riselo share a loyal and unconditional bond. For most critics, the close relationship between the two men depicts an adolescent brotherly friendship. Arata considers the men's struggle to emancipate from each other the manifestation of the psychological distress experienced at the

threshold of independence and adulthood (47). The possibility of a marriage between Belisa-Lisardo disturbs their male companionship. The relational triangle between Belisa, Lisardo and Riselo is unconventional in the *comedia de capa y espada* since it is usually a man who fights to break up a couple. Belisa's strength as a woman will help Lisardo transcend adolescence into manhood by teaching him to prioritize love between a man and a woman over brotherly love.

Yet, I would add that Lope inserts overt homosocial allusions in the conversations between Lisardo and Riselo, despite the fact that most critics choose to disregard any trace of homoeroticism. Despite Arata's assertions regarding the innocent boyish play between the two male characters, I would argue that the marked undertones of homoeroticism trigger even further Belisa's evolution as an assertive female character. According to Roberto J. González-Casanovas "homophilic constructions of friendship [were] inherited from classical antiquity (Aristotle and Plato via the Church Fathers and Arab scholars)" (168). In the thirteenth century, the foundation of a harmonious society was believed to depend on male supremacy. González-Casanovas notes that "Aristocratic idealizations of same-sex friendship and companionship find expression in chivalric epics, romances, and treatises, as well as in vernacular reworking of classical ethics (found in *Siete partidas*, parts 2 and 4) (165). Early modern secular and religious authorities continued to uphold this homophilic paradigm while, at the same time, its contestation became more prevalent in the theater.

In *El acero de Madrid*, Lope de Vega criticizes male homophilic relationships as disturbing the foundation of society based on the union between a man and a woman. It is important to consider the progression of the male camaraderie in the play between

Lisardo and Riselo, as well to scrutinize the overt references to homoeroticism between the two men. In the pursuit of women, both men demonstrate a deep bond and loyalty towards each other. Surprisingly, once they secure their female companions, they appear to lament their imminent separation and renege on their plans of marriage. Fearful of losing each other to women, Lisardo and Riselo are ready to risk everything to stay united. Lisardo will give up his love: “Ya ni quiero a Belisa / ni en mi vida la veré...” (1619-1620); “Ay, Riselo, echa de ver / que hallarás otra mujer / y no hallarás otro amigo!” (1656-1658). Riselo responds loyally: “Lo mismo te digo yo. / (...) / Hoy a Marcela he dejado: / mira si tu amigo soy” (1829-1830).

At this point in the play a masculine-attired Belisa and a veiled Beltrán set out to find Lisardo. Belisa plans to scare her lover into thinking Beltrán is a pregnant mistress seeking retribution. The pregnant Belisa vicariously reveals her real condition through Beltrán’s role, which portrays an inverted representation of Belisa. This cleverly inverted image is unique in a *comedia de capa y espada*. Lisardo finds himself in a precarious situation when he is confronted by Belisa and Beltrán in disguise. Beltrán insists that Lisardo knows who she/he is: “Soy vuestra esclava. / Diome una dama el consejo / de que me viniese así, / porque si no ya tuviera / la panza como una cera” (3037-3041). These significant words reveal her pregnancy and claim Lisardo’s obligation as father. Belisa is victorious in her strategy to gain leverage with Lisardo through the revelation of her pregnancy by way of Beltrán. Lisardo immediately yields to her appeal: “En obligación estoy, / a lo que por mí pasáis” (3051-52). Furthermore, in breaking the male bond between Lisardo and Riselo, Lope subverts chivalric homophilic ideals that obstruct heterosexual love and desire. In the end, Prudencio finds Lisardo and confronts him for

deflowering his daughter. Ultimately, Lisardo offers to marry Belisa out of love and not fear. Lope also breaks away from conventional endings by showing the marriage between lovers of different social classes; Lisardo is poor but can match Prudencio in honor. Belisa managed to sever the contractual ties between Prudencio and Octavio and the homosocial bond between Lisardo and Riselo in order to marry her own choice of husband.

Lope's *El acero de Madrid*, satirizes preconceived notions of women to show how these biases condition female pathology. The fact that Belisa's *opilación* is a front for agency suggests that women may well manipulate and use to their advantage discourses, such as the medical, that have been largely deployed to limit their agency. In this manner, female subjectivity and sexuality are foregrounded. Belisa exemplifies the new woman, one who is aware of her sexuality and desires to experience mutual pleasure with her partner. Lope attempts to enlighten his public on women's issues and contests repressive attitudes toward sexuality. Belisa's actions focus on issues such as the normalcy of female desire, the possibility of a sexual life as an unmarried woman, and the reality of pregnancy outside of marriage. Contrary to the sexually engaged female characters in other *comedias de capa y espada*, Belisa stands as an equal to Lisardo as concerns sexual activity, but surpasses all the men in the intelligent way that she wields the power she has as a woman.

#### **4.3 The Language of Female Desire and Dissent in Tirso de Molina's *El vergonzoso en palacio***

Tirso de Molina's exploration of language and its use to manipulate or create social realities is a predominant theme in many of his plays. In *El vergonzoso en palacio*

Tirso exposes the social and political crises that stem from the language of seduction, such as the promise of marriage. At first glance, the linguistic seduction of three distinct characters in the play seems to produce symmetry of action. However, and more importantly, the power of language used to seduce is quite irregular. Each seduction is linguistically distinct mapping the lineage and intentions of the speaker. The differences dramatize major concerns with the range of manipulation in the language of seduction used in Spanish society. Unlike courtship, seduction flouts social rules and involves secrecy and deceit.<sup>14</sup> The seducer controls the victim. The present analysis is solely concerned with female agency in the act of seduction, namely the case of Madalena. A summary of the other two cases is necessary in order to assess the greater significance of female desire vis-à-vis male desire. The first seduction case that sets the drama in motion presents the Conde de Estremoz's seduction and abandonment of Leonela, the sister of Ruy Lorenzo, the Duke of Averó's secretary. This sexual deception illustrates two prevalent societal problems: 1) the abuse of social standing and entitlement to obtain sexual favors; and, 2) the abuse of the verbal promise – a commitment to legally marry – as a means to facilitate sex. The second case of seduction, already explored in chapter II, is the Conde de Penela's seduction of the Duke of Averó's daughter Serafina in her bedroom at night. The fearless count hides his identity by pretending to be don Dionís, the man represented in a portrait with whom Serafina falls in love.<sup>15</sup> In the first case, a count seduces a woman of low social standing; in the second case, a count seduces a woman of higher lineage. Of the two, only the latter seduction by the Conde de Penela is more likely to be punishable by law due to the social rank of the victim.

This study intends to draw attention to the more significant power of female language and desire as exemplified by Madalena's seduction. Throughout the play, Madalena struggles to subvert contracts that favor patriarchal hierarchies through linguistic negotiations in order to fulfill her own desires of marriage. Tirso shows how female language, both written and spoken, undermines the privileged position of male writing and speech, thus facilitating an agency that will allow these women subjects to determine their own fate. The main actions that drive the plot are the following: Madalena manipulates her father by convincing him to have her love interest set free from prison to be employed as her secretary; she selects her own husband; she does so against monarchical written orders; and, she bravely accepts the repercussions of her transgressions despite the fact that in the end the lover turns out to be an aristocrat, thereby eliding the social instability that may have arisen by a socially unequal marriage. What is remarkable about the *tramoyera* in this play is that she courageously undermines the crown's negotiation of her marriage. I now will examine the various uses of language deployed by Madalena in order to show how she assumes her agency in society.

Female desire is placed against the backdrop of male desire in *El vergonzoso en palacio*. The dramatic premise moves around the conjunction of male desire and documents written by men. The written word has supremacy over men's actions and evinces the privileged status of written social contracts. Forgery, the subversion of the written truth, is at the center of the political strife of one plot, while the authority of royal licenses regarding marriage contracts controls the other plots. The Duke of Averro, Madalena's father, first confirms his daughter's marriage after receiving a royal letter: "Esposo te dan los cielos / (...) / el conde de Vasconcelos. / A su padre el de Berganza, /

pues que te escribió, responde; / escribe también el conde” (519-525). The monarch marries aristocrats in order to keep aristocratic properties in line with monarchical rule. The royal letter should dictate the marital fate of Madalena and the Count of Vasconcelos; however, the order from the palace does not ultimately determine the betrothal of the eldest daughter. This is one of few plays on the Spanish golden age stage that showcases a female lead who challenges the monarchy. Madalena stands out as a heroine ultimately deciding whom she will marry and subverting the authority of the monarch’s written word.

Through the interplay between spoken and written language Tirso traces Madalena’s evolution from a passive daughter to a woman of agency. In Madalena’s first appearance, her speech reflects the notion of constructed gender in that she voices the cultural discourse of female identity imposed by the male hierarchy. In Act One she accepts her father’s marital arrangement by reciting to him the expected rhetoric of the ideal obedient daughter. Her initial submissive stance resembles a wax image that can be molded:

MADALENA	Mi voluntad es de cera; vuexcelencia en ella imprima el sello que más le cuadre, porque en mí solo ha de haber callar con obedecer.
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DUQUE	¡Mil veces dichoso padre que oye tal!. (I 938-943)
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Tirso initially introduces Madalena as an obedient daughter who recites in a purely mechanical way the ideology which has interpolated her and with no evidence of individual thought. Madalena appears as a model for marriage exemplifying modesty and silence. Conduct manuals insisted on these restrictive female qualities to ensure societal

order. As Ann Rosalind Jones has pointed out, in early modern society as a whole, moralists believed “that women’s speech opened them to irresistible sexual temptation, that articulateness led to promiscuity,” and ultimately that “in a woman, verbal fluency and bodily purity are understood to be contrary conditions” (78).

Yet Madalena’s critical thinking is awakened when she witnesses a foreigner named Mireno stand up to her father to defend his honor, despite his inferior class. This new experience induces her self-discovery. She has never before witnessed someone challenge her father and the judicial law. Mireno stands up for the truth above social caveats, regardless of being jailed for freeing a traitor. Madalena identifies with this outsider’s principles and is transformed by his brave words. She is moved to feel unfamiliar sentiments of compassion, desire, and individualism. Most importantly, she respects his righteous dissent. The result is that she falls in love with Mireno and desires him as a lover and husband. The tension between her desire for Mireno and her obligation to her father and the monarchy plays a major role in Madalena’s conscious development of her own free will. From this point on, Tirso brilliantly dramatizes the process of female individuation, drafting a character who thinks for herself and reasserts the value of her own desire.

Madalena begins to reveal her attraction to Mireno privately. The theatrical aside is the first medium through which Madalena’s self-searching thoughts are expressed. Tirso repeatedly uses asides to offer women the opportunity to reveal their own thoughts. Through this dramatic technique the playwright comments on the private and public dichotomy with its ramification of shame and silence imposed on women.



As the action unfolds, Madalena exposes greater depth of character through various soliloquies. The asides convey to the audience her interior conflict: the uncontrollable passion she feels for Mireno battles with her commitment to obey her father and accept the marital arrangement in place. In the first scene of Act Two she questions her old values: “(...) la vergüenza / mi loco apetito venza”; in the second scene she states,

...la honrada calla  
y la otra dice su mal.  
Callaré, pues que presume  
cubrir mi desasosiego,  
si puede encubrirse el fuego,  
sin manifestalle el humo. (99-104)

Madalena's struggle between desire and reason echoes the dangers of desire as signaled by Juan Luis Vives's treatise *Instrucción de la mujer Cristiana*. Vives advised young women not to fall in love. He writes that because women are vulnerable to love and its overpowering and ominous effects, the wisest course is to leave marriage arrangements to parents, for they who marry for love “shall lead their life in sorrow” (Vives 335).

Nonetheless, Madalena gains new and revealing appreciation for desire through speech, calling to mind Hélène Cixous's call to end women's silence: “By taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, [ ] women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence” (351). Cixous emphasizes the exigency of female speech to reassert the value of women's voice in society. Initially, Madalena follows this approach to self-empowerment by manipulating men through her language. Her first step is to give voice to and negotiate her needs and desire to the duke. Aware of the authoritative value of written contracts in society, particularly for her father, she cunningly persuades him

that in order to write an eloquent letter to her promised husband she must learn how to write properly with the aid of a secretary, Mireno:

(...) Sabiendo escribir tan mal  
quien quiera que se quedara  
en palacio, y me enseñara,  
porque en mujer principal  
falta es grande no saber  
escribir cuando recibe  
alguna carta, o si escribe,  
que no se pueda leer. (II 278-582)

Convinced of the contractual importance of Madalena's correspondence with his future son-in-law, the duke accepts her plea and choice of tutor. Madalena saves Mireno from imprisonment by making him her personal writing tutor and simultaneously facilitates the time and space needed to communicate her desire for him.

In contrast to the seductions mentioned earlier in *El vergonzoso en palacio*, a duke's daughter seduces a man of lower station. Mireno's seduction, which she initially believed to be a simple endeavor, becomes a complicated affair for Madalena. Tirso carefully presents Madalena's evolution from object to subject through her discovery of the power of language. At first, Madalena attempts to communicate with Mireno by utilizing what she describes as the only alternate escape valve available to an honorable woman, the language of signs. The physical demonstration of love by means of the eyes and body is a codified language, for women especially, that transmits messages that complement and supplant verbal language. The effectiveness of body language depends on several factors: gender, spoken words, and nonverbal signs. In the second soliloquy, Madalena vividly struggles with silence and body language as a type of pseudo-voice developed to escape censorship of female speech:

(...) las llamas tiranas

del amor, es cosa cierta  
que, en cerrándolas la puerta,  
se salen por las ventanas;  
cuando las cierran la boca,  
por los ojos se saldrán;  
más no las conocerán,  
callando la lengua loca; (II 107-114).

Her words poetically evoke the female struggle to free oneself from the confined body.

Madalena invokes the Neo-platonic theme that love is transmitted through the eyes as her initial form of communication. Mireno thinks that she loves him because of the way she communicates with her eyes. He convinces himself of her attraction, "...por el balcón de sus ojos, / no he visto su voluntad? / Amor me tiene" (271-274). The demonstration of love through physical signs is a codified language transmitted but only partially understood.

As their contact increases, Madalena attempts to express her love for Mireno through different communicative techniques. Since she is bound by the female standard of modesty, she conveys her thoughts through implications, nuances and figurative language to a man who only understands male direct speech. Spoken language is gendered and structured differently for Madalena and Mireno. Madalena expresses herself through implicit and indirect discourse while Mireno communicates only through literal and direct language. They are both confused with each other's systems of communication to the point where it seems they speak two different languages. In this manner, and most poignantly through this story of desire and seduction, Tirso eloquently dramatizes the impotence of men and women to understand and interpret each other's communicative systems.

It is also important to note that the development of Madalena's subjectivity coincides with the Mireno's process of objectification. Madalena's efforts to actively solicit and seduce Mireno emasculate rather than empower him. When communicating with her, Mireno assumes the stereotypical feminine traits of shame, silence and fear that Madalena previously displayed: "Vergüenza: ¿por qué impedes / la ocasión que el cielo os da?" By contrast, Madalena becomes an assertive woman by being the pursuer and seducer. Failure to communicate her desire effectively triggers Madalena's ascension toward linguistic subjectivity as she becomes more uninhibited in her verbal pursuit of Mireno. However, while she begins to articulate desire more directly, Mireno grows silent. Unfortunately, Mireno's fortitude and bravery exist when directed to other men, but disappear only with women of a higher social status.

Aware of her failure in communicating desire, Madalena decides to literally slip and fall into his arms, touching his hand and saying,

Sabed que al que es cortesano  
le dan, al darle una mano,  
para muchas cosas pie. (II, 1152-1154)

Her clever play on words is meaningless to Mireno "que enigma es darme pie / la que su mano me ha dado?" This expression has several meanings: "Dar pie" signifies to give a motive for something; the foot also has sexual connotations. Madalena's euphemistic foot metaphor has a long tradition. The Dominican Jean-Baptiste Labat while traveling through Spain in 1705 observed, for example, the sexual value given to female feet:

Las mujeres que van a pie por las calles jamás se recogen sus faldas ni sus guardapiés, por mucho barro que haya; es más decente recoger un pie de barro y de porquerías que dejar ver la punta del pie, porque una mujer que deja ver su pie a un hombre le declara por eso que está dispuesta a concederle los últimos favores. Por otra parte, los españoles

tienen ciertas reglas de proporción con relación a los pies,  
que son tan ridículas que sería desagradable para mí el  
referirlas. (189)

Madalena's reference to her foot is a covert attempt to court Mireno in a sexual manner. She does not slip but clearly takes his hand. More importantly this action symbolizes a betrothal, one that, in this case, is designed by the woman. She assumes the subject position and transforms him into the object. Mireno instead misinterprets the hand and foot locution as permission to teach her proper writing etiquette for the purpose of composing love notes to Count Vasconcelos.

It is noteworthy that Tarso, Mireno's page, correctly deciphers Madalena's pragmatic riddles. The illiterate servant is literate in popular rhetoric - implicit discourse, idioms, and metaphors and therefore is able to translate the meaning of Madalena's words to his master:

¿Más muestras quieres que dé (...)  
¿Puede decirlo más claro  
una mujer principal?  
¿Qué aguardabas, pese a tal,  
amante corto y avaro,  
que ya te daré este nombre,  
pues no te osas atrever?  
¿Esperas que la mujer  
haga el oficio de hombre? (...)  
¿En qué especie de animales  
no es la hembra festejada,  
perseguida y paseada  
con amorosas señales?  
A solicitalla empieza, (...)  
Habla; no pierdas por mudo  
tal mujer y tal estado. (285-305)

In line with the role reversals in the play, it is the low-class lackey who educates Mireno on how to be a man. Tarso emphasizes the masculine qualifier of direct speech "*habla*." When Mireno confides that his shyness [*vergüenza*] inhibits his ability to speak to

Madalena, Tarso is confused about his master's feminized qualities. Madalena's higher status has emasculated Mireno being that his lower class makes him feel inferior and socially unworthy of her love. Tarso pushes his master to be assertive: "habla, o yo se lo diré." For the servant, desire erases social limitations.

Mireno continually ruminates over the linguistic cues and physical signs he believes could signify her attraction:

Mas después el afición  
con que me honra y favorece,  
las mercedes que me ofrece  
su afable conversación  
el supenderse, el mirar,  
las enigmas y rodeos  
con que explica sus deseos,  
el finger un tropezar  
(...), el darme  
la mano, con la razón  
que me tiene en confusión... (321-332)

For Tarso, Madalena's performance represents typical female linguistic seduction: "Es rodeo / y traza para saber." Tarso's ability to comprehend Madalena's communicative system demonstrates that women and the lower classes share similar conventions of language. Tarso advises his master to put aside reason and to use his heart, "Desenvuelve el corazón," as an attempt to render his stoic master emotional. Mireno is uneducated in the complexities and nuances of language and seduction and can only understand direct communication and rational behavior; Madalena's idiosyncratic behavior is unintelligible to him.

Soliloquies are fundamental for character development in a play, for it is at these private moments when the character's thoughts are revealed to the audience. Madalena and Mireno's soliloquies contribute to our understanding of women and men's verbal

language and body language. Madalena asks herself, “Si me ama, / ¿cómo calla don Dionís?” “Ya le han dicho que le adoro / mis ojos, aunque fue en vano; / la lengua, al dale la mano / a costa de mi decoro;” “...aún diciéndoselo yo / podrá ser que no lo crea” (429-440). She struggles to decode Mireno’s unresponsive demeanor given her presumably clear communication. She tries to interpret his physical cues, facial expressions and linguistic brevity to no avail.

Once again, she strives for verbal directness: “...abiertamente / le declararé mi amor, contra el común orden y uso.” The truth is however that the next discursive medium is equally complex; she prepares a dramatic performance. Madalena had already embodied the role of actor/director from the time when she devised Mireno’s appointment as the duke’s secretary. Mireno himself acknowledges her directorial authority: “La que nos dio libertad, / desta liberalidad / es la autora” (II, 338-340). In line with her role as actor/director, Madalena designs a more nuanced performance. She decides to reveal her true love for Mireno by *acting* as if she is talking in her asleep; and dreaming about a romantic conversation between the two of them. However, the meaning is produced on three levels: with regard to the dream; with regard to the somniloquy involving a conversation; and, with regard to Mireno, the audience of the performance. Although Madalena believes her dramatic performance will clue him in on her feelings of love and desire, Mireno appears lost between reality and dream. When he enters her room for the daily lesson, he believes from her body language that she is asleep: her eyes are closed and her hand is holding up her cheek. Tirso highlights Mireno’s literal interpretation of body language. For him, the scene evokes the myth of Courtly Love and Madalena is the ennobling spirit: “¡Hizo el Autor soberano / de nuestra naturaleza / más

acabada belleza?” (473-475). Her beauty is divine next to his low status: “...es la reliquia divina, / y mi humilde boca, indina / de tocalla” (478-480). Madalena calls out to him when he tries to leave, asking questions and giving answers. Mireno screams from the shock of her chimerical disclosures. The actress plays two roles in the somniloquy, herself and Mireno. Her cross-gendered performance is a unifying motif that evokes her sister Serafina’s male performance in an earlier scene. Madalena advises Mireno to speak up: “La lengua tiene de hacer / ese oficio” (552), “Hablad,” “Pues hablad,” “Declaraos.”<sup>16</sup> Demonstrating her perspicacity for reading men, she eloquently summarizes Mireno’s fundamental concerns: “Temo perder por hablar / lo que gozo por callar,” “la desigualdad .../ entre los dos / me acobarda” (562-63). Madalena demonstrates a highly developed skill with which to decode male facial expressions, body language and linguistic behavior. Women have the ability to derive meaning from observation since they themselves have to compensate for the lack of speech. She offers her wisdom:

La igualdad y semejanza  
no está en que sea principal,  
o humilde y pobre el amante,  
sino en la conformidad  
del alma y la voluntad. (599-603)

She suddenly awakens to hear Mireno surrender to her histrionic performance. Madalena insists that he repeat what he has heard, a common technique in effective communication. She presses that he tell her: “Decídmelo;” “Mucho lo deseo oír / acabad ya, por mi vida;” “Acabad, / que estáis Don Dionís pesado” (645-658). When he finally repeats that *she* loves him, she denies it, leaving Mireno stunned and confused. Madalena rejects him in order to protect her honor, the same thing he is trying to protect. Her objective is to



manipulate Mireno into declaring his own unconditional love for her. Mireno does not comprehend Madalena's retraction because he believes he has expressed his love clearly with "palabras tan resueltas." According to Madalena's needs, he has not communicated his love for her explicitly, only in an indirect manner. Both gender and class factor into this problematic situation. Madalena is limited by the social prescriptions on modesty, silence, and obedience imposed on noble women. In the same way, Mireno must respect the rules of courtly behavior and is obliged to act respectfully with Madalena, as a subordinate and not as an equal.

Madalena's final linguistic undertaking to seduce Mireno reaches a comical crescendo in the battle of the sexual nuances and metaphors pertaining to syntax and writing tools. Madalena confronts Mireno in front of her father, the person who at the beginning of the play elicited the foreigner's brave words. She challenges Mireno's masculinity in front of another man by asking him to cut a quill for her and then angrily throwing it to the ground because it is too short. The quill is a ubiquitous symbol of the phallus in early modern literature. The frustrated gesture by Madalena is meant to criticize Mireno's poor writing skill and diminished masculinity, hence pressuring him to act out. She is trying to elicit another proclamation from him to her father, this time concerning his love for her. When Mireno asks why she threw the quill down, she responds: "Siempre me la dais con pelo." The play on words rhymes with her suitor Vasconcelos, in an effort to inflame his jealousy. Also, the mention of hair is a reference to Spanish expressions "tener pelos en la lengua" - to be afraid to speak one's mind; and "tener pelos en el corazón" - to have a cold heart. The sexual nuance in *pelo* adds yet another dimension of sexual imagery, alluding to the lack of passion in Mireno. As a

result, Madalena begins to continually raise her voice in frustration and anger while communicating with Mireno: “¡Qué amigo que sois de corto!”; (*Enojada.*); (*Pruébala* [la pluma] y *arrójala.*); “¡Ay de mí!” (1142- 1163). Mireno withdraws from this exasperation and states, “No he de hablar más en mi vida;” “Vergüenza, sufrí, y calla.” On the other hand, the duke responds to his daughter’s behavior without much authority at all, “Madalena, reportad.”; “¡Qué mal acondicionada sois!” (1146). The duke’s power over his daughter has diminished.

Finally, the focus shifts from women’s spoken to written language. The delivery of a letter from the Conde de Vasconcelos stating his imminent arrival for his wedding ceremony is a pivotal moment in the play. The Conde de Estremoz announces the news:

CONDE        Mañana llegará aquí;  
                   porque trae tan limitada,  
                   dicen, del rey la licencia, (...)

DUQUE        ¿No me escribe?

CONDE        Aqueste pliego.

DUQUE        Hija: la ocasión llegó  
                   que deseo.

MADALENA (*Aparte.*) Saldrá vana. (1164-1173)

The political importance of the written document in official matters is highlighted in this exchange. However, Madalena’s peripheral comment “*saldrá vana*” clearly indicates that she will decide her marriage and subvert the hegemony imposed through male writing. Madalena’s linguistic epiphany occurs once she grasps the reality that female agency depends on a conflation of both written and spoken language. Tirso plays up this moment of lucidity through stage directions: Madalena takes the quill and writes -“...*pónese a*

*escribir ella.*” She gives Mireno the letter to read and tells him to do as she instructs in writing. Mireno reads the letter and clearly understands that he should wait for her in the garden that evening. Their communicative impasse disappears. From the balcony, Madalena calls him up to her room “Entrad, pues mi vergonzoso,” transforming him into a man of action “adios vergüenza.” The brave seduction is a serious social transgression on the eve before her marriage to Vasconcelos. At this point, however, she is indifferent to the fatal consequences of her transgressions.

The following morning, Madalena’s agency plays out by informing her father that she is already married: “Aunque el recato / de la mujeril vergüenza / cerrarme intente los labios / digo, señor, que ya estoy / casada” (1530-1534). This declaration of self-assertion in choosing her own husband demonstrates that she has assumed subjectivity, and has evolved from her initial subordinate position at the beginning of the play - “...en mí sólo ha de haber / callar con obedecer” - to the empowered woman that has verbal and legal power, “*digo, señor, que ya estoy / casada.*” Tirso portrays Madalena in the role of authority, encroaching on her father’s role. She exemplifies the notion that the subject is constructed through direct and unrestrained speech. In the last scenes, Madalena is the individual who controls language confidently.

MADALENA	El cielo y amor me han dado esposo, aunque humilde y pobre, discreto, mozo y gallardo.
DUQUE	¿Qué dices, loca? ¿Pretendes que te mate?
MADALENA	El secretario que me diste por maestro es mi esposo. (1536-1542)

With the words “el cielo y amor me han dado esposo” Madalena’s linguistic manipulation works in her favor, reiterating the same words her father used on her earlier, “Esposo te dan los cielos” (II, 519), while adding the importance of love to equalize Mireno’s low social standing. Cunningly, she then blames her father for his choice of secretary: “El secretario que me diste” (III, 1540). In turn, the duke orders Madalena to close her mouth after she claims her rights.

DUQUE	Cierra el labio. ¡Ay desdichada vejez! Vil: ¿por un hombre tan bajo al conde de Vasconcelos desprecias?
MADALENA	Ya le he igualado a mi calidad amor, que sabe humillar los altos y ensalzar a los humildes.
DUQUE	(...) Dárete la muerte.
LAURO	El secretario de mi sobrina, vuestra hija, es Mireno, a quien ya llamo don Dionís y mi heredero.
MADALENA	----- Don Dionís está en mi cuarto y mi recámara. (1543-1567)

Madalena subverts inter-class marriage prohibitions. It is assumed that Madalena and Mireno have shared a bed, where they make the promise of marriage to each other. The verbal promise, even in secrecy, involved a formal agreement between couples; the physical consummation completed the union (Carrión 122). It is Madalena who carefully machinates and generates the marital pledge. She has accomplished Mireno’s seduction and gained his hand in marriage.

In this final scene, Madalena subverts the authority of the written contract with the power of her words. At this point, she is fully individualized by bravely taking accountability for her social transgressions and affirming her new status as a wife of lower lineage. Madalena's marriage will not maintain or elevate familial social status and wealth. More significantly, Madalena rebuffs the royal decree supported by her father: "Hija: el rey te honra y estima; / cuán bien te está considera" (I, 936-937). This poses a significant problem for the duke; he has an obligation to the king. The duke threatens his daughter's life in response to her reckless indifference of royal authority that puts his life in jeopardy. The king has sent a written pardon of treason for Mireno's father. Nevertheless, in the end, in typical *capa y espada* style, Mireno is revealed as a noble, Madalena has not committed an act of *lese majeste* after all, and her life is spared from her father's death threat.

In *El vergonzoso en palacio*, Tirso de Molina dramatizes female agency through Madalena's appropriation of female spoken and written language with the ultimate aim of seduction. My contention is that Madalena's defiance of the king's written marital mandate and her seduction of Mireno convey an assertive woman who is undefined by patriarchal discourses of power and who forges her own identity. Mireno's sudden new aristocratic lineage is simply a conventional way of saving the *comedia* from turning into a tragedy, and need not fully determine our reading of the play. Madalena's command of both spoken and written representation of desire lays bare the illusoriness of the language and meaning as residing exclusively in the realm of masculine power and agency.

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<sup>1</sup> Heiple clarifies the effects of the disproportion of a humor: “A superabundance of heat (choler) would create a strong imagination capable of producing poets, artists, inventors, and such, depending on the degree of excess. An excess of dryness (melancholy) would create a strong intelligence or judging faculty, making for good philosophers, judges, and mayors, for example. An excess of coldness created a strong memory, making good Latin student. (...) The fourth quality of humidity (phlegm) did not create a distinctive personality. (...) Since males were determined by an abundance of heat and dryness, they enjoyed the highest mental faculties of imagination and reason, whereas, women because of their humidity could have only a strong memory, which Huarte thought to be of little use” (123-124).

<sup>2</sup> *El acero de Madrid* is also said to have inspired Molière’s well-known farce *Le médecin malgré lui* (1666) (Eugenio de Ochoa, *Tesoro del teatro español desde su origen*. Nabu Press, 2012, 549).

<sup>3</sup> Defourneaux offers a seventeenth century commentary on the high number of prostitutes in the Prado: “It is useless to search for the home of the chaste Diana in the Prado, nor the temple of the virgin dedicated to Vesta. But one can certainly find Venus and blindfold love (...) Meanwhile these sinful women have acquired the freedom of the city” (71).

<sup>4</sup> In 1615, Medical Professor Jean Varande coined the term “chlorosis” to describe the malady that caused a greenish complexion on young women. He derived the name from the Greek word *chloris* which signifies greenish-yellow. In the Renaissance, the disorder was regarded as a decrease in menstruation (Guggenheim 1).

<sup>5</sup> Nicolas Culpeper, *The Fourth Book of Practical Physick, of Women’s Diseases* (1684) (cited in Traub 393, n.40). Greensickness and hysteria caused mental problems (Turner 277). In *The Technology of Orgasm: “Hysteria,” the Vibrator, and Women’s Sexual Satisfaction*, Rachel Maines underlines that genital manipulation to orgasm was the prescribed remedy for hysteria from the fifth-century BC to the twentieth-century (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999, 394, n. 43).

<sup>6</sup> In the early 1900’s, chlorosis disappeared from medical records in the 1920s-30s (King 4). In 1936, Gregorio Marañón, one of the most prominent Spanish physicians of modern times, contended that:

[as for] this illness, which has appeared in millions of classical medical diagnoses; which has greatly influenced the lives of women (and, as a result, of men) over the course of several centuries; which has enriched many pharmacists and owners of mineral springs; which has evoked so many lover’s sighs and inspired so many poets – we must ask ourselves whether it ever really existed. (8)

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<sup>7</sup> Today, ‘Hypochromatic Anemia’ is the term used to describe a lack of iron in the blood.

<sup>8</sup> Helen King’s research on the history of ingesting non-edible substances (clay, chalk, earth) offers a fascinating look into the obsessive-compulsive disorder known as ‘pica’. ‘Geophagia’ is a type of the pica, described as the desire to eat clay or earth (103-107).

<sup>9</sup> Laguna developed and corrected many Galenic postulations about the humoral body. For him, madness, witchcraft and other evil pathologies had material explanations. He dispelled these notions and researched material effects on the brain as the cause of psychosis:

The significant thing is, of course, that along with several other advanced, Humanist scientists of the period, Laguna here credits the activities and beliefs of witchcraft, not to the devil or some other malevolent spiritual agency, but to the workings of chemical substances in minds predisposed to fantasies. (Simms 13)

He conducted an experiment on a woman accused of witchcraft in order to demonstrate the medicinal effects of herbs. Laguna prescribed a green ointment made from the root nightshade to relieve his patient of sleeplessness and torment: “Laguna’s experiment serves as a therapeutic event. It is by inducing sleep with the green ointment that the wife is allowed to dream and experience the erotic pleasures she is otherwise deprived of.” “[...]; and, at the same time, by dreaming to express poisonous feelings against her husband, and then after purging herself through speaking the forbidden hate-filled words, to return to sleep. This event also confirms Laguna’s view that witchcraft is not a devilish craft nor a mere self-delusion, but rather a real illness with physical causation, symptoms, and cure. It conforms to the Galenic notions of humoral imbalances effecting mind as well as body, and the consequent need of the physician to restore the proper balance to the patient. However, it also extends and even transforms the conventional notion of humours from the relatively paradigmatic fixity of the Galenic system taught in the medical schools of Renaissance Europe” (online article without page numbers, Norman Simms).

<sup>10</sup> In Act Two, Beltrán prescribes an ointment of herbs to treat Octavio’s melancholy. He also acquires “un manojo de espliego” [a bundle of lavender] to treat Teodora’s presumed *opilación*. Renaissance doctors used a variety of herbal medicines to cure humoral imbalance (Groneman 346).

<sup>11</sup> According to the DRAE, *acero* is defined as “ánimo, brío, denuedo, resolución.”

<sup>12</sup> Bau and Canavese’s work on the historical use of water for the enhancement of wellbeing sheds light on its early use for the maintenance and cure of the body. In the *Directorio de enfermeros y artífice de obras de caridad para curar las enfermedades del cuerpo* (1668) written by the renowned Spanish barber and nurse Simón López he states that the profession of barber was the predecessor of infirmary. In his manual there is a reference to *agua dorada y azerada* [golden and ferruginous water]:

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La primera se logra mediante la cocción en ella, de forma repetida, de un doblón de oro, tras lo cual dejándose enfriar servirá como bebida efectiva en casos de gota y melancolía. El *agua azorada*, que se logra mediante la cocción de *azero* en el agua, tras varias horas de cocción serviría para la disentería<sup>12</sup> y las cámaras (Bau 13).

Another seventeenth-century Spanish reformer in nursing, Andrés Fernández recommended the following treatment for those patients who hemorrhaged:

A los de cámaras siempre se les ha de dar acerada, y almazigada, poniendo siempre vnas brasas con almaziga, dentro de vn cántaro o tinaja cubierta, de manera que no eche el humo fuera, por espacio de vn quarto de hora, y despues quitar las brasas y poner el agua dentro y, meterle dentro del azero tres, o quatro vezes, según fuere la vasija, y según la doctrina de vn muy graue doctor [...]. (Bau 13)

<sup>13</sup> If a woman was unmarried, a midwife was prescribed to manipulate the virgin's genitals until she reached orgasm. Doctors Nicholas Fontanus in *The Woman's Doctour* and Nicolas Culpeper in *Practice of Physick*, both advise this procedure founding their theories on Galen findings (Traub 84).

<sup>14</sup> According to Barahona, seduction was documented as a serious abuse committed by men in early modern Spain:

The world of seduction, therefore, was one of carefully calibrated promises and assurances of means to ends; of calculated deceptions and duplicities; of subtle guile and cunning; of numerous secrets, both short-and long-term, to prevent private behavior from becoming public; of secret vows, pledges, and promises offered without witnesses; of secrets for religious purposes; of secret rendezvous and meeting places; of surreptitious entries into victims' homes; of secret hours; of lies and misrepresentations to entice, persuade, and trick; of go-betweens and proxies to carry messages, money, and gifts to elude the ever-alert public eye; and of poignant silences out of fear of parents and families and out of justifiable concern for reputations in the court of public opinion. In sum, courtship was primarily carried out in the public sphere, seduction mostly in the private one. (14)

<sup>15</sup> Serafina sleeps with the count thinking he is don Dionís. The mistaken identity scene in the bedroom evokes Don Juan's seduction of Doña Ana in *El burlador de Sevilla*. While in *El burlador* a letter offers Don Juan details about an opportunistic means to



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access his victim, in *El vergonzoso* a portrait provides the seducer Antonio with the identity he will steal in order to seduce Serafina. Bass provides a thought-provoking interpretation of the play in *The Drama of the Portrait*.

<sup>16</sup> In the following scene, Madalena's sister Serafina disparages men's inappropriate verbal advances. She repeats the command "¡Callad!;" and stands by her belief that men should not talk about love: "¿Qué amor / habla tanto?" (I, 961).

## CONCLUSION

In the early seventeenth century, the *comedias de capa y espada* open a space for alternative forms of subjectivity articulated in the individualist actions of the *tramoyeras*. Deeply embedded in the socio-cultural, economic, and political context of the time, this genre draws attention to contentious issues around women's place in society. Amidst literary conventions emerge relentless fully-realized characters who undermine dominant ideals and proscriptions. I have drawn attention to the profound impact of this genre from diverse historical changes seen in the perception of marriage, the funding of religious confraternities, the increase in female actors, *autoras*, and transvestite roles, the literary feuds, the power of the gaze, the questioning of identity, the ownership of property, and the acceptance of pre-marital sex, influenced generic development. As a result, I have shown how the *comedias de capa y espada* reflect, respond, and raise questions regarding women's concerns and the possibility of feminine agency and control within the early modern Spanish socio-symbolic landscape. The playwrights discussed in this study, Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, Calderón de la Barca, and María de Zayas show the *tramoyera* as a champion of women's social issues, calling attention to their self-assertion and subverting the polarized view of women as either "good" or "bad."

The history of female cross-dressing in real life and performance reflects the fluidity of gender and the illusion of representation. Serafina in *El vergonzoso en palacio* exemplifies performance, personifying excellence in seventeenth century female involvement in the theater. My approach to Serafina as also an icon for the *nueva comedia* reveals her role in the defense of the new aesthetic values of consumerism and entertainment. By contrast, in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, Juana's gender-bending exploits manifest a revolt against the devastating tradition of the *mayorazgo* [entail] system and marriage between first-born inheritors. The victimization of women, both through arranged marriages and through their exclusion from *mayorazgos*,

provokes Juana's defiance of primogeniture in patriarchal Spanish aristocracy. Approaching the famous comedy from a socio-economic stand-point bears out women's preoccupation and negotiation of their economic welfare in seventeenth-century Spain.

It is the contradictions in women's lives that are more responsible for the existence of this genre than the other way around. For example, the traditional view of the *esquiva* as motivated by "vanity," "pride," or "narcissism" is incomplete. My study of Serafina in *El vergonzoso en palacio*, Leonarda in *La viuda valenciana*, María in *La moza del cántaro*, and Fenisa in *La traición en la amistad* has shown that their defense against loss of autonomy, physical abuse, dowry embezzlement, and greedy suitors precipitates *esquivez*. Furthermore, the contemporary label ubiquitously given to *esquivas* as *varonil* should be interpreted by post-modern readers as outspoken, independent, and assertive. The patriarchal view of female non-conformism as selfish, cruel, and unruly is certainly portrayed in *comedias*. However, through my inquest into the nuances of the *esquiva* figure I have challenged her homogenous interpretation and shown a more complex subject.

My examination of the *tramoyeras* who scheme in order to secure their desired choice of husband challenges conventional notions about female characterization and agency. Some characters employ their gendered resources, such as silence, language, and femininity to acquire leverage in attaining their goals. In *El laberinto de amor*, Rosamira's negotiation of marriage through silence is an intelligent masquerade that destabilizes patriarchal authority and social prescriptions. The status of widowhood that oftentimes characterizes the *tramoyeras*, contributes further layers to how women exercised control within patriarchal societies, moreover, recent studies on the social and political power wielded by widows reflect a new understanding of their authority and ascribe historical shades to the literary figures. In *La dama duende*, the young

widow Ángela is a remarkable example of the economic and social gains achieved through the masquerade of femininity. She exemplifies the glaring artificiality of gender through her cogent performance of the *tapada*, the *dama duende*, the damsel in distress, and the *dame sans merci* in order to entrap a wealthy man in marriage. Another fascinating widow María, in *La moza del cántaro*, demonstrates acumen in performing the roles of *tapada*, soldier, servant, and chambermaid as well as in her impressive command of language. She stands out as a *tramoyera* who uniquely downplays her lineage through her disguises to deter opportunist suitors. Furthermore, she legitimizes the notion of variant female subjects in the *comedia* as her opinionated, demanding, and principled persona secures a loving marriage; we finally find an uncommon compatibility of love and honor. In *El vergonzoso en palacio* Madalena exemplifies the emancipation of a self-effacing daughter by appropriating assertive language to sexually seduce her love interest and by defying the prohibition of inter-class marriage despite the threat of death.

*La traición en la amistad* is the only female-authored *comedia* I have chosen to analyze considering it provides us with four *tramoyeras* in one play. At first glance, Fenisa is easily characterized as the *femme fatale* and the perfidious friend, a fascinating representation of a deeply flawed woman. But, upon further reflection, it is clear that Fenisa abides by a strict set of principles concerning love and relationships. Although she is chastised for her criticism of monogamy, her preference not to abide by social mores is persuasive: she is independent, she dominates public and private spaces, and she is not obligated to a man to ensure wealth nor to provide off-spring. One might ask if a post-modern reading of Fenisa is tenable - I have shown that it is; all the female issues debated in the play remain culturally relevant today. Especially

valuable are the auto-biographical nuances of the famous female author and how they influence the multivalent interpretations of the play.

One of the most illuminating studies included in my research emerged from *El acero de Madrid*, considered one of Lope's earliest *comedias de capa y espada*. The hidden layers of proto-feminist assertions of female subjectivity exceeded my expectations. I found that behind the veil of the popular motif *la falsa opilada* [the fake anemic girl], a rich subtext of female sexuality, gynecology, and psychology revealed insights about women's avenues to acquire agency. Paradoxically, the medical discourses used by men to subjugate women are in fact the discourses employed women to transgress social restrictions.<sup>1</sup> Belisa astutely inverts the stereotypical sickly conditions associated with her gender into sources of power. She recognizes illness, melancholy, and pregnancy as a means of empowerment. Through the performance of *la opilación* [chlorosis], and melancholy, Belisa manipulates her father and aunt, acquires access to the public sphere of the city parks, and enjoys opportunities for premarital sex. In her exploitation of her pregnancy she severs the contractual ties and homosocial bonds between men, regains the attention of her wavering lover, and chooses a husband of her choice. Belisa's resourceful and astute approach to attaining her goals is a reflection of real opportunities assumed by women in early modern Spain. A case in point is the significant influence of the female entourage of Felipe III. In *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun*, Magdalena Sánchez reveals the underpinnings of women's power in Felipe III's court, and how they wisely used melancholy, pregnancy, and childbearing as a political ploy and negotiating tool (157).

I have shown that proto-feminist readings of these *tramoyeras* yield rich interpretative routes on many pervasive debated topics in seventeenth century Spain. It is imperative that we approach these *comedias* as opportunities to discover women's commanding presence and

complex subjectivities, regardless of the comedic elements, in order to recuperate, for the most part, an unknown history. My discerning conclusions on the *tramoyeras* in the *comedias de capa y espada* forces us to change our preconceptions of the genre and challenge our understanding of the literary, socio-cultural, and historical value of these fascinating female figures.

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<sup>1</sup> Carrillo, Bernal, and Carrillo-Linares present convincing evidence concerning the misogynistic agenda behind the diagnosis of chlorosis in young women (134). Sánchez offers fascinating examples of the abuse of chlorosis from both sides, doctors and patients (1998, 156-171).

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