

7-12-2014

# Funny Girls: A study of the Graciosa in Four Early Modern Plays

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**FUNNY GIRLS: A STUDY OF *GRACIOSAS* IN FOUR EARLY  
MODERN SPANISH PLAYS**

by

**DOLORES RUIZ-FABREGA DE HOUIDOBRE**

**DISSERTATION**

**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the**

**Requirements for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**Spanish and Portuguese**

**The University of New Mexico**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico**

**May 2014**

## DEDICATION

This dissertation would not have come to fruition without the time, love and support of many people. First, I would like to thank my parents, Dr. Tomás Ruiz-Fábrega and Dr. Luz María Ruiz-Fábrega for always guiding and forcing me to realize my full potential. I'd like to thank my sisters, Dr. María Conklin and (soon to be) Dr. Natalia Ruiz-Fábrega, for their undying companionship and comradery through and through. I'd like to thank my Illa, Lita Rodriguez, for the many prayers and offerings that she has taken the time and self-sacrifice to make. I'd like to thank my husband, Jeremiah Saul Houidobre, my calm, for the commitment of seeing this process through. You are my perfect....To my own little *graciosas*, Luz María Marcela and Lolita Alexandra Ximena, I thank you for giving me the ultimate reason for finishing my studies. You girls are my inspiration for anything and everything that I do, always. I'd like to thank Bobby, Tomás and Alfredo because without them life would not be as fulfilling. I'd like to mention grandma Cecilia, grandpa Bill, Caleb, grandpa Steve and grandma Jennifer for their concern during this process. I would also like to mention my friends: Sarah, Wes, Art, Rachel, Dave, Jes, Sarah, Matt, Nate, Tessa and their families for their interest and support. Mostly, I would like to thank the kindest intellectual that has ever existed, my grandfather, Dr. Alfred Rodriguez. Thank you, Illo for, without your never-ending patience, arduous dedication and unfailing love, I would not have become a scholar. I dedicate this work to you with all of my heart.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the chair of my committee that saw this study through, Dr. Susana Rivera, for allowing me the opportunity to complete my studies. Thank you on so many levels. I'd like to also thank the rest of the committee members, Dr. Mary Quinn, Dr. Anthony Cárdenas and Dr. Michael Kidd for their willingness to be a part of this study and contributions to it.

## Funny Girls: A Study of *Graciosas* in Four Early Modern Plays

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### ABSTRACT

This study centers on the *graciosa*, the female stock comic figure of early modern Spanish theater. It focuses on the comical discourse of this character in order to underscore five basic reasons that prove that she is a figure of this theater that requires more scholarly focus. The *graciosas* that are analyzed are: Celia and Clara from Lope de Vega's *La dama boba* (1613), Isabel from Calderón de la Barca's *La dama duende* (1629), Flora from Francisco Rojas Zorrilla's *Primero es la honra que el gusto* (prior to 1648) and Irene from Agustín Moreto's *La fuerza de la ley* (1651). This study also examines, applying language ideology theory, how the *graciosas*' discourse, especially when expressing disaffection with the society depicted in the plays, can serve to offer a more holistic perspective of the issues that concerned early modern Spanish theater-goers, especially women.

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## Introduction

Among the defining elements of early modern Spanish theater as, for example its three acts and its polymetric versification, is the stock male comic figure known as the *gracioso*.<sup>1</sup> His character, usually appearing as the servant of the male protagonist, is omnipresent in the *comedia*, there being few of them without one.<sup>2</sup> As Ley indicates, “Aun en las obras—la minoría—que no tienen un *gracioso* claro y definido hay figuras afines a él” (145). In this theater there is also a fairly frequent presence of a complimentary *graciosa*. This stock female comic figure, if not seen as regularly as to be independently considered a defining element of the *comedia*, surely merits further study. Scholars have generally failed to sufficiently underscore her role. Although her presence is a frequent phenomenon, only some minor studies have

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1. In *Drama of a Nation: Theater in Renaissance England and Spain*, Walter Cohen indicates, “A number of the defining features of the Spanish stage already discussed—among them the *gracioso*, dramatists’ collaboration, actor-sharers, and clerical attacks on the theater—date either from the very end of the sixteenth century or from the seventeenth century itself” (267). Also see Wilson, Edward M and Duncan Moir, *A Literary History of Spain: The Golden Age Drama 1492-1700* (43).

2. There is an extensive bibliography dealing solely with the *gracioso*: Miguel Soto-Puig, *El gracioso en el teatro español*, Charles David Ley, *El gracioso en el teatro de la península, siglos XVI-XVII* and F. William Forbes, “The *Gracioso*: Toward a Functional Re-Evaluation.” (73-83).



appeared in recent years that focus concretely on this feminine recurrent character.<sup>3</sup> As García Lorenzo has put it, referring to the *criada*, usually the defining job-related characterization of the *graciosa*, “Efectivamente, llama poderosamente la atención que la criada, compañera siempre de las damas de Lope a Calderón...carezca, no ya de una monografía, sino incluso de artículos a ella dedicados...” (9). Thus being the case, this study focuses on these ‘funny girls’ of early modern Spanish theater and examines five examples of the *graciosa* figure in this era. The detailed analysis of these characters will offer a general outline, possibly valid for all theatrical productions of this time, of this female stock comic character.

As mentioned earlier, the *graciosa* is not as frequent a figure as the *gracioso*. The most probable reason for the stock female figure’s less frequent appearance is tied directly to the demands of the restrictive patriarchal society depicted in the theater in question. In such a society, the male protagonist, usually accompanied by his servant, possesses a freedom of movement in the public sphere that is denied to the female protagonist, who is generally confined to the private sphere.<sup>4</sup> This, to some extent, reduces the public mobility of her accompanying *criada*. The large number of *graciosas* can probably be accounted for, on the other hand, by the fact that the most popular subgenre of that theater, the *comedia de capa y espada*, is almost always centered, precisely due to societal restrictions on women’s movements, in the home of the courted *dama*. Nevertheless, the humorous female servant, the *graciosa*, is so frequent a

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3. *La criada en el teatro español del Siglo de Oro*, the compilation edited by García Lorenzo, includes short but significant studies on the *graciosa* but does not pretend to delve deeply into the significance of her presence in early modern Spanish theater.

4. For the concepts of ‘private’ and ‘public’ spheres, see Graham Allan and Graham Crow.

“Introduction” *Home and Family: Creating the Domestic Sphere* (1-13).

figure in this theater that scholars have, if only in passing, acknowledged her presence, hence the name given her.<sup>5</sup> Scholarly studies have, as a rule, proceeded in this sense by merely fusing her with the *gracioso*. That is, she is simply a *gracioso* that happens to be female. But doing so has led to the general assumption that the theatrical presence of the *graciosa* merely reinforces the humor presented by the *gracioso*. This assumption, which rings true if just the multiplied funny content of a *comedia* is being considered, does little justice to her unique humor and disregards her distinct gendered projection and discourse. Her feminine humor can be readily distinguished from the masculine humor of her ever-present *gracioso* companion.

Whether her dialogue involves marriage, the lack of freedom that women experienced in both the public and private spheres or the role of servants, this stock female figure has much to say about conditions that concerned the theater-going public of her day. Her comical speech frequently deals with the position of women in this period of Spain's history. As a low-class woman she is permitted to bring up and deal with topics that were, for example, unbecoming to the *dama*.<sup>6</sup> Thus, her humorous discourse can treat in a very candid manner issues that were polemical at the time.<sup>7</sup>

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5. Although the term is found in early modern Spanish theatrical texts, unlike the *gracioso*, no printed *Siglo de Oro Partes*, to my knowledge, acknowledge the *graciosa* in their *dramatis personae*. It may well be an early expression of male editor discrimination.

6. In *Love in the 'Corral': Conjugal Spirituality and Anti-Theatrical Polemic in Early Modern Spain*, Thomas O'Connor has noted that, "For the idealizations of female comportment in the figure of demure, chaste, and socially morally superior *damas* tended to depend on an equally, unreal, gendered illusion revealed in the debased figure of the low-class *criadas*..." (90).

Before delving any further into a discussion on the *graciosa*, there are a few key terms and concepts that will appear frequently and their comprehension is necessary for a full understanding of the subject. The first is Lope de Vega's, *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en estos tiempos*. This text is basic to early modern Spanish theater because it is the poetic that fixes the formula that it will follow. It establishes many precepts for the composition of the *comedia*, such as how many acts there should be for each work, how each of the characters will be expected to speak and for what public it is produced. However, the most important tenet that this poetic establishes for the purpose of this study is that Lope fuses what had been two separate genres of classical theater, the tragic and the comical. As he explains:

[L]o trágico y lo cómico mezclado,  
y Terencio y Séneca, aunque sea  
como otro Minotauro de Pasífe,  
harán grave una parte, otra ridícula,  
que aquesta variedad deleita mucho;  
buen ejemplo nos da naturaleza,  
que por tal variedad tiene belleza. (174-80)

This premise is extremely important because it includes the *graciosa* and funny characters in general in the standard make-up of the *comedia* that would be performed for the rest of this period.

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7. In *La comedia Española (1600-1680)*, Charles Aubrun makes this observation about the *gracioso*, which I believe extends equally to the *graciosa*, “El gracioso...conserva su franqueza ante el rey y ante los grandes” (109).

The second of these key terms, the *cazuela*, will be referred to often because it is a determining factor in the humor that arises from the connection between the *graciosa* and the female spectators. In the typical theater houses in Madrid such as *El corral de la cruz*, built in 1579 and *El corral del príncipe*, built in 1582, there was an area that was reserved for women. This section, because of its economical price of admission, was transformed into a popular women's section of the arena. Its separation along both social and gender lines made the *cazuela* a powerful segment of the audience. The unified reaction to a play emanating from this group could dictate its success or failure. The existence of the *cazuela* is particularly interesting because the *graciosa*, being a common woman herself, had a target public in the *corral* to which she could direct her discourse and performance. It also meant that she had to act in a way that would appeal to this section's plebian sensibility so that the play would be accepted by this strong influential force.

The third of these key terms, the *comedia de capa y espada* is also related to the demands of a predominantly popular audience that required a high level of comedy. As mentioned above, the *tragicomedia* is the formula that theatrical productions would follow as a whole. However, in Lope's poetic, the proportions of 'comedy' and 'tragedy' are flexible. The subgenre in which the comedic clearly outweighed the tragic is that of the *comedia de capa y espada* in which humor reigned. It usually attained its substantial humorous quality by means of intrigue, equivocation (akin to that of a 'comedy of errors') and a happy ending after having to overcome several complicated obstacles. This subgenre makes up a very high percentage of the *comedias* written and, because it presents an especially inviting medium for playwrights to exhibit their comedic talents, it is not surprising that four of the *graciosas* analyzed appear in this subgenre.

Lope de Vega's *El arte nuevo de hacer comedias en estos tiempos*, the *cazuela* and the *comedia de capa y espada* all relate to humor in one way or another and the stock comic figure is a crucial part of them. The masculine one, as previously mentioned, has been sufficiently studied, but the female one has not. Thus, the main intent of this dissertation is to focus on this female comic figure, the *graciosa*, in her own right, as a separate and distinct entity from her male counterpart, in order to give her a voice in scholarly criticism. There are five reasons that support the hypothesis that she merits an independent focus that would reveal her true significance. There is, to begin with, the *graciosa* as a comical figure *per se*. Early modern theater is generally defined as a popular one in the European stage of that time.<sup>8</sup> Popular theater, by definition, requires a strong dose of humor.<sup>9</sup> The importance of the droll element is reflected

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8. As Diéz Borque has observed in the *Pórtico* of his *Teatro y fiesta en el barroco*, “El teatro barroco fue también el primer gran momento de asentamiento y esplendor del teatro público. El teatro, con un importante alcance popular se convierte en un hecho que entra a formar parte de las expectativas normales de la vida diaria” (7). Orozco Díaz, in his text, *El teatro y la teatralidad del barroco*, explains, “...sobre todo en Inglaterra y España la intercomunicación de espectadores, actores y autores explica y fundamenta muchos de los rasgos de la dramática nacional que entonces se crea. Se trata, pues, de algo no exclusivamente literario sino plenamente social” (238). And Cohen states, “The play’s colloquial style, punning, improvisational quality, intimate shifting relations between actor and audience, and the evocation of both tavern and town-square also indicate its profound indebtedness to popular culture” (61).
9. Cohen explains, “...the late sixteenth-century drama of the *corrales* reveals a number of characteristic elements of popular theater-audience address, proverbs, word play, disguise, dance and the mingling of comic and serious moments” (178).

in the humorous interpolations that made up the staging of the plays in the *corrales*. Before, between acts and at the end of each featured play, laughter would be incited by theatrical insertions of unequivocally droll examples of *teatro menor*. Joseph Oehrlein best describes the process of the production:

El comienzo lo marcaban unos “golpes como martillazos”, seguidos, inmediatamente, de una pequeña pieza musical (instrumental o cantada). Así se quería dirigir la atención del público hacia la escena, donde empezaba, con la recitación de la loa, es decir el prólogo, la representación misma. Entre la *jornada* primera y segunda de la *comedia* se ponía como intermedio el *entremés*; entre la *jornada* segunda y tercera se intercalaba un baile, y después de la tercera una *jácara*; canciones, bailes, un *sainete* o una *mojiganga* concluían el espectáculo.  
(24)<sup>10</sup>

Another crucial clue to the significance of the comical element of this theatrical formula is, as noted above, the unique presence of the *gracioso* in most plays at this time in Spain. No less singular and definitely adding to the jocular density is the recurrent appearance of a female figure, the *graciosa*. As a major contributor to the important comedic dimension, a focus on her would add to the varied forms with which this theater sought to maintain a high level of unambiguously funny input within the play itself.

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10. The *entremés*, the *jácara* and the *mojiganga* are by definition jocular subgenres. For the basically humorous nature of the theatrical dance, see Gaspar M. Quijano. *Los bailes dramáticos del siglo XVII*, (328): and for the primarily humorous character of the *loa*, see Jean Louis Flechniakoska, *La loa* (67).

A second reason to justify a study concentrating on the *graciosa* derives from the fact that she is a woman. This differentiates her in a most essential way from the masculine character of the *gracioso*. It follows, therefore, that the traditional scholarly focus upon her as a mere reinforcement or ‘side-kick’ of the *gracioso* has largely obscured her peculiarly gendered voice. This consequently inhibited the study of a discourse that is, if anything, genuinely feminine. The *graciosa* contributes an alternate perspective on reality to that of her male counterpart. Her appreciation of the world is different and she, thus, has divergent issues to humorously present before what were predominantly popular audiences.<sup>11</sup> She represents a dimension of comedy that literary critics dilute when they study her as a mere shadow of the *gracioso*. Reading many plays with a *graciosa* will lead one to conclude that the jokes, the puns, the subtle (and often times not so subtle) critiques that she voices should be studied with special attention as a gendered discourse filled with clues that would allow us to better understand the world depicted in early modern Spanish theater.<sup>12</sup> Since these plays offer a significant correlation to social behavior,<sup>13</sup>

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11. Cohen, when referring to the audiences of early modern Spanish theater, concludes, “...just as in England, the popular element was probably predominant” (169).

12. Marcella Salvi explains in *Escenas en conflicto: El teatro español e italiano desde los márgenes del barroco*, that, “Al investigar los discursos conflictivos que caracterizan la cultura de la primera modernidad, no se puede prescindir del análisis de las problemáticas relacionadas con el papel contradictorio que desempeña la mujer en la cultura y sociedad española e italiana del Siglo XVII” (58). And Cohen has also made the observation that, “Just as an initial social distinction between classical and Renaissance literature depends on the presence or absence of slavery, so in the comedy the first principle of differentiation is the relative liberation of women,

studying this character in a more meaningful manner can help to better understand Spanish society during that epoch as a whole, but especially the role of women within it. As Vollendorf explains:

There are limits to what can be known about women's history without returning to the archives to rescue the hundreds, if not thousands, of women's voices recorded in texts as far-ranging as Inquisition depositions, spiritual auto/biographies, letters, poetry and fiction. (4)

The *graciosa*'s role, then, could be one example from fiction of 'women's voices' potentially providing clues to understanding the history of women in Spain.

A third reason for focusing directly on the *graciosa* is altogether sociological. That the *graciosa* was played by a woman may be a given today, but this novelty reflects a basic revolution in the feminine struggle for a public voice in late sixteenth century Europe. Joseph

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a movement that in some ways has its roots in primitive Christianity and that has continued, with inevitable false starts and regressions, to the present" (187).

13. Orozco Díaz states:

El entusiasmo que todos sentían por el teatro, la importancia que éste había alcanzado en la vida como centro de toda clase de diversiones...especialmente en España, donde se había impuesto una comedia que mezclaba, como en la vida, lo trágico y lo cómico, lo elevado y lo vulgar, y con hechos extraordinarios, pero que sucedían en el mismo plano y ambiente de la realidad cotidiana. (172)

And Marcella Salvi explains that, "El teatro, como práctica social, participa en el proceso hegemónico de la época apoyando y a la vez cuestionando las normas de comportamiento que la sociedad impone a los sexos" (88).



Oehrlein observes that they were allowed to act much earlier in Spain than in any other country, “En una fase muy temprana, en comparación con otros países, se les permitía a las mujeres actuar en la escena con los mismos derechos que sus compañeros masculinos” (18). Thomas O’Connor states that actresses were allowed on the stage beginning on November 18, 1587 with the expected consequences, “the alarm was set off in the masculine guardians of society by the lawful and public display of attractive women, who could now perform a wide range of action, including the emotional representation of erotic passion” (87).

The revolutionary opening of the public stage to women clearly affected all the feminine roles in theatrical productions, but probably none as much as that of the *graciosa*. As Professor Profeti indicates:

La fecha (1587) es importante también porque desde ahora en adelante las actrices podrán representar en España sin restricciones; la presencia femenina, incluida la *bufa*, queda asegurada. Y según la comedia áurea va desarrollándose a través del siglo XVII, a la *graciosa*...se le otorgan funciones cada vez más amplias: el personaje llegará así a desempeñar un papel central no sólo en el plano burlesco, sino en el tejido del enredo y en la sátira literaria. (“Funciones teatrales” 57)

Her humorous perspective on society would have gained a much more expressive projection of the true feminine character than could ever be transmitted by a disguised young or older male. Apart from other differentiating factors of gender authenticity, the *graciosa* played by a woman would have automatically projected a more realistic female identity, with its proper vocal inflexions, gestures and body movements adding significantly to her popular feminine

message.<sup>14</sup> *Comedia* texts, notoriously lacking in stage directions,<sup>15</sup> would have benefited from an actress in this role and the women in the audience would more readily identify with her. In large measure, a female *graciosa* achieved gender genuineness. For the first time the laughter was not merely incited by the fact that a male was dressed up as a woman,<sup>16</sup> but produced, rather, by the same gender authenticity that her male counterpart had always enjoyed.

The next reason has to do with the fact that both *gracioso* and *graciosa* share the special extra-theatrical privilege that Bristol has identified in the clown of Elizabethan Theater:

The independent public relationship between the clown and his audience disregards the conventional boundary between a dramatic performance and the social occasion that provides its surrounding environment. (124-25)

As Profesor Profeti notes, “La graciosa, con el paralelo personaje masculino, pone en tela de juicio la misma verdad de la representación, con alusiones a la convención teatral que

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14. For feminist perceptions of the projection of the feminine body, see, for example, *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*.

15. See Díez Borque, “El teatro español del Siglo de Oro carece casi por completo de indicaciones escénicas sobre la actividad del actor, y la reconstrucción del conjunto de signos (paradigmas) de que disponía hemos de hacerla por medios indirectos, y, en consecuencia, de forma incompleta,” “Aproximación semiológica a la ‘escena’ del teatro del Siglo de Oro español.” *Semiología del teatro* (65) For an explanation of this fact, see Bruce R. Burningham, *Radical Theatricality: Jongleuresque Performance on the Early Spanish Stage* (146-47).

16. Even to our own day there are examples of the humor elicited by men dressing as women: Tony Curtis, Milton Berle, Tom Hanks, Robin Williams, and Dustin Hoffman etc. These characters are humorous because of the discrepancy that is obvious by having men play women.

predisponen a la ruptura de la ilusión escénica” (“Funciones teatrales” 62). The fourth reason, then, for an in-depth study of the *graciosa* is specifically this license of dispelling theatrical illusion to step outside of her dramatic role and speak directly to the audience.<sup>17</sup> The capacity to be both in the play and outside of the same, in the real present of the spectators, is a basic and differentiating characteristic of the Spanish stock comic figure in general, but especially revealing in the case of the *graciosa* when related to the *cazuela* as noted below.

The English clown and the Spanish *gracioso*, availing themselves of this privilege, projected a fundamentally popular subculture beyond the boundaries of the hegemonic, noble world usually represented in the plays. What Bristol indicates with reference to the Elizabethan clown is perfectly applicable, again, to the Spanish *graciosa*, “The power of the clown over other *dramatis personae* corresponds to the power of an objective social domain over the nominal individuality of a particular character or person” (141). The ‘social domain’ indicated is, of course, a broadly popular one. But this subculture directly channeled via the clown and the *gracioso* to the lower-class attending public is, of course, a masculine version of the same. This incomplete and gender-limited perspective is greatly enriched, made whole, as it were by also granting to the *graciosa* the theatrical illusion-dispelling privilege. With such a privilege, and the empowerment it brought, she uniquely offers an otherwise unexpressed gender-specific perspective on her society.

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17. For theatrical illusion-dispelling asides, see, for example, Jeremy López, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama* (47-49).

The fifth and final reason put forth for the need of a study of the *graciosa* is distinctively particular to the audience of the plays. It is the existence of a *cazuela*,<sup>18</sup> a separate, general admission area of the playhouse limited specifically to women; that is, a section of the arena made up of popular female patrons.<sup>19</sup> This exclusively Spanish phenomenon was so important that some critics have attributed the seemingly pro-feminist tenor of this theater to its existence.<sup>20</sup> But most crucial for the goals of this study is the fact that the *graciosa* could, thus, direct her differentiated feminine speech toward the very concretely popular women's segment of the audience. It can be assumed that she, as well as the *gracioso*, had a special relation with the lower-class spectators. It must be noted, however, that only the *graciosa*, with her ability to identify with the *cazuela*, could relate her discourse directly to the feminine section of the popular audience.

The singularly Spanish theatrical phenomenon of the *cazuela*, together with the recurrence of a *graciosa*, a role played by a real woman, created an exceptional combination in European theater. The character's capacity to directly address that solidly popular women's area of the playhouse with her feminine dialogue lent a special relief to the play's often anti-

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18. The lower-class men in the audience also had their own gender-segregated section that would compliment the *cazuela*: the *mosquetría*.

19. Wealthy or noble women sat where their expensive tickets allowed them.

20. Aubrun indicates, "... si la comedia tiene más bien tendencia feminista es que busca la aprobación de la *cazuela*" (70).

hegemonic, anti-*status quo* content.<sup>21</sup> This would be so because the unanimous and simultaneous reaction of the *cazuela*, echoing throughout the arena, could determine, in effect, the success or failure of a play.<sup>22</sup>

When addressing women's issues in a patriarchal society, no playwright could overlook the importance of pleasing this segment of the audience. The *graciosa* with her feminine perspective and discourse often became the masculine playwright's instrument for reaching the *cazuela* with a dialogue conversant with its female members. Her language is often written for the women in the audience who, as noted above, had a lot to do with the acceptance of the theatrical piece as a whole. That this was often the case is readily documented in the fifth strofe of Lope de Vega's *Arte Nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo*, the most important dramatic poetic of that period. In it he explains:

Verdad es que yo he escrito algunas veces  
siguiendo el arte que conocen pocos;  
mas luego que salir por otra parte  
veo los monstruos de apariencias llenos  
adonde acude el vulgo y las *mujeres*  
que este triste ejercicio canonizan..." (132-33; emphasis added).

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21. Thomas O'Connor has made the observation that, "women of the serving and lower-classes were often depicted as untrustworthy and inherently transgressional and thereby a threat to the social order" (90-91).

22. The popular feminine *cazuela* would certainly have to be included among, as Burningham indicates "... those members of the public who voted with their feet, voices, whistles, and sometimes more solid objects..." (37).

There are, of course, scholarly views that would lessen the importance of the feminine contingent in early modern audiences. Thomas O'Connor believes, for example, that:

To approach the issue of how women tended to be portrayed in the *Comedia* in this either-or fashion is to lose sight of the fact that, whether “realistically” or “idealistically” drawn, the roles assigned to actresses on the stages of Spain were dramatic constructs produced in large measure by the poetic imagination of a male corps of writers. In this way the image of woman presented weekly in the *corrales* was one controlled by and largely flattering to predominantly male audiences. (89)

This comprehensive study of the *graciosa* and her role should significantly alter such views.

To summarize, the study of the *graciosa*, of her feminine humor and speech, is a necessary and valuable tool for better understanding the underlying social issues, especially regarding women, that were present in Spanish society at this particular moment. As I have indicated, there are five good reasons for doing so: the *graciosa* contributes significantly to the all-important comedic content of that theater's tragi-comical formula; she offers a popular female perspective on matters that would be lacking without her; she is, in her time and for the first time, truly a woman performing the role, with all the positive consequences thus derived for the authentic projection of the feminine; she assumes the basic privilege of speaking directly to the lower-class audience and acquires thereby an extra-theatrical popular dimension; and, to conclude, she has, in the *cazuela*, a built-in, plebian feminine target for her discourse. The five basic aspects of the *graciosa* outlined above make possible her importance in projecting significant social facets present in Spain during this time. In the analysis of her comical dialogue

in four plays, her contribution to our knowledge of Spanish society in her day will be highlighted using recent scholarly techniques to be identified shortly.

The factors just discussed illustrate the need for a study of the *graciosa*. This dissertation constitutes, then, an innovative critical investigation of this character by rejecting her usual treatment as a redundant shadow of the *gracioso*. It focuses specifically on a character that has generally been studied before only indirectly as a compliment of the omnipresent *gracioso*. This study will hopefully encourage a more just evaluation of this character's usually disregarded significance.

An examination of the female comical figure of early modern Spanish theater requires a working definition of the subject. Similar to her masculine counterpart, the *graciosa* is traditionally defined by her role as the servant of the noble female protagonist or *dama*. This long-standing occupational identification is valid, as in the case of the *gracioso*, because it reflects the role she plays in an extremely high percentage of her dramatic appearances.<sup>23</sup> In keeping with this working definition, the five subjects chosen for this study of this theatrical type are, in effect, the intimate servants of their play's feminine protagonists.

An important criterion for the selection of the characters to be studied is the length of their stage presence in the plays in which they appear. *Graciosas* run the gamut from a few lines to a strong stage presence throughout the entire play. For the purposes of a thorough focus on their comical discourse, subjects that offer an extended stage presence were chosen, thus, each of the characters is present throughout the play. They speak many lines, making possible a profound analysis of their speech.

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23. As occurs with the *gracioso*, there are examples of the stock female comical role in a given *comedia* being exercised by a character other than a maid.

The selection of five *graciosas* was necessary because not all of the important aspects of her contribution would logically be found in a single exemplar. The characters chosen were taken from four different playwrights, thus guaranteeing that they reflected a generalized phenomenon, a feature common to all of the contributors to that theater. I chose two personages from Lope de Vega's, *La dama boba*, because a sample from the progenitor of the *graciosa* type, as he was of the *gracioso*, was imperative to my study. The other three proceed from *comedias* written by members of the second generation of early modern Spanish playwrights who most fully developed the potential of that dramatic characterization,<sup>24</sup> and Calderón de la Barca, Rojas Zorrilla and Moreto are its outstanding representatives.

I will proceed chronologically in presenting the selected *graciosas*, dedicating a chapter to each play analyzed. The first two are Celia and Clara from Lope de Vega's *La dama boba* (1613), these characters were chosen, not only because they met with the initial criteria mentioned above but also because they may be considered, for the purposes of this dissertation, prototypes of the generalized characterization. As such, they will already display most of the elements that typify this role. Some of these are fully developed, such as the love-pairing of *graciosas* and *graciosos*. Other elements, such as the periodic break with theatrical illusion, are incipiently present. Unusually doubled in a single work, each of them will serve one of the two very different feminine protagonists and, as will be noted, variedly contribute much of the humor in the play.

The second *graciosa* is Isabel from Calderón de la Barca's *La dama duende* (1629). Other than the initial criteria mentioned above, Isabel was chosen because her performance, more than that of the others, serves to highlight non-verbal humor. This stems from the fact that

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24. See Profeti quote on page 10.



most of the action that occurs in the play takes place in silent darkness in the residence of Doña Angela, the noble female protagonist. Also, given the special temporary conditions of Doña Angela's residency, Isabel knows the ins-and-outs of the house better than her *ama* which allows Doña Angela to communicate with her love interest. In other words, Isabel is a catalyst to the plot and has an important role throughout the play. She, as is the norm in such cases, is the intimate counselor to the aristocratic *dama* and offers humorously critical statements from her popular and feminine perspective throughout the play. She is broadly representative of the servant *graciosa*, as well, in that she and the male protagonist's servant, the play's *gracioso*, develop a mutual love interest. This baroque sub-plot, a parallel to the main plot, was frequently implemented in the *comedia*, lending greater relief to the popular.

The fourth *graciosa* is Flora, from Rojas Zorrilla's *Primero es le honra que el gusto* (undated, but prior to 1648). I selected her because, apart from meeting the original criteria, her function as *alcahueta*, a mercenary go-between in her employer's love affairs, brings to her discourse risqué issues offered from a woman's perspective. Her speech is, thus, much more forward and sexual, and her feminine outlook on such matters offers a clearly subversive, anti-patriarchal point of view. Flora would undoubtedly have been well received by the *cazuela*. Like Isabel, she has a comical love interest in the servant of the *caballero*.

The fifth *graciosa* is Irene from Moreto's, *La fuerza de la ley* (1651).<sup>25</sup> I selected her because she met the above criterion and because her most important contribution to this study is that she offers a number of theatrical-illusion-breaking dialogues in which she speaks directly to the public, even more specifically, on occasion, to the *cazuela*. This conscious breaking of theatrical illusion, during which she steps out of her dramatic role exploits a privilege that the

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25. See James A. Castañeda. *Agustín Moreto*, for the dating of this play.

*graciosa* shares with the omnipresent *gracioso*. This particular discourse, which brings the speaker into the real present of the audience, has the powerful effect of projecting a popular cultural alternative to the hegemonic world represented in the play. Such dramatic moments offer the clearest basis for a rejection of indictments of early modern Spanish theater as nothing more than a propaganda machine for the hegemonic *status quo*.<sup>26</sup>

Since the stock female comic figure's humorous discourse is the central focus of this dissertation, it was important to select characters that would be illustrative of the period studied. Thus, they appear in plays by representative authors and are valid examples of the dramatic possibilities that *graciosas* were offered by that theater. The selections of *La dama boba*, *La dama duende*, *Primero es la honra que el gusto* and *La fuerza de la ley* fully represent the *capa y espada* sub-genre that was most favored during that time. This varied selection of *capa y espada* plays allows whatever findings may emerge to be broadly applicable to all of early modern Spanish theater.

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26. Jose A. Maravall, in "Teatro, fiesta e ideología en el barroco" (*Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca*. Edited by José Maria Díez Borque) explains, "...las obras no eran en aquel tiempo—yo pienso que en ninguno—creación libre, ocurrencia pura y simple del autor. Estaban hechas de encargo...el encargo era general y esos grandes autores dramáticos tenían que trabajar para defensa y exhalación de la monarquía y para afianzar el orden monárquico señorial amenazado" (84). For recent criticism's defiance of Maravall's dictum, see, for example, Burningham (32-33), and William R. Blue, "Carnival and Lenten Alternations" (95). See also his, *Spanish Comedies and Historical Contexts in the 1620's* (7).

Each of the five *graciosas* will be studied separately. Analyzing them in their own textual space will permit a more intense focus on each and thus highlight the richly diverse subjects that they humorously engage. A key goal in assessing their differentiated comical discourse is to gauge its possible social impact. For this task I plan to utilize the theory of language ideology as a general approach. This focus has its basis in anthro-linguistic studies, and has been used to identify sociological phenomena through speech, which allows a more complex and deeper examination of how and why people use their language to influence society and how it, in turn, constructs the way they speak. In the evaluation of the humorous dialogue language ideology will be utilized to examine literary texts instead of living real-time speech. It is important to bear in mind, however, that these plays were not written in a vacuum, and that the playwrights, whether consciously or subconsciously, dealt with the issues of their day in their theatrical productions. Language ideology is useful, then, to better understand the sociological phenomena reflected in the *graciosa's* discourse that reveal interesting aspects of the society in which the plays were written. It is pertinent to the study of literature, and to theater in particular, because its medium is dialogued speech, which holds to the theory's definition: "Representations, whether explicit or implicit, that construe the intersection of language and human beings in a social world are what we mean by 'language ideology'" (Woolard 3). According to Schiffelin it focuses on, "cultural conceptions not only of language and language variation but also of the nature and purpose of communication and its role in the life of social collectivities" (v).

Since theater reflects reality on many levels, as will be explained later, and *graciosa* discourse deals with many relevant life issues in her historical context, language ideology offers a base from where to analyze the important social tenets that are constantly brought to the fore by this character. Woolard again puts it well when she explains that:

Ideologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology. Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form but also the very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling, and law. (3)

Since the *graciosa* represents a particular sector of society, I will analyze her dialogue as expounding the societal values of this community. Language ideology theory allows this because as Paul Kroskrity explains:

[L]anguage ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group. A member's notions of what is "true", "morally good" or "aesthetically pleasing" about language and discourse are grounded in social experience and often demonstrably tied to his or her political-economic interest. (8)

Language ideology in this study is, then, a tool to examine the comical speech of the five aforementioned *graciosas* with the underlying understanding that, "language valuation and evaluation are processes through which different social values and referents come to be associated with languages, forms of speaking, and styles of speaking" (Spitulnik 163). I will analyze what the subject says, how she says it and how it pertains to the societal structures that were then in place. It is important to understand that some issues were subversive of the *status quo* and could mostly be dealt with by funny, non-threatening characters, namely the *graciosa* and the *gracioso*. Focusing on the humorous dialogues of these lower-class characters will give a

more complete view of women and society in early modern Spain, especially regarding feminine issues.

Along with language ideology other theories are utilized to aid in the evaluation of *graciosa* discourse and performance. Since this study focuses on theater, Judith Butler's performative theory premising that society constructs gender hinged on socially accepted acts that are mimicked and therefore repeated throughout time, was applied. In essence, Butler explains that what constitutes gender is a social performance. This well-known feminist theory has gender construction as its basis where women are concerned. This is why it is especially helpful for evaluating the expressive non-linguistic communication of these female subjects. The characters selected for the study are distinct individuals but they frequently repeat similar linguistic characteristics, a norm that I would venture to assume extends to non-linguistic communication such as gestures, bodily movements etc. Since all I can study are texts in a theater notoriously lacking in stage directions, performative theory, because of its focus on a set repetition of acts, is an indispensable aid in imagining the non-verbal aspects of the subjects' performances.

So much of the comedy in Spain's *comedia* reflects that of the medieval carnivalesque tradition that Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on these customs, as expressed in *Rabelais and his World*, will be referred to extensively. Using examples from all genres of literature, he defines carnivalesque humor in medieval culture and its continued presence in early modern literature. The conclusion that Bakhtin derives is that carnivalesque laughter projects a plebian sub-culture that passes from the medieval to subsequent periods. He believes that this type of humor serves as an escape valve for the low-class masses from an unchangeable world. Bakhtin explains:

One might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. (10)

It is only logical that a popular theater such as Spain's at that time would retain and reflect many of the traits of that medieval folk tradition. This is why Bakhtin states, "If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood" (6). The *graciosa* being a popular character often gives expression to that persistent popular sub-cultural element and with the aid of Bakhtin's study her discourse can be better understood within her social and historical context.

Applying these different theories, along with feminist critics such as Lisa Vollendorf, Barbara Becker-Cantarino and Kathleen Llewellyn, I will methodically analyze the comical speech of each of the selected subjects. The study of the *graciosas*, characters who voice popular and feminine perspectives within a basically aristocratic/patriarchal social context, will be invaluable in understanding early modern Spain. By showing how indispensable these jocular women are, I hope, ultimately, to fuel enough interest in them so that the *graciosa* may attain a space and a voice in the scholarly discussions of this theater.

### **General outline of the study**

Each chapter begins with a brief commentary on the playwright involved because salient facts about his life and his social/historical surroundings have some importance in understanding his work. After this biographical sketch, a general assessment of the text and its place in the author's body of work is offered. Following this is a brief plot summary that will help the reader follow the complicated actions that take place in the typical *comedia*. The bulk of the chapter, however, consists of a detailed analysis of the character's humorous performance, which will

highlight examples of the five reasons put forth earlier for the stock female comical figure's important significance in early modern Spanish theater. An in-depth examination of the droll content of *graciosa* discourse will serve to emphasize her varied and vital contribution to the pervading comedy required by the popular nature of these theatrical productions. It will make possible a focus on the specifically differentiated feminine perspective of that laughter-inciting speech, emphasizing the unique function that it exercises in projecting a low-class woman's viewpoint within the noble/patriarchal context. It will also reveal aspects of her theatrical intervention that highlight the then revolutionary effect of her role being played by a real woman. It will facilitate a perception of her privileged dispelling of theatrical illusion to reach out to the popular audience. As already noted, this license grants her an extra-theatrical projection that other characters in the play hardly possess. It will, finally, explore her special relation with the *cazuela*, the unique institution of early modern Spanish theater that, as already noted, offered a powerful audience receptor for her popular feminine perspective. She can speak to the *cazuela* both within her dramatic role, or, most directly, by stepping out of it with theatrical illusion-shattering effect. As indicated this focus on the stock female comic figure's theatrical attributes will allow, employing the theories outlined earlier, a more precise measure of the social impact of the *graciosa*'s humorous discourse.

## Chapter 1: Celia and Clara

### Lope de Vega's *La dama boba*

The prodigious creativity of Lope de Vega goes unchallenged in the history of modern literature. No other literary figure of the western world comes even close to him in the variety of literary genres, both in verse and prose, to which his genius contributed.<sup>27</sup> Despite his great achievements in prose, in which *La Dorotea* stands out as a masterpiece within its novelistic type,<sup>28</sup> as does *La Diana enamorada* in its pastoral subgenre and *Peregrino en su patria* in that of the Byzantine novel, Lope de Vega was, above all, a poet. In the poetic medium, Lope de Vega produced significant works in all its varied manifestations: poetic novels and epic poems on historical events, on religious subjects, on mythological themes, and with *La gatomaquia*, of course, the best mock-epic of his time.<sup>29</sup> His lyrical *poemarios* (*Rimas humanas*, *Rimas sacras*, *Rimas de Tomé Burguillos*), including one of the first heteronym volumes in poetic literature, place him, with Góngora and Quevedo, at the highest level of early modern Spanish poetry.

Master of all the traditional Castilian verse forms (*romance*, *quintilla*, *redondilla*, *cuarteto*, etc.) as well as those evolved from the Italian Renaissance (*terceto*, *soneto*, *canción*, *silva*, *octava real*, etc.), Lope de Vega seemed destined to figure prominently in the crystallization of the lyrical Spanish theater of his day. And figure prominently he did, being universally credited with fixing the form and content that the *comedia* would boast for more than

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27. See, for example, A. Zamora Vicente, *Lope de Vega*.

28. This is a particularly Spanish theatrical/novelistic subgenre that runs through Spanish literature from Fernando de Rojas, via Galdos, to Baroja.

29. I will have occasion to comment on this work in my subsequent analysis of the *graciosa*-related comical content of *La dama boba*.



a century. It is in his theatrical production that his fecund genius is most evident, with more of his plays having come down to us (something on the order of 400) than there are plays extant from the entire Elizabethan Theater.

It is unlikely that Lope de Vega's dramatized Neo-Platonic premise in *La dama boba*,<sup>30</sup> that love can produce a manner of intellectual awakening, possesses any valid scientific basis. The fact is that even mankind's empirically acquired wisdom, which owes nothing to science, appears to counter such a theory, insisting in very practical terms that love tends, if anything, to throw a wrench into the reasoning machinery of our intelligence. And yet, Lope de Vega's dramatized 'romantic' notion, defying both human science and human experience, remains attractive, to such an extent that, as Diego Marín has put it:

Entre las relativamente escasas comedias de Lope de Vega que conservan un valor permanente y siguen figurando en el repertorio del teatro clásico español, incluso en escenarios extranjeros, así como en diversas ediciones populares, se encuentra *La dama boba* como una de sus obras maestras del género de capa y espada. (29)

Lope de Vega, unanimously recognized father of the *comedia* format that would prevail in early modern Spanish theater, is widely credited, as well, with fixing the basic outline of its male stock comic figure, the *gracioso*, an indispensable element of that theatrical format.<sup>31</sup> It is not surprising, thus, that he would have initially outlined, too, the female stock comic figure, the

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30. As Donald Larson indicates, "love is teacher: this is the last, and in a sense the first, of the important themes of the play" (60).

31. See Cohen, (267). Recent studies, such as Burningham (154-55), clearly suggest the traditional elements available to Lope de Vega for this fundamental characterization.

*graciosa*. As indicated in my introduction, the proliferation of *graciosas* is due in large measure to the popularity of the *capa y espada* subgenre in Spain. So it is again not surprising to find not one but two valid exemplars of the *graciosa* in Lope de Vega's best known rendition of that subgenre, *La dama boba*.

The selection of this Lope de Vega play for my study was governed by a number of added factors. Perhaps foremost among these is the date of its appearance, 1613.<sup>32</sup> It is a relatively early *comedia* in Lope de Vega's creative cycle and in the evolution, as well, of early modern Spanish theater. Its two perfectly definable *graciosas*, each the comical personal maid to one of the play's two women protagonists, clearly establish the early development of *Siglo de Oro* theater's stock female comic figure.<sup>33</sup> This may well be significant for a future study of the staged development of the *graciosa* character.

A second factor that supported my selection of *La dama boba* was the play's projection of two *graciosas*, which, if not unheard of, is certainly unusual. Such occasions permit the comparative highlighting of the variations possible within the generally defined character. This renovating variability, which, as might have been expected, also characterizes the *gracioso*, is a *sine qua non* virtue of such recurring theatrical personages as a theater's stock comic figures. In the in-depth study to follow of the two female stock comic figures of *La dama boba*, I will endeavor to offer an analytical format that explains and underlines their effectively contrasted theatrical projections.

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32. See Diego Marín (11).

33. It is worthy of note that scholarly tradition pinpoints the first fully definable *gracioso* in Lope de Vega's *La francesilla*, dated by Morley and Bruerton between 1595 and 1598, which, at least chronologically, closely ties the development of the *graciosa* to that of the *gracioso*.

A third factor that merits mention in this regard is the fact that *La dama boba* is a *capa y espada comedia* that boasts two female protagonists—very particularly so the “dumb” Doña Finea, who gives the play its title—that are themselves very funny. The heightened level of humor required by Spain’s popular theater at that time, and very especially so by its *capa y espada* subgenre, is, as noted earlier, a fundamental reason for the uniquely recurring appearance of a female stock comic figure. The latter often comically reinforces the humor invariably contributed by the omnipresent *gracioso*, but in the case at hand the two *graciosas* must compete for comical space, as well as with the *damas* they serve. Not to mention the added fact that each funny *dama* has a special gentleman wooer, and that each of the latter presupposes a jocular *criado/gracioso*. All in all, the playwright accumulates, including the unusually funny female protagonists, six characters capable of eliciting laughter from the popular audience. *La dama boba* is thus a significant test of how a playwright manages to successfully allot comical space to two *graciosas* when the cast of a play is saturated with laughter-eliciting characters.

A final factor in my selection of *La dama boba* is the play’s decidedly feminine focus. There is no doubt that Lope de Vega’s masterpiece is centered, as is obvious from its very first verses, on the contrasted projection of its evolving sister protagonists. These *damas* give expression to their evolving soul-states, unquestionably feminine soul-states, via intimate dialogues with their respective female maids. As already indicated in the introduction, these personal exchanges between women allow playwrights to offer singularly feminine points of view, thus, giving credence to the significance of the *graciosa*. In the case of *La dama boba*, this phenomenon is exceptionally redoubled.

The prominent place that *La dama boba* retains among the hundreds of *comedias* that Lope de Vega wrote, convincingly bolstered by the four factors outlined above, made almost

mandatory its selection for my study of the *graciosa*. As indicated in the introduction, the four chosen plays are, however varied they may be thematically, examples of the very popular *capa y espada* subgenre. Donald Larson explains the reason for its popularity:

Life's triumphs over those forces which would limit it are given their most spectacular embodiment in the melodramas and heroic romances in the *Comedia*. They are represented in their most ingratiating aspect, however, in the romantic comedies, that is to say in the *comedias de capa y espada*... The principal theme of all these plays is the same: youthful love... Inevitably, it seems, in witnessing or reading about the adventures of young lovers, we are moved to thoughts of spring, of fructification, and of fulfillment. (44-45)

This theatrical subgenre relies, for its intense comedic level, on gimmicks, convoluted intrigues and all manner of comically confusing incidents, requiring an initial plot summary for a better comprehension of the subsequent comical analysis of the *graciosa*'s contribution.

### **Plot Summary of *La dama boba***

#### **Act I**

Don Liseo and his criado, Turín are going to Madrid to meet Don Liseo's betrothed, Doña Finea. They encounter Don Leandro, a man who knows her family who explains that Doña Finea has a large dowry because her uncle left her his inheritance to off-set her less-than-attractive personality.

Don Octavio, the father of Doña Finea and Doña Nise explains to his friend Don Miseo that his daughters are frustrating because Doña Finea is too dumb and Doña Nise is too smart.

Doña Nise and Celia, her personal maid, appear speaking about a book and they have a comical conversation about poetic prose. Doña Finea arrives with her teacher who is desperately

trying to teach her the alphabet. Doña Nise makes a comment about how dumb her sister is. While they are speaking, Clara, Doña Finea's personal maid, enters and gives a very non-sensically humorous description of her cat giving birth. Celia and Doña Nise indicate that Clara and Doña Finea deserve one another.

Don Duardo, Don Feniso and Don Laurencio, all Doña Nise's suitors, appear and Don Duardo reads a poem that he has written for her. She wisely puts him down and secretly confesses to Don Laurencio that she favors him and manages to give him a letter.

Don Feniso and Don Duardo inform Don Laurencio that it is obvious that Doña Nise is in love with him, and leave him alone. In a soliloquy, he explains that even though he loves Doña Nise he must court Doña Finea because he is poor and needs her dowry more than Doña Nise's intelligence.

Pedro, Don Laurencio's *criado*, enters and his amo explains to him that he is no longer interested in Doña Nise because Doña Finea can offer him riches. Pedro tells him that he is making a wrong choice. Don Laurencio then tempts Pedro with wooing Clara who soon enters with Doña Finea. Don Laurencio courts Doña Finea and Pedro courts Clara in a very comical manner.

Doña Finea and Clara have a funny exchange about how Don Octavio is trying to marry Doña Finea to a man (Don Liseo) without any legs because the portrait of him only shows his upper body. Doña Finea then confides to Clara that she wants to marry Don Laurencio and Clara admits to having been attracted to Pedro.

Don Octavio enters with Doña Nise and informs Doña Finea that her future husband is approaching, and advises her to be on her best behavior. But when Don Liseo arrives Doña Finea

does nothing but insult him. Don Liseo remarks to Turín that he will not marry her because he has fallen in love with Doña Nise.

## Act II

The act opens with a conversation between Don Laurencio, Don Duardo and Don Feniso, in which the audience is informed that Don Liseo has been there for a month and still has not married Doña Finea. They talk about how she isn't as dumb as she used to be, because, as Don Laurencio explains, she is in love and that love makes her intelligent.

Doña Nise, who has been ill, enters and all three men say beautiful things to her. She asks Don Duardo and Don Feniso to get her some flowers so that she can speak to Don Laurencio in private. She accuses him of courting her sister but he tries to deny it. Then, Doña Nise asks Celia, the eye-witness, to relate to Don Laurencio what she observed while Doña Nise was ill. Don Liseo enters to find them arguing and supporting Doña Nise, challenges Don Laurencio to a duel.

Meanwhile, Doña Finea is taking a dance lesson. She gets into a fight with her instructor who says he will no longer teach her. Clara enters and in a humorous exchange informs her that she has accidentally burned a letter that Don Laurencio had written to her. Neither can read so Doña Finea asks her father to read what remains of the letter. He does and then asks how much contact she has had with Don Laurencio. She responds that they have hugged, and he dictates that no more hugging will be tolerated until she is married.

Turín enters and reveals to Don Octavio that Don Laurencio and Don Liseo are about to duel. Doña Finea confesses to Clara that she is in love with Don Laurencio but that she will obey her father's wishes and marry Don Liseo.

Don Liseo and Don Laurencio are about to duel when they realize that they are each other's best chance at achieving what they both want. Don Liseo loves Doña Nise and Don Laurencio pines for Doña Finea. They decide that they will help one another.

The two sisters fight over Don Laurencio. Doña Nise insists that he is hers. When he walks in, Doña Finea tells him that he is getting her in trouble with Doña Nise and her father and that they need to un-hug, which they do, and he exits. Don Octavio walks in and Doña Finea proudly says that she has un-hugged Don Laurencio, which sends him through the roof.

Don Laurencio re-enters and Doña Finea informs him that she must fall out of love with him. Pedro, Don Feniso and Don Duardo appear and Don Laurencio explains to Doña Finea that in order to stop feeling jealous she should vow, in front of the three witnesses, that she will be his wife. She acquiesces they all go to a notary to legalize the promise.

Doña Nise explains to her father that she was speaking to Don Laurencio about something serious. Doña Finea says that she has obeyed both of them and got rid of her 'love' for Don Laurencio by vowing, in front of witnesses, that she would marry him. Don Octavio is irate. Don Liseo enters and confesses his love for Doña Nise and informs her that Don Laurencio is helping him court her. She responds that she doesn't accept his love proposition because it is treacherous to her father and her sister. Don Laurencio comes in and stands unseen behind Don Liseo. Doña Nise begins speaking with Don Laurencio but Don Liseo believes that she is still speaking to him until he sees that Don Laurencio is behind him. Don Laurencio declares to Don Liseo that he will help him conquer Doña Nise.

### Act III

Act three opens with Doña Finea, in a soliloquy, thanking love for making her smart. Clara enters and tells her that everyone is happy about her new-found intelligence. Doña Finea

says that Don Laurencio is her teacher, to which Clara responds that Pedro is hers. They agree that love is wonderful.

Don Liseo is trying to convince Doña Nise to love him, but she insists that love cannot be reasoned or forced. Celia announces the entrance of the music teacher. Don Octavio invites them to witness how Doña Finea has changed completely. Doña Finea and the musicians come in and put on a dance. Don Miseno, Don Octavio's good friend, is taken aback by her beautiful performance.

Don Liseo and Turín stay on stage and Don Liseo says that in order to get even with Doña Nise he will marry Doña Finea. Don Laurencio and Pedro come in and Turín tells them that Don Liseo has left to propose to Doña Finea. Doña Finea enters and Don Laurencio tells her that Don Liseo now wants to marry her because she has become smart. Doña Finea says that she will just act stupid again so that Don Liseo won't want to marry her. Don Liseo enters and speaks to Doña Finea, who pretends to be stupid again, and he becomes, once again, disenchanted with her dumbness and leaves to tell Don Octavio that the wedding with Doña Finea is off.

Don Laurencio arrives and while he and Doña Finea speak, Doña Nise and Celia enter. Doña Nise suspects that Don Laurencio and Doña Finea are in love and she and Celia decide to eavesdrop on their conversation. After Doña Finea and Don Laurencio exchange words of love, Pedro comes in and warns the couple that Doña Nise and Celia are listening. Doña Finea tells Don Laurencio that she will act dumb once again and leaves. Doña Nise confronts Don Laurencio, who tries to deny what she has just seen. He tries to flip the roles and states that, since she no longer loves him, she should marry Don Liseo. Doña Finea enters and her sister accuses



her of treachery. Doña Finea acts dumb and frustrates Doña Nise, who then warns her not to pursue Don Laurencio.

Don Octavio and Don Laurencio enter. Seeing his daughters fight, he orders Don Laurencio to leave his house, but he insists that he will not leave without his wife. Don Octavio asks him who his wife is and Don Laurencio explains that Doña Finea gave him her word of marriage in front of witnesses. Don Octavio inquires if this is true and all the witnesses back up his claims. Don Octavio says that Doña Finea is betrothed to Don Liseo and that he will go to court and make sure that it is carried out. Doña Nise and Celia follow him in order to learn the final outcome.

Doña Finea has Clara hide Don Laurencio and Pedro in the attic. Don Octavio comes back and tells Doña Finea that men trick her so easily that she must hide while he fixes this situation. Doña Finea suggests that she go to the attic and Don Octavio agrees, not knowing the two men are there. Don Liseo comes in and asks Don Octavio for Doña Nise's hand in marriage, but Don Octavio informs him that she has been promised to Don Duardo and that if Don Liseo doesn't marry Doña Finea he must leave his house.

Doña Finea and Clara arrive and congratulate each other on how well their plan is coming along. They make a long comical list of those who live in attics, humorously naming all of the social types that make an attic their home.

Don Octavio enters with Don Miseno, Don Duardo and Don Feniso and Don Liseo arrives shortly after. Doña Nise comes in and remarks to Don Liseo that she will marry him out of spite and he accepts the proposition. Celia appears and reveals to Don Octavio that she has just seen Clara carrying food to the attic and that there were two men hidden there. Don Duardo and Don Feniso go up to the attic to see what is going on while Don Octavio goes to get his

sword. Don Octavio reaches the attic, ready to kill to save his honor, but realizes that Doña Finea has married Don Laurencio and Doña Nise has accepted Don Liseo as her husband. Then Don Octavio decides, in keeping with *comedia* tradition, that Pedro will marry Clara and Turín will marry Celia. Don Duardo and Don Feniso close out the play by comically giving each other their hands.

### **Analysis of the comical input of Celia and Clara in *La dama boba***

It is clear that what distinguishes the *graciosa* from the simple maid is her contribution to the indispensable dimension of humor of the early modern Spanish *comedia*. It is logical, then, that the significance of that theater's stock female comic figure be best ascertained by analyzing examples of her compliance with her primary theatrical function. The problem that arises in *La dama boba*, with its two *graciosas*, is that of analytical presentation. I could have proceeded by artificially analyzing separately their mingled comicality within each act of the play, but have opted instead, to analyze the comical contribution of Clara and Celia consecutively, as it is offered in the text.

#### **Act I**

The first to appear is Celia, confidential maid to Doña Nise, the polarized *sabihonda* sister of Doña Finea, known for her exaggerated dumbness. Their initial dialogue is clearly intended to establish Doña Nise's intelligence by allowing her, while expounding on *Aethiopica*, Heliodorus's famous novel, to knowingly distinguish poetic prose from historical prose and elaborate on the Greek novelist's purposely difficult technique. The humor in the scene is provided by Celia, who, despite an unexpected level of education (for example, she can read, which Doña Finea, we soon learn, cannot), comically reveals her lower social status. She does so, with her first words, answering Doña Nise's query regarding a book she was to obtain, "Y tal,

que obliga / a no abrille ni tocallo” (273-74), which she elaborates on in answer to Doña Nise’s asking her why. Celia explains:

Por no ensuciarle,  
 si quieres que te lo diga.  
 En cándido (white; my trans.) pergamino  
 vienen muchas flores de oro (275-78).

One could say that Celia, disregarding its contents, judges the book by its cover, merely as a pretty object. It is also interesting to point out in Celia’s discourse that she fears dirtying the book’s ornate cover. A book’s elaborate workmanship attests to its owner’s social class. In *Book History*, Margaret Shotte explains that a bookshop keeper would provide “customers with numerous options regarding format, price illustrations, and language. He carried the same title in several sizes to appeal to different pocketbooks” (39). Though this deals with book culture in seventeenth century England, one can surmise that it was much the same in early modern Spain. The expensive ornamentation described by Celia funnily reveals that this is a high quality book that she does not want to dirty with her lower-class hands.

Celia’s literacy will not, by itself, confuse her social status, which would have been transmitted in such obvious elements as dress, as well as in less obvious but just as determining elements as demeanor, bodily movements and richness and timbre of expression. As Bauman and Briggs explain:

Locke observed long ago that social class is inscribed in the body as much as it is on the tongue when he suggested that it is training and practice that create differences in ‘carriage and language’ between a middle-aged ploughman and a gentleman. The ability ‘to reason well or speak handsomely’ is limited by an

individual's access to the metadiscursive practices that instill such competence—  
and thus quite clearly by class and gender. (157)

They conclude that, “the development of reasoning and linguistic precision is limited by the range of experiences gained through one's occupation and the amount of leisure time available” (157). Celia's social-class-specific lack of aesthetic sensitivity, continues, serving as a foil for Doña Nise's expression of her sophisticated sensibility and literary knowledge. When Doña Nise indicates, for example, that the book's author, Heliodorus, is a poet, Celia objects, “¿Poeta? Pues pareciome / prosa” (281-82), which allows her *ama* to expound on poetic prose. And when Celia indicates its confusedly boring beginning, “Miré el principio y cansome” (284), it allows Doña Nise to knowingly extol the writer's interest building *in medias res* technique. Finally, the aesthetically insensitive *criada* humorously wonders why so many people are attracted to such confusing material, “Pues, ¿de cosas tan oscuras / juzgan tantos?” (303-304), and allows Lope de Vega, via Doña Nise, to take a potshot at *culteranismo*.<sup>34</sup> Early modern Spanish theater abounds in *gracioso* attacks on *culteranismo*,<sup>35</sup> with the *oscurantismo* of Gongorine texts as a prominent focus of those comical criticisms. It is not at all surprising that *culterano* latinization of both semantic and syntactic Spanish creates a poetic language that distances itself radically from common popular speech patterns. Its identification with the more educated hegemonic nobility would explain the laughter with which predominantly popular early modern Spanish audiences received such witty attacks.

There is little question in my mind that Celia adds emphasis, along with jocularity of its own, via the ability of the actress involved to accompany her words with facial expressions and

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34. For the reference to *culteranismo* see Diego Marín (75).

35. See James A Castañeda. “El impacto del culteranismo en el teatro de la Edad de Oro.”

gestures. One can readily imagine Celia's face in the process of declaring that Heliodorus's famous text bored her to death, or her body movements while expressing her disbelief that there could be people attracted to obscure, confusing and, therefore, boring texts. It is a non-verbal comicality that actresses who specialized in such roles surely practiced and mastered, although in early modern Spanish theater no stage directions bear witness to the fact.

The scene can stand as an example of the versatility of the stock female comic figure. Celia, like the ubiquitous *gracioso*, can converse, without ceasing to be a low-class servant, on just about any level with her noble *ama*. Even in Lope de Vega, presumably the initial outlier of this female characterization, there could appear a *graciosa* capable of reading and opining upon literature with her well-read noble *dama*. This versatility of the stock comic figures is a virtue not often underscored, but would appear essential given the varied masters that they must serve in the intimate fashion that their roles required.

On a socio-historical level, the fact that Celia, a lowly *criada*, can read stands out in this play because Doña Finea, the not-so-smart noble protagonist, cannot. Theatrical roles probably project social reality, as Donald Larson explains of the early modern audience, "the fact is that these people were generally convinced that there was a quite real analogy between social lives and theatrical roles" (59). If we accept this, along with Domingo Ynduráin's observation that, "el personaje, en la comedia española, es el representante ideal de una clase social" (31), we can then assume that Celia's ability to read reflects a generally understated literacy among lower-class women. Woolard, when explaining literacy with language ideology theory, comes to the conclusion that:

Literacy is not an autonomous, neutral technology but rather culturally organized, ideologically grounded and is historically contingent...Literacy is therefore not a

unitary phenomenon but rather a diverse set of practices shaped by political, social, and economic forces in diverse communities...This means that orthographic systems cannot be conceptualized as simply reducing speech to writing but rather are symbols that themselves carry historical, cultural and political meanings. (23)

That Celia can read while lower-class women are usually presumed to be illiterate represents a hopeful social economic message.

Celia, in sly asides to her *ama*, adds to her humorous input at the beginning of the following scene, in which the two come upon Doña Finea, the “dumb” sister, at her reading lesson. Her ironic statement regarding the stage of Doña Finea’s education, “En los principios está” ( 311), is immediately confirmed by a hilariously funny confrontation between Doña Finea and her teacher. The confrontation is patently farcical in its physicality. The teacher exercises his prerogative of physical punishment (in accordance with the pedagogical system in place then, and for long thereafter, that believed in the dictum that, “la letra con sangre entra”) when his pupil is unable to recognize specific letters. This prompts Doña Finea’s no less physical self-defense, which will only end when Celia’s ironical aside, “Ya tarda / tu favor, Nise discreta,” (335-36) urges Doña Nise’s intervention to save the teacher. The hysterical scene continues as the two sisters comically argue, with Celia offering an emphatic aside that humorously summarizes Doña Finea’s obtuseness, “¡Ella es pieza / de rey!” (387-88).<sup>36</sup> It ends when Celia, backing her *ama*, amusingly stresses what Doña Finea’s father will do if he finds out about the

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36. This would roughly translate as ‘she’s some piece of work,’ which culminates the playwright’s presentation of Finea.

altercation, “Mas que te sale el alma, / si lo sabe...” (“He’s going to kill you if he knows...”; 395-96; my trans.).

The appearance of Clara, Doña Finea’s personal maid and the play’s other *graciosa*, initiates the following scene. The ensuing comical dialogue between them, Clara asking to be congratulated because their cat has given birth to kittens, reveals their common lack of intellectual sophistication. When Doña Finea asks if it had the kittens on the roof, and Clara indicates that she did so in the house, they both agree that it is a very intelligent cat. This prompts Clara to offer a mini-mock epic description of the celebrated event.<sup>37</sup> She states:

Salía, por donde suele,  
 el sol, muy galán y rico,  
 con la librea del rey,  
 colorado y amarillo;  
 andaban los carretones  
 quitándole el romadizo  
 que da la noche a Madrid,<sup>38</sup>  
 aunque no sé quién me dijo  
 que era la calle Mayor  
 el soldado más antiguo,  
 pues nunca el mayor de Flandes  
 presentó tantos servicios;<sup>39</sup>

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37. Lope de Vega later published a full mock-epic (1634) with feline characters. The following is of scholarly interest for mapping the development of his masterpiece *La gatomaquia*.

38. Madrid residents were already then called ‘gatos’.

pregonaban aguardiente—  
 agua biznieta del vino  
 los hombres Carnestolendas,  
 todos naranjas y gritos.<sup>40</sup>  
 Dormían las rentas grandes,  
 despertaban los oficios,  
 tocaban los boticarios  
 sus almoreces a pino,<sup>41</sup>  
 cuando la gata de casa  
 comenzó, con mil suspiros,  
 a decir: “¡Ay, ay, ay, ay!  
 ¡Que quiero parir, marido!”  
 Levantose Hociquimocho<sup>42</sup>  
 Y fue corriendo a decirlo  
 A sus parientes y deudos;  
 Que deben de ser moriscos,

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39. Both a play on ‘mayor’ and ‘servicios’; the name of Madrid’s largest marketplace and the military rank conceded to the longest-serving sergeant.

40. “Revelling men, throwing oranges and yelling, hawked a colorless alcoholic beverage twice distilled from wine.”

41. “The rich slept, tradesmen awoke, the apothecaries clanged out the death knell on their mortars,” The humor lies in the lethal effect of their medicines.

42. Hociquimocho=chato



Porque el lenguaje que hablan,  
 en tiple de monacillos,  
 si no es jerigonza entre ellos,  
 no es español ni latino.<sup>43</sup>  
 Vino una gata v(i)uda,  
 con blanco y negro vestido—  
 sospecho que era su ag(ü)ela--,  
 gorda y compuesta de hocico;  
 y si lo que arrastra honra,  
 como dicen los antiguos,  
 tan honrada es por la cola  
 como otros por sus oficios.<sup>44</sup>  
 Trújole cierta manteca,

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43. “These are probably Muslims because the language they speak, sounding like young altar-boys, is probably the gibberish they use, certainly neither Spanish or Latin.” The humor lies in the veiled accusation of ‘*morisco*’ homosexuality via the reference to quality of voice and with ‘neither Spanish nor Latin’ standing in for ‘neither male or female’.

44. “There appeared a widowed cat, dressed in white and black—I suspect it was her grandmother—, fat and with toileted lips, and if, as the ancients say, what drags behind one is a measure of one’s honor, she gains as much honor from her tail as others do from their social position.” The humor involved flows from the fact that what is being described is a cat: but its black and white coat resembles the black dress and white headdress that human widows then wore; her long tail is as honorable as the trailing dress is to royalty.

desayunose y previno  
 en qué recibir el parto.<sup>45</sup>  
 Hubo temerarios gritos;  
 no es burla, parió seis gatos  
 tan remendados y lindos,  
 que pudieran, a ser pías,  
 llevar el coche más rico.<sup>46</sup>  
 Regocijados bajaron  
 de los tejados vecinos,  
 caballetes y terrados,  
 todos los deudos y amigos;  
 Lamicola, Arañizaldo,  
 Marfuz, Marramao, Micilo,  
 Tumbaollín, Mico, Miturrio,  
 Rabicorto, Zapaquilda;  
 Unos vestidos de pardo,  
 Otros de blanco vestidos,

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45. I don't know what this *cierta manteca* is, possibly a lotion/paste then applied to facilitate birthing.

46. "There ensued some terrifying shouts, and, believe it or not, she bore six kittens, so color-patched and lovely that, had they been white horses with color patches, they could have pulled the richest coaches." The humor in the description of the kittens lies in the exaggerated comparison with coach horses.

Y otros con forros de martas

En cueras y capotillos.<sup>47</sup>

De negro vino a la fiesta

el gallardo Golosino.

luto que mostraba entonces

de su padre el gaticidio.<sup>48</sup>

Cuál la morcilla presenta,

cuál el pez, cuál el cabrito,

cuál el gorrión astuto,

cuál el simple palomino.

Trazando quedan agora,

para mayor regocijo

en el gatesco senado

correr gansos cinco a cinco.<sup>49</sup>

Ven presto, que si los oyes,

dirás que parecen niños,

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47. 'forros de martas en cueras y capotillos', 'dresses and capes lined with marten fur'. The humor lies in the humanization that the mock poetic genre employs, and, of course, in the laughable appellations.

48. 'de su padre el gaticidio', 'his father's murder'

49. 'correr gansos cinco a cinco', is a carnival amusement consisting of tying down a goose and trying, on horseback, to slaughter it by grabbing its neck.

y darás a la parida  
el parabién de los hijos. (413-488)

Clara's funny narrative, the longest run of verses in the play, constituting well over 2% of its content although unrelated in subject to its plotline,<sup>50</sup> is only the tip of the humorous iceberg. The narrative lends itself extremely well, given the domestic animal's familiar antics, to the non-verbal abilities of the actress in the role. One can imagine the countless times throughout Clara's recital when her words would have been comically enhanced by imitative gestures and bodily posturing. It serves, as well, to indicate the important need of a female stock comic figure in the cast of so many plays. The subject of the interpolated humorous interlude required, on the one hand, a feminine narrator, and, on the other, a socially unrestrained popular character, that is, a *graciosa*.

On a social note, through this amusing description with humanized animals Clara is able to give a vivid picture of what would have occurred during a birth in Spain's early modern period. Such scenes are rare because the birthing process was a taboo subject, especially so amongst the upper classes, whose young, unmarried women were, until fairly recently, forbidden to witness (much less talk about) the event. Only the play's *graciosa*, presenting it in a comical manner, could offer this type of description and have it be socially acceptable. And even so, Clara's narration, in the presence of two unmarried *damas*, projects her as being as boorishly insensitive (*boba*) as her *ama*. As the scene comes to an end, Celia, astounded, as is Doña Nise, by what they have just heard, humorously questions the similarity between Clara and her *ama*, "La semejanza es bastante; / aunque yo pienso que Clara / es más bellaca que boba" (496-98).

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50. It exemplifies, via such a lengthy spell of unrelated, unmitigated laughter, the indispensable importance of its comical dimension to Spain's popular early modern theater.

The realistic pragmatism that contrastingly differentiates the popular *graciosa* from her noble *ama* thus functions in Celia and itself serves as the basis for doubting Clara's incredibly exaggerated *bobería*.<sup>51</sup>

Clara will be the instrument of the following two comical moments. In the next scene, Don Laurencio and his servant Pedro agree that they will concentrate their courting on Doña Finea and Clara, respectively.<sup>52</sup> The wooing procedure of *graciosos* and *graciosas*, humorously parodying that of their respective masters—whether spontaneous or, as in the present case, contrived—was a standardized source of comedy in early modern Spanish theater. As the popular audience would have expected, Pedro's courtship of Clara is just that:

PEDRO. Con él, como os digo, vengo

tan muerto por vuestro amor,

que aquesta ocasión busqué.

CLARA. ¿Qué es amor, que no lo sé?

PEDRO. ¿Amor? ¡Locura, furor!

CLARA. Pues, ¿loca tengo de estar?

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51. One must assume that the audience, familiar with the usual presentation of popular servants, would have agreed with Celia, but the interesting situation suggested, of the *graciosa* Clara merely 'acting out' her role in order to be compatible with her *dama*, is never fully resolved.

52. Pedro's initial doubt regarding the authenticity of Clara's *bobería*, "Sospecho que es más taimada/que boba" (735-36), is cancelled almost immediately by his description of the task before him: "¡Que ha de poder un cristiano / enamorar una mula!" (743-44). This does not refer to Clara's physical appearance, which Pedro's master certifies as 'beautiful of face and figure' (745).

PEDRO.       Es una dulce locura,  
                   por quien la mayor cordura  
                   suelen los hombres trocar.

CLARA.       Yo, lo que mi ama hiciere,  
                   eso haré.

PEDRO.       Ciencia es amor,  
                   que el más rudo labrador  
                   a pocos cursos la adquiere.  
                   En comenzando a querer,  
                   enferma la voluntad  
                   de una dulce enfermedad.

CLARA.       No me la mandes tener;  
                   que no he tenido en mi vida  
                   sino solos sabañones. (808-26)

As can be noted, Clara carries forth her obtuse *bobería*, culminating it by equating the ‘sickness’ of love to sores or blisters.

In social terms, the humorous exchange about love that Pedro and Clara sustain makes clear that the lower class does not share the noble neo-platonic ideal of love, which heightens, rather than befuddles, the mind. In this play, Lope has his main characters become enriched through the power of love. As Larson explains, “*La dama boba* is ornamented with a number of “set” speeches which extol love’s power to elevate and educate...it makes the usual points: love illuminates the darkness of the mind, it causes the mute to speak, it transforms ignorance into wisdom and discretion” (61). However, through the comical discourse of Clara and Pedro, the

pragmatic and non-idealized positions on love are expressed. Larson notes that, “comedy exalts normalcy, and it defines normalcy as the mean, the accustomed, the ordinary, the common-sensical” (50).

In Clara and Pedro’s dialogue, when contrasted with the main theme of the play, we have a clear example of how the lower class is defined by its rejection of noble ideals, which would have struck a sympathetic chord with the predominately lower-class audience. As Jesús Gómez explains, “Existe una proporción directa entre la clase o estamento a los que pertenece el personaje y la naturaleza de los argumentos dramáticos, como reconocen de manera paladina los preceptistas de la época” (31).

The humor continues as Doña Finea and Clara dialogue once their wooers are gone, it is a conversation that could be termed, in indicating its funniness, a *diálogo entre bobas*. When Doña Finea wonders about what love is, Clara sums up its confusing effects with a comical culinary metaphor: “No hay pepitoria / que tenga más menudencias / de manos, tripas y pies.” (852-54).<sup>53</sup> And when Doña Finea, referring to a small portrait that her father has given her of his latest choice for her husband, notes that her chosen mate (Don Liseo) doesn’t seem to have legs, Clara agrees, “Luego éste no podrá andar” (882). The dialogue ends when, with her father approaching, Doña Finea, fearing that he comes to marry her off, says she prefers the suiter who just left, who at least has legs. Clara adds to this, referring to Pedro’s wooing advances, a very witty hunting metaphor: “Y más, que con perro caza; / que el mozo me muerde a mí” (887-88). The amusing matter of the legless portrait will be revived toward the very end of the first act. When Don Liseo is finally presented to Doña Finea, she exclaims: “¡Aún agora / viene con

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53. ‘There is no fricassee that has more pieces of pig hands, tripe and feet’.

piernas y pies!” (916-17) To which Clara responds, “Esto, ¿es burla o jerigonza?” (918), a remark that would seem to indicate that she is truly as *boba* as her mistress.

How dumb, you may ask, can the two be? What is clear is that the *graciosa*, whether feigning dumbness or merely expressing it, fulfills her primary dramatic role in providing added comedy and social critiques to the play. In this case, with the ‘dumb’ *dama* herself inciting the public’s laughter, the stock female comic figure’s funny additions may be somewhat redundant. It is, however, not usually so, as will be noted in the plays to follow, in which the mistress is hardly funny at all and it is the *graciosa* alone who injects the significant measure of the humor that Spain’s popular early modern theater required in all its performances. And, it is through this comicality, one must bear in mind, that the *graciosa* is able to explicitly or implicitly critique many hegemonic tenets of her day.

## Act II

In the second act, *graciosa* humor is much less necessary. It is a setting laced with the comical intrigue of the protagonists and the wittily presented “intelligent” evolution of Doña Finea and “dumbing down” of her *sabihonda* sister. Still, there are periodic, if brief, contributions by the two female stock comic figures. As in the first act, it is Celia who initiates these. At its onset, Doña Nise, after a month-long illness, comes upon the group of suitors philosophizing on the positive effects of love on intelligence. Doña Nise commends their serious exercise, but Celia drolly indicates, “Amores pienso que son, / fundados en el dinero” (1150-51). In the lofty philosophical ambience maintained by the young suitors, Celia’s pragmatic remark humorously cuts to a stark economic reality that the audience is well aware of. It is funny because Don Laurencio’s grandiloquent Neo-platonic-based defense of the positive effects of love on intelligence is hopefully driven by his need to court Doña Finea for her dowry.



Celia's observation of Don Laurencio's motivation is completely correct. Don Laurencio himself says that he is marrying Doña Finea for her dowry many times throughout the play. As Laura Bass explains:

Modern readers of *La dama boba* have been unsettled by the ironic tension between spiritual elevation and material interest: if the play at once celebrates through the filter of Neoplatonism the power of love to awaken Finea's intellect, at the same time it exposes the base motives of the very source of that love, Laurencio, who wants her for her dowry. (774)

At one point in the play, Don Laurencio lists Doña Finea's financial worth. As Bass notes, "with his cumulative list of assets, Don Laurencio has reduced Doña Finea, in Horst's words, to 'income-producing real estate'. The conflation of woman and income is underscored in the literal dressing-up of *renta*, who wears a *basquiña* (skirt)" (784).<sup>54</sup>

However, it is Celia's witty presentation of Don Laurencio's true intentions that highlight the lower nobility's financial situation in Spain during this period. Celia's discourse reinforces Bass's observation that, "on the stage itself, especially in the space of urban comedy, money had a visible place, and not only in opposition to higher, intangible values of discretion" (773). What Celia's words point to, if analyzed critically is, as Bass concludes, "the extent to which New World wealth had intruded into aristocratic patterns of courtship and the anxiety that intrusion

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54. For Don Laurencio's dressing of *renta* wearing a *basquiña* (skirt), see *La dama boba* (vv. 1624-39).

produced among some members of the ruling elite” (785).<sup>55</sup> In this case, Celia’s words, as one example of *graciosa* discourse, serves, as Kroskrity explains, “to keep us aware of the status of language as a primary site of political process and of the discursive mediation of those very activities and events we recognize as political” (1). The study of *graciosa* discourse, analyzed with language ideology theory, encourages us, as Kroskrity further emphasizes, “to use the more traditional skills of linguistic anthropologists as a means of relating the models and practices shared by members of a speech community to their political-economic positions and interests” (3). Such is the case in this situation, in which Celia humorously speaks her truth about the courting nobility.

Celia’s down-to-earth appreciation exemplifies an important function that the stock comic figures of early modern Spanish theater, both male and female, invariably fulfill. They constantly, laughingly puncture the balloon of noble idealism with a popular pragmatism that was shared, for the most part, by a predominantly popular audience. If the *gracioso* counters his master’s idealistically impossible perception of the world, of life, the *graciosa*, with a similar social background and cultural attitude, will usually douse her equally utopic mistress with a comedic cold shower of mildly cynical practicality.

Celia’s next humorous contribution occurs when Doña Nise, accusing Don Laurencio, her love interest, of courting Doña Finea in her absence, delegates her maid to divulging the detailed basis for the accusation. There are sound and obvious reasons for such a delegation in the plotline. First of all, because Celia, spying for her ailing mistress, has been the witness to the

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55. Bass’s ‘New World wealth’ refers to the new wealthy class made up of what was referred to as *peruleros* (today we use the term *indiano*), non-nobles who had become obscenely wealthy in the New World.

goings-on; and then, of course, the noble *dama* may reasonably feel that it is beneath her. But there is perhaps another, less obvious reason that the author of a patently funny play may well have considered, even when there are no stage directions to confirm it. To wit: that the discourse of the *graciosa* could bring laughter to an otherwise tense situation.

It is not difficult to imagine the actress in the role of Celia resorting to her capacity for non-verbal humor in the process of spelling out her mistress's accusations. What is more, it is suggested, by the most unusual situation involved: a lowly female servant berating a male nobleman. When she says, "yo sé que has dicho a Finea / requiebros," (I know that you have lovingly praised Finea; my trans; 1281-82), a gloating timbre to her voice, a socially meaningful merriment in her eyes, perhaps a knowing wink to the popular audience, would surely have registered in the *mosquetería* and the *cazuela*. This can serve as an example of the playwright opting for the character that at that moment could generate most laughter even when doing so turned an inflexible social order on its head. It is no accident that he has a *graciosa* in the cast and at hand to perform the comical chores required. It both explains and justifies, at least to some extent, early modern Spanish theater's creation of the stock female comic figure. The popular character possessed, as such, resources of non-verbal humor (gestures, winks, voice inflexions) that noble *damas* normally could not display on stage.

It is an openly funny *non sequitur* that Celia, as spokesperson for her *ama*, should also voice recriminations only pertinent to her own social level. She states:

y no solo tú a mi dueño (sic)  
 ingratamente pagaste,  
 pero tu Pedro, el que tiene  
 de tus secretos las llaves,

ama a Clara tiernamente. (1285-89)

And not only have you been

ungrateful to my mistress,

but Pedro who has

the key to all of your secrets,

tenderly loves Clara. ( my trans.)

Celia humorously refers to the fact that servants, as permanent fixtures of noble households, were privy to their masters' most secret matters. This fact is the basis for an aspect of *graciosa* and *gracioso* roles that is not encountered in the four plays that I selected but that merits a mention here, the common gossiping among servants concerning their masters. Pedraza, for example, explains that:

[Criados] convierten la cháchara y la murmuración en la actividad que da sentido a su vida y a su empleo como criadas. Mano a mano con el gracioso, quitándose la palabra de la boca, critican y refieren las costumbres de sus amos... Los señores son muy conscientes de esta invencible inclinación de sus criados, que todos aceptan como normal y consuetudinaria... La murmuración es una reacción fisiológica imposible de vencer sin graves daños para el organismo. (134-35)

It is fairly obvious that *gracioso* gossip concerning their masters' views and conduct opens an avenue of comical inter-class criticism that, with predominantly popular audiences laughing, would certainly have had social impact.

As the focus passes from Doña Nise to Doña Finea, the chore of adding to the play's funny content passes from Celia to Clara. Since "dumb" Doña Finea happens to be as comical as her servant, dialogue between them is usually doubly humorous. Perhaps the best example of this

is the long passage in which Clara seeks to excuse herself to her *ama* for falling asleep and allowing Don Laurencio's letter to be scorched:

CLARA:       ¿Cómo te podría decir  
una desgracia notable?

FINEA.        Hablando; porque no hay cosa  
de decir dificultosa,  
a mujer que viva y hable.

CLARA.        Dormir en día de fiesta,<sup>56</sup>  
¿es malo?

FINEA.        Pienso que no;  
aunque si Adán se durmió,  
buena costilla le cuesta.

CLARA.        Pues si nació la mujer  
de una dormida costilla,  
que duerma no es maravilla.

FINEA.        Agora vengo a entender  
sólo con esta advertencia,  
por qué se andan tras nosotras  
los hombres, y en unas y otras  
hacen tanta diligencia;  
que, si esto no es asilla,<sup>57</sup>

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56. 'Día de fiesta,' 'day off'

57. 'asilla', 'ailment'

deben de andar a buscar  
su costilla, y no hay que parar  
hasta topar su costilla.

CLARA.        Luego si para el que amó  
un año, y dos, hartó bien  
lo dirán los que le ven  
que su costilla topó.

FINEA.        A lo menos los casados.

CLARA.        ¡Sabia estás!

FINEA.        Aprendo ya,  
que me enseña amor quizá  
con liciones de cuidados.

CLARA.        Volviendo al cuento, Laurencio  
me dio un papel para ti.  
Púseme a hilar. ¡Ay de mí,  
cuánto provoca el silencio!  
Metí en el copo el papel,  
y como hilaba al candil  
y es la estopa tan sutil,  
aprendiose el copo en él.  
Cabezas hay disculpadas  
cuando duermen sin cojines,  
y sueños (sic) como rocines

que vienen con cabezadas.

Apenas el copo ardió,  
cuando, puesta en él de pies,  
me chamusqué; ya lo ves.

FINEA.       ¿Y el papel?

CLARA.       Libre quedó,  
como el santo de Pajares.  
Sobraron estos renglones,  
en que hallarás más razones  
que en mi cabeza aladares.<sup>58</sup>

FINEA.       ¿Y no se podrán leer?

CLARA.       Toma, y lee.

FINEA.       Yo sé poco.

CLARA.       ¡Dios libre de un fuego loco  
la estopa de la mujer! (1432-1484)

As indicated, the entire scene is comical, with all manner of humor contrived to produce laughter. The “desgracia notable”, the burning of a letter from Don Laurencio to Doña Finea caused by Clara’s falling asleep at the spinning wheel, was thought up exclusively to this end. It allows for a line of humor constructed around *refranes* and *dichos refranescos*, witticisms that make up a manner of popular, empirical lore. The *Refranero Español*, compiled in the Spanish

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58. ‘Aladares’, ‘curls that fall over the ears’

Renaissance as an example of *filosofía vulgar*,<sup>59</sup> is a bountiful source of comicality in the popular theater of early modern Spain.

There is, to begin with, the non-verbal humor expressed by Clara, conveying via looks and gestures her fearful guilt, in boning up to confess her fault. She is side-tracked by Doña Finea, who exonerates her for falling asleep (the first part of her intended confession), but mentions in so doing that when Adam fell asleep it cost him a rib. Clara grasps the idea, funnily indicating that if woman was the result, sleeping couldn't be that bad. When Doña Finea realizes that the biblical story could explain why men run after women, just seeking their lost rib, the two women amusingly "discover the Mediterranean".<sup>60</sup> To wit: that men who find their true love can be said to have found *su costilla*, an identification, feminine love object/*costilla*, that was universal and timeless in the Judeo-Christian world.

The dialogue continues as Clara moves back to her confessional stance, doing so with a justifying recital of the actions that led to the accidental fire. There is no end to the possibilities for non-verbal humor that this allows the *graciosa* (1461-76), a series of faces and body movements that I'm sure the actress exploited to the hilt. But Doña Finea is only interested in whether the fire destroyed Don Laurencio's letter, and Clara alludes to a *refrán* in answer: "El milagro del santo de Pajares, que ardió él y no las pajas" (1477). That is, that the fire scorched the letter, which she confirms by indicating that its surviving lines will still contain more excuses than she has hairs on her head. And when Doña Finea insists on trying to read the damaged letter, Clara ends the dialogue, "¡Dios libre de un fuego loco / la estopa de la mujer!" (1483-84),

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59. Juan de Mal Lara, *Filosofía vulgar*. Sevilla, 1568.

60 . Spanish phrase comically employed for those who "discover" what everybody knows.



by alluding to a *refrán* that appropriately incorporates fire while referring to Doña Finea's passionate state: "El hombre es fuego, la mujer estopa, y llega el demonio y sopla."

Clara's final funny contribution in the second act comes at the end of another dialogue between *dama* and *graciosa*, closing a sad scene with a burst of humor. Doña Finea, having decided to bow to her father's demand that she forget Don Laurencio, asks Clara what she is going to do about her ongoing relations with Pedro, Don Laurencio's servant. Clara's answer: "¿No ves que amé porque amabas, / y olvidaré porque olvidas?" (1575-76) is an inside joke between playwright and audience to some extent breaking theatrical illusion because the *graciosa* is commenting on her role, the playwright, via the *graciosa*, indicates that he will comply with theatrical tradition.

This situation, in which the *criados* are to marry each other based on their subjection to their *amo*'s fancy, is exacerbated in this play because of the four marriages that must occur in true *comedia de capa y espada* fashion. Larson explains that this has to do:

With the realization that for each person on earth there is one role which he can most appropriately play, that all other roles are in various degrees inappropriate, and that happiness and genuineness stem from the assumption of that peculiarly apposite role to which one has been, in a sense, predestined...What this tells us by inference is that each person in the world of the comedy has a particular *oficio* and that each *oficio* implies a relatively fixed set of attitudes and a relatively fixed way of behaving. (57)

Larson strengthened his case by noting that:

It is often written that the life and literature of the seventeenth century in Spain were pervaded by a histrionic sensibility...As has been made clear by a number of

recent studies, notably E. Orozco Díaz *El teatro y la teatralidad del barroco*, the idea that “all the world is a stage” was a good deal more than a mere metaphor for the Spaniards of this period...complete immersion in one’s proper part was assumed to be liberating, not constricting. As with actors on stage, the playing of roles provided a means of self-expression, challenged inventiveness, and quickened the emotional life. In the assumption of one’s proper role lay security and the freedom of the inner person. In its rejection, repression, confusion, and ineffectuality. (59)

In any case, the parallel pairing of *dama/caballero* and *criada de dama/criado de caballero* was so standardized by then that the playwright could, in baroque theatrical illusion-defying fashion, jokingly refer to his forced acquiescence.

That this type of pairing, based on the whims of the noble class, which had become theatrical convention is a good example of why, as Paul Kroskrity explains, “language ideologies are profitably conceived as multiple because of the multiplicity of meaningful social divisions (class, gender, clan, elites, generations, and so on) within sociocultural groups that have the potential to produce divergent perspectives expressed as indices of group membership” (12). Kroskrity continues:

Viewing language ideologies as “normally” (or unmarkedly) multiple within a population focuses attention on their potential conflict and contention in a social space and on the elaborate formulations that the fact of such contestation can encourage. This emphasis can also be maintained in the analysis of “dominant” ideologies or those that have become successfully “naturalized” by the majority group...By viewing multiplicity as the sociological baseline, we are challenged to

understand the processes employed by specific groups to have their ideologies become taken-for-granted aspects and hegemonic forces of cultural life for a larger society. (12-13)

In this particular example, in which, Jesús Gómez points out, “el protagonismo de los personajes plebeyos está subordinado al de los nobles, como ocurre con la mayoría de los criados” (30), Clara’s discourse involving this theatrical convention comically reveals how members of the lower class resolving their lives around the whims of a hegemonic social group has become expected behavior. However, its comical, carnivalesque, self-mocking presentation is, itself, a popular judgment on the matter.

### Act III

The last act of *La dama boba*, with its protagonist sisters moving quickly away from their respective humorous extremes, *boba* and *sabihonda*, contains much less laughter-inciting material than the two preceding acts. Larson explains that:

By the end of the play, Finea knows infinitely more than she did at the beginning, and Nise, although she does not know less, and indeed, could hardly know less, is at least more humble, more reticent about parading her knowledge, and more aware of the value of the practical (versus theoretical) intellect. (51)

Perhaps it is also because Lope de Vega had to quickly unsnarl the tangled web of love affairs that he had created in his *capa y espada comedia*. In any case, what funny lines or incidents occur involve the two *graciosas*, who fulfill their basic *raison-de-êre* in early modern Spanish theater of supplying added humor. They do so in the most diverse situations and in the most varied ways.

For example, when Doña Nise and Celia overhear Don Laurencio's amorous words directed at Doña Finea, a bewildered Doña Nise asks her maid whether they are those of a lover or courtesies of a soon-to-be brother-in-law. Celia's answer, "Regalos deben de ser; pero no quisiera ver / cuñado tan regalado" (2648-650) is a funny combination of yes and no, with the no naughtily alluding to a scandalous situation. An overly endeared brother-in-law, which is actually not yet the case in the play, evokes a perhaps titillating image of incestuous adultery. In the extreme *mojigata* context of Counter-Reformation Spain, it would probably have been enough to rouse the more popular segments of the audience to roaring laughter, and could have only been spoken by the *graciosa*.

The above scene ends with an irate Doña Nise confronting Don Laurencio and the latter definitely dashing her amorous hopes. When Don Laurencio and his servant leave, the playwright employs his *graciosa*, Celia, to insert the tension-dispelling humor capable of maintaining the strictly comedic intent of *La dama boba*. She does so by merely counter-pointing her mistress's every attack upon Don Laurencio with one of her own against Pedro, Celia's established formulaic mate. This is comical, and would have produced laughter in the audience, because the parallel courting and mating referred to above is always parody and thus itself funny:

NISE.           ¿Qué es aquesto?

CELIA.          Que se va

Pedro con el mismo humor,

y aquí viene bien que Pedro

es tan ruin como su amo.<sup>61</sup>

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61 . Lope de Vega adds to the humor involved by a theatrical illusion-dispelling reference, "y aquí viene bien," to that formulaic parody.

NISE. Ya le aborrezco y desamo....

CELIA. Y el Pedro, ¿quién le vio ir  
tan bellaco y socarrón? (2677-2686)

As expected, when the focus returns to Doña Finea, Clara will assume the task of bringing humor to the fore. When Doña Finea decides to hide a harried Don Laurencio in her attic, Clara will, of course, have to implement the deed. Clara obeys, but not before wittily bringing the formulaic parody into play, “¿Y a Pedro?” (2821). And then, when Doña Finea grants permission to hide Pedro as well, an amusing exchange ensues between the *graciosa* and the *gracioso*:

PEDRO. Clara, en llegando la hora  
de muquir, di a tu señora  
que algún sustento nos dé.

CLARA. Otro comerá peor  
que tú. (2824-2828)

Clara’s allusion to the formulaic parody, itself laughter-inciting, prepares one of the outlets allowed by having both a *gracioso* and a *graciosa* in the cast. The wit here is centered on the *gracioso*, on his language (‘muquir’ is always funny slang, often based on Romani) and, above all, on his materialistic worry with eating under the circumstances. But Clara’s few words, “another will eat less well than you” (2827-28; my trans.), probably aroused the greatest laughter from the knowing popular audience. If the “another” refers, as it appears to,<sup>62</sup> to Don Laurencio, Clara is saying that he will be better supplied with food than even his master. She can say this because, she will be charged with feeding the hidden lovers. It is a show of power of the lowly

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62. The singular ‘another’ rather than ‘others’, would have us discard a general statement.

over their social superiors that the predominantly plebian public would have relished. Humorous exchanges between stock comic figures, male and female, are characteristic of early modern Spanish theater. In this case, the amusing exchange between the two is brief, but these, as we shall see in the analysis of subsequent plays, could be extended as required in popular theater.

A dialogue between Doña Finea and Clara about the two men hidden in the attic, using references to Diogenes and Plato, establishes, in keeping with the play's premise that love does seem to enhance intelligence. It also prepares Clara's long and curious list of people living in attics.<sup>63</sup> Its funnily commented listing appears to have no other function than to incite a fairly long period of laughter, and some of its allusions to specific people or events are today unidentifiable. Although most references and allusions are blatantly funny, part of the humor is lost to us when the passage of time has rendered the details unknown. This is always a problem with comical material which must rely, in order to incite laughter, on referents in the present, a present that, in many cases, disappears totally through the years.<sup>64</sup> Clara states:

En el desván vive bien  
un matador criminal,  
cuya muerte natural  
ninguno o pocos la ven.<sup>65</sup>

En el desván, de mil modos,

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63. The attic is used symbolically as a separation from society.

64. María Grazia Profeti explains, "...los juegos de palabras del teatro barroco pueden hoy resultar incomprensibles para un público 'no entendido,' es decir un público que ha perdido el contexto referencial que hacía posible la alusión." ("Código ideológico-social" 15).

65 . Funny use of 'desvan' for 'cárcel.'

y sujeto a mil desgracias,  
 aquél que diciendo gracias  
 es desgraciado con todos.<sup>66</sup>  
 En el desván, una dama,  
 que creyendo a quien la inquieta,  
 por una hora de discreta,<sup>67</sup>  
 pierde mil años de fama.  
 En el desván, unpreciado  
 lindo, y es caimán,<sup>68</sup>  
 pero tiénele el desván,  
 como el espejo, engañado.  
 En el desván el que canta  
 con voz de carro de bueyes,<sup>69</sup>  
 y el que viene de Muleyes  
 y a los godos se levanta.<sup>70</sup>  
 En el desván, el que escribe

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66. Probable reference to a “maldiciente.” For the possible reference to a specific “maldiciente,” of which more than one belonged to Madrid’s literary circle, see Diego Marín (177), footnote.

67. Funny play on “discreta,” which here can mean, not discrete, but “know-it-all.”

68. “lindo,” “fop”; “caimán,” dangerous wastrel

69. screechy voiced

70. An attack on moriscos, “viene de Muleys”, who pass themselves off as “old” Christians, “godos”. See Diego Marín (178), footnote.

versos legos y donados,<sup>71</sup>  
 y el que, por vanos cuidados,  
 sujeto a peligros vive. (2963-2986)

This passage, a list of general criticism of professions and people in general, goes back to carnivalesque humor,<sup>72</sup> and it becomes a significant part of *gracioso/graciosa* comical repertoires.

*La dama boba* ends, quite expectedly, on the humorous note of the formulaic parody of parallel marriages on the two social levels of the play, nobles and plebeians. This is complied with, even when comically forced, as is the case of Celia and Turín, but Lope de Vega may have added extra bones of laughter for his predominantly popular public. The two remaining noble suitors, Don Feniso and Don Duardo, are made to offer the prescribed final plea for the applause of the audience together, something usually, but not always, carried out by the *graciosos*. The fact is that even more may well be read into its final passages to disparage the nobility.<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

Scholars have found, in great measure determining my selection of plays for this study, that the stock female comic figure, the *graciosa*, was most fully developed by the generation of playwrights associated with Calderón de la Barca. Lope de Vega, the logical creator of the character type, reveals, in the examples just analyzed, that his basic outline already included its

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71. “poor verses”; see Diego Marín (178), footnote, who believes the reference may be to a specific poet.

72. See Bakhtín (179-80, 185-87, 258).

73. At the very end of the play, Feniso directs himself to Duardo: *Vos y yo sólo faltamos. / Dad acá esa mano hermosa*. This may suggest homosexuality.



outstanding theatrical virtues, even if only incipiently in some cases. I shall attempt, here, to summarize some *graciosa* characteristics in *La dama boba* that will reappear, more fully developed in most cases, in the study of the plays to follow.

However, in the case of one of those theatrical virtues, the stock female comic figure's versatility, her capacity to adapt to a noble *ama* that sustains her presence in the dramatic piece, Lope de Vega's characterization can hardly be improved upon. It is probably so because the plotline of this play has two diametrically opposed female protagonists, each with a maid/*graciosa* that perfectly suits them. Celia and Clara, without losing their fundamental popular identity, match the idiosyncratic peculiarities of their *amas*. It is a patent adaptability in the type that, as noted in my analysis, runs through the entire text. This versatility in the stage projection of the *graciosa* is a *sine qua non* for this recurring character.

Another theatrical virtue that these early *graciosas* already boasted is a great potential capacity for exercising a non-verbal humor that, lacking stage directions, the scholarly reader must stress. It is imperative that this be done to realize the full jocular potential of the stock female comic figure. This is so because, given her gender and social status, the *graciosa* was especially endowed, at least at that point in time, to fully exercise it. She alone in the casts of early modern Spanish theater could carry out the kinds of facial expressions, gestures and body movements that conveyed another layer of humor. I will have occasion, in the ensuing analyses of *graciosa* performances, to dwell on this matter.

Other capacities for inciting a laughter so essential to the theater of the time are already revealed, if perhaps still incipiently, in Lope de Vega's Celia and Clara. The presence of a stock female comic figure in a play allows, as noted in the above analysis, for the intensely amusing dialogued confrontations of *graciosas* and *graciosos*. The brief examples noted above introduce

a modality of humor that future playwrights would exploit at length as a means of rapidly and assuredly raising the comical temperature at any given moment in the play. I will have occasion to exemplify this in the ensuing analyses.

There is another avenue of *graciosa* humor that is only tentatively present in *La dama boba* but will experience much further development in future playwrights. It is the stock female comic figure's unique ability, shared with the *gracioso*, to disregard theatrical illusion at will, comically shattering the fourth wall of the theatrical event. The examples noted are barely noticeable, but I will have occasion to underscore it repeatedly in subsequent analyses. It will evolve in future generations as a significant ploy of the *graciosa*, transforming her, periodically, into the playwright's popular connection to his plebian audience.

My analysis of the *graciosa* performances in *La dama boba*, even if in some aspects offering incipient and tentative examples of the type's full potential, already offers us a complete set of characteristics. Other playwrights would develop it further, but its essential functions and capacities are clearly present in the play. The *graciosa* is successfully introduced as an added source of humor in a theater desperately requiring it. She already projects the versatility required of a stock comic figure, and offers, given her gender, distinctive feminine elements to the comedic dimension of the *comedia*. It is because of these comical aspects that the *graciosa* is able to use a discourse that may often have produced a social impact that by employing language ideology theory, I have emphasized as a source of women's history that historical texts often fail to illuminate.

## Chapter Two: Isabel

Calderón de la Barca and *La dama duende*

Calderón de la Barca undoubtedly has a place among the greatest playwrights of all time if only for his most well-known play, *La vida es sueño*. Although not as prolific as Lope de Vega, with whom he co-habitated in early seventeenth-century Madrid, the percentage of his more than 100 *comedias* that have achieved the status of masterpieces may even exceed that of the “Monstruo de los ingenios”. In a very real sense, Calderón de la Barca has had to share his fame with the unprecedented conjunction of literary genius represented by: Cervantes (1547-1616), Góngora (1561-1627), Lope de Vega (1562-1635), Quevedo (1580-1645) and Tirso de Molina (1571-1648), to name the most prominent. Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) represents the last generation of ‘greats’ usually included in what is traditionally referred to as a ‘Siglo de Oro’ of Spanish literature that flowed from the Renaissance into the Baroque.

Writing within the popular tragi-comical *comedia* format developed by the earlier generations of Lope de Vega and Tirso de Molina, Calderón de la Barca, court playwright, reflected in his plays a not unexpected structural sophistication and intellectual refinement of that accepted *comedia* formula. This structural-refining procedure is noticeable, for example, in his peasant-honor masterpiece, *El alcalde de Zalamea*, the *refundición* of a Lope de Vega play.<sup>74</sup> Calderón de la Barca was most widely known for his tragic honor plays such as *A secreto agravio, secreta venganza*, *El médico de su honra* and *El pintor de su deshonra*. Modern criticism has correctly ascertained that with these plays, which often result, *Othello*-like, in the murder of an innocent wife, Calderón de la Barca challenged rather than reinforced the

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74. See Albert E. Sloman, *The Dramatic Craftsmanship of Calderón: His Use of Earlier Plays*, (217-40).

extremely anti-feminine conjugal honor interpretations of his age. As Eric Graf has noted, “*El medico de su honra* (1635) does indeed criticize honor killings” (1). It should not be forgotten, however, that the bloody solution to female adultery, real or imagined, continued to be legally sanctioned in the western world into the twentieth century.

Calderón de la Barca’s contributions to the tragic dimension of an inherited tragi-comical *comedia* formula were significant. However, they were to the comedic subgenres, especially to the playful *capa y espada* subgenre that represents a very high percentage of Spain’s early modern theatrical production. In these, as a rule, the prescribed happy ending is made as comically and intriguingly complicated as possible. The legion of playwrights residing in the Madrid of that day endlessly sought new twists to hold the demanding popular audiences. Calderón de la Barca did so by stressing the ridiculous lengths to which male family members would go in attempting to protect the honor of unmarried female members of the household. His exaggerated implementation of the prison-like isolation of the unmarried woman from contact with young non-family males is slyly resisted, naturally, by the young female protagonist. Calderón de la Barca availed himself masterfully of the opportunity for comical intrigue afforded by the house/room restrictions imposed on her by protective father and/or brothers.

Two Calderón de la Barca plays, *La dama duende* and *Casa con dos puertas mala es de guardar*, set the benchmark for successful excellence in the *capa y espada* subgenre. In both, the peculiarities of the imprisoning room/house greatly determine the action. This space takes on a life of its own that influenced the future of the dramatic subgenre. In the specific case of *La dama duende*, whose *graciosa*, Isabel, will be focused upon in the following pages, an open passage between rooms is transformed into a dissembling cupboard by the protective brothers. One room conceals their young widowed sister, unhappily hiding in her brother’s home while

debts incurred by her deceased husband are resolved. The other room temporarily houses a visiting young male friend, whose spontaneous presence in Madrid expectedly complicates the young widow's secret presence in the house.

Setting the play in the residence of the young female lead is a generalized *sine qua non* of this predominantly comical subgenre. As already indicated, this was probably due to the plot-limiting restrictions on the public-sphere movement of their typically young maiden protagonists. But this in itself guaranteed an enlarged role and a heightened stage presence for her maid, the *graciosa*. Thus, the play's main setting permits a doubling of the number of fundamentally comic figures, which in turn facilitates the extraordinarily high level of the required humorous content. As noted, this specific theatrical setting accounts for a very large percentage of the numerous *criadas/graciosas* that appeared in early modern Spanish theater.

In *La dama duende*, Calderón de la Barca ingeniously altered the usual formula somewhat by making his female protagonist, Doña Angela, a young widow, hide out in her brother's house and not in her own residence. It should also be noted that there are two brothers living in the house in which the action takes place. Don Juan is the older and more temperate while Don Luis, the younger, is a hothead. Thus, the poor young widow has two guardians of her forced seclusion. This doubling of brothers also adds, of course, to the possibilities for laughingly confusing intrigue, which is only heightened by having them both enamored of their cousin, Doña Beatriz. Doña Angela, as a widow, has a greater degree of away-from-home movement than unmarried women. Her freedom is only limited by the need to keep her temporary residence secret from the authorities. This allows for her necessary accidental encounter in the street with the young gentleman who will turn out to be the visiting lodger in her brother's house. It also explains her ignorance regarding her protective brother's structural

alteration of his home in order to impede the usual access to the room in which she is hiding. It is a structural alteration upon which the entire funny plot of *La dama duende* literally “hinges.”

Since Calderón de la Barca modifies the general formula of the *capa y espada* subgenre by first having a young widow rather than a young maiden as protagonist and secondly having her live in an unfamiliar house, he expands and intensifies the already enhanced role that these plays always provide the *graciosa*, who is usually the *criada* of the female lead. In this case, it does so by giving the *graciosa* a greater knowledge of the physical space of the home than her *ama*. This knowledge grants her an especially active role in humorously taking advantage of that physical space which is important to the plot development of the play and for the laughter-inducing schemes of her mistress.

Equally important in expanding the comical participation of the *graciosa* is the young-widow status with which Calderón de la Barca characterizes his feminine protagonist. Usually the *graciosa* contributes a humorous content that stems from a popular and practical worldview that generally contrasts with the naiveté that so often characterizes the young maiden that typically centers *capa y espada* plays. However, in this *ama* and *graciosa* relationship, Doña Angela’s marital status combined with the more worldly experience than that of a typical *dama* enriches the constant exchange between them. What results is a *tú-a-tú* type dialogue that facilitates the protagonist also contributing to the dimension of humor of the dramatic piece .

Finally, I would like to underscore that in this play, Calderón de la Barca develops a plot that exploits the non-verbal dimension as an expression of comedy that has been relatively little studied. Early modern Spanish theater’s lack of stage directions often leaves the critical reader with little idea of the wealth of humor transmitted via the gestures and physical movements of the popular stock comic figures. As mentioned in the Introduction, Judith Butler’s performative

theory will be utilized to try to recreate, to some extent, the non-verbal humor of the *graciosa* that is truly important in this theatrical production.

The *capa y espada* subgenre, with its cultivation of comical intrigue, abounds in incidentally secretive scenes of a simulated darkness in which confused characters mistake whom they encounter and/or attempt to hide from one another. The furtive nature of such scenes requires that silence be kept. This in turn requires that most of the actions involved and the emotions they elicit be transmitted in non-verbal fashion, via movements and gestures. Since plays could only be presented during sunlight hours,<sup>75</sup> this would have presented no problem for early modern audiences, because the darkness written into the text (via dialogue or by the mere appearance of torches or candles) had to be imagined. That is to say, the audience, if not the actors, could see all that occurred in the imagined darkness. The same cannot be said, of course, of the modern reader of the text, who, without detailed stage directions, misses out on all the non-verbal humor.<sup>76</sup>

The play's central device for initiating laughter, namely the secret cupboard, allows for repeated and extended secretive scenes of the nature described above and this makes *La dama duende* an ideal subject for the study of non-verbal humor. Sufficient stage time is given to this laughter-eliciting comedy to allow for a significant study of the many options the *graciosa* enjoys for non-verbally conveying to the fullest all her jocular talents. I assume that if laughter-meters could somehow be applied to the reading of such scenes a great increase would be noted

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75. See Esther Fernández, "Los corrales de comedias del siglo XVII madrileño: espacios de sensualidad urbana" (84).

76. As Díez Borque explains, "El teatro, desde un punto de vista semiológico, podía ser definido como la ejecución verbal y no verbal de un texto" ("Aproximación semiológica" 52).

when non-verbal funniness is properly registered. All we have to do is think of the importance of the non-verbal humor performed by female comic leads like Lucille Ball and Carol Burnett in the past century.

The funny scenes offered the *graciosa* by the popular *capa y espada* subgenre, combined with the special possibilities specifically contained in Calderón's *La dama duende*, will be underscored in the detailed analysis to follow. Since the primary goal of the prominent *graciosa* in such plays is to augment the incidence of laughter in an already essentially comical subgenre, many of the examples will be representative of the varied types of humorous strains associated with the stock comic figures of early modern Spanish theater. These run the gamut from the simple punning that is so characteristic of popular theater to witty comments that may be catalogued as social criticism. A large number of the dialogues will relate to the significant non-verbal humor that Calderón de la Barca incorporated into his masterpiece. Some important fragments will document humor derived from the feminine exchanges between *graciosa* and *ama*. As noted, the special *viuda* status of the play's female protagonist will permit me to underscore a women's perception of a social and political context that was decidedly patriarchal.

### **Plot Summary of *La dama duende***

#### **Act I**

Don Manuel, accompanied by Cosme, his servant and the play's *gracioso*, are seeking the home of Don Juan, where he has been invited to stay during his Madrid visit. Suddenly, Doña Angela runs into him and begs him to keep the man following her, who happens to be her controlling brother Don Luis, from catching up to her. Don Manuel has Cosme try to slow Don Luis down and then confronts him himself, provoking a duel between the two gentlemen in



which Don Manuel's hand is cut. Don Juan comes to the defense of his younger brother, Don Luis, only to find that his opponent is his guest.

Don Luis complains to his servant, Rodrigo, that his brother should not take a single man into their home because their young, recently widowed sister is hiding there from creditors on her deceased husband's estate and the only separation between her hiding-room and that of their guest is a hastily constructed cupboard closing off the door-less opening between them.

Meanwhile, Doña Angela, safe at home, is complaining to Isabel, her servant and the play's *graciosa*, about how secluded she feels since becoming a widow and having to hide in her brother's home. The dialogue allows for Isabel's humorous criticism of her mistress. Doña Angela learns through Don Luis that the man who saved her from his surveillance is staying in their house. She swears to care for the wounded man who treated her so well and Isabel comically informs her of a secret passage between the visitor's and Doña Angela's room.

In the nearby room Don Manuel orders Cosme to unpack and leaves. While unpacking, Cosme finds some money and quickly goes off to locate a bar. As soon as he exits, Doña Angela and Isabel, being informed by Rodrigo that the room is empty, go through the moveable cupboard into Don Manuel's room. They go through the luggage with Isabel contributing a running comical commentary on the things they discover. When they come upon a small portrait of a lady, Doña Angela, upset, writes a letter for Don Manuel to find. They hear Cosme coming and depart in a hurry, leaving everything a mess. When Cosme discovers the disarray in the room he seeks out and informs Don Manuel and his host that there is a goblin in the house.<sup>77</sup> The men laugh at him and tell him that he is just drunk and to sleep it off.

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77. Throughout the play there is an on and off discussion between Don Manuel, the educated and reasonable master and Cosme, the popular and superstitious servant, over the existence of a

## Act II

Doña Angela is relaying to her visiting cousin, Doña Beatriz, that she has been entering Don Manuel's room and exchanging anonymous letters with him. Don Juan enters, interrupting their conversation, and we find out that he and Doña Beatriz are in love. He leaves and Doña Angela continues informing Doña Beatriz of the sequence of events. Then Don Luis appears, suspending her story once again, and we find out that he, too, is in love with Beatriz, but that she shows no interest in him. Isabel supplies the comedic comments that spice up the *dama*'s secret conversation.

Don Manuel arrives early from the court because he is missing some documentation, and, although it is nightfall, he must return to the court so he tells Cosme to get the needed documents from their room. Don Manuel was unexpected, so when Cosme enters the room Isabel is also entering through the secret passage with a tray of clean clothes. Isabel must put out her candle and is thus disoriented in the 'dark'. She is forced to follow Cosme around the room, behind him as he moves, in order not to be seen in the light of his candle, until she is able to locate the secret entrance. When she does, she knocks into him to put out his candle, and, again in the 'dark', makes a run for the entrance. Unfortunately, she stumbles into the impatiently returning Don Manuel, who grabs the tray she is holding. While Cosme goes off to light his candle, Don Manuel and Isabel struggle in the 'dark' over the tray. Isabel finally lets go of it and passes through the false entrance into the safety of Doña Angela's room. Cosme and Don Manuel are baffled by what makes the idea of a *duende* believable.

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goblin to explain the mysterious goings-on. As Valbuena Briones indicates (29-32) it reflects the post-Tridentine church's campaign against irrational superstitions. Calderón has humorously presented the Counter-Reformation position on superstition.

The scene shifts to Doña Angela's room where the women are plotting their next move in the presence of Doña Beatriz, who is visiting in order to seek relief from her stifling father's demands.<sup>78</sup> Doña Angela reveals to Doña Beatriz that both her brothers are in love with her and want to see her. Doña Beatriz then pretends to leave the house in order to facilitate contact between Doña Angela and Don Manuel. Isabel sprinkles comical remarks throughout the noble women's conversation, even breaking theatrical illusion at one point to elicit laughter.

When Rodrigo informs her that Don Manuel and Cosme have left, Doña Angela goes back into Don Manuel's room to leave him a note explaining how they can meet. While she is there, Don Manuel and Cosme return prematurely because Cosme, in all his confusion, had forgotten the missing documentation. When they enter the room, they find Doña Angela writing a note. She warns them not to come any closer and that soon they will meet under different circumstances. Not wishing to wait, Cosme and Don Manuel block all the room's exits so that she cannot escape. While they are doing this, Doña Angela goes through the false door and they are again perplexed when they come back to find an empty room.

### *Act III*

Following Doña Angela's written instructions, Don Manuel is escorted via confusing nocturnal streets back to the front door of the house where both he and Doña Angela reside. Isabel meets him at the door and leads him in the 'dark' to Doña Angela's room which has been

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78. Although never fully developed, Calderón de la Barca manages to insert into his hilarious play the two masculine elements, fathers and brothers, who in a patriarchal society force imprisoning conditions on their unmarried daughters and sisters.

lavishly decorated and boasts the presence of several beautiful young women,<sup>79</sup> lending it a dream-like aura. As planned, Don Manuel is now confused and astounded. Doña Angela appears, with Doña Beatriz acting as her servant.

Angela greets him and asks him not to inquire about her identity. A slip of the tongue by Doña Beatriz, leads Don Manuel to believe that Doña Angela belongs to the high nobility. At this point, Don Juan tries to enter his sister's room and Isabel, in the 'dark', takes Don Manuel to a different place (unbeknownst to him, his own room) until Don Juan leaves. However, while Don Manuel is unknowingly waiting in his own 'dark' room, Cosme walks in and asks him why he is there. Don Manuel wants to make sure that he is truly in his own room, so he exits to look outside. While he is outside, Isabel, Don Juan having left his sister's room, comes back for Don Manuel but mistakenly takes Cosme instead.

While Cosme is in Doña Angela's room, Don Luis knocks on the door and Isabel returns Cosme to Don Manuel's room. Don Luis enters Doña Angela's room and is upset thinking that his brother Don Juan is trying to court Doña Beatriz. At this point, fearful of her hot-blooded young brother's reactions, Doña Angela leaves, seeking asylum in Doña Beatriz's nearby house.

Isabel leaves Cosme in Don Manuel's room and quickly exits, but she leaves the moveable cupboard poorly closed. Don Luis swears he hears voices and, noticing that the cupboard is ajar, enters Don Manuel's room and accuses him of using the secret entry to see Doña Angela. They get ready to duel but Don Luis has no sword so Don Manuel waits there until he gets his weapon.

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79. We are not told who these beautiful young women are. They could either be friends of Doña Angela or dressed-up servants.

In the meantime, Don Juan has found Doña Angela walking in the street on her way to Doña Beatriz's house. He does not know that Don Manuel has come back from the court and temporarily puts Doña Angela in Don Manuel's room where he can best control her movements. Don Juan leaves to inquire about why his sister left the house so late at night. While Doña Angela and Don Manuel are in the same room, she tells him what has been going on. Don Luis enters with his sword only to find his sister there behind Don Manuel, who asks Don Luis for Doña Angela's hand in marriage. The returning Don Juan and Don Luis bestow their blessing. The play ends with a double wedding: Doña Angela with Don Manuel and Cosme with Isabel.

As the plot summary suggests, the added comedy periodically inserted in Isabel's dialogue and/or asides complies with her prime mission of contributing to the unrelenting high level of humor required in the *capa y espada* theatrical subgenre. Up to a point, whenever the play's official *gracioso*, Cosme, is offstage, Isabel is onstage, so that their dual laughter-inciting mission is fulfilled. Cosme's *gracioso* role will contain longer comical passages, but in terms of maintaining the crowd's laughter without a significant lapse, Isabel's contribution is vital. The following pages will examine her essential role.

### **Analysis of Isabel's comical discourse in *La dama duende***

#### **Act I**

Isabel first appears in the act of helping her widowed young *ama*, Doña Angela, change from the dressy clothes she had worn in her rebellious outing into the widow's weeds that long tradition required. She says:

Toma presto;  
porque si tu hermano viene  
y alguna sospecha tiene,

no la confirme con esto,  
 de hallarte de esta manera,  
 que hoy en palacio te vio. (373-378)

Isabel's fearful admonition that Doña Angela change quickly, before her brother sees her in such attire, may well have provoked laughter in a non-verbal manner. The facial expressions and gestures that transmit fear have traditionally promoted hilarity in audiences, as contemporary performances continue to confirm. Isabel's expressed fear of the reaction of Doña Angela's brother to her defiance of his masculine authority is made to contrast with the still rebellious discontent verbally expressed by Doña Angela herself as she changes clothes. It was a most important characterizing moment for Calderón's extraordinarily bold feminine creation. I say this because, as Kathleen Llewellyn explains:

Perhaps the most visible sign of widowhood was the mourning garments these women wore, their 'widows' weeds'. Erasmus spoke with approval of the Biblical Judith's coarse woollen garment wrapped about her loins, and scolded the widow who abandoned her mourning dress to attend a wedding or feast. (50)

In fact, there were manuals written during this time by both holy men and actual widows describing a widow's proper dress. Llewellyn finds that:

[A] simply dressed widow...was more likely to ward off the eyes of lustful young men; attractive (or worse, provocative) clothing would draw attention to the body underneath and cause a young man to desire that which he should not...She must, of course, cover all parts of her body that might incite lust, and her clothing must be simple and unadorned...If she were to adorn herself with attractive clothing or jewelry after the death of her husband, it was only because she wished to find

another to replace him, inappropriate behavior from both a social and moral perspective. (50)

In the first few lines of the play, Isabel's discourse highlights a great polemic of the day, the treatment of widows in early modern society. The skilled playwright, wasting no opportunity to bring humor to his *comedia de capa y espada*, took advantage of the occasion. He identified the characterizing contrast between the two women in a comical manner that would achieve his two goals with masterful theatrical economy while dealing with a controversial issue of the time.

The *graciosa's* first appearance is usually a catalyst for laughter. In this case there is little verbal humor involved so the actress playing Isabel would have had to resort to facial expressions, gestures and body movements to elicit laughter in this particular scene. This is an example of how the revolutionary admittance of women onto the stage would have added gender authenticity and multiplied the comicality because as Butler indicates:

[Gender] is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (402)

Isabel's non-verbal performance would have been authentically feminine and recognized as such by the audience.

As the introductory scene continues, Isabel answers Doña Angela's long lament over her confinement, curtailing even such an innocent activity as attending a play, with the following densely comical passage. Isabel explains:

Señora, no tiene duda

de que mirándote viuda,  
tan moza, bizarra y bella,  
tus hermanos cuidadosos  
te celen; 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 azahar,  
que al cielo mil gracias doy  
cuando en las calles las veo  
tan honestas, tan fruncidas,  
tan beatas y aturcidas;  
y en quedándose en manteo,  
es de mirarlas contento;  
pues sin toca y devoción,  
saltan más a cualquier son,  
que una pelota de viento,  
y este discurso doblado  
para otro tiempo, señora,  
¿cómo no habemos ahora  
en el forastero hablado,  
a quien tu honor encargaste.



y tu galán hoy hiciste? (402-426)

Isabel's first seven verses, necessary to explain the goings-on, culminate with her down-to-earth personal evaluation of the circumstances. It is, as understood by all, a sexual reference to young widowhood, "porque este estado / es el más ocasionado/a delitos amorosos". The words clearly refer to the fact that young widows, no longer required to protect their virginity, might readily disregard the behavioral limitations imposed by that essential-to-marriage requirement. Writings of the time, according to Llewellyn, "recognized that the young widow, having been sexually initiated, was more likely than a virgin to stray into sexual sin" (47). It clearly alludes, as well, to the much-avoided subject of female sexuality, seeming to affirm its reality via the supposed comportment of the sexually experienced *viuda*. As Llewellyn explains, "the widow, as a former wife, was sexually initiated and was therefore considered, from a moral perspective, to be more dangerous than a virgin" (43). The widow's non-virgin status was problematic in this society, so that manuals of the time instructed them on their sexual activities. As Llewellyn further explains:

[T]he widow must be chaste, of course, but chastity for the widow was somewhat complicated...not only must she avoid carnal pleasure available to her in the present and those to which she might have access in the future, the widow, contaminated by sexual experience during her marriage, must even avoid memories and thoughts of the delights of the conjugal bed...She must make a vow to God that she would remain in this chaste state, and...once she had made this vow she would be condemned to eternal damnation if she broke it. (47)

Only the popular *graciosa*, with her practical and non-idealized perception of the world, could comically bring such matters to the fore in a socially non-threatening manner.<sup>80</sup> There is always humor involved, of course, in the mere allusion to ‘forbidden’ subjects, which creates, regardless of the particular spokesperson, a playwright/audience conspiracy of elusive understanding. And for my study, the social acceptance of such discourse gives a more holistic representation of women’s issues in Spain’s early modern era.

With the phrase, “y más en la corte hoy” (“and more so in today’s Madrid” my trans.), the *graciosa* brings her critical views into the audience’s real-time and real-place present. She offers a hilariously funny critique, which one suspects includes Doña Angela, of a “merry widow” reality. It is a reality in which young widows offer a false public show of mandated bereavement while expressing in private the true vital sexual needs that their youth demands. The pun used to describe these young widows “azahar/azar” (411) would render the two faces that Isabel comically depicts: outward purity, symbolized by the white orange blossom, and inner sexual conflict.<sup>81</sup> Isabel’s discourse draws forth many realities about young widows during Spain’s early modern era. In writings of the time, the dichotomy of public versus private displays of widow-hood is dealt with by prominent widows themselves. As Llewellyn indicates, “widows advising other widows were far less concerned with the problem that the widow presented to

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80. It is impossible to gauge the ecclesiastic censor’s guidelines in such matters, but not hard to imagine that he would allow more leeway of sexually oriented expression in the popular *graciosa* than in the idealized noble *dama*.

81. My reading of *cortesanías*, both ‘Madrid women’ and, possibly, ‘prostitutes,’ prefers the first reading, since Isabel is clearly not referring to prostitutes. At most, Isabel would be punning, thus characterizing the comportment, not the profession, of the young widows she is criticizing.

society, and far more concerned with the problem that society presented to the widow” (54). In particular, these women-written manuals were more concerned with the malicious gossip or what in Spanish is called *el qué dirán* than with the actual comportment of the widow herself. These widowed writers counseled the widow by “explaining to her quite clearly that she must establish and maintain a certain ‘widow-esque’ image in order not to lose whatever standing she had left in society” (Llewellyn 61). In counseling her, “the female writers, unlike Erasmus, Vives and Francois de Sales, acknowledged that the private person may be different from the public persona, that there may be disparity between the self and the self-representation” (Llewellyn 62). Isabel’s discourse makes clear that society viewed this segment of the female population with greater scrutiny, perhaps as a threat to the reigning morality. It was how a society, based on virginity and purity, dealt with the non-virginal and yet unmarried woman.

Since the young widow defies an easy categorization, early modern Spanish society struggled to incorporate her. As Llewellyn again explains:

The widows’ very existence was a problem...there was no convenient place for an unattached woman in this patriarchal world, and the widow was a particularly problematic unattached woman. Because of her status as head of household, she wielded a certain amount of power, and was therefore a potentially destabilizing force. (43)

This can be observed in Isabel’s discourse if analyzed with language ideology in mind, because, as Woolard states:

[I]deologies of language are not about language alone. Rather, they envision and enact ties of language to identity, to aesthetics, to morality, and to epistemology.

Through such linkages, they underpin not only linguistic form and use but also the

very notion of the person and the social group, as well as such fundamental social institutions as religious ritual, child socialization, gender relations, the nation-state, schooling and law. (3)

In this case the *graciosa*'s discourse paints an accurate picture of the issues women were confronted with during this period.

The *graciosa* then transitions again in order to focus openly upon Doña Angela. She does so via a humorous pun. To understand her comical use of '*doblado*' to mean 'set aside' one has to imagine that the theatergoer would have seen that she is in the process of folding the clothes that her *ama* is taking off. The creative pun would have been extra funny because of its parallel of her activity of the moment.

Isabel would have changed her tone when asking Doña Angela why they were not talking about the young man whom she had compromised in their recent secret outing. The voice change to a picaresque coaxing tone, perhaps, along with the terms she employs, "a quién tu honor encargaste" (in whom you placed your honor; my trans.) and "tu galán hoy hiciste" (today made your beau; my trans.) are the basis for humor. Laughter would probably have been elicited by the public now recognizing in Isabel the kind of abetting go-between attitude widely identified in early modern Spanish theater with the *graciosa*.

Isabel's use of this type of discourse, easily recognized by the public of the time, with the corresponding vocal tone and appropriately suggestive gestures allows the modern day reader to observe that *criadas*, in the real world, often acted as active abettors. The theatrical representation suggests so. This opens a window for further investigation of the role of these low-class women in relation to their upper-class counterparts. If the audience recognizes, accepts and can relate to this type of discourse, one could surmise that it reflected social reality on some

level and that low-class servants and their upper-class *amas* could represent a gender-specific social position that transcended social class differentiations.

The *graciosa* is next heard from via a couple of asides interjected into the conversation between Doña Angela and her brother Don Luis. The two apprehensive women misinterpret his comment, wrongly seeing it as a precursor to a scolding of Doña Angela for her recent excursion beyond the walls of her seclusion. Isabel's aside, "¿Otro susto?" indicates this and "Eso sí", verbalize Calderón's masterful projection of an equivocation-driven tension-followed-by-relief sequence that is a common device of the comical subgenre.

Isabel's short expressions are very humorous because her words, being accompanied by complementary gestures, probably did more than merely verbalize that sequence. One can readily imagine Isabel's frightened features while uttering the first of her asides, "Another fright" (457; my trans.) when perceiving an imminent danger and then her "whew, that was close" (463; my trans.) relief when the danger does not materialize. It is an important tactic used by playwrights to release moments of tension. In this scene in particular, it is the anxiety caused directly by Doña Angela going against the socially accepted norms and Isabel helping her in doing so. If this situation required dissipation by humor, we can confirm the extent to which early modern Spanish society restricted such feminine behavior. It also implies, on the other hand, that it occurred frequently enough to incite laughter. Woolard explains that, "simply using language in particular ways is not what forms social groups, identities, or relations...rather, ideological interpretations of such uses of language always mediate these effects" (18). One may conclude that the secluded woman rebelliously leaving the confines of her private sphere may have occurred more often than usually thought.

Isabel next speaks openly when the preceding dialogue between Doña Angela and her brother Don Luis has made it known that Don Manuel will be a guest in their house. She says:

¿Qué dirás, señora mía,  
 después del susto cruel,  
 de lo que en casa nos pasa?  
 Pues el que hoy ha defendido  
 tu vida, huésped y herido  
 le tienes dentro de casa. (543-548)

Although redundant in terms of the knowledge they impart, the lines would have added to the desired comical density when the actress in the role of Isabel accompanied her words with winks and gestures. These, possibly approaching the level of jocular lewdness in the final words, “you have him inside the house” (my trans.), would constitute her funnily abetting dare to the bold feminine protagonist. It serves as an example of the *graciosa* inciting a sexuality that she perceives in her noble *ama*.

As the scene continues, with Doña Angela, our merry widow, effectively set on secretly ‘caring’ for her wounded Galahad, Isabel fulfills the always funny traditional characterization of the practical, down-to-earth, scheming *graciosa*. She does this with her knowledgeable and practical disclosures regarding the artificial cupboard separating Doña Angela’s quarters from Don Manuel’s room, the play’s central gimmick. In addition to the humorous scheming ambience, Isabel’s disclosures are themselves amusing. She declares:

Y si para eso  
 te dispones, yo bien sé  
 por donde verle podrás,

y aun más que velle. (564-67)

(And if you propose to care for him,

I know the way that you can see him,

and even more than merely see him. (my trans.)

Her first revelation to Doña Angela ends with a comically bold suggestion that was probably accompanied by a picaresque wink. As a woman, Isabel uses her female gestures throughout this scene to suggest lewd behavior, and, as Butler explains, “the body is always an embodying of possibilities both conditioned and circumscribed by historical convention” (404).

It is a daring suggestion that the *graciosa* reinforces when Doña Angela innocently thinks of opening a peephole in the wooden cupboard and Isabel indicates, “Más que eso mi ingenio entabla” (“My ingenuity plans more than that” 584; my trans.). This phrase would have been accompanied, again, by some manner of non-verbal expression that the audience would laughingly understand. Just as important as the comical component of her discourse, is the fact that Isabel is acting as an indispensable catalyst to the plot. One could go as far as saying that Isabel is responsible for Doña Angela’s fate by divulging her knowledge of the secret structure in the house.

In much literature of this period, servants, because of their practicality are the characters who know best how to proceed in the face of complicated problems. This is perhaps even more so in the case of female servants. We may well surmise that it would probably not have been tolerated for Doña Angela to come up with the initial idea for the means of rebelling against patriarchal constraints. However, it was socially permissible, especially as humorously presented, for Isabel to share her down-to-earth knowledge with Doña Angela. This was viewed

and accepted by the audience, which could well suggest that women, even if via the sensible wit of a low-class servant, had many ways of circumventing their cloistered environments.

The presentation and explanation of the central artifact of the play concludes with Isabel's funny recollection of how she came upon it. She explains:

Yo lo sé bien; porque, cuando  
 la alacena aderecé,  
 la escalera le arrimé,  
 y ella se fue desclavando  
 poco a poco, de manera,  
 que todo junto cayó,  
 y dimos en tierra yo,  
 alacena y escalera.... (593-600)

Calderón probably inserted it in order to get the laughs that the *graciosa* would have readily elicited by an acted-out illustration of a story that would have included a full repertoire of the non-verbal. It is not hard to imagine her fully gestured replication of the rise, the teetering and the catastrophic fall. As sitcom humor reminds us into our own day, physical spills without personal physical damage are sure laughter-eliciting devices. I would venture that this slapstick-like rollicking passage was inserted to counter the tension created when the women find a way to actively pursue their desires. This is needed because at this point the audience perceives that Doña Angela will, in fact, break society's rules in the pursuit of her own feminine desires.

Doña Angela has fully decided to use the cupboard artifact to enter Don Manuel's room in order to fulfill her 'caring' chore when Isabel expresses a final worry. Isabel asks:

Notable cuento será,



mas ¿si lo cuenta? 639-640

The concern is a valid one (“but, what if he spills the beans?” my trans.), pinpointing a loose end in their plot, which is resolved when Doña Angela readily rejects the idea that Don Manuel will tell her brothers that someone is secretly looking after him. What is of interest is that Calderón availed himself of the *graciosa*’s word play, “cuento/cuenta”, guaranteeing a laugh from the audience, to effect a necessary plot clarification. It perhaps exemplifies just how important every opportunity for inciting laughter was in the subgenre and how a handy *graciosa* could readily contribute it.

More socially significant is the importance granted to *el que dirán* via Isabel’s question. In a society in which what is spoken about you can affect your honor and in which women writers, “warned the young widow about the malicious and possibly dangerous gossip that would accompany any seemingly inappropriate association with men” (Lewellyn 54), it is of the utmost importance that any honor-damaging information be kept confidential. This conversation between Isabel and Doña Angela reveals that more important than proceeding with the socially unacceptable furtive interaction with Don Manuel was whether he could be trusted to keep it private. This could speak volumes of how interaction between men and women would have had to take place and the importance of not having anyone know during a time when, “the widow must isolate herself in order to protect herself from evil talk from malicious tongues” (Llewellyn 57). It allows the modern-day reader to understand the freedoms that could possibly be taken by women if silence was kept by the male co-conspirator. As modern-day readers it is not hard to understand that secrecy in early modern Spanish society was a significant part of daily life and social interaction.

The scene in which Doña Angela and Isabel test the concealed entrance into the room occupied by Don Manuel contains, as expected, a number of comical moments. The first that appears in the exchange between the two women is Isabel's pun on the word "regalo" (808-09), which signifies 'comfort' as used by Doña Angela and 'gift' as immediately after employed by the *graciosa*. Other moments of humor derive from the dramatic situation of the women's invasion of the living quarters of a male. It is laden with the potential of amusement stemming from the long tradition of women's intense curiosity.<sup>82</sup> This universally accepted feminine characteristic is immediately exploited by Calderón, who has the *graciosa* comically suggest that they search through the open luggage. Isabel suggests:

En el suelo hay dos maletas.  
Y abiertas. Señora, ¿quieres  
que veamos qué hay en ellas? (817-819)

And when Doña Angela "reluctantly" gives in, the humor continues with Isabel's negative conjecture as to what they won't find in searching the open suitcases: "Soldado y pretendiente, / vendrá muy mal alhajado" ("A soldier and seeker after royal rewards, there probably won't be any jewels" 825; my trans.). With her comment, she falls back upon a traditional medium of *gracioso* humor: the critique of social types.<sup>83</sup>

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82. One need not look further than the classical portrayal of Pandora as well as the biblical portrayal of Eve.

83. Although not directly pertinent to this study it should be remembered that many of the subjects, themes and images in the expressed humor of the *graciosa*, like that of the *gracioso*, can be referred to as 'traditional' in being readily identified with the medieval popular/carnavalesque tradition studied by Bakhtín.

The scrutiny of the contents of the suitcases begins and, in a twist that must have amused the audience, Isabel momentarily becomes the necessary foil for Doña Angela's own wit:

DOÑA ANGELA.    ¿Qué es esto?

ISABEL.            Muchos papeles.

DOÑA ANGELA.    ¿Son de mujer?

ISABEL.            No, señora,

sino procesos que vienen

cosidos y pesan mucho.

DOÑA ANGELA.    Pues si fueran de mujeres

ellos fueran más livianos... (823-829)

This word play on the term *liviano*, light/morally loose, is worth mentioning because it exemplifies the comical utility of the *graciosa* figure even when the funny remarks are not hers. It is a good example, as well, of the kind of somewhat risqué humor that Calderón could access via a young widow instead of a young maiden as protagonist.

The scene of the two women pulling things from Don Manuel's suitcases is itself amusing. But it becomes especially so when Isabel is befuddled by some items of masculine toilette, which her more experienced *ama* must explain. Still, it is the *graciosa* who has the last say before they come across such serious items as letters from a woman and her *retrato*:

Oye, que, más prevenido,

no le faltará al tal huésped

la horma de su zapato. (845-847)

Calderón availed himself of the fact that an apropos traveling artifact is metaphorically used in the traditional *refranero*, where the shoehorn, *horma de su zapato*, appears in two distinct

sayings.<sup>84</sup> It is still used to this day in those two ways, and the shoehorn that their surprise guest will surely have can be either someone who will put him in his place or someone ideally suited to him, in a romantic sense. The audience is held in momentary suspense, as is Doña Angela, until the *graciosa*, with a laughter-releasing “Porque aquí la tiene” (848), brings forth from the suitcase an actual shoehorn.

Moments later, as Doña Angela writes a note for Don Manuel, Isabel, via a soliloquy, expresses her intention of searching the suitcase of Cosme, the *gracioso*, and describes what she finds. She explains:

Entre tanto  
la maleta del sirviente  
he de ver. Esto es dinero;  
cuartazos son insolentes,  
que en la república donde  
son los príncipes y reyes  
los doblones y los reales,  
ellos son la común plebe. (861-868)

With her funny personification of the coinage she discovers, Isabel touches on an established area of *gracioso* humor: a social criticism that, in carnivalesque fashion, dissolves real socio-economic problems into laughter.<sup>85</sup> As Bakhtin explains, “the people’s ambivalent

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84. *Ha encontrado la horma de su zapato* means that someone has encountered another person capable of controlling them. *Es la horma de su zapato* means that someone has found their perfect fit. A soulmate, of sorts.

85. The economic problem in this particular case is best explained by Laura Bass:

laughter...expresses the point of view of the whole world; he who is laughing also belongs to it” (12). Suffice it to say that her self-mockingly demeaning (*cuartazos insolentes*) identification of the copper coinage with the masses (*la común plebe*) while identifying the gold and silver coinage (*los doblones y los reales*) with members of the establishment (*príncipes y reyes*) would have drawn carnival-like laughter from the popular audience.

Comments such as these, which critically, and self-mockingly, underscore an extreme social inequality, would seem to counter Maravall’s already cited opinion regarding the one-sided social impact of early modern Spanish theater. This is especially so if the predominantly popular character of the *corral* audience is taken into account. As Burningham indicates:

The continuing importance of the *vulgo*, however, made its presence felt in plots played out on two tiers, with servants functioning as foils and comic relief to the dilemmas of their masters, a structure that also provides space for critique of the established order, as did popular Elizabethan theater. (37)

This type of discourse allows for direct and acceptable social critique. Isabel’s words allow the reader to note that there was socio-economic strain between the lower class and the

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With precious metals from the Americas insufficient to maintain Spain’s global empire abroad and the nation within, the Crown resorted to the infamous *vellón* for domestic circulation, reserving gold and silver for international trade. Massive amounts of this copper coinage were minted between 1586 and 1627, and its face value was manipulated on several occasions. This emptying out of inherent monetary worth, of great concern to theologians and reformers, was also registered in the realm of the verbal, as writers—perhaps most famously Quevedo—related false words to false coins. (784)

hegemonic class. In a time in which we often presume that people would blindly and faithfully accept their socio-economic status, Isabel's comments allow us to note that there did exist tension with regard to social class. So much so, that these lines spoken by Isabel would have elicited the laughter of the knowing popular audience. This is, in essence, what carnival-humor sought during unchanging centuries: to dissipate through laughter the pressure originating in unchangeable social conditions.<sup>86</sup>

In *comedias* with both a *gracioso* and a *graciosa*, two types of amusing relationships usually spring up between them: a rivalry that humorously pits one against the other and/or a no less funny love affair. Isabel's decision to take the coins she has found and replace them with pieces of charcoal would be the kind of funny *burla* between comic figures expected by the audience. She anticipates Cosme's discovery of the transmutation, which accommodates the play's *duende* theme,<sup>87</sup> allowing for much subsequent *gracioso*-elicited laughter. Less obvious but no less humorous are the words with which Isabel ends her soliloquy. She asks:

Diran:

¿Dónde demonios los tiene  
esta mujer? no advirtiéndolo  
que esto sucedió en noviembre  
y que hay brasero en el cuarto. (873-877)

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86. As A. I. Martin explains, "During carnival the world is stood on its head in an explosion of ritual madness which is designed to serve as an escape valve in preserving peoples' sanity during the remainder of the regenerated year" (168).

87. As the play's title anticipates, Cosme, the superstitious *gracioso*, will comically attribute the odd occurrences in their room to goblins.

The *graciosa* speaks directly to the public, “You will say: Where in the world is this woman going to get pieces of charcoal?”(my trans.). She then explains to the audience that it may not have noticed that the play’s action takes place in November, and that, for All Souls Day, there is an offertory brassiere in Don Manuel’s room.<sup>88</sup>

This sudden break with theatrical illusion invariably incites the self-conscious laughter of the audience, made aware that it has been drawn into the full acceptance of a fiction. It is a laughter-eliciting theatrical practice that, according to Duckworth in *Roman Comedies: Seven Plays of Plautus and Terrence*, goes back to Roman theater:

Another source of comic effect, which Plautus often uses, is the breaking of the dramatic illusion. The actor for the moment steps out of his part, speaks directly to the audience, and calls attention to the fact that he is an actor in a play. (2)

In the case at hand, the *graciosa*, momentarily stepping out of her role supplies a clarifying *acotación*. This allows the spectators to see that she knows that she is an actress playing a role in a play. Possessing the privilege of becoming one in time and space with the audience, *graciosas* and *graciosos* will occasionally transform themselves, like the Elizabethan theater’s clown, into spokespersons for the popular social strata with which they are invariably identified. Bristol’s observation regarding the Elizabethan clown is fully applicable to Spain’s early modern *graciosas*, “The power of the clown over other *dramatis personae* corresponds to the power of an objective social domain over the nominal individuality of a particular character or person” (141). The social domain referred to by Bristol is patently the popular strata of society. And in the case of the *graciosa*, as I will have occasion to underscore in a subsequent play, the stock

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88. Valbuena Briones (82), footnote 77, explains the offertory brassiere, and how it ties in to the *duende* theme.

female comic figure appears to portray that role, as well as that of spokesperson for her subjected gender. I believe that this capacity allows the *graciosa* the potential to be more than a mere character, thus occasionally granting her socially pertinent discourse a special significance. This is so not only in that she embodies the popular domain but because she speaks to the present social context of the popular audience. She is a character but she can also step out of her theatrical *persona* and address the spectators in their here-and-now. The popular *graciosa* is thus directly linked to the popular audience, often even directly linked to its feminine dimension (*cazuela*), potentially lending her discourse an important social significance.

In this instance, for example, Isabel's discourse openly brings to the audience's attention the fact that the play takes place in November, the month identified with All Soul's day. This, functioning as an *acotación*, explains the fact that there are extinguished coals at hand but it does much more. It links the play's *duende* theme to the religious holiday that expresses the Church's basic tenet of the Communion of Saints: the spiritual influence of the living on the dead and of the dead on the living. When the spiritual component of the Communion of Saints is overlooked, superstitious belief in ghosts and goblins can occur. Calderón de la Barca, a supporter of the Counter-Reformation Church's re-spiritualizing, anti-superstition goals, takes the church's message to a plebian public, the main source of superstition. His message is that the fundamental doctrine of the Communion of Saints is spiritual and should not give rise to ghosts and goblins. It is a religious message incorporated into a comical play and conveyed to popular audiences in a



theater that was at the time the only schoolroom of a basically illiterate society.<sup>89</sup> As Fabián Campagne explains:

Early modern Spanish literature of superstition presents one of the most complete historical configurations of Christian superstition doctrine...The literature of superstition is prime material...because its main task was precisely the discrimination of vain practices considered incapable of producing the desired effects, and because it allows us to perceive the real phenomena in which early modern intellectuals really did believe. (30-31)

Isabel's discourse provides modern day readers an understanding of the tensions present in her society over the changes brought on by the Counter-Reformation.

The *graciosa* will end her important contribution to the humorous density of Act I of *La dama duende* with a laughter-eliciting means often exploited by the stock comic figures of early modern Spanish theater: the interjection of language incomprehensible to the largely popular audience. The unintelligible terms may derive from a foreign language, as is the case of Isabel's use of Latin, *culterano* vocabulary or even criminal slang. In theater, as in motion pictures, the introduction of incomprehensible expressions almost invariably sparks a funny-bone reaction in the bewildered public. In this particular case, however, it should be observed that including Latin in the *graciosa's* speech produces an additional amusing element, with possible social connotations. Latin, when spoken by a low-class character, would have been laughable. As Woolard explains, this linguistic behavior can be analyzed in terms of language ideology theory

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89. It should be noted, that according to Angel Valbuena Briones in the introduction to his edition of *La dama duende* (29-32), Calderón's use of the duende theme constitutes an attempt, along Counter-Reformation lines, to debunk popular religious superstitions.

because, “rankings of language continue to be invoked to regulate the access of speech varieties to prestigious institutional uses and their speakers to domains of power” (17). When the *graciosa* tries to imitate the discourse of power in her day, Latin, she accesses the domain of the noble and educated, transgressing a linguistic domain. It is a strategy that evokes laughter, but in a “‘pragmatic’ sense of ideology—the strategies, practical symbols, and systems of ideas used for promoting, perpetuating, or changing a social or cultural order—directs attention to the role of such local models of language as instruments of power and social control” (Kroskrity 115). In our own day, it is funny when a character avails him or herself of a discourse too elevated for his/her social status, so it can only be imagined that at a time when social class and socio-economic position were much more rigid this comical element would have been especially pronounced. We can also see how this tactic for eliciting laughter from social status has not changed since the early modern era.

In summary, the stage presence of the stock comic figures appears to be a general characteristic of early modern Spanish theater. This may be due to the playwright’s wish to connect immediately with a mainly popular audience. Calderón de la Barca wisely uses this theater’s indispensable humorous dimension to that end. This procedure would likely be intensified in theatrical subgenres, such as the *comedia de capa y espada*, in which the comical heavily outweighed the tragic. This is well exemplified in the first act which achieves the extraordinarily high level of amusing content that sets the tone of the entire play with the levity offered by the *graciosa* via the comedy she contributes. Through this funny discourse Isabel is allowed the privilege of social critique so important to understanding Spain’s early modern era, especially relative to women’s issues. The remaining two acts of *La dama duende* sustain a very high level of hilarity, as required by this type of sub-genre, but does so by relying much more on

the effects of the ever-growing *enredo* of its customarily entangled plot. This will condition, as will be noted below, the nature of most of the humor that the *graciosa* will generate.

## Act II

The first comical contributions of Isabel in the second act are of the type already studied. The first involves a funny word play. She interrupts Doña Angela's conversation with Doña Beatriz, "y respondiéndole así, / pasé..." ("and answering him so, I passed..." 1131; my trans.) with the following: "Détente, no pases, / que viene don Juan, tu hermano" ("Stop, don't pass, because your brother, Don Juan, is coming" 1133; my trans.). The tense change of the single verb humorously marks the inference of a clear and present danger. With the useful *graciosa* on hand, Calderón takes advantage of the forced transition to elicit a laugh from the audience.

When Don Juan leaves, the two women continue their dialogue, only to be interrupted again by the arrival of Doña Angela's other brother, Don Luis. Calderón again avails himself of Isabel to extract a laugh from announcing the new interruption: "Pon <otro hermano> a la margen, / que viene don Luis." ("Put <another brother> at the margin, because Don Luis is coming" 1156; my trans.). If I read these words correctly, the margin that the *graciosa* refers to is that of the actor's manuscript of the play used during rehearsals. She is thereby again supplying an *acotación*. If this is the case, it is an example of the always amusing *graciosa* privilege of breaking theatrical illusion. By speaking to her *ama* as rehearsing actress to rehearsing actress, Isabel steps out of her role and could even be said to carry Doña Angela with her. However, on a more serious note, her comical discourse, if analyzed using the social perspective of language ideology, allows us to observe how difficult it was for women, especially widows, at a time in which, "a young widow was safest in a secret chamber" (Llewellyn 48), to make love connections possible. In this particular case, her discourse allows a

modern-day reader to view the intra-gender cooperation between women of different social classes coexisting within the same household.

The rest of Isabel's contribution to the hilarity in the second act will include an occasional funny line, but will depend much more on a non-verbal humor that is not registered anywhere in the text. For over sixty verses Calderón choreographed, for the most part in a darkness that the all-seeing audience had to imagine, the highly emotional and motion-filled encounter of Isabel and the two guests. The actress playing Isabel is granted innumerable opportunities to utilize the non-verbal resources of her trade which would include the manipulation of almost every part of her body with laughter-intensifying real woman authenticity.

Even before the *graciosa* encounters first Cosme and then Don Manuel, she tells us that she is frightened by the darkness. She complains:

¡Ay de mí, triste!  
 Que como es de noche, tengo,  
 con la grande oscuridad,  
 de mí misma asombro y miedo.  
 ¡Válgame Dios, que temblando  
 estoy! El duende primero  
 soy que se encomienda a Dios. (1535-1541)

Neither of the exclamatory phrases is itself funny, and only the accompanying physical expressions of fear (eyes enlarged, the actual trembling she indicates) would have elicited the laughter that the playwright sought. Only the final words cited, accommodating the goblin identity that a fearful Cosme has given her, are themselves comical. Still, cognizant of the

humorous potential of physically expressed fear, Calderón continued for another eight verses with his *graciosa* shaken by another, different fear. This stems from the fact that the loss of her bearings in the ‘dark’ would hinder her escape via the secret cupboard and allow her to be caught. Again the actress would have exploited, only orally signaled by Isabel’s exclamations, all her physical, non-verbal talents in transmitting her character’s panicked feelings. As noted, the expression of fear in non-tragic circumstances is invariably funny.

When Cosme surprisingly enters the room, bringing a lighted candle with him, Isabel, unseen, slips in behind him. What necessarily ensues, although there are no *acotaciones* to inform the reader, is a hilarious pantomime on the part of the *graciosa*. In order to stay behind Cosme and remain unseen, Isabel must duplicate his movements about the room. She must do so while holding the tray with Don Manuel’s freshened clothing, which would have complicated her movements. This pantomime, which the actress again would have no doubt comically exaggerated, would have been accompanied, of course, by humorous facial expressions and gestures. All these are laughter-eliciting factors that the early modern audience would have readily perceived.

With the light from Cosme’s candle, the unseen *graciosa* regains her bearings, but she understands that she must somehow put out the candle if she is to reach the secret cupboard exit. The fact that in so doing Cosme will hear her but not see her gives rise to Isabel’s only funny line, “y a dos daños el menor” (“choose the lesser of two evils” 1635; my trans.). But the most laughter-producing item in the situation, which the text clearly but all-too succinctly indicates, has to do with the time-tested and popular-audience-tickling farcical violence. The *graciosa* strikes the *gracioso* in order to put out his candle, and probably brought down the all-seeing

house with laughter. Farcical violence was the meat and potatoes of the most popular theatrical subgenre, the *entremés*, of which early modern audiences appear never to have tired.<sup>90</sup>

The farcical situation is extended because before the *graciosa* can find her escape route, she encounters Don Manuel, who has entered the room after his servant, and he grabs at the *azafate* she is carrying. Isabel utters a funny line, with what I believe contains a Cervantine echo, “*Peor es esto; / que con el amo he encontrado*”.<sup>91</sup> But what surely would have brought forth the popular audience’s glee would have been the violent tug-of-war that ensues. For the length of time required to speak the seven lines that occur between Don Manuel’s grasping the tray and Isabel’s aside indicating she has let go of her end, the yanking back and forth would have been played out before the all-seeing audience. It represents a long spell of laughter by any measure.

In the rest of the act, Isabel reverts to her simple duties as maid, but her contribution to its comical density is significant. This is especially so because the fundamentally popular mediums to which she gives humorous life in the act, silent pantomime and farcical violence, were both frequent ingredients of the *capa y espada* subgenre. And, perhaps more importantly, because these could only be enacted on stage—given the winking, gesturing and bodily movements involved—by such popular characters as the stock comic figures, *graciosas* and *graciosos*.

It is important to note the prolonged stage presence of Isabel’s theatrical performance in the two scenes analyzed. She, more than any other character, is responsible for eliciting laughter

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90. It should be recalled that many theatrical spectacles of the period had two *entremeses* sandwiched between the play’s acts.

91. It should be noted that the play, through Don Manuel’s words, has a distinct Quijotesque flavor. Valbuena Briones (26) also notes this.

as well as carrying out the action of the plotline. Her discourse, verbal and non-verbal, in these scenes is also socially relevant. For example there is social significance in her expressions of fear that reiterate the tendency to make uneducated, popular characters afraid of the unknown, thus portraying them as superstitious. So much so, in this instance, that Isabel, knowing full well that she is the *duende* is still frightened.<sup>92</sup>

### Act III

In the last act, Isabel is mostly involved in carrying out the tricky business of having Don Manuel believe that he is visiting the mysterious Doña Angela somewhere other than the house they share. In effect, the act opens, as she speaks to Don Manuel in the final leg of the risky plan. She orders:

Espérame en esta sala;  
luego saldrá a verte aquí  
mi señora. (2243-2245)

Her dialogue is not in itself comical, but it is very likely that the actress, whether instructed to or not, would have taken the opportunity to add a measure of hilarity to the act's initial scene. She would have readily achieved this in a non-verbal fashion via a conspiratorial wink or gesture, or both, to an audience that was in on the deceitful goings-on.

The same may be said of Isabel's exclamation, "¡Yo estoy muerta" (2426), when the meeting between Don Manuel and Doña Angela is interrupted by the arrival of Don Juan and

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92. One has but to recall Hollywood's practice into the 1940's, where-in African American actors were almost invariably charged with depicting superstitious fear. This shows a parallel because both *criadas* and African American actors reflected the lower-class and uneducated portion of the population.

also of the single phrase that she utters when instructed to quickly take Don Manuel back, through the secret cupboard, to his own room, “Vamos presto” (2435). In the first, her exclamatory words would have signaled the facial and/or gestured expression of fear, always a comical resource. In the second, Isabel’s few words could again have been accompanied by expressions of fear or, perhaps funnier under the circumstances, of exasperation, the equivalent of “here we go again” to which the knowing audience would have laughingly responded. Although always continuing to non-verbally extract some laughter in that chore, the *graciosa* ceases to be a mere instrument of the elaborate *enredo*, when, upon returning for Don Manuel when the coast is again clear, she mistakes Cosme, in the imagined darkness, for his employer. The two *graciosos* will then enact the last funny pantomime of the play, which, at least verbally, will include Don Manuel. Cosme, fearfully coming to believe that the *duende* is carrying him off, will naturally give expression to most of the non-verbal humor involved. Still, the all-seeing audience would have laughed as it watched Isabel’s unknowing complication of the already tangled *enredo*. As they would have laughed with Isabel’s no doubt well-gestured surprise upon discovering her error and with her defense upon being scolded for it. And it is the *graciosa* who keeps the audience laughing as the arrival of Don Luis complicates matters even further. She does so via exclamations undoubtedly accompanied with humorously fearful *guiños* and exaggerated tremors.

When the *graciosa* returns Cosme, via the secret cupboard, to his own room, the two comic actors would have taken the opportunity to strut their stuff. It can be presumed, therefore, that the two lines with which Isabel textually confirms Cosme’s return to the guest room serve to signal a manifestation of non-verbal humor. What I cannot detail is just how the *graciosos* represented it. Most likely, given Isabel’s words “Vente conmigo”(2677) and “Entra presto”



(2727), the hilarity would have resided in having had the *graciosa* pushing and shoving the *gracioso* along in farcical fashion. The physical acting required to carry out this scene to its full potential would have had to have been very much refined. Just as it is in our own cinema and theater, only an experienced actress would have been able to carry it out with any measure of success. This non-verbal communication should be analyzed, as I have done, as a distinct discourse; and in this case, this aspect of the female stock comic figure's non-verbal performance allows us to better understand her role in the important theatrical culture of Spain's early modern history.<sup>93</sup>

The *graciosa* does not reappear again until the end of the play, doing so in order to comply with the fairly standardized norm of having the *gracioso* or *graciosos* bid farewell to the audience. In *La dama duende*, Calderón de la Barca ingeniously brought in at that point another fairly fixed comical element, the proposed marriage of the *graciosos*, paralleling that of the protagonists. It is clear that this standardized breaking of theatrical illusion is funny, as is the expected suggestion of a marriage between Isabel and Cosme. But less noticeable to the reader of the text, although not to the early modern Spanish audience, is the opportunity it afforded for the *graciosa* to exercise, one last time, the powerful effect of the non-verbal humor that she has relied on throughout the play. When Cosme appears to reject the marriage to Isabel that Don Manuel urges, the *graciosa* speaks her single line at the play's end, "¿Por qué causa?" One must imagine Isabel 'en jarras' (fists on hips; my trans.) and fiery features glaring Cosme down to sense the full comical impact of that last scene.

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93. For the central place occupied by the theatrical in Spain's baroque period see, for example, Orozco Díaz, *El teatro y la teatralidad del barroco*.

*La dama duende*, more than any other play analyzed in this study, exemplifies the important non-verbal discourse of the *graciosa*. It is perhaps the proper place to further discuss its role in defining the female stock comic figure. When studying Isabel, it became clear to me that it would take perfecting the art of this physical performance to be considered a successful *graciosa*. The actress would have had to master a set of skills in order to enact the non-verbal representations so often associated with her role. For it must be kept in mind, that women performing as *graciosas* (after 1587) would not have had, as her male counterpart had, a long tradition from which to draw.

Since non-verbal acting is paramount to the successful rendition of the feminine comedian today, I would assume that it was also paramount in this period. We know when women began to act on stage which is when actresses began to fashion the theatrical projection of the female stock comic figure. It follows, then, that this factor would exceptionally allow a view into the very creation of that role via the study of the first *graciosas*. Clearly, they had to possess a set of performative skills for their role and this led me to think of performative theory, “because their acquisition required a ‘stylized repetition of acts’” (Butler 402). Judith Butler uses it to explain gender constitution, but I would like to apply this concept to indicate how the *graciosa* actually becomes a *graciosa*. Butler often uses theater to describe social actors, her theory of constituting a social being through repeated acts could be applied to better understand the initiation and the development of a theatrical stock actor through repeated acts as well.

The comical female stock figure becomes so through “a performance that is repeated,” (Butler 409). It is also true of this stock character that, “This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation” (Butler 410). Tying this to the *graciosa* as a stock character

allows students of early modern Spanish theater to better understand that the role of the female comedian has a history of acts that make her verbal and, more important to us now, her non-verbal performance a more tangible aspect to study. One only need observe comical feminine actresses in our day to get an idea of the performance of their predecessors, since what makes them funny today is constituted, most likely, by a similar stylized repetition of acts that made the *graciosa* a successful female stock figure in the past.

Also important to note is that in order for a scene where a man is being escorted into a widow's chambers to be socially viable it must be saturated with the humor that turns a dangerous social situation into a non-threatening scene. In a society in which, as Llewellyn describes, the widow is under the protection of her family members and “must never undertake any actions without their knowledge and approval” (53), and in which “the widow must avoid the company of these dangerous people unless her presence is absolutely necessary” (Llewellyn 57), the actions of Isabel and Doña Angela pose a threat to the status quo. They must be presented, therefore, in an innocuous manner. Calderón manages this in this scene by means of Isabel's humorous verbal and non-verbal discourse.

However, when studying the social impact of *graciosa* discourse, verbal and gestural, one must take into account that she embodies a specific social strata (popular), a component that Judith Butler's purely gender theory does not encompass. It is important to note this because for this study it is paramount that the *graciosa*, on some level, project a popular culture that shockingly confronts that of the hegemonic social medium of the play. This class identification allows this character to intensify the social impact of her discourse and allows us a window into social tensions that were pervasive in this time.

## **Conclusion**

The *capa y espada* dramatic format that proliferated on Spanish stages for over a century lent itself especially well to comedy which an essentially popular theater demands. So Isabel, as maid to its feminine protagonist, may serve to exemplify the basic function exercised in early modern Spanish theater by the uniquely Spanish phenomenon of a female stock comic figure. She is capable of adding an important, perhaps necessary, measure of humor that authentically carried the variant feminine perspective because of her portrayal by an actual woman. And finally, that as a *graciosa*, she harbors a potential for social impact far surpassing that of other cast members by having the privilege of addressing the audience directly. The last two reasons mentioned make her discourse a valid source for enriching our knowledge of the social context of this era.

My analysis of the humor contributed by Isabel to *La dama duende*, a comedy of errors version of the *capa y espada* theatrical subgenre, allowed me to delve fully into non-verbal humor. The *comedia de enredo*, with its darkness-induced non-stop surprises and mistakes, is especially suited to the expression and transmission of visual rather than verbal humor. It is a form of laughter-eliciting comedy that is always present in this theater, but that is usually understated and understudied because of its lack of stage directions. Taking the performances of the *graciosas* into full consideration would most certainly multiply the instances of provoked laughter. And it is precisely through their non-threatening humor, verbal and non-verbal, that the female stock comic figures manage to counter the hegemonic, official discourse of their social context. This is why it is important to analyze this character's discourse, non-verbal as well as verbal, in order to better understand the unofficial, latent social polemics that could be missed if one merely studies official texts and official histories of that period.

### Chapter Three: Flora

Rojas Zorrilla and *Primero es la honra que el gusto*

There is little information available for rendering a full biography of Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla.<sup>94</sup> Although he was born in Toledo in 1607, he lived since early childhood in Madrid. His family resided near the city's principal theaters, the *Principe* and the *Cruz*. It can thus be presumed that an avid attendance at the offerings of these theaters may well have sparked young Rojas Zorrilla's theatrical vocation. His schooling in the Spanish capital appears to have brought him into contact with Pedro Calderón de la Barca, seven years his elder. This childhood friendship may well have facilitated, years later, his acceptance at the court of Phillip IV, where much of his artistic life was centered.

His early demise and the fact that theaters were closed during the last four years of his life due to the death of Queen Isabel in 1644 perhaps explain Rojas Zorrilla's relatively limited dramatic output. This notwithstanding, the quality of his extant plays has had literary scholars systematically placing him only behind Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca, Tirso de Molina and Ruiz de Alarcón on a canonical short list of the best early modern Spanish playwrights. Literary criticism has consistently signaled him out for his unorthodox stance in the face of the rigid honor code of his day. This is documented in his dramatic works for at least three of that code's basic tenets: the exclusively masculine task of cleansing a besmirched honor, dueling as the unquestioned means of that cleansing and, perhaps the most radical of his unorthodox stances, the *sine qua non* virginal state of women at marriage. In his mythology-based *Progne y Filomena*, Rojas Zorrilla has the two titular sisters take bloody revenge upon the royal husband for his savage rape of Filomena. Several of his plays use *graciosos* to present dueling in a

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94. E. Cotarelo y Mori, *Don Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla. Noticias biográficas y bibliográficas*.

critically humorous light, and in *Cada cual lo que le toca* he went to the extreme of having a husband forgive his wife for a pre-marital affair. Even when such an unorthodox act occurs only after the seducer has been properly dispatched while attempting a second, post-marital seduction; the play was booed and never again reached the stage. It is, as far as I know, the most radical expression of its kind in this time.<sup>95</sup>

As already noted, it is held by scholars that early modern Spanish theater is, despite the rigidity of the prevailing patriarchal honor code, a decidedly pro-feminine European theater. If there is a single body of dramatic works that justifies that opinion, Rojas Zorrilla's output would certainly be a prominent candidate. For example, there was no better dramatization written at the time against the traditional norm of marriage by paternal fiat than *Entre bobos anda el juego*, with which he launched the fashionable *comedia de figurón*. By making the ridiculous noble *figurón* the paternally prescribed mate for the young feminine protagonist, Rojas Zorrilla organized a play that in its entirety declaimed against that tradition. The most direct tirades against such marital unions and against male-dominated marriage in general, come as expected from the lips of the play's *graciosa*. And just to mention another among several other plays that could serve the purpose, *Abre el ojo* can be thought of as a revolutionary redemption of the *buscona*, a young woman living by her picaresque wits. It was of course bold on the part of the playwright to have such a feminine lead, a woman functioning by her comical wits on the legal and moral margin of society. It was no less daring to make her an endearing character. Again, a most prominent *graciosa* is the expressive abettor of the feminine protagonist's anti-establishment ways.

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95. See Francisco Rojas Zorrilla, *Cada cual lo que le toca* edited by Américo Castro (177).

*Primero es la honra que el gusto* is also centered on the subtle rebellion of a young protagonist against her father's marital choice for her. It is close to the standard *capa y espada* play, with much *enredo*, but not structured, like *La dama duende*, upon one singular physical gimmick. My choice of this particular play for an in-depth analysis of its *graciosa*'s comical discourse was determined by the fact that Flora is a good exemplar, as the often-on-stage funny maid of the feminine lead, of some characteristics that abound in the *graciosa* of this period. My presentation of her via a handful of plays would be incomplete without an example of the stock female comic figure's funny mercenary activities.

As many a *graciosa*, Flora is what was broadly referred to as an *alcahueta*. She takes advantage of her position as maid to the play's female protagonist to fatten her own purse. But, unlike some of her ilk, she is careful to do so without unduly risking the well being or honor of her *ama*. Still, the mercenary exploitation of her position will contribute significantly, as is often the case in these plays, to the comical entanglements that they required.

#### *Plot summary of Primero es la honra que el gusto*

##### Act I

The play opens with Flora, the *graciosa* lying to Don Juan, her noble client, by telling him that she has delivered his letter to Doña Leonor, her *ama*, when, in reality, she has not. Flora informs the audience that she will not do anything that Don Juan asks of her, indicating that she is working a scam. Don Juan leaves with Flora so as not to be seen by Don Rodrigo, Leonor's father. Doña Leonor and Don Rodrigo enter while she is informing him that she does not want to marry Don Juan, whom her father has chosen for her, because he is too dumb. Still, he insists that he constitutes a good choice for her. Don Rodrigo then leaves to consult with Don Félix, a

young friend who is also a friend to Don Juan and, unbeknownst to Don Rodrigo, his daughter's great love.

Flora approaches her *ama* and admonishes her for accepting her father's choice for a husband. Doña Leonor makes it clear that in her social class to obey her father is mandated, unless she can dissuade him. Flora proclaims to Doña Leonor that her submissive attitude no longer reflects social practice, for at present women have become the judges, prosecutors and even the agents of their marriages. Doña Leonor states that she must write a note to Don Félix, her true love, informing him about her situation. Knowing that her role requires her to carry that note, Flora, in what should probably be indicated as an aside,<sup>96</sup> comically explains that lovers do not pay well for bad news.

Don Félix appears outside his house with a letter in his hand from a former lover, Doña Violante, in whom he is no longer interested. Instead of reading it, he rips it in two and throws it away. Flora, who is looking for Don Félix in order to deliver Doña Leonor's letter, sees him but decides not to make her presence known. Thinking the discarded letter will be of interest to her *ama*, she stealthily, unseen, manages to pick up the two halves and then leaves. Don Félix, regretting not having read it, starts looking for the discarded letter. Pepino, his servant and the play's *gracioso*, arrives and Don Félix accuses him of having taken it. Pepino swears that he has not and has a spat with his *amo*. Don Félix then decides that he must see Doña Leonor and leaves.

Doña Ana, who loves Don Juan, appears in a panic and asks Pepino to allow her in the house because her spying brother is following her. Pepino takes her in but is frightened that he

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96. The only texts of the play that has come down to us are 18<sup>th</sup> century *sueñas* with little textual guarantees.



might have to confront the man following her. His fear is humorously redoubled when he realizes that Don Félix could return to the house with Doña Leonor. He decides to hide Doña Ana in the house. As Pepino had feared, Don Félix arrives with Doña Leonor and Flora. Doña Leonor's reaction to Don Félix's endearing praises suggests that she has come to confront him with Doña Violante's letter. But before this occurs, Rojas Zorrilla interpolates, in very funny asides, Pepino's coarse propositioning of Flora and her no less coarse rejection. The two leave together, and the expected confrontation of Don Félix and Doña Leonor takes place. She discloses that she knows about a previous love, showing him Doña Violante's letter. He retorts that he ripped the letter in two and never answered it. Doña Leonor's reaction is interrupted by the return of Pepino and Flora to warn them that Don Rodrigo is coming. Don Félix tells Doña Leonor to hide and Pepino manages to avoid hiding her in the room in which Doña Ana is already hiding.

Don Rodrigo asks Don Félix if he believes that Don Juan is worthy of Doña Leonor's hand, to which Don Félix responds positively. This upsets both Doña Leonor and Doña Ana, each listening from her respective hiding place: the first because her father seems set on his choice of husband for her, the second because she is in love with Don Juan. Don Rodrigo and Don Félix depart. Doña Ana begins to leave because the coast is now clear since her dominating brother is no longer present but Doña Leonor sees her, thinks she's Doña Violante, and believes that Don Félix is two-timing her. This seems to be confirmed when Don Félix confuses the departing Doña Ana with Doña Leonor and starts to lovingly praise her. Doña Leonor appears and Don Félix is utterly confused when she berates him for his unfaithful conduct and swears that she will avenge herself.

## Act II

Don Juan is confessing his love to Doña Ana, but he simultaneously informs the audience in asides that he is lying to her and that he loves Doña Leonor. Doña Ana believes him. When she leaves, Flora appears, with a letter for Don Juan from Doña Leonor, which she compares to a sweet delicacy. When the sly *alcahueta* describes her physical efforts to take the letter from her chaste *ama*, Don Juan recompenses her with a gold chain. Flora accepts the exchange of gold chain for letter, and then comically calculates in an aside how much she could extract from a lover for an entire ream of letters. Leonor has written that she wants to speak with Don Juan that very night and invites him to her home when her father is out. Don Juan can't believe his luck, but Flora's comical aside sets things straight.<sup>97</sup>

Don Félix and Pepino show up. Don Félix is perturbed at the sight of Flora with Don Juan, who informs Don Félix that Doña Leonor has granted him her favor. Don Félix says that he is happy for him but his aside reveals his inner torment. When Don Félix leaves, Don Juan decides to catch up to him and Flora and Pepino are left on stage. Pepino, comically exalting her *alcahueta* arts, asks Flora to clarify what is going on with the love triangle. Flora very funnily explains that Doña Leonor is just behaving like all other ladies, who, given the miserly conduct of contemporary males, needs a man for every day of the week. Pepino, after lamenting such feminine behavior, changes the subject and asks Flora how much she has received from Don Juan for her services. She shows him the gold chain, but comically tells him that he has no part

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97. Rojas Zorrilla's text does not previously refer to the letter from Doña Leonor that Flora delivers to Don Juan, but it is clear from the comment of the *graciosa* that, as probably expected, Doña Leonor seeks to hinder Don Juan's courtship. I will expand on this flaw in the play's development when Flora's comment is analyzed.

in it. Their amusing dialogue continues until the end of the scene, with Pepino making it clear that his professed love for Flora is motivated by her newfound wealth.

Doña Leonor is in her bedroom and her soliloquy informs the audience that she is set on rejecting Don Juan personally. Flora appears, informing her *ama* that she has given her letter to Don Juan, but that Don Félix was present and had behaved jealously. Doña Leonor says that she must explain things to Don Félix, and Flora berates her for having so readily forgiven him for the Doña Violante incident. Flora goes on to humorously observe that lovers are crazy in behaving childishly weak when their love object is not present. Then, as Doña Leonor proclaims her love for Don Félix, Flora wittily informs her that he is approaching. Doña Leonor asks her to watch out for the appearance of Don Juan or her father, to which Flora comically accedes as she leaves.

Doña Leonor scolds Don Félix for invading her private quarters, endangering her honor, but her jealousy-enraged lover accuses her of unfaithfully abandoning him for Don Juan. She tries to explain that the situation is not what it seems, but fails to do so before Flora runs in to say that Don Rodrigo is approaching and that Don Juan is waiting to see her in the hallway. Doña Leonor tells Flora to take Don Juan to her room and asks Don Félix to leave for her honor's sake. Don Félix, who has heard all this, says good-bye forever. Doña Leonor leaves out of one door, but Don Félix cannot escape because Don Rodrigo is already coming up the steps and hides in an empty room. Doña Leonor hides Don Juan from her approaching father. Don Rodrigo has heard Flora warning Doña Leonor of his arrival and is suspicious. He will act like he has heard nothing, but as he speaks to his daughter Pepino appears, looking for his master and, upon seeing Don Rodrigo, tries to leave. Don Rodrigo asks him what he is doing in his home so late at night. To the wonder of the amazed Pepino, Flora makes up a funny story to justify that he is there to pick up something from her. Don Rodrigo seems to accept this story and orders Doña Leonor to

retire to her room. As she leaves, Doña Leonor's aside indicates her intention of waiting for her father to go to sleep so that she can inform Don Juan that she will not marry him. Don Rodrigo is left alone on stage and reflects about the happenings of the evening and determines to examine every inch of his house.

Don Félix comes out of hiding believing it is safe but hides again when he hears footsteps close by. Don Rodrigo comes out with a light and says that he has but two rooms to search. When he tries the door to the first of the two, he finds that it is locked, but Don Juan asks, from inside, whether it is Doña Leonor. Both Don Rodrigo and Don Félix, who is listening from the other room, hear him. Don Félix's heart breaks because he believes that what Don Juan said about Doña Leonor accepting him as a husband is true. Don Rodrigo is upset because he must defend his honor against the intruder. When he opens the door and sees Don Juan he believes that his wishes have been fulfilled and forgives him the dishonorable invasion of his home. Thinking that his daughter has accepted his choice for her husband, he asks Don Juan to stay the night and they will perform the marriage the next morning, thus avoiding any dishonor.

Don Félix comes out swearing to stay and hide where Doña Leonor hid Don Juan so that when she comes to find Don Juan she will find him instead. When this occurs, Don Félix accuses her of being an ungrateful liar, but she tells him that her heart is his. Don Félix then informs her that her father found Don Juan in the house and in order to save his honor is planning a wedding the next day between her and Don Juan. Doña Leonor and Don Félix are heartbroken.

### Act III

Don Rodrigo is surprised that his daughter insists that she does not want to marry Don Juan. He explains to her that because Don Juan was in their house last night she must marry him for his honor's sake. Leonor says that she prefers to die by the sword, quickly, than dying slowly

married to Don Juan. Don Rodrigo orders his daughter to marry Don Juan in the morning, but she swears to marry Don Félix or die.

Flora announces that Doña Ana, whom she comically describes as a noble lady, has come to see Doña Leonor. Doña Ana begs Doña Leonor not to marry Don Juan because he promised to marry her and she has put her honor at stake. Doña Leonor says that she will help her, satisfying her own desire while maintaining Doña Ana's honor. She leaves so that Doña Ana can confront Don Juan.

Don Juan enters the room thinking that he is speaking to Doña Leonor but finds instead that it is Doña Ana. Doña Leonor then appears and tells Don Juan that he must marry Doña Ana to save her honor. Doña Ana says that she will spend the rest of her days trying to repair her honor and runs off. Don Juan runs after her yelling that he will not marry Doña Leonor. Don Rodrigo hears those words and Don Juan knows that he is in trouble. Don Rodrigo warns Don Juan that the wedding between him and Doña Leonor is to take place the next day whether they like it or not. Don Juan then realizes that marrying a reluctant Doña Leonor, who is in love with another man, will endanger his honor, so he will marry Doña Ana because '*primero es la honra que el gusto*'.

Don Félix, with Pepino, approaches Doña Leonor's home, while he ponders fortune's incessant mutability. Just then Don Juan and Doña Ana exit from one door and Don Rodrigo from another. Don Rodrigo, believing that Don Félix is responsible for his daughter's refusal to marry Don Juan, challenges him to a duel that would avoid his dishonor. Don Félix explains that he wishes to marry Doña Leonor. Don Rodrigo accepts his offer because "*primero es la honra que el gusto*". Don Juan then offers his hand to Doña Ana. Pepino ends the play announcing that since the two couples have married he will do the same with Flora.

## Analysis of Flora's comical discourse in *Primero es la honra que el gusto*

### Act I

The work opens with a comical scene centered on Flora, the *graciosa*, who is selling her go-between services to Don Juan, who hopes to court Doña Leonor, her *ama*. Her mission, which she did not complete, had been to deliver a letter from him to his love interest. Flora's description of Doña Leonor's fictitious reaction to the letter that was never delivered is very funny. It relays, on the one hand, that Flora knows that Doña Leonor does not love Don Juan. And, on the other hand, it shows how the canny *graciosa* manages to put each negative aspect of Doña Leonor's rejection in a positive light. Flora hopes to keep Don Juan dependent on her services. He gives her a diamond believing that Flora had fulfilled his request and revealing that she has been successful in her deception.

Up to this point, the audience has been humorously introduced to a model of the *graciosa* with which it is familiar from its frequent repetition in early modern Spanish theater: that of the mercenary servant who exploits her position with a self-centered lucrative intent, broadly defined by the term *alcahueta* or go-between in amatory matters. Although the *gracioso* is as prone as his feminine counterpart to function in this sense, the presence of the *graciosa* in the leading lady's household gives her a decided edge in this respect. In any case, Flora's verses upon receiving her reward, with its aside that rejects what she openly states, would have had the audience in stitches. She says:

Mil años, sin que a tu amor  
se atreva esquivo desdén,  
amante Matusalén  
goces, don Juan, de Leonor.

(*ap.* Buenos mis enredos van;  
 la trampa ha sido cruel:  
 ni a Leonor di tal papel  
 ni conoce a tal don Juan;  
 toda alcahueta se ajuste  
 a imitar mi proceder,  
 que a un galán se ha de vender  
 a diamante cada embuste.) (441a)

The exaggerated wish for Don Juan's sexual success is Flora's thank you for the gem received, and the aside that follows is then comical in several ways. To begin with, it reveals Flora's ploy to be fraudulent ("trampa"), which, by never having delivered Don Juan's letter, makes her mercenary activity a much more humorous scam. It may even have pleasantly surprised the audience by transforming a simple, familiar *alcahueta* into a wily con woman. The aside itself, especially in its second half, clearly breaks theatrical illusion, offering another level of humor containing Flora's professional counsel to any *alcahueta* within earshot, perhaps sitting in the audience, "you should sell each lie for a diamond to a gentleman" (my trans.). Just how funny it must have been can only be fathomed if one imagines the *graciosa* directing herself to a women-populated *cazuela* in which Madrid maids probably abounded.<sup>99</sup>

Through her humorous discourse, Flora is able to implicitly disclose many socially significant issues. What caught my attention foremost is the payments that Don Juan gives Flora for her services. In this case, the reward is a diamond; in another scene it will be a gold chain. Although it is understood that these go-betweens would get paid for their services, Flora's

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98. For the nature of early modern audiences in this sense, see Burningham (35-37).

discourse allows us to better understand how economically lucrative this side-job could be for a servant. The presence of this activity in Spanish literary tradition,<sup>99</sup> including its recurrent appearance in early modern Spanish theater, suggests that, on some level, such behavior reflected societal norms. In “Spain’s Golden Age Culture and the ‘Comedia’,” Gerald Wade indicates that *comedias* represented “an accurate illustration of the most profoundly significant aspects of the culture” (836). It is clear that the use of *terceras* was a common practice. Esther Fernández explains that, “entre estos funcionarios, cabe destacar en primer lugar el *alcahuete o alcahueta*, quienes podían tomar diversas formas: desde verdaderos profesionales del arte celestinesco, hasta amigos o sirvientes” (79).

Through Flora’s discourse it is made clear that the purpose of her service is to gather as much wealth as possible. If Flora’s rewards were typical, these servants could have accumulated more economic power than one would imagine. Flora’s discourse suggests this since she also offers economic advice to other maids on this matter. Although inherently humorous, this exchange between Flora, Don Juan and the audience also has some socio-economic significance. If read from a language ideology perspective, her counseling other potential *alcahuetas* in the audience (maids) to ‘soak’ their noble clients conveys a measure of class warfare that would have obviously appealed to the predominantly popular audience.

Before the first scene ends, Flora has occasion to add to its comical density via other asides. The conversation between the two continues, and the sly *graciosa* convincingly insists on the positive reaction of Doña Leonor to a letter the audience now knows was never delivered.

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99. The go-between activity is present in Spanish literature since *El libro de buen amor*, but the distinction is that the women involved are professional procurreses. The go-between activity of *graciosas* is akin to that tradition but readily differentiated.



When Don Juan confidently sets himself up with his own aside, “Quién las criadas granjea / consigue un medio importante” (“He who wins over the servant gains an important edge”; 441b; my trans.). Flora, in a very baroque coincidence of asides, counters with a corresponding one, “¡Qué fácilmente un amante / cree las nuevas que desea!” (441b). The humor arises, of course, from the ‘accidental’ correspondence of the unheard asides, to which only the audience is truly privy. And finally, when their secret meeting is about to be interrupted by the appearance of Doña Leonor and her father, Don Juan reminds Flora that he is depending on her as he exits, to which the graciosa answers in a scene-ending aside; “Seguro puedes estar... / (ap.) De que no haré lo que pides” (441b). Such simple asides, even without exploiting the kind of theatrical-illusion-breaking potential already analyzed in the previous chapter, are frequently used witty instruments of the stock comic figures. Merely by letting the audience in on what other characters in the play ignore, creates a current of player/audience conspiracy that tickles the viewers’ collective funny bone.

On a more serious note, Flora’s discourse reminded the early modern audience and informs the present day reader that women with go-between capabilities had the power of deciding what news reached her *ama*, who was controlled and limited in her public-sphere appearances, and what news did not.<sup>100</sup> I assume that, like the duped Don Juan in our theatrical text, there were men tricked or mislead by these women in search of economic gain during that time. But what is of sociological interest, when analyzing Flora’s discourse in terms of language ideologies, is that—although not in the case of Flora, who is clearly just scamming Don Juan—

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100. An example in this play of the cited control and limitation would be Doña Ana’s brother spying on his sister’s every movement.

other go-betweens with this power could well allow the highest bidder to communicate with the lady they served.

From the very beginning, Flora fully exemplifies just how indispensable the presence of her type was in the popular *capa y espada* play. In this theatrical formula, one must always bear in mind that hilarity is constantly called upon to defuse the always tragedy-threatening ‘honor’ attitude that remained the backbone of the noble class represented in the play. In many such plays, the *graciosa* is strategically located in the leading lady’s household, central to the dramatic action, and has the task, along with the *gracioso*, of efficiently doubling the comical input. Flora’s non-stop humor in that first scene has her successfully complying with that task, which she will continue, as we shall see, throughout most of the play.

Of special significance is that Flora opens the production with an initial humorous display. It is an option that the playwright often employed with his *graciosas* in order to immediately set the tone of a theatrical work in which the comical will decidedly dominate. In the first scene, Flora more than adequately fulfills this goal. Her transformation from simple *alcahueta* to scam artist, who completely deceives her victim, heightens the usually amusing *alcahueta* role. A deceptive scam is just funnier than the simple rendering of immoral services. But it also eliminates, as in this case, any serious conflict of interest with regard to her *ama*. This occasionally occurs in early modern Spanish theater when the maid’s lucrative but traitorous go-between activities actually place the honor and/or safety of her *ama* in jeopardy. It is clear that Flora’s *alcahueta*/con-woman goals do not contemplate fulfilling any treacherous activity such as secretly introducing a hopeful lover into the home that could bring harm to Doña Leonor.

In the following scene, the audience learns that Don Rodrigo has chosen Don Juan to be Doña Leonor’s husband. Doña Leonor offsets the benefit of Don Juan’s wealth by indicating that

he is *necio*, which seems confirmed by Flora's scam, but her father is adamant. When Don Rodrigo leaves, Flora joins her *ama*. It seems clear in the ensuing dialogue that the playwright is intent upon diluting Doña Leonor's anguish with Flora's humor, as the comical subgenre requires. When, having failed to convince her father, Doña Leonor feels that she cannot rebel against the tradition of paternal prerogative. Flora asserts:

Ese portarse, yo no lo recuso;  
pero siento que no es vivir al uso,  
que en la presente edad son en sus bodas  
fiscales, jueces, y aun agentes todas. (412a)

She doesn't object to obeying paternal mandates, but points out that it would be contrary to present customs, which have women be the prosecutors, judges and even the agents of their own marriages. It is difficult here to ascertain whether the social 'reality' proclaimed by Flora constitutes a hopefully exaggerated wish, or if it is a candid description of a social reality. It is probably neither, but rather the playwright's use of a humorous exaggeration by his *graciosa* to project a polemical issue of the times upon the stage, which was the unique public forum of that day. The root of that polemic, basically between law and tradition, is stressed by Vollendorf, "law stated that daughters could not be forced to marry against their will, but in practice parents often dictated the choice of partner for their daughters" (3). It should be made clear that the 'law' referred to in the quoted passage was canonical and not civil. That is, it was based on the dictums of the Council of Trent (1561) that Phillip II had immediately (1562) made fully effective in Spain. And it should be noted, as well, that the 'practice' referred to in the quoted passage reflected the long tradition of paternal rights in the matter.

There is little question that the Tridentine elevation of marriage from its traditional contractual basis to a sacramental dignity brought with it a protection of the will of the nuptial participants concomitant with the new dignity granted it. But this key protection of the participants in marriage came into conflict with the long-standing tradition of paternal privilege regarding female offspring. Adjusting tradition to the new Tridentine dictates would naturally take several generations, as most famously manifest in the marriage protocols involving Fernando/Dorotea and Cardenio/Lucinda in the first part of the *Quijote*. It is an example of how:

A research focus on language ideology makes a promising bridge between linguistic and social theory. In spite of the traditional difficulties posed by the ideology concept, it allows us to relate the micro culture of communicative action to political economic considerations of power and social inequality, to confront macro social constraints on language behavior, and to connect discourse with lived experiences. (Woolard 27)

Flora's assertion that the traditional norm of paternal authority in such matters has been overturned possesses a secondary comical impact that arises from the fact that the defiance that she suggests is the basic plot formula, which the audience would have knowingly perceived, of the typical *capa y espada* play.

Doña Leonor continues in her anguish, not acknowledging Flora's declaration of daughterly control over paternal authority. She opts for writing to Don Félix with the terrible news, which prefigures the rest of the play. But the *graciosa*, who would naturally bear the burden of delivering this news in a letter, again dilutes the tension with the wittiness of her remarks. Flora explains:

El llevar malas nuevas siento mucho;

mas distingo el porqué, de virtud lleno,  
 que en tales ocasiones  
 los amantes están muy preguntones,  
 muy hazañeros, muy desaforados,  
 y sólo en dar el porte reportados. (442a-b)

I dislike delivering bad news,  
 and I know why, for although a virtuous act,  
 it results more in my harm than in that  
 of the receiver of the news.

On such occasions, the lovers ask a lot of questions,  
 are very prepared to act, are all out of sorts;  
 and only control themselves when it  
 comes to paying for the delivery. (my trans.)

Although the text does not point it out, it seems likely that these lines are spoken as an aside by Flora and, as such, directed to the audience and not her *ama*. The self-interested *graciosa* can comment humorously upon the economic misgivings of such chores, as she effectively does. In these comments, the popular character probably uses lyrical expression as a discursive means by rendering her comically pragmatic observations in *arte mayor* verses. This is amusing because popular characters expressing mean material concerns in the *comedia* normally and more naturally used *arte menor* verse forms, those employed in popular poetry or music, which further tied them to the popular audience.

When a popular character uses elitist verses in this context, it is a funny event even in our own cinema. This can be attributed to the social fact that speech can be compartmentalized along

socio-economic lines and that certain types of speech are, “linguistically well-defined, possibly positional...and...that speech behavior in general expresses important information about the speaker’s identity” (Kroskity 112). Lope also speaks of this in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias*, explaining that each character should speak in a certain manner (269-87). Jesus Gómez states about Lope’s verses that, “en el pasaje citado del *Arte nuevo*, se hace eco Lope de la vieja teoría retórica sobre el *decorum*, es decir, de la adecuación entre el carácter del personaje y su correspondiente nivel lingüístico” (28).

Having a low-class woman speaking in *arte-mayor* to express lowly economic concerns is a form of humor because it represents a comical break with socially acceptable speech indicators. As Woolard notes, “the ‘simple folk’ might be categorized iconically by ‘plain speech’, in contrast to the ‘ornate’ speech of another social stratum...” She adds that, “the interpretation of linguistic form” is a “dependable index of a social group” (19). As Kroskity explains, “members have a partial awareness of this system, which occasionally surfaces in members’ ‘discursive consciousness’ of selected aspects of their language structure and use...this self-consciousness of language is the very condition of rationalizing or challenging conventional practices” (117). As we observe through Flora’s ‘mis’-use of *arte mayor* verses, a low class character can only make use of the register of language reserved for the upper class with a comical intent. However, it is through comedy that social inequity is often presented and it is through the awareness initiated in a humorous manner that social change occurs through time.

Apart from its irreverently humorous use of an elitist poetic medium this short discourse by the play’s *graciosa* may well contain, from a language ideology perspective, a concrete social message. The social-class identification of the two parties involved in Flora’s comment—the complaining popular messenger and the miserly noble receiver—could well reflect the popular

character's perception of the noble receiver's economic straits. I will defer a full analysis of the lower nobilities' economic problems to a subsequent comment by Flora that is more straightforward on this matter.

The self-interest of Flora, of popular stock comic figures in general, is usually made to contrast with the altruism of the noble protagonists. This self-interest always incited laughter from predominantly popular early modern Spanish theater audiences. However, the social meaning of the laughter that is extracted in such cases may well suggest the self-mocking tradition of popular, carnivalesque laughter stemming from medieval times and constituting the philosophical basis of a popular subculture. As Bakhtin explains:

Let us enlarge upon the second important trait of the people's festive laughter: that it is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world... This is one of the essential differences of the people's festive laughter from the pure satire of modern times. (11)

I will return shortly to this matter, hoping to explain the polemical self-mockery (through the popular *graciosos*) that constitutes much of the humor elicited by popular stock characters from mostly plebian audiences. The study of this type of comical discourse, guided by the theory of language ideology can offer a glimpse into taboo issues of Spain's early modern period.

As Flora arrives to deliver the letter written by her *ama* to Don Félix, she sees him but remains unseen. Don Félix is in the midst of a soliloquy with a letter in his hand. Her curiosity is heightened when she learns that it is from another woman. She sees him tear it in half and throw it away, unread. Misplaced and/or stolen letters are, of course, a frequent gimmick for the *enredos* so common to the comical subgenre. In this case, Flora's decision to steal it for her *ama* offers an extraordinary example of non-verbal humor.

In two asides, the *graciosa* describes to the audience how she goes about stealing the two pieces of the letter from under Don Félix's nose, as it were. Flora explains:

Si coger pudiese ahora  
 aquel papel que rompió,  
 ¡qué dichosa fuera yo  
 si le viera mi señora!  
 Pardiez, que emprenderlo puedo,  
 pues él está divertido;  
 bájome sin hacer ruido,  
 y alargo la mano; un dedo  
 me falta para llegar,  
 pues extender bien el brazo;  
 ya está en casa el un pedazo,  
 el otro se ha de pescar  
 con el mismo tiempo pues. (442b-c)

It is clear that her descriptive words are not themselves funny and that the laughter elicited obviously stems from the bodily contortions, facial expressions and gestures that accompany them. We should bear in mind, as readers of a text without descriptive stage directions, that it is a real woman acting out the role, unusual for those times in Europe. As Bergman notes, "Factors such as societal norms, circumstances of performance, even the weather, can be as important, if not more so, than the text itself in determining its humorous nature" (103). Her authentic physical movements and gesticulations would undoubtedly have been funnily appreciated as



such, and perhaps somewhat more, since the stretched and contorted female body would have itself added some spice to the jocularitas.<sup>101</sup>

These are extended and intensified, with the added non-verbal expressions denoting a fear of being caught, when Don Félix changes his mind and tries to recover the torn letter himself. Flora's second aside indicates her new difficulties, undoubtedly accompanied by the correspondingly new set of comical non-verbal expressions, and then announces her success. She states:

Malo es esto: cierto es  
mi recelo; pero yo  
ya entrambas mitades tengo,  
lindamente sucedió.  
La que es alcahueta fiel

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101. This would be so even without the gimmick of the *disfraz varonil*, that playwrights discovered in order to highlight the feminine physique. Lope comments about this in his *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* when he explains that:

“Las damas no desdigan de su nombre,  
y si mudaren de traje, sea de modo  
que pueda perdonarse, porque suele  
el disfraz varonil agradar mucho. (280-284)

This use of ‘revealing’ male attire (essentially tights) usually involved the feminine lead and rendered no comical effects. See Carmen Bravo-Villasante, *La mujer vestida de hombre*.

a hacer todo esto se obliga;  
 señores, nadie le diga  
 que yo le cogí el papel. (442c)

The fear of being caught, which the first part of the verses cited above indicate, “Oh, no! I’m really afraid!” (my trans.), would have emotionally brought the audience more intensely into the ongoing action, being afraid for her. When sensed by the audience, this shared emotional state would have also intensified the humor when she breaks theatrical illusion. Once Flora has the two halves of the discarded letter, she indicates that she has done her duty. She does so with a witty oxymoronic combination of *alcahueta* and *fiel* that would not have escaped the audience’s notice. That is, she morally excuses her immoral activity by alluding to its intent, which is to enlighten her *ama* with the letter’s contents.

As such, the entire aside is a manner of direct communication with the audience, but in closing Flora takes it a step further. Taking advantage of her *graciosa* privilege, she openly addresses the audience, “señores”. She breaks theatrical illusion to comically make the public an accomplice of her theft. In its entirety, this instance is a good example of how an early modern playwright could combine the aside and the *graciosa* privilege of directly defying theatrical illusion for maximum humorous impact. Rojas Zorrilla has first drawn the audience to an intense emotional (fear of being caught) identification with the character on stage, only to then have her step out of her role to become one with its present, non-artistic reality. The purposely jarring intersection of the two ‘realities,’ the artistic and the non-artistic, would have had a significant comical effect.

It is noteworthy that the always surprisingly funny break with theatrical illusion is itself sometimes double-barreled. On the one hand, there is the actor’s sudden dissolution of the

imaginary line that separates the everyday world from the creative world of the play. And, on the other hand, there is the sense and meaning of the very words that initiate that dissolution. In the present case, “gentlemen, no one tell him that I took the letter” (my trans.), Flora comically asks the audience not to tell a character who is very much in the play that she’s taken the letter. It’s truly funny to have her, standing outside the play, conniving with the audience about an action that has taken place in the play.

Although a very humorous scene, it is important to underscore, from the perspective of language ideology theory, the social implications that the humorous discourse and actions connote. In this instance, it is worth highlighting the words, “a faithful go-between must do things such as this” (my trans.) because Flora must deliver this letter from another woman in Don Félix’s life to Doña Leonor. It is significant that Flora is in the public sphere, a place where she has much more mobility than her *ama*. These words spoken by Flora are a clue to better understand how women from different classes had a special type of symbiotic relationship during Spain’s early modern period. It is made clear in this scene that Flora is Doña Leonor’s eyes and ears and, in this case, even arms and hands, in the public sphere. Because of the social prohibitions and restraints imposed on women of the higher classes when it came to mingling in the public arena, they required a messenger to bring information to them from that sphere into their private one. As Vollendorf notes, “Women, associated with the home’s domestic space, were expected to be obedient and silent” (3). Low class women with little financial means would work for those who had the wealth to keep a servant but not the freedom to be a part of the outside world. It appears that these women from different social classes helped each other in order to get what they each lacked: financial means by the lower class and freedom by the higher class. Flora states, “How happy I would be if my lady could see this letter” (my trans.). Her

discourse amusingly underlines the relationship that the *ama* and the *criada* maintain in order to function in their society, as Paul Kroskrity explains, those concerned with human agency, “allow varying degrees of members’ consciousness of their own rule-guided activities ranging from discursive to practical consciousness” (19). The audience’s laughing acquiescence lends credence to the general acceptance of this social symbiosis.

In terms of the significant comical contribution of the *graciosa* in the many plays in which she appears in early modern Spanish theater, it should be mentioned that her humorous impact often lingers after she leaves the stage. In the scene just analyzed, for example, Flora’s theft of the letter sets in motion another one hundred or so verses of pure comedy. Don Félix accuses his servant, Pepino, of having taken the discarded letter and there ensues a discussion in which the male stock comic figure fully satisfies the reason for his omnipresence in the tragicomical formula of this theater.

Before the end of the first act Rojas Zorrilla again enlists his *graciosa* to obviously inject a dose of diluting levity as the plot takes a serious turn. With the stolen letter in Doña Leonor’s possession, her accusing dialogue with Don Félix is interrupted by a series of asides between the *gracioso* and the *graciosa*. The asides are necessary because both servants are present as the protagonists speak to each other, but the asides themselves constitute a dialogue.<sup>102</sup> The entire funny conversation follows in order to make its analysis intelligible:

PEPINO. (Ap.) Mientras se dicen los dos  
veinticuatro disparates,  
que fueran cuarenta nueve

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102. As a scholarly curiosity, this aside within an aside is an example, itself defiantly comical, of the baroque mind ever pushing at the limits of Classical verisimilitude.

si cupiera el asonante,  
 nos podemos ir nosotros  
 allí dentro a hacer aparte  
 nuestros papeles, Florilla.

FLORA. (Ap. ¿No ve que es un ignorante?)

Erró, vuesarced, mi rey,  
 o mi roque, ¿pues no sabe  
 que un pepino y una flor  
 nunca traban maridaje?

PEPINO. (Ap. Anda, que eres una necia.)

No en flores el tiempo gastes,  
 que aunque el Papa no dispense,  
 podrán en aqueste lance  
 el pepino enflorecerse  
 y la flor empepinarse. (443b)

Rojas Zorrilla availed himself of a tried and true source of humor in early modern Spanish theater: the parallel courtship of the protagonists and their servants. The stock comic figures' skits, earthy and allusively sexual, are a funny antidote to the aseptic performance of the principals, who never kiss or say anything that remotely alludes to the physical nature of their mutual attraction. A prior ecclesiastical censorship often reduced these characters' sexual allusions to relatively innocuous metaphors. However, it can be presumed that once on stage the actors who sought the public's laughter would have exercised their non-verbal abilities, perhaps posturing and gesturing lewdly, to get across a comically sexual scenario. How far they could go

will always remain conjectural, but the potential should be borne in mind when such scenes are analyzed for their humorous impact.

That said, even without considering its gesticular possibilities, the short skit by the *graciosos* is filled to the brim with laughter-eliciting elements. To begin with, Pepino, by alluding to the fact that he is in a play, “which could be forty-nine if the rhyme allowed” (my trans.), breaks theatrical illusion. This laughable stepping outside of the play is immediately redoubled when he suggests to Flora that they go off by themselves and carry out their usual theatrical roles, that is, their expected love affair. As Bergman notes, “Comedias, known to be self-referential in many ways, are littered with references to the act of joking itself, even referring to the ambiguous nature of humor” (107). It should be noted that his suggestion, having momentarily stepped outside of the play and into the real present, becomes a comically enhanced ‘real’ lewd proposition, probably with corresponding winks and gestures. It is impossible to say today whether such alternating between the theatrical and the real escaped the notice of the censoring clergymen.

What Flora answers is no less funny. She starts by calling him, in an aside within the aside, an *ignoramus*. Insulting name-calling is a ploy in exchanges between stock comic figures, and can either take a loving stance or one of rivalry. She continues with insulting irony, addressing him as an exalted noble, “vuesarced”, and then playing upon a set expression from chess, ‘*ni rey ni roque*’ (no one; my trans.), to comically make him neither her prince, “rey” or her nobody. She finishes by punning on their names (his, “cucumber,” itself funny, as was often the case in the nomenclature of the *gracioso*) to explain why they would be a mismatch, “Don’t you know that a cucumber and a flower can never marry?” (my trans.).<sup>103</sup> Pepino answers,

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103. In effect, botanically ‘flower’ and ‘fruit’ cannot co-exist.

following her lead, by first insulting her, again, as an aside within the aside, "God, but you are stupid" (my trans.), and then using punning irony in qualifying her insults as positive praises, "Don't waste your time with flowery praises" (my trans.). Pepino then follows her punning of their respective names with his own, countering her claim of mismatch with words that—given that his name is purposely phallic—can readily be interpreted in comically sexual terms, "although without papal dispensation, it could be that in this case the cucumber can flower and that the flower can become /take on a cucumber" (my trans.). The reference to the lack of church sanction clearly suggests an amusing immoral *maridaje* or no sanctioning marriage at all in the alluded sexual encounter.

The comical, non-threatening tone of this exchange between the *graciosos*, masks the fact that they are discussing topics laden with sexual allusions. Doña Leonor is in Don Félix's house, confronting him about the letter from Doña Violante that Flora had brought her. The noble protagonists are debating over the implications of his supposed infidelity that the letter might suggest. The debate is quite serious and, in true baroque style, the exchange between Flora and Pepino humorously parallels that of their superiors. If one examines the discourse of both couples, the idealized attitudes expressed by the protagonists and the materialistic/sexual substance of the other, the socio-political differences are perfectly clear. The popular couple's discourse, when discussing their 'amorous' relationship, is quite materialistically crude when compared to the idealized repartee of their noble counterparts. In this case, the popular subculture is self-mockingly, in carnivalesque fashion, projected on a stage harboring the impossibly, falsely idealized noble hegemonic world.

Included for its humorous effect, the stock comic figures' courting is almost always portrayed, thus, in pointedly sexual terms. It is traditionally accepted, of course, that courting in

the lower class is explicitly based on carnal satisfaction while the courting in the higher-class projects an exclusively spiritual basis. But it should be indicated that the popular discourse just analyzed, allows for a great freedom of sexual expression, which naturally conveys a much greater physical freedom. In their discussion, Flora tells Pepino that they can never marry. Pepino's proposition is clearly one that avoids the question of marriage altogether. He goes as far as to say that even without marriage they could still make use of one another. Even if stated comically, it is a man telling a woman to engage in sexual activity.

What the inter-*gracioso* discourse achieves is comic relief from the amorous contrast between idealized, desexualized noble courtship and material, sex-laden popular courtship. What is particularly critical to this concept is feminine sexuality. The usually over-idealized projection of the female noble protagonist denies feminine sexuality. The other extreme, represented by the humble characters, constitutes a proclamation of natural feminine sexuality. As Vollendorf explains:

Foucault's assertion about open treatment of sexuality in the early modern period certainly applies in the Spanish context to women as well as to men. Indeed, what surprises readers today is not merely the inclusion of sexual details, but their explicit nature in prose fiction, trial records, spiritual biographies, and other texts.

(2)

Among the "other texts" referred to by Vollendorf, but with much greater social impact than any of the other sources she mentions, one would have to include the discourse of *graciosas*. In a popular figure such as Flora, blatant sexuality is not seen as an aberration and the question no longer was whether feminine sexual impulses existed, but how early modern Spanish society



accepted them as natural, even if only by allocating obvious sexuality to women from the popular social strata.

The selection of Flora to exemplify the important comical contribution of *graciosas* in early modern Spanish theater is justified by the play's first act. In it, we are offered the great variety of humorous outlets that the *graciosa* allows the playwright in complying with the typical formula of that theater. It documents, for example, that *graciosas* can out-contribute the *gracioso*. There are, besides, dimensions of the comedy in general that are gender-typed or require the feminine. One such example would be the scene of Flora's 'loyalty'-driven stealing of Don Félix's discarded letter. Apart from the motivation itself, there is the non-verbal posturing and contortioning that takes place, which was always spicier, when a female body was involved.

My analysis reveals the great variety of comical forms displayed by Flora in just the first act, including repeated punning, which is the most common. She is at her funniest when embodying two of the standard humorous *personae* open to *graciosas*: that of the *alcahueta*, exploiting her position for economic gain, and that of the sexually allusive partner of the *gracioso*. In the first case, Flora intensifies the funny setting and contributes to the plotline (underscoring Don Juan's '*necedad*') by brazenly scamming him. In the second, during the wooing face-off with the *gracioso*, she is the one who initiates the punning on their names and she is the first to use irony in addressing her male counterpart. In both cases her discourse offers us a more comprehensive view of the position of women during Spain's early modern period.

## Act II

The purposely-complicated plot entanglements common to the subgenre have the *graciosa* deliver a 'real' letter from her *ama* to Don Juan, Flora's duped client. Both she and the audience know that Doña Leonor wants to meet him in order to ask him to desist in his courtship,

although he is her father's choice. The encounter between the scamming Flora, who knows the letter's intent, and her victim is funny from her first congratulatory words, "Buenas nuevas, buenas nuevas / ¡Albricias, señor don Juan!" (445). The informed public is thus advised that the avaricious *alcahueta*/scammer is not, under the new circumstances, about to forego her scheme or let her deceived client off the hook.

Then, with the spectators in on her scam, Flora comically puts the proper finishing touches on her scheme. First, she literally makes Don Juan's mouth water with the suggested positive contents of her delivery. She says:

De mi ama, cuando menos,  
 os traigo un papel; catad  
 si vos fará buena pro/  
 bocado que es dulce asaz. (445c; my emphasis)

From my employer, nothing less,  
 I bring you a note;  
 taste and see if a  
 meal so sweet is not going  
 to do you great good. (my trans.)

Apart from the deception, which the public is in on, Flora's very words are humorous such as the gustatory metaphor she employs, transforming the letter into a deliciously sweet bite or the archaic, 'romance of chivalry' language she employs. Flora's introductory remarks are, from a linguistic perspective, a masterpiece of scamming proficiency. Her metaphorical transformation of the letter that she brings into pleasurable sensorial terms, which delicately suggest the sensual,

is seconded by language that recalls a world of chivalry that projected a sensuality that would have been censored in Counter-Reformation Spain.<sup>104</sup>

When the gullible victim states that he couldn't pay her enough for what she brings, Flora, on cue, as it were, puts forth her case for a heavy payment. She states:

Sabe

Su Divina Majestad,  
 don Juan, que fueron mis ruegos  
 tenazas, y en su crueldad  
 clavó el papel; forcejamos,  
 yo tirar y ella cejar.  
 Emperreme, agarré bien,  
 y de un tirón, a pesar  
 de su fuerza, le arranqué  
 de su recato. Mirad  
 si con tal perro de ayuda  
 podrá vuestro amor pelear. (446a)  
 As God is my witness,  
 my pleas for Doña Leonor

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104. In this case the language itself recreates a remote *ideological* ambience that opposes the thinking of the period in which the play was performed. As Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal have noted in their article, "Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation," "By picking out qualities supposedly shared by the social image and the linguistic image, the ideological representation—itsself a sign—binds them together in a linkage that appears to be inherent" (38).

to give up the letter were like  
 tongs holding the paper,  
 while my *ama*, reluctant,  
 tightened her hold on it.  
 We struggled, me pulling  
 while my *ama* pulled back.  
 Like a dog, I held on tight  
 and with a final pull, despite  
 her strength, I took the paper  
 from her shy reluctance. Take  
 notice that with such a dog  
 to help your love can surely put  
 up a fight. (my trans.)

The basis for the humor is the fact that the audience knows that the story of the struggle is made up in order to raise the monetary value of Flora's services. It is heightened by Flora's narration, beginning with her exaggeratingly setting up God as witness and ending with transforming herself into a canine doggedly holding on to something precious. It is an image that everybody knows from personal experience. But the greatest intensifier of the funny words would have been the actresses' physical reenactment of the struggle described, pulling this way and that, grimacing with the effort, etc. She would most probably not have foregone the

opportunity that the playwright afforded her to display non-verbal humor. With no detailed stage directions, the non-verbal humorous component would be left up to her craft.<sup>105</sup>

Flora immediately has her way, receiving the by then standardized *cadena* from Don Juan, her victim. This leads to another burst of humor from the *graciosa*. She asks:

Admito el trueque. (Ap.) Si medio  
 pliego de papel no más  
 paga así su amante, ¿a cómo  
 cada resma le saldrá? (446a)  
 I accept the payment.  
 If a lover is willing to pay  
 so much for a half page of paper,  
 how much would an entire ream  
 cost him? ( my trans.)

She happily acknowledges the exchange of *cadena* for letter, and then, in an aside, poses a comically greedy question. The direct, business-like sealing of the deal is itself more humorous than it might seem, perhaps astonishing the audience, because *alcahueta/graciosas* more often than not feigned altruism, rejecting before finally accepting their payment. The surprising alteration of a cliché always elicits laughter. But Flora's exceptionally business-like attitude is

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105. The role of *gracioso* is known to have been very specialized, with reknown actors playing no other role; so it seems very likely that actresses playing *graciosas* would also have specialized in performing the antics so proper to the role's laughter-eliciting goals. We know that this is true in our own day, in which a comic actor seldom plays a 'serious' role.

enhanced by the avariciously calculating question that she asks herself. But then, of course, Flora is a full-blown scam artist.

When the overjoyed Don Juan reads Doña Leonor's letter requesting a secret meeting with him, the *graciosa* ends the scene with a final amusing aside after he has left. She states:

¡Ay, mi don Juan de buen alma,  
 ¡qué fácil sois de engañar!  
 ¡Cómo después esa miel  
 se os ha de volver agraz!” (446a).

There is humor in the somewhat gloating designation of Don Juan as a sap, for when she seems to be taking pity on him, *buen alma*, she is recalling for the audience Spanish expressions (*alma de cántaro*, for example) that employ the ‘soul’ to designate a lack of practical intelligence. To a large extent, Flora's real meaning here would have been delivered to the public non-verbally, with an anything but pitying set of facial expressions. The final segment of her aside is comical, too, for it confirms her in the exploiting attitude of the scamming *alcahueta* by turning bitter, “agraz” the same sweet-bite metaphor that she had earlier used to further her scam.

In this instance, Flora's comical discourse points to the established simple-mindedness of Don Juan. His lack of intelligence is mentioned several times in the play, and Flora's speech underlines his intellectual shortcomings.<sup>106</sup> The amusing nature of this scene may somewhat soften the fact that a clever low-class woman is clearly manipulating an unintelligent gentleman, but the fact that the predominantly popular audience obviously enjoyed it all reveals, from a

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106. It should be noted that Rojas Zorrilla is often credited with the creation of the *comedia de figurón*, in which the noble gentleman, its protagonist, is clearly ridiculed.

language ideology perspective that analyzes the relation, “between the forms of speaking and the conditions of social life in many complex ways” (Irvine 64) some measure of class confrontation.

With the arrival of Don Félix and Pepino, the next scene offers another funny chapter in the rocky courtship of the two *graciosos*. Briefly, Don Juan, overflowing with joy, tells Don Félix of his late-night date with Doña Leonor. When Don Félix, overwrought with jealousy, runs off and Don Juan takes his leave, Pepino humorously accuses Flora of being the cause of his master’s sorrow. Falsely putting the burden on her *ama*, Flora comically explains:

Señor mío: en Madrid no hay  
dama ninguna que pueda  
con sólo un galán pasar,  
porque son tan redomados  
aun los más finos, que ya  
cualesquiera dellos es  
de su bolsa más galán  
que de su dama; y así,  
mi ama quiere imitar  
el común estilo, haciendo  
como todas las demás;  
que galanes y camisas  
siete se han de remudar  
cada semana. (446c)

Flora's statement is a blatantly false exaggeration, as the audience knows, but the playwright uses it to bring before the audience, via the outspoken *graciosa*, a feminist position on courting: she equates women to men in the wooing game as if it were a social reality, "my mistress wants to imitate the common practice, doing what all the other women do; changing suitors as if they were shirts, at seven per wee" (my trans.). She proclaims that women, too, are now playing the field and entertaining several *galanes* at a time. Although no more than a hopeful wish, the *cazuela*'s undoubtedly boisterous positive reception to this gender-equalizing proposition would have given expression to women's discontent with a social reality of the seventeenth century and of long thereafter.

The humor accompanying the 'revolutionary' statement stems from the image she employs: changing suitors as one changes one's shirt. This image is usually applied in Spain, even today, to the male's procedure of approaching multiple women, and the irony is accompanied by a laughable exaggeration. As I often make a point of stressing, this statement probably allowed the *graciosa* a wealth of funny non-verbal opportunities, at the very least putting on and taking off imaginary shirts.

Such humorous statements, especially directed at the women's section of the theater, were most probably more intended to incite the public to laughter than to suggest a gender equality in such matters that was still centuries away. But novel perceptions and ideas are not born whole and instantaneously into societies. So it wouldn't surprise me to find, if such a study were undertaken, that much of what we cherish today as 'the norm' began in riotous laughter with carnivalesque echoes. In these terms, the many 'feminist' proclamations comically voiced, especially by permissibly outspoken *graciosas*, in early modern Spanish theater should not be simply discarded. These comments, even though funny and spoken by a member of the popular



class, should be given some weight and credit in changes to come centuries later. As Don Kulick explains, “by using language in the specific ways they do, speakers embody and re-create salient stereotypes about what women and men are, they engender affect, and they position themselves in socially meaningful ways in relation to Christianity, civilization, and the modern world” (100). These remarks reveal somewhat shocking ideas to the student of Spain’s early modern era. Such is the case, reflected here, of a *graciosa* uttering revolutionary statements that run counter to the idealized hegemonic values of the time, in which, “in literature as in life, female chastity was rewarded by the dominant Catholic culture” (Vollendorf 5). That such statements, even when spoken by unrestrainable *graciosas*, could not only pass censorship but also incite laughter, indicating some measure of social acquiescence, is itself revealing.

It should be noted that Flora’s revolutionary proclamation of gender equality in courtship is based on gentlemen’s’ present lack of economic means. As noted in an earlier oblique reference by Flora to gentlemen’s sad pecuniary state, such references, if analyzed with a language ideology perspective, can be seen as socio-economically loaded. The more than century-long struggle of the lower nobility in Spain, the social level depicted in most *comedias*, was in fact a painful reality. There was a great money revolution throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a steep inflation promoted by the precious metals from the New World that impoverished the landed lower nobility, as witness the *escudero* of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the protagonist of *Don Quijote*. The seventeenth century suffered something similar via the recurrent devaluation of coinage. The economic plight of the lower nobility had always been comically projected in early modern literature, but its use in Spain’s theater of the time referred to by popular stock comic figures, would have had a much greater social impact. It is not hard to imagine the class-centered reaction of predominantly popular audiences.

Faithful to his theatrical heritage, the *gracioso* Pepino is most interested in the material, economic aspect of Flora's enterprise. He asks her how much she's gotten out of Don Juan and the *graciosa* is comically coy. She explains:

Esta cadenilla; mas  
de ella, vuesarced, mi rey,  
niquil ha de garrafar. (446c)  
This little chain, but from it,  
your lordship, my king, you  
are getting nothing. (my trans.)

Her diminutive for the *cadena* is funny either as an ironic indication of its large size or as a ploy to lessen Pepino's interest in her spoils. Her noble address and royal designation for the *gracioso* are ironic, and her refusal to share her ill-gotten gains is funnily delivered in popular street slang.<sup>107</sup> Pepino retorts by proclaiming his glee in the fact that there are vulnerable Don Juan's in the world, but ends on a romantic note, indicating how much he loves Flora. There ensues a rapid and comical exchange between the two *graciosos*:

PEPINO.       ...¡Ay, Flora, lo que te quiero!  
FLORA.               ¿Mucho?  
PEPINO.               Mucho.  
FLORA.               ¿Tanto?  
PEPINO.               Y más.

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107. This popular slang often took expressions from Romaní, the corrupted language of the Gypsies. The introduction of slang was a comical device already employed in the medieval carnivalesque tradition. See Bakhtín (145-95).



carnavalesque subculture of impotence-driven self-mockery as a social response to the hegemony. Unless explained in this manner, it would make no sense that humble spectators filled the public playhouses decade after decade during Spain's early modern period. And fill them they did, as Esther Fernández explains "Los días de representación se multiplicaban para cumplir con la demanda de público. Se pasó de dar funciones solamente los domingos y días festivos, a autorizarse dos sesiones semanales; los martes y los jueves" (72). She continues explaining that:

[S]i nos centramos en la zona de Madrid, los corrales más importantes fueron el de la Cruz y el del Príncipe, separados por la irrisoria distancia de aproximadamente unos doscientos metros...el hecho que ambos teatros sobrevivieran económicamente estando tan próximos indica la multitudinaria asistencia capaz de abarrotar ambos locales simultáneamente a diario. (73)

Finally, Fernández speaks of the success of the *comedia* in economic terms. She explains:

El caso de los patios de comedias madrileños era único no sólo por estar respaldados por la corona y por su público adicto—situación que también se daba en Inglaterra—sino por tener como primeros beneficiarios a los hospitales y otras instituciones pías. Este hecho influyó de manera decisiva en su "concomitante e inevitable" florecimiento y expansión que ofrece ese público. Aunque no faltaron prohibiciones y temporadas de cierre, los rendimientos de los teatros comerciales resultaban ser demasiado tentadores para dejarlos escapar, incluso si para ello había que hacer la vista gorda respecto a ciertos aspectos ilícitos. No es difícil entonces concluir que la localización de los corrales madrileños tal como la he descrito fuera una estudiada estrategia de comercialización, al facilitar la

asistencia del mayor número posible de asiduos y, como consecuencia, aumentar al máximo los ingresos. (75)

The predominately popular audience would not have attended these plays if they had felt persistently insulted, because, as we all know, no one pays scarce money to be consistently demeaned.

Yet another observation that could be made after analyzing Flora's discourse is that she is economically attractive to the *gracioso* who himself has received nothing during the entire play. Their exchange speaks volumes of how, in the case of the lower class, women might have been better able to earn a living than their male counterparts. Flora's dialogue suggests that what makes her an attractive mate is her possession of economic wealth and it reveals how much economic power these women could have had in their own social circles.

Flora will interject comical 'spots' throughout the remainder of the second act, dutifully augmenting the hilarity required of the *capa y espada* play. For example, her practical observation of lovers. They are directed specifically to her noble *ama*, but are applicable, of course, to the general feminine population of the theater. Flora states:

Notables sois las que amais;  
 extraña es vuestra locura,  
 nunca estáis con más ternura  
 que cuando sin él estáis.  
 Pucheritos son de niños  
 vuestras iras en rigor,  
 que en diciendo 'ajo' el amor,  
 paran en tiernos cariños. (447a)

“Love is a madness” (my trans.), she says, “because, illogically, you are only truly tender when your lover is absent” (my trans.), suggesting that when he is present women project a natural defensive indifference, something the women in the audience would understand. Then, even funnier, she resorts to childlike images to describe their encounters. The woman’s invariable irritation with her lover are “pucheritos de niños” (childish pouts; my trans). But her suitor just has to say “ajo” (a baby’s first recognizable word, which supposedly makes women gush with emotion) for the irritation to dissolve into loving tenderness. Although these words may have generated laughter for the theater-going public of that day, for the modern-day reader they are a window into how a servant could perceive, with her pragmatic view of the world, the impossibly idealistic behavior of her *ama* with regard to courting and love in general.

Shortly after, when Flora spies the approach of Don Félix as Doña Leonor expresses undying love for him, she lets her *ama* know of his impending arrival with the expression. She warns:

Hele, hele por do viene

Don Félix por la calzada. (447b)

With the lover’s name inserted, it is the traditional formula of the theatricalized *romance de ciego* for announcing the approach of an anxiously expected new character. There is a measure of theatrical-illusion dispelling humor in openly citing a theatrical form within a play, but most of the laughter achieved would most probably have been elicited from Flora’s irony. The formula she cites is almost invariably associated with the arrival of a knightly medieval hero to the rescue of a young maiden, which decidedly contrasts with the pusillanimous Don Félix. It is not unreasonable to think that a popular early modern Spanish public might see in that ironic contrast—heroic medieval noble and contemporary lovelorn, courtly noble—a funny dig at the

reigning hegemonic class. This could be taken as an example of counter-discourse, which Jane Hill explains as, “arguments that take specific formulas of the discourse...and expose them to explicit contradiction and, in the most interesting cases, parody” (76). If this is indeed a dig at the true state of the hegemonic noble class by comparing the nobleman of the time with the more heroic nobleman of the past, one can see why it would have elicited laughter from predominantly popular audiences. Whereas this dig may be easily dismissed by a present-day reader, in the context of the early modern period it might have spoken volumes because “the dynamics of counter-hegemonic resistance must be understood within their specific cultural matrix and that this includes the nature of the indexical projections constituted within particular linguistic forms” (Hill 83).

The *graciosa* then comically participates in the happy resolution of one of the several ‘dangerous’ mis-identification *enredos* that the *capa y espada* subgenre relished. When Don Rodrigo finds Pepino in his home, Flora efficiently convinces him of the reason for his presence via the quick-witted elaboration of two lies. She initiates her verbal scam with a very baroque double aside, first she lets the audience know of her intent to lie and, secondly, she asks Doña Leonor to go along. She then offers up her first lie intended to confuse Don Rodrigo with respect to Pepino’s identity. Knowing that Pepino’s face would be familiar to Don Rodrigo, she, like an accomplished deceiver, brings in the deceived as witness. In answer to Don Rodrigo’s asking if she knows Pepino, Flora answers:

Y tú tambien, si te acuerdas,  
le conoces: es criado  
de doña Aldonza Teresa  
de Girón, grande amiga

de mi Señora. (448a)

You do too, if you remember.

You know him: he is the servant  
of Doña Aldonza Teresa,  
great friend of my lady. (my trans.)

Flora's second lie is necessary to explain Pepino's presence. In answer to Don Rodrigo's questioning his late visit, Flora answers:

A una impertinencia,  
Viene por una jaulilla  
que me encargó que la hiciera  
su ama, que tengo yo  
linda maña para hacerlas... (448a-b)  
For nothing important.  
He is just picking up a little hair-bun clasp  
that his *ama* asked me to make  
for her. You see I make these  
very well... (my trans.)

During the short scene, perhaps the trapped Pepino's punning asides are more directly funny, but the scene is stolen by Flora's ingenious prevarications that I imagine accompanied by the actress's expressive non-verbal ploys, displaying the quick-witted, scheming and scamming female stock comic figure *en su salsa*, as they say in Spanish.

Her discourse also shows, in an indirect, implicit way, how honor issues, with their possibly dire consequences, could be humorously diffused by a white lie from a *graciosa*. When



her speech is analyzed using language ideology theory it can be said, in general, that in the decidedly comical *capa y espada* plays, fathers whose daughters are desperately seeking a freedom of marital choice that tradition did not allow them come across as easily deceived. As Donald Larson has noted, “fathers, far from putting up a...resistance to the plans of their children, are conspicuously accommodating, helpful, and understanding” (47). But this offers a window into society’s necessary accommodation of the rather ruthless consequences involving honor. In this particular example, the presentation of an easily deceived father lets us understand from our present-day perspective that no father would have wanted to kill his socially errant daughter. And this fact empowered the *graciosa* to use clever ways to divert danger from her *ama*.

Flora’s contribution to the comical density of act two readily matches that of the official *gracioso*, thus fulfilling the primary reason for her presence in the play. As noted, the variety of jocular techniques that she employs is as great as in act one. The new humorous strategies that appear as a result of her potential as *alcahueta*, or the rather explicit sexual confrontation of *graciosos*, have been analyzed above. I have also emphasized the humorous interventions of the *graciosa* that, self-mockingly projecting a dissident popular subculture, in the carnivalesque manner that Bakhtin has underscored, reflect what Burningham has referred to, in countering Maravall’s one-sided top-down hegemonic propaganda, as down-up cultural interchanges.<sup>111</sup> These involve the presentation of a popular subculture’s amusing unconventional perceptions of core tenets of the period’s noble hegemonic ethos.

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111. According to Burningham when criticizing Maravall’s position, “we believe that the picture he paints is too monolithic and too ‘top-down’ in its characterization of cultural interchange” (33).

## Act III

Our consistently funny *graciosa* of acts one and two offers her single comical intervention of act three at the beginning. When Doña Ana, in love with the clueless Don Juan, visits her *ama*, Flora describes her as follows:

Paréceme en su buen arte,  
 viendo en paz la crespa lid  
 de su hermosura y donaire,  
 que es galera de buen aire  
 de las calles de Madrid. (450b)

The basic metaphor of Flora's description, morphing the young woman into a fit fighting ship is undoubtedly amusing, for it clearly recalls the millennial love/war metaphor. Here it suggests the sea battle scene between the sexes that characterized the daily streets of Madrid. As Fernández explains:

Por las razones anteriores, en las páginas que siguen tomo los corrales de comedias de la villa de Madrid como un espacio privilegiado a partir del cual se desarrolló el erotismo urbano y social, más allá de la comedia en sí y sus tecnocracias y valores trascendentes, que se pueden quedar en lo estrictamente literario. Lo que propongo investigar a lo largo de este artículo es cómo la estratégica ubicación geográfica de estos patios, su distribución interior y su funcionamiento interno contribuyó a la creación de unos lugares eróticos sociales. Es decir, el teatro representa dos espacios a la vez. Lo es en términos estrictos, porque para notarlo uno no tiene que hacer otra cosa que salir del teatro. Pero sólo viendo esa duplicidad el público es capaz de transformar el espectáculo teatral en

una experiencia orgánica y totalizadora de bacanal dionisiaca (que entiendo como una fiesta caracterizada por un desenfreno tanto erótico como irreverente) que se extendía más allá de lo considerado puramente teatral. (72)

This image, perhaps granting an important advantage to the feminine fleet, would no doubt have received a resounding reception from the boisterous *cazuela*.

The third act of Rojas Zorrilla's *Primero es la honra que el gusto*, only available in several incomplete eighteenth century *suektas*, contains barely 500 verses.<sup>112</sup> This is just about half the standard length of a *comedia* act in early modern Spanish theater, and suggests that the *suektas* had a single common source, which suffered damage in its third act. This is intriguing, for it might suggest, but definitely does not prove, that the prudishly classical-minded Eighteenth Century cut out much Baroque license that it found intolerable. One can only hypothesize that a great deal, if not all, of the missing material, if acts one and two are any guide, would have offered several additional encounters between Flora and Pepino. Perhaps we shall never know what these two cynical lovers projected.

## Conclusion

Flora, the *graciosa* of *Primero es la honra que el gusto*, a title that is itself ironic, contributes greatly to the comical density required of the subgenre. My selection of this *comedia*, despite of its abbreviated third act, is more than justified by it being a showcase for the combination of two important veins of humor that thrived in the popular *capa y espada* venue. The *graciosa* as *alcahueta*, greedy exploiter of her privileged position, and the parallel love affair of the *graciosos* are the backbone of the play's hilarity but by no means exhaust Flora's humorous repertoire. Especially underscored, because not often studied, is the non-verbal humor,

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112. See MacCurdy, *Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla* (121).

for which the *graciosa* is particularly apt. Finally, my selection of this play, as well as that of Moreto's to follow, was prompted, in great part, by the possible social impact of their feminine stock comic figures' humorous discourse, which, when analyzed with the theory of language ideology, appears to highlight social issues that are still academically controversial.<sup>113</sup>

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113. I refer to the controversy surrounding Maravall's lopsided commentary of the social impact of early modern Spanish theater.

## Chapter 4: Irene

Moreto's *La fuerza de la ley*

Some ten years younger than Rojas Zorrilla, Agustín Moreto y Cabaña (1618-1669) stands out, chronologically, as the youngest and the last of the great playwrights of Spain's early modern period. As prolific as most playwrights of this period, he had written some fifty *comedias* before being fully ordained, at 39, in 1657. Two of his plays, *El lindo don Diego* and *El desdén con el desdén*, may well have weathered the passage of time better than the masterpieces of Lope de Vega, Calderón de la Barca and Tirso de Molina, usually placed ahead of him on the canonical academically-inspired list of greats. *El lindo don Diego* is widely considered the best *comedia de figurón*, a subgenre that mocked noble comportment and thus pre-figured much of eighteenth-century Spanish theater. The second, which masterfully dramatizes, as its title indicates, an ancient rule concerning inter-gender relationships (disdain of the love object as a winning amatory strategy) has quite expectedly retained its freshness.

I selected Moreto's *La fuerza de la ley* in order to exemplify the possible function of *graciosas* outside of their ideal *comedia de capa y espada* medium. There are no available statistics, but one can confidently assume that a much lower percentage of female stock comic figures appear in other modalities of the early modern Spanish *comedia* because many of these are not set in the home of the leading lady. Nevertheless, there are sufficient *graciosas* in those other works to justify my selection. *La fuerza de la ley*, despite Moreto's attempt at a happy ending with Aurora's warm corpse still in the wings, cannot escape the category of 'honor drama,' especially with its 'tragic' female victim. It stands, thus, at the opposite end from the *capa y espada* play in the categorization of *comedia* forms. This basic differentiation can readily be detected in comparing the plot developments of Moreto's *La fuerza de la ley* and Rojas

Zorrilla's *Primero es la honra que el gusto*. Both plays are constructed around the same subject: male-mandated marriages, paternal in one case, royal in the other. In Rojas Zorrilla's *comedia de capa y espada*, the possibly negative consequences are comically diluted to the point that no truly 'tragic' possibilities are contemplated and no paternally mandated marriage takes place, quite the contrary. In Moreto's play, on the other hand, a 'tragic' aura is present throughout, the male-mandated marriage is carried out and tragedy ensues, however manicured by the playwright.

There is a radical difference in theatrical ambience, then, between *La fuerza de la ley* and the three other plays already analyzed, which lie clearly within the parameters of the *capa y espada* tradition. This represents the difference between the predominantly comical and the predominantly tragic contents offered within the tragi-comical theatrical formula. Irene's significant humorous role in Moreto's play signals the possibility of *graciosa* appearances in plays included in any of the varied forms into which early modern Spanish theater has been traditionally divided.

Another reason governing my selection of *La fuerza de la ley* is that its typically outspoken popular *graciosa*, Irene, can serve as a good example of the female stock comic figure whose funny forays appear to have a premeditated social intent and impact. Her important overall jocular contribution to the play will include several occasions in which she will exploit her exclusive privilege of breaking theatrical illusion to speak directly to the public. In these, and even in an intimate dialogue with the play's ill-fated leading lady, Irene will give expression to popular opinions and general attitudes that might well have carried a significant social message.

In the following pages, I will analyze all of Irene's humorous interventions. Only in this manner, allowing a perception of the varied comical forms that *graciosas* could exercise, can

some idea be gained of the significance of their role. In the process, I will use language ideology theory to discern any clue to better understand Spain's early modern society.

As is usually the case, Irene will share the indispensable comical dimension of the play with a *gracioso*, in this case, Greguesco. This, as already noted in analyzing *La dama boba*, *La dama duende* and *Primero es la honra que el gusto*, allows for purely amusing dialogue, outside the parameters of the main plot, between the two stock comic figures. It also occasionally allows for the projection of a common worldview critically opposed to that of their noble masters. In purely quantitative terms, Greguesco will enjoy much more stagetime than his female counterpart. His role as a manner of court jester allows him, with a great deal of baroque disdain for verisimilitude, to constantly pop up among the royal protagonists of the play. However, his clownish punning and boorish greed, if constantly injecting humor into a stark theatrical panorama, remains, for the most part, just that. Irene occasionally joins in his farcical-like humor, but her net comments singularly project her popular identification, and, if not producing more laughter, are more germane to the main plot and contain meaningful information allowing modern-day readers to better understand early modern Spanish society.

### **Plot summary of *La fuerza de la ley***

#### **Act I**

The play opens with Seleuco, king of Babylonia, explaining that he will not exempt the captain of his personal guard from the standard penalty for adultery, plucking out the eyes of the offender, because to do so would remove his subjects' fear of the law. Nise, the king's daughter announces that her love, Alejandro, has returned victorious from battle. Alejandro enters and informs King Seleuco, his uncle, of the grand battle won against Egypt and that King Ptolomeo of Egypt has offered his daughter, Fénix, as a wife for Demetrio, son and heir of King Seleuco.

Alejandro asks for his cousin Nise's hand in marriage. King Seleuco calls for Nise and reveals that he is going to inform Demetrio that his future wife, Fénix, has arrived. Before he exits, he assures Alejandro that he will get his reward. Nise and Alejandro exchange words of love. Greguesco, the play's *gracioso*, tells Irene, the play's *graciosa* and Aurora's maid, that they too, should court each other. She responds that the noble couple must court first because that is what generally happens in a *comedia*. Nise feels that if Demetrio doesn't want to marry Fénix there will be a delay in her marriage to Alejandro with whom she exchanges love sonnets that Greguesco and Irene comically parody. We are taken to Demetrio's room where he is lamenting his impossible love for Aurora who enters and informs him of his regally imposed betrothal to Fénix. The King discloses to his son his decision to marry him to Fénix, but he confesses that he loves Aurora. His father insists that Fénix is the future queen of Egypt and he will marry her or die. Demetrio chooses death. King Seleuco decides against Nise and Alejandro's wedding and orders him to marry Aurora. Alejandro and Nise are heartbroken, as is Aurora. Alejandro insists that he does not want that union and the King threatens him with death.

## Act II

Aurora, already married to Alejandro and living in a wing of the palace, has accepted her forced marriage, but laments that her husband is not ardent enough. Irene comically counsels her on how to handle a reticent husband. Demetrio, thinking that Alejandro is away, comes to see Aurora. He kisses her hand in an attempt to seduce her and drops his gloves in the process. Alejandro and Greguesco enter only to find Demetrio there, which makes Alejandro uneasy. Alejandro has twisted his ankle and Aurora acts the loving wife as per Irene's instructions as she indicates in funny asides. Alejandro and Greguesco find Demetrio's glove and believe that it is a sign of Aurora's possible infidelity. While looking for her cousin Aurora, Nise encounters



Alejandro. She returns his picture but they admit that they still love each other. Demetrio walks into Alejandro's rooms because he requires a service from him. Alejandro suspects, and rightly so, that Demetrio just wants time alone with Aurora so he brings up the gloves so that Demetrio knows that he is aware of his contact with her. Irene offers a long soliloquy about the burden that honor brings upon a woman. She speaks directly to the audience about how wonderful it is to be without honor, which is worthless. Her discourse amounts to a scandalous free-love philosophy. Demetrio, meanwhile, has taken Alejandro away from the palace so that he can have his way with Aurora. When he goes into her rooms he confuses Aurora with Nise. Nise, thus, discovers his intent and advises him to stop pursuing Aurora, but he refuses to listen so she decides to call King Seleuco. Demetrio continues his pursuit of Aurora and puts out the candle so that he can have his way with her. Alejandro has figured out Demetrio's ploy, and seeks him. When he gets to Aurora's rooms everything is 'dark' so he leaves without being heard by Alejandro. The King approaches and Alejandro feigns no concern for his own honor. The King explains that he has been warned of a traitor in the palace and orders Alejandro to search the rooms. Demetrio appears and the King covers up for his son's behavior by telling everyone that he had accompanied him. However, he insists that Alejandro take his bride from the palace to safeguard his honor and warns his son that he will have to punish him by plucking his eyes out if he continues in his adulterous intent.

### Act III

Nise and the King observe Demetrio mournfully contemplating a small portrait of Aurora. King Seleuco informs her that he had to unjustly banish Alejandro and Aurora to a summerhouse some distance away from the palace. When the King leaves, Nise returns to Demetrio's room to console him, although she is as heartbroken as he. Alejandro enters,

explaining that the King has called for him. He finds Demetrio sleeping while holding Aurora's portrait, and wishes to kill him but instead exchanges Aurora's portrait for one of Nise and leaves. Demetrio wakes and is furious because he suspects that Alejandro has taken Aurora's portrait from him. Greguesco appears with flowers from Alejandro and Aurora's summerhouse. Demetrio feels among the flowers for a secret letter from Irene, now apparently his go-between with Aurora. Greguesco notices that Demetrio has found the letter and figures out their scheme. Demetrio reads the letter in which Aurora tells him that Alejandro will be with the King and that her door will be open for him later in the evening.

That night Irene is in the patio and offers a long soliloquy in which she reveals that her free-love philosophy is profitably implemented in her go-between function for Aurora and Demetrio. She explains that she is afraid that Demetrio will not pay for her services and offers a materialistic perception of society as justification for her continued services to him. Alejandro and Greguesco arrive unexpectedly because Greguesco has told him about the letter. Irene hears noises and believes that it is Demetrio. She is happy because she expects to be handsomely rewarded and calls for Demetrio, but Alejandro answers. Irene says that she will let Aurora know that he (Demetrio) has arrived without knowing that it is actually Alejandro who believes that Irene has recognized him. Irene tells a nervous Aurora that Demetrio has come that she has nothing to fear because Alejandro is with the King. Alejandro appears and Aurora, believing that it is Demetrio, assures him of her love for him. Alejandro, believing that Aurora is aware of his identity, is upset at Greguesco for doubting his wife's fidelity. Demetrio then enters, bumps into Alejandro and, thinking that he is Aurora, begins to speak. When Aurora answers, Alejandro still believes that she is speaking to him. However, when she calls him 'Vuestra Alteza' he realizes that he has been dishonored, he plots his revenge and hides. Irene comes in with a source of light

and Aurora and Demetrio finally see one another. Aurora goes further into the room where she finds Alejandro with a sword. When she returns to Demetrio, he and Irene assure her that what she saw was a figment of her imagination. Demetrio and Aurora go back to the place together even though she is still sure that she saw her husband and believes they are walking to their deaths. She asks Irene to follow them, but she wisely goes her own way. Alejandro says that it is time to regain his honor and kills Aurora, but instead of killing Demetrio as well, he throws his sword at his opponent's feet. When King Seleuco comes in, Alejandro is out of his mind explaining that he has been dishonored. The King responds that he will make his honor whole and commands Filipo to take Demetrio and pluck his eyes out. Nise reminds her father that the heir to the throne cannot, by tradition, be blinded, but he insists that punishing his son for his adultery will show his people that the law must be obeyed by everyone. Filipo tells the King that his subjects want forgiveness for their prince and both Alejandro and Nise bow at his feet and ask that Demetrio be spared. But he proclaims that there will be two eyes lost that day, one will be his son's and the other will be one of his own and thus, justice and pity will be a new pairing in the rule of his kingdom. The King gives Alejandro the kingdom of Athens and weds him to Nise.

### **Analysis of Irene's comical discourse in *La fuerza de la ley***

#### **Act I**

Both *graciosos* are somewhat inexplicably present on the first occasion that Alejandro, victoriously returning hero, expresses his love and marital hopes to Nise, the king's daughter. Breaking into this love dialogue, and simultaneously breaking theatrical illusion, Greguesco states:

Ahora, Irene, entra el coloquio

lacayuno. (83b)

Now, Irene, comes the servants'

love talk. ( my trans.)

The *graciosa* answers:

Necio, aguarda;

que ahora toca a nuestros amos. (83b)

Wait, stupid, it's our

masters' turn now. (my trans.)

And the *gracioso* acknowledges:

Dices bien, no me acordaba

que siempre se acaba el paso

entre lacayo y lacaya. (83b)

You're right, I forgot

that the scene always ends

with the dialogue between

the servants. (my trans.)

The break with theatrical illusion always elicits laughter and with it Greguesco prematurely introduces the familiar humorous *topos* of the stock comic figures' parallel love affair. This will soon be developed further, but the first short skit achieves its indispensable injection of hilarity with Irene's name-calling objection and Greguesco acknowledging his miscue. On another level, it is noteworthy that the entire skit results in the projection of the playwright's own self-mocking *mea culpa*, that Spanish early modern audiences probably relished. It also revealed that there existed a traditional 'fixed' order of plot sequences in this period's *comedia*. Clearly standing

outside their role, in the present of the laughing audience, the *graciosos* become spokespersons for the playwright, who alone is responsible for the intolerable deviation from the pre-established norms. Frequently, when *graciosos* offer theatrical-illusion-dispelling comments about their own roles and laughter is produced when it is also detected by the popular audience.

It can well be speculated that Moreto's guilty admission, via the *graciosos*' comical discourse, of his tentative violation of the fixed norms of the *comedia* (in this case, the order of protagonists/*graciosos* love scenes) probably constitutes a dramatist's complaint. When analyzing the *graciosa*'s dialogue, it is not difficult to perceive his discomfort in the face of the creativity restricting fixed norms of the *comedia*. It thus allows the modern reader a peek into Spain's early modern playwright's creative process, possibly restricted by demanding popular audiences to which he must succumb in the end.<sup>114</sup>

In effect, when the protagonists' love duet, including a moving sonnet by each, ends, the *graciosos* begin their own love dialogue, now in its traditional place. It is clearly tongue-in-cheek and again a break with theatrical illusion, referring to the original skit. Greguesco characterizes the protagonists' sonnet-based love duet as syrupy sweet ("dulzura", "almíbar"), then suggests, "echemos a este almíbar / un poco de calabaza" (Let's mix some pumpkin into the syrup; my trans;) (84).<sup>115</sup> They decide to do this by offering each other a sonnet-portrait, thus harking back

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114. See Lope de Vega's *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias* for the dramatist's surrender to the audience's wishes.

115. The use of the term *calabaza* (pumpkin) probably involves a comical pun. On the one hand, it is a common/vulgar vegetable, thus countering the sweetness of the sugared water (almíbar) identified with the protagonists' love duet. And on the other hand, as precursor to the tone of the

to the long tradition of the burlesque anti-poetic description.<sup>116</sup> The funnily negative sonnets follow:

GRUGUESCO.        Es tal tu gracia, Irene, que al probarla  
                              da Gloria<sup>117</sup> a cuantos mata ya de verla;  
                              tu rostro es el de un pez llamado merla,  
                              que nace en dos lagunas que hay en Parla.  
                              Tus ojos son de aguja, que al pasarla,  
                              se pican muchos sastres por meterla;<sup>118</sup>  
                              pues lo que tu nariz, si fuera perla,  
                              no hubiera oro en Ofir con que pagarla.<sup>119</sup>  
                              Cierta bola interior tus dientes birla;<sup>120</sup>  
                              tu barba, a tener barba,<sup>121</sup> fuera borla  
                              del pendón de tu rostro, que almas turla.

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*graciosos*' duet, it is the term traditionally used to express a woman's rejection '*dar calabazas*', of amorous male advances.

116. Perhaps best exemplified in that period's literature by Cervantes' tongue-in-cheek description of Maritornes.

117. This is a pun on *Gloria* which normally has a positive connotation, but when capitalized refers to the funereal chant.

118. This is a way of indicating that her eyes are extremely small, which is an unattractive trait.

119. This is a funny way of indicating that her nose is extremely big, also an unattractive trait.

120. Based on a popular ball-throwing game, it suggests bucked teeth.

121. "a tener barba": if you had a chin. Having no chin was an unattractive physical trait.

No sé ya qué el amor pueda decirla,  
 Y ves aquí tu rostro, aunque sin orla,  
 en barla, verla, birla, borla y burla. (84b)

IRENE. Para pintarte, empiezo por la boca,  
 que es como de costal, mas no tan seca,  
 porque de aficionado, y no manteca,  
 trae siempre tanto moño, que me coca.<sup>122</sup>  
 Tus bigotes helados, son de estopa,  
 a quien tu espada le sirvió de rueca;<sup>123</sup>  
 en tu pie miro el zancarrón de Meca<sup>124</sup>  
 y en tu nariz el alba(n)al de Moca.<sup>125</sup>  
 Toda tu habilidad es mala cuca;  
 contigo la limpieza se salpica,  
 el talle es de Babieca, el juicio de haca.<sup>126</sup>

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122. Irene states that his mouth is monstrously large (a *costal* is a sack), but not dry because it is always slobbering with wine (*aficionado*).

123. Irene indicates that his moustache is stiff and coarse (*helados*, *estopa*) and poorly barbered (*espada*).

124. The ‘*zancarrón de Meca*’ was a frequent form of reference to the prophet Mohamed, with ‘*zancarrón*’ suggesting overly large and bumbling feet.

125. ‘*El Albanal de Moca*’ Albanal means drain and Moca, rather than a place name, probably refers to snot ergo a snot drain for a nose.

Es el pesebre quien te da en la nuca;  
 y este retrato mi pincel te aplica  
 en cuca, coca, quica, queca y caca. (84b-c)

It is perhaps worthy of note that Moreto carried his burlesque sonnets to the limit by parodying the final accumulation of referents that characterized many baroque sonnets. A deeper interpretation shows how the discourse of the *graciosos*, using gibberish words in the cumulative ending, might reflect a popular rejection of sophisticated idealized hegemonic discourse. If analyzed with language ideology theory, this could be interpreted as a counter-discourse. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, counter-discourse is an effective strategy used by popular characters to parody and, thus, weaken to some degree, the controlling hegemonic discourse. Hill explains this phenomenon:

Women, and men who possess little in the way of locally relevant capital, seldom engage in the discourse. Instead, they may produce an oppositional discourse, contesting the discourse [of hegemony]...by exposing its formulas to contradiction and even to parody. This “counter discourse” undermines the terms of the linguistic ideology, constituting an “interruption” of the idea that particular forms of language are inextricably linked to particular forms of social order. (69)

If we accept Hill’s explanation of counter-discourse, the *graciosos* are not only mocking noble courtship but also the poetic form associated with upper-class love rituals.

The *graciosos*, stepping back into the play, as it were, finish off this much longer second skit with a recital of their character rather than physical defects:

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126. Irene suggests that Greguesco’s body form recalls the Cid’s horse and his judgment is that of a nag.



[illegible]

Unlike the burlesque physiognomic exaggerations of the sonnet portrayals, these are to be taken at face value. When Irene says she's leaving to eat something, her companion expresses a heart-felt, "What pain!" (my trans.) which could be interpreted as an almost romantic expression of sorrow at her leaving. But the *graciosa*, who knows better, asks, "The act of drinking water?" (my trans.) which suggests that his sorrow is for her eating instead of drinking. The *gracioso* then confirms her interpretation, "Shut up, the very word water kills me" (my trans.). And when Irene laments her sorry fate at his drunkenness, Greguesco misinterprets it to be an expression of

her fear of losing him, “Do you fear losing me?” (my trans.) Surprisingly, Irene then takes his words literally, confessing her own vice, “If I gamble” (my trans.). When he asks whether she would gamble him away, she admits that she would, “a la taba,” a popular game of chance using bones.

In this scene the discourse of the stock comical figures underscores their behavioral shortcomings. We find that Greguesco is a drunkard and that Irene is a gambler. It seems that whereas the upper classes agonized over their moral purity, *graciosos* openly trumpeted their vices. In fact, many *graciosas* have humorously projected vices.<sup>127</sup> This negative characterization of the *graciosa*, as Felipe Pedraza explains, “podría atribuirse y habrá quien atribuya esta caracterización negativa a la vieja misoginia literaria que acumula pecados y maldades en la creación de los personajes femeninos” (136). However, since the *gracioso* has similar vices, I would not attribute this characterization of the *graciosa* to traditional misogyny. In fact, as Pedraza himself immediately explains:

[A] pesar de estas manchas, las *graciosas* son criaturas simpáticas, que resultan atractivas, incluso admirables, al espectador. Quizá porque representan de forma más drástica y decidida que el *gracioso* los contravalores que dictan la inteligencia y el sentido común frente al universo idealizado hasta el encorsetamiento de las damas y los galanes positivos. (136)

Since the early modern stage is teeming with examples of lower-class characters with vices, it can be posited, to some degree, that the stage is a reflection of the social roles present in early modern society. Irene’s discourse is thus likely to reflect the real-life situation of servant women

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127. See, for example, Felipe Pedraza, “Las *graciosas* de Rojas Zorrilla” (134-35).

in Spain's early modern society. This topic will be revisited in a subsequent passage where she speaks openly about honor.

After their funny admissions of personal flaws, drunkenness and gambling, the *graciosos* end the skit on an equally amusing note, with negative *piropos*. Greguesco states, “¡Qué brio para el barreño!” (What great spirit for the washbasin!; my trans.), and Irene counters with “¡Qué harnero para la paja!” (What a great sieve for hay!; my trans.). I have not been able to resolve the complete meaning of this last *piropo*, which is not unusual, given the short life of some popular expressions and the centuries that have elapsed. This kind of popular comedy, involving equivocal statements and misinterpretations in such skits is as old as humor itself, reappearing age after age, even into our own day. It is not at all strange to see it as part of the repertoire of the popular stock comic figures.

In general terms, Irene's role in the first act fulfills her contribution to early modern Spanish theater's indispensable humorous dimension. As I shall have occasion to underscore in analyzing the following two acts, the secondary role of the *graciosa* does not limit her own potential for personally adding to the jocularity, at times, attacking, on her own, hegemonic norms and tenets of her day.

## Act II

At the beginning of act two, in a dialogue with Aurora, recently forced to marry Alejandro, Irene offers a comical forty-verse speech counseling her on the subject of forced-marriage-bride behavior. This long speech has more consecutive lines than the playwright usually allows the official *gracioso*. In it, Irene answers Aurora's lament that Alejandro is a cold bridegroom. She lectures:

¡Ay, señora! Esa pasión

tendrá remedio, si quieres;  
de las comunes mujeres  
aprende aquesta lición.  
Mujeres hay de tal masa,  
Que les diera, con cadena,  
menos susto un alma en pena,  
que su esposo entrando en casa;  
y viendo que es mal forzoso,  
a puro fingir de miel,  
pasa a traguitos la hiel  
del hígado de su esposo.  
Más remedios no han fingido  
las viejas para la cara,  
que ella al venir tiene para  
las caras de su marido.  
Si es triste, dice: “¿Qué tienes,  
dueño mío? ¿Qué dolor,  
pues no te alegra mi amor?  
¡Ay, Dios, qué triste que vienes!  
Hijo mío, así no estés:  
mira que me das pesar.”  
Y si le viera ahorcar,  
le tirara de los pies.

Si le ve venir severo,  
 dice: “Bien mío, ¿tú airado?  
 No quiero estés enojado;  
 ea, digo que no quiero;  
 templa ese enojo cruel.”  
 Y al cuello le echa los brazos,  
 y para apretar los lazos,  
 imagina que es cordel,  
 y fingiéndole un puchero,  
 le enternece y le reporta,  
 que para comerle, importa  
 saber manir el carnero;  
 y tras esto, tanto espera  
 en el fin de su dolor,  
 un hijo que una pollera.<sup>128</sup> (88a-b)  
 Oh Madam! That passion  
 will be remedied if you want;  
 from the common women  
 learn this lesson.  
 There are some women  
 who are less frightened

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128. A *pollera* is a chicken-carrying basket cruelly restricting any freedom of movement.

by a chained lost soul  
than by their returning husband;  
and knowing it's a forced evil,  
by dint of feigned honey,  
they slowly swallow the gall  
from their husband's liver.

Old women have not imagined  
more remedies for their faces,  
than she has, when he returns,  
for her husband's faces.

If he is sad, she says: "what is it,  
my lord? Such pain that my  
love does not elate you?

Oh, God, how sad you are!

My dear, don't feel that way  
because you worry me."

And if she saw him hanging  
she would pull on his feet.

If she sees he returns irate,  
she says: "My dear, you angry?

I don't want you angry,  
no, I won't have it;  
calm you cruel anger."

And throws her arms about his neck  
 and in order to tighten the knot,  
 she imagines she's a hanging noose,  
 and feigning a pout  
 she tenderizes and controls him,  
 because in order to eat it,  
 it's important to tenderize the ram.  
 And after that, so much depends  
 for her on an end to his sorrow,  
 that she comes to think it better  
 to have a child than a prison. (my trans.)

The forty verses are unrelentingly funny, which is undoubtedly the primary reason for their insertion. However, a comical perspective on any subject is mankind's oldest and perhaps most effective form of criticism. I will analyze the long passage, interrupting my explanation of the humor involved whenever the discourse appears to connote a social message beyond its important and immediate laughter-eliciting function. In this sense, a manner of preamble is required in order to point out that the play's main subject, the negative marital effects of mandated, loveless unions, is touched upon by the *graciosa* although it is never directly mentioned by her. This focus on the traditional practice of paternally mandated marriages of female offspring will exercise a background influence on the passage.

Irene offers a popular solution to a concrete problem that afflicts her noble mistress, the lack of love reflected in her husband's behavior: "Oh my lady! There could be a remedy to your relationship if you are willing to learn a lesson from the common women" (my trans.). Such an

offer is only possible, however comical the solution proposed, if the problem is gender-specific, that is, common to all women. In this sense, the dilemma would impact the *cazuela* as well as the high-class ladies seated in their private boxes. Irene's forty verses are thus colored from the first with a feminine, proto-feminist focus.

A funny comparison sets up Irene's solution: there are women who fear the appearance of an unloving husband more than the appearance of a ghost. This comparison determines '*burla burlando*', the woman's emotional state. Before the inevitable evil of an unloving husband, which establishes the hopelessness of the situation, she, as a wife, must fake enough sweetness to 'sip up' the man's bitter gall. A droll generalization then follows: that old crones have not devised more remedies for their faces than women have devised for remedying the faces (reflecting discontent) that their husbands bring home. There follow several examples of the returning husband's negative mental states (sadness, anger) to which a woman's feigned loving response is required. However, a comical coda to each reveals her true feelings: "And if she saw him hung she would pull at his feet" (my trans.), an expression still used in Spanish to exemplify personal hatred. Then, after 'lovingly' throwing her arms about his neck, "she imagines that her arms are rope," (my trans.) which, based on the expression, "echar un cordel al cuello," reveals her desire to cruelly subjugate him. But the weaker sex can only resort to pretend pouts, sensitizing the husband, as Irene explains, in funny culinary terms: one has to know how to tenderize ram-meat before you can eat it. As Vollendorf explains, "women of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds often used non-threatening, subordinate postures to their advantage" (8). The *graciosa* ends her solution with a humorous sexual allusion, suggesting that the final step is to take the husband to bed, for in her desperate straits she prefers having a child than living imprisoned.



In order to grasp the full comical impact of the lengthy passage, it must be assumed that the playwright has his *graciosa* dramatize a great deal of her solution, thus facilitating the actress's non-verbal capacities. We can imagine a professionally gifted comedian with all manner of *guiños* interpreting the feigned words of the wife, reinforcing them, as well, with gestures. In this kind of little theater within the play, the proven actress would undoubtedly have exploited the opportunity to display the art of mimicry. Added to this is the fact that the male role in the encounter is to be projected with facial expressions (sadness, anger, etc.), which would have provided her with the intensified funniness of transgender depictions. Men imitating women and vice versa has a proven jocose impact even into our gender-interchanging day. In this speech, more than in any other that I have analyzed in this study, the non-verbal acting lends itself to an actress producing and reproducing the tenets of performative theory with relation to gender. Irene's physical enactment of it best reflects what Butler has observed:

[T]he body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation, which any phenomenological theory of constitution needs to describe. In order to describe the gendered body, a phenomenological theory of constitution requires an expansion of the conventional view of acts to mean both that which constitutes meaning and that through which meaning is performed or enacted. In other words, the acts by which gender is constituted bear similarities to performative acts within theatrical contexts. (403)

In the passage, there is no reference to, much less any direct assault upon, the traditional social practice of male-mandated marriage that is central to the play and the direct cause of Aurora's sorrow. The accepting victim herself of that custom, she is only sorrowed by her

husband's lack of feelings for her. The *graciosa* also seems to accept this inevitable norm by teaching women how to successfully cope with one of its negative consequences. Nowhere in this study is it made more clear that, as Butler indicates:

[T]o be female...is a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a woman is to have *become* a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman", to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (404-405)

As we have seen, the solution Irene offers is introduced in a comical fashion, probably the only way this topic could be presented at that time, so that laughter echoes through the speech. Still, it is easy to observe that, to some degree, her how-to depiction of coping with a generalized and dire consequence of that traditional social practice has a critical impact on it. With respect to Irene's mocking verbal and non-verbal interpretation, for example, one can presume that her jovial feminine reactions to a loveless husband, may well show that women had already come to a proto-feminist awareness that "faking it" served to prolong the abuse. Butler explains, "as a strategy for survival, gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (407), because the gendered performance creates, as Butler continues, "the conditions of oppression which issue from an unexamined reproduction of gender identities which sustain discrete and binary categories of man and woman" (407). Irene's mocking interpretation of the gendered performance she advocates is, thus, most revealing of women's limited recourses in early modern Spain.

It is difficult for our modern minds to understand a world in which change is not an option. Under such circumstances the outlet for discomfort or even suffering under a traditionally

prescribed procedure could well have been the escape-valve of laughter.<sup>129</sup> An accepting, self-mocking laughter, which does not assault tradition head-on, would not threaten traditional institutions or practices, but it could patiently gnaw at them. After all, change always has time on its side.

Something similar can be said with respect to the feminist slant that the *graciosa* lends to her funny speech. By openly extending the traditional practice across social classes it becomes gender-specific. As Vollendorf explains, “gender was a sufficiently decisive category of identity that women, notwithstanding class and ethnic lines, often experienced early modern Spanish culture in similar ways” (2). The howling laughter of the popular *cazuela* and the sedate smiles of the ladies in their private boxes would have coincided upon seeing themselves self-mockingly depicted. This all-female encompassing problem might have even created solidarity among women of all social classes during this time period. But only centuries of that laughter’s gnawing process would achieve the slow dissolution of ‘immutable’ social classes that would eventually lead to a perspective capable of producing change. But, as I mentioned before, change always has time on its side.

It is interesting that the *graciosa*’s discourse allows us to see that men, too, were contracted into loveless marriages. The position of young women in this socially mandated-type

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129. Peter Burke, in his book, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, quotes French clerics defending the Feast of Fools in 1444, as follows:

We do these things in jest and not in earnest, as the ancient custom is, so that once a year the foolishness innate in us can come out and evaporate. Don’t wineskins and barrels burst very often if the air-hole is not open from time to time? We too are old barrels. (201-02)

of union is made clear again and again. However, a modern-day reader often forgets that men, if not as often or as decisively, were also forced into these loveless contract-like marriages. Irene's discourse, clearly directed to the female portion of the audience, if further analyzed using language ideology theory, clearly shows that there were also men who were not happy with their imposed marital companion. In a society in which marriages were prepared and/or imposed on both sexes, it is not surprising to find in its theater expressions of the two genders' discontent with such a practice. As Kulic explains, "language ideologies seem never to be solely about language—they are always about entangled clusters of phenomena, and they encompass and are bound up with aspects of culture like gender, and expression..." (100). In this case, Irene's discourse allows us to perceive a topic that is infrequently broached with regard to men in early modern society.

Two scenes later, when Alejandro returns home with a painfully sprained ankle, the *graciosa* will interrupt the dialogue between Aurora and her husband with several asides. They are funny because they call the attention of the audience to the fact that with her suffering husband Aurora reacts with the wifely love and care that Irene's 'lesson' had recently advocated. In each case, Irene's reference to the "lición" makes her intent perfectly clear: "Ap: Eso sí, pese a tu tío / ve tomando la lición" (89) and "Ap: Miren cual la tengo ya / solo con una lición" (90). That intent cannot have escaped the spectators, especially in the second aside, with a theatrical-illusion-defying "miren" directed specifically at them.

In any case, but especially so if the actress visibly directed her asides to the women's section, Irene's pointed recollection of her "lición" could have itself offered a real message. Her how-to lesson on a woman's suffering mitigation of the consequences of forced marriages is actualized on stage in the hegemonic noble strata of the play. One can imagine the laughing

approval of the *cazuela* in having it pointed out that the noble leading-lady follows the pattern of behavior exercised and advocated by popular women. More importantly, perhaps, and beyond the immediate laughter elicited, is the unavoidable message that all women were in the same boat. This type of discourse, uniting women as women, regardless of class and social circumstance, makes it clear that, at least in some aspects, they all share in carrying this burden of patriarchal social practices.

The next scene is in its entirety given over to Irene. It is composed of some seventy verses and is the longest speech of any character in the play. She will give expression to one of the most revolutionary proclamation against the honor principle that I have encountered in early modern Spanish theater. The *graciosa* begins with an always comical breaking of theatrical illusion that takes her out of the fictional play and into the real present of the audience. Irene says:

Luces salgo a prevenir,  
y pues sola me provoco,  
de soliloquiar un poco  
licencia vengo a pedir.

I step out to bring light. (91c)

And since I am angered alone,

I come forth to ask license

To soliloquize a bit. (My trans.)

She asks for permission to speak to the spectators and in stepping out of the play's fictional time and space, she clearly signals that, regardless of the action taking place in the theatrical

performance, what she has to say will apply to reality. Then she directs herself to a concrete segment of the public. Irene says:

Mosqueteros, a estas pocas  
 coplas me dad la costumbre,  
 porque si ellas no dan lumbre,  
 son de fuego vuestras bocas. (91c)

Musketeers, grant my few verses  
 The privilege that custom gives me  
 And if they shed no light  
 Your mouths can spout fire. (My trans.)

She admonishes the popular *mosquetería*, the standing male segment of the audience that could almost instantly whistle down a play, to let her speak her peace. She lets them know that if she does not enlighten them then they can object to her discourse. Then she immediately announces the subject of her words. She explains:

De honor y amor mi ama herida  
 se ve, y yo he de discurrir  
 de qué nos viene a servir  
 el honor en esta vida. (91c)

My mistress is wounded  
 by honor and love, and I have  
 to figure out what honor is  
 good for in this life. (my trans.)

It becomes clear why she has started by asking the *mosquetería* to let her finish her speech. It is because her discourse will negatively appraise so-called conjugal honor, which permitted the husband to cleanse, with only his wife's blood, any presumed premarital or marital indiscretions by her. And conjugal honor, with pre-marital and marital fidelity circumscribed to the female, was shared by all men, regardless of social class.

Early modern Spanish theater abounds in popular rejections of honor, the centerpiece of noble, hegemonic behavior. Such rejections of any of the many situations that would require an honorable comportment, in effect, are a major component of the male stock comic figure's humorous repertoire. Most of the elements that compose the noble code of behavior are self-mockingly assaulted by *graciosos*. Bravery is rejected in favor of self-preserving cowardice; idealistic altruism is rejected in favor of pragmatic self-interest, etc. But two elements of the hegemonic honor code are, as a rule, kept off the table of comical treatment and both are directly related to female behavior: pre-marital sex and marital infidelity. Vollendorf explains that statutes of the time, "profoundly impacted gender relations, reinforcing the dominant view of women as vessels of a man's seed and renewing pressure on women to present themselves as honorable and chaste" (3). Transcending social classes, there was a common masculine position regarding feminine promiscuity and adultery, so that male *graciosos*, who voiced the rejections of honor, do not usually touch upon them. There is evidence, witness Rojas Zorrilla's *Cada cual lo que le toca*, that the playwright who dared challenge the *status quo* in this area (feminine pre-marital sex, feminine adultery) was subject to being whistled off the stage by the popular male *mosquetería*.<sup>130</sup>

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130. See footnote 96.

This would explain Irene's admonition to the *mosquetería* before proceeding to comically gore broadly masculine sacred cows. It would also explain why Moreto had a *graciosa* be the spokesperson for such an unheard-of assault. As Barbara Becker-Cantarino explains, in a society in which there was, "a constant shifting back and forth and a powerful tension between pro-woman sentiments dressed in the finest Renaissance rhetoric and strong patriarchal assertions as soon as male privilege or power appeared to be touched upon, let alone questioned or infringed upon" (160), only an innocuous character could speak freely and openly on the matter. Her discourse would obviously not be as scandalous or threatening to the *status quo* as this same discourse spoken by a *dama*. Besides, she most authentically represents the gender victimized by the 'honorable' behavior required only of women by an openly double-standard tradition.

I will freely translate the remainder of Irene's long discourse, doing so in manageable segments and analyzing each segment for the many comical and socially critical elements that it contains. She states:

¿A qué esta mental bambolla,  
que es desdicha no tenella;  
y el que la tiene, con ella  
no puede poner la olla?  
Si por su honra una mujer  
vive a la Puerta Cerrada,<sup>131</sup>  
por fuerza ha de ir la cuitada  
a San Francisco a comer.<sup>132</sup>

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131. The text has the two words capitalized and my only explanation for this anomaly is that it was done to suggest a metaphorically sexual illusion. Literally, living without sexual relations.



Honor la veda que acuda

a toda festividad;

honor la da gravedad,

pero la tiene desnuda,

honor la quita el paseo,

honor la da siempre susto,

honor la priva del gusto,

y no le quita el deseo.

Honor nos hace groseras,

pues ¿de qué, discurro en esto,

sirve el honor, si tras esto

no da pollos ni polleras?

El las más noches condena

a ayuno a quien le ha tenido,

que parece que ha incurrido

en la bula de la cena...(91c-92a)

Why this mental froth,

that is an ill not to have,

but with which, the one who has it,

cannot make a meal?

If because of honor a woman

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132. San Francisco was a Madrid church, a point for the distribution of meals, *sopa boba*, for the poor.

lives behind closed doors,  
 the poor soul will have to go  
 to San Francisco to eat.  
 Honor forbids her to go  
 To any kind of festivity;  
 honor gives her gravity,  
 but it keeps her naked;  
 honor keeps her from walking  
 honor keeps her always afraid,  
 honor deprives her of pleasure  
 but doesn't remove her desire.  
 Honor makes us graceless,  
 so I conclude from this:  
 what good is honor if, after all,  
 it gives nothing in return?  
 It condemns who has it  
 to nights of fasting,  
 seeming to have achieved  
 a freedom from dining... (My trans.)

Irene first focuses on 'honor' in general from a disdainfully humorous popular-pragmatic perspective. To begin with, she explains that honor is nothing that you can sink your teeth into, in other words it is a "mental bambolla". Then she offers an amusing, pragmatic definition of

honor as the immaterial thing that degrades you if you lack it, but doesn't give those who have it enough for a single meal.

The *graciosa* then centers on female virtue/honor, which is the concrete subject of her discourse. If for the sake of her virtue/honor, a woman lives without sexual relations, she's going to have to seek a free meal somewhere if she wants to eat. I am pretty sure that, while seeming to continue with pragmatic food/eating images, she is using *comer* as a comically sexual metaphor. This is by no means a novelty and would have been readily understood by the public.<sup>133</sup> There follows a list of things that honor forbids, culminating with the transparent particular summation that honor denies pleasure without diminishing desire.<sup>134</sup> This then leads to the general conclusion that since it can leave women shamed and it offers nothing in return, even if virtuous behavior is kept, honor is worthless. The segment ends with images of fasting that can readily be interpreted with a metaphorically sexual meaning.

The following segment is dedicated by Irene to those women who forego honor, and she applauds the freedoms they thereby gain:

Y al contrario de esta flor,  
miren qué bien en la villa  
pasa cualquier picarilla  
si ella se trata de holgar,

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133. To this day, for example, a man's sexual success or failure is conveyed by *comerse o no comerse una rosca*.

134. The existence of feminine sexual desire and sexual pleasure, which remained controversial at that time, and their expression avoided, are givens in Irene's gender-wide perception of the feminine.

a esto solo está despierta;  
ella vive a puerta abierta,  
y ninguno la va a hurtar;  
ella todo lo ha de ver,  
su gusto a todo prefiere;  
ella sale cuando quiere  
y entra cuando ha menester;  
no es pena faltarle el coche,  
y tenerle es alegría;  
si no vendimia de día,  
sale a rebuscar de noche;  
si se tapa de medio ojo,  
cuanto quiere ser parece;  
come de lo que apetece,  
y no malpare de antojo;  
y en vida tan desigual  
su gusto hace, y no es error,  
pues porque no tiene honor  
a nadie parece mal. (92a)

And on the opposite side of the game,  
look at how well any low-class woman,  
who doesn't know what honor is,  
has it here in town.

If she wants to have fun,  
that's all she has to think about.  
she lives with her door open  
and nobody comes to steal her;  
she has to see everything,  
and prefers her pleasure to all else.  
She leaves home whenever she pleases  
and returns whenever she needs to.  
She is not sad when she has no coach,  
and happy when she has one.  
If she doesn't get something in the daylight  
she goes out to look for it at night.  
If she covers her eye with a shawl,  
she can be whoever she wants.  
She eats whatever she likes  
and doesn't miscarry from cravings.  
And in such a varied life,  
she does as she pleases without fault,  
because, having no honor,  
nobody thinks badly of her. (My trans.)

The list of freedoms that honor-less women possess, especially if the food/sex metaphor is held here, is made to contrast directly with the prohibitions imposed on women who must subject themselves to honor's demands. There are no especially difficult expressions or any special

forms of humor exhibited, but the whole counterculture premise of the comparison it establishes renders the segment highly comical, as it must be when dealing with such controversial topics.

It is surprising that this type of discourse, even when humorously rendered by the *graciosa*, would have been approved by ecclesiastic censors, because Irene openly and unapologetically attacks feminine virtue by countering it with the freedom and pleasure enjoyed by ‘fallen women’, prostitutes and such. This discourse is revolutionary if it is taken into account that, as Becker Cantarino explains, “a rather enduring response to unruly, loose women—mostly prostitutes—was the growth in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Catholic Europe of institutions designed to house repentant prostitutes and indigent, unattached women” (171). The socio-ethical double standard that Irene’s division of the female population indicates has prevailed for as long as women have lived under the subjection of patriarchal societies. It is the differentiation, regardless of economic or social class, between women who retain and live out the virtues proclaimed almost exclusively for the feminine gender in such societies, versus women who reject the aforementioned virtues and become de-socialized and criminalized. As Becker Cantarino indicates:

On the other side of the coin, the so-called wicked witches—lewd, immoral, unruly, asocial women—were subversive or repressed women or groups, who in their antipatriarchal and unsubmitive attitudes or disruptive actions foreshadowed, facilitated, and eventually contributed to the creation of feminist consciousness and feminist actions. (155)

Irene’s soliloquy is ultra-modern in its frank exclamation for only in the last fifty-odd years, and only in the Western world, have the elements of feminine virtue/honor been openly challenged. It could be said that Irene’s discourse is an example of how the, “early modern period was such a

pivotal era for women's social development and for setting the stage for the emergence of feminist consciousness" (Becker-Cantarino 172). These discriminatory virtue/honor dictums, traditionally and one-sidedly espoused by patriarchal societies (anti-promiscuity rules governing prized virginity at marriage and absolute fidelity, even when one-sided, during marriage) have been undercut, just recently, by pre-marital sexual freedom and easy, gender-equitable divorce. However, we can see the roots of such change, already, in Irene's counter-*status quo* soliloquy, which is why it is important to carefully analyze *graciosa* discourse as a socially critical voice and, therefore, a rich source for women's stance in the early modern period.

It is important to note that Irene's revolutionary and unapologetic soliloquy would have been witnessed by a mixed audience, both in terms of gender and social class. Because it is without a doubt radically anti-*status quo*, it is of interest how early modern women would have reacted to it. We know that the design of the *corral* could be compared to the prisons/schools in Foucault's panopticon<sup>135</sup>. The kings/priests were seated on the top levels, thus being able to observe not only the production but also the reactions of the nobles and the popular segments of the audience. The nobility, which did not suffer a separation of the sexes at performances, "la

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135. Michel Foucault explains the concept of the panopticon:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links the center and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchal figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed among the living beings, the sick and the dead-all this constitutes a compact model of the disciplinary mechanism. (198).

excepción eran los aposentos frecuentados por las clases nobles o los miembros de una misma familia, en los cuales no existía segregación de sexos” (Fernández 82), were below the royalty but above the popular sections of the *corral*, where they were able to observe the reaction of the *mosquetería* and the *cazuela*. The all-feminine popular section was heavily populated, because an *apretador* was usually present to, “empujar físicamente a las mujeres para que cupiera el mayor número posible de espectadoras femeninas en la cazuela” (Fernández 80). One could surmise, then, that the reactions of the audience to a soliloquy such as this would be noted by others and that an appropriate positive reaction from the popular women massed within the *cazuela* and by noble women, without, would have reached the male public attending the production.

Apart from the audience’s reactions to such a radical proposal, the theory of language ideology allows us to deduce issues that might have been latent in her soliloquy. As Debra Spitulnik explains, “Language ideologies are, among many other things, about the construction and legitimation of power, the production of social relations of sameness and difference, and the creation of cultural stereotypes about types of speakers and social groups” (164). That Irene could bring up this topic in such a candid manner suggests that women could talk openly on subjects that were, as pre-marital and marital honor would have been, clearly gender-specific both to the victimized female and the victimizing male. It suggests, as well that, women in general, regardless of social class, could envy the freedom enjoyed by their morally and legally proscribed counterparts. Because Irene challenges what we think was a gender-wide acceptance of the feminine virtues upheld by early modern Spanish society, it has a particularly modern ring to it and is another example of why the in-depth investigation of the *graciosa*’s discourse could



be an important key to clarifying women's issues that were polemical at that time and even today.

The last segment of the soliloquy summarizes Irene's devaluation of honor/virtue. The actress stepping back into the play, comments on the situation that its feminine protagonists are living, both of them constrained by virtuous honor from satisfying their passions. She concludes:

Pues honor pataratero,  
 ¿de qué sirves o has servido,  
 Si no me das lo que pido,  
 y me quitas lo que quiero?  
 Mas ya el soliloquio cesa,  
 pues salen Nise y Aurora  
 (que en este partido ahora,  
 una juega, otra atraviesa),  
 y los músicos con ellas,  
 a aumentar melancolías.  
 Si estas penas fueran más,  
 ¡qué presto saliera de ellas! (92a)  
 So, ridiculous honor,  
 what are you ever good for  
 if you don't grant what I ask  
 and deprive me of what I want?  
 But now my soliloquy must end  
 because Nise and Aurora are coming

(who in the present game,  
 one plays, the other parries),  
 and the musicians with them  
 to augment the melancholy.  
 If these sorrows were mine,  
 How quickly I would dissolve them! (my trans.)

Going back to the plotline of the play, Irene integrates her anti-honor/virtue philosophy into the specific situation of the two feminine protagonists. Her final statement, sticking to her guns, as it were, prepares the clashing baroque ‘tragic/happy’ note upon which the play ends.

### Act III

Irene, in a second long soliloquy, again comically breaking theatrical illusion in addressing the audience directly, will set in motion the confused action of the final act by humorously explaining her *alcahueta* function in light of her ‘free-love’ philosophy. I will again, for clarity’s sake, segment her long speech, freely translating it, and then analyze its content.

Irene explains:

Temblando de la osadía,  
 de Demetrio el ciego amor  
 espera la atención mía;  
 pero ya ha espirado el día,  
 con que el riesgo es menor.  
 Gran culpa es la que fomento,  
 mas disculpa la flaqueza,  
 viendo en mi ama el sentimiento,

en su esposo la tibieza  
 y en mi maña el rendimiento;  
 que es tal, que si de mi hablilla  
 se vale para su afán,  
 rendiré con persuadilla  
 la mujer del Preste Juan  
 al galán de la Membrilla.<sup>136</sup> (97b)

Trembling at the risk,  
 Demetrio's blind love  
 awaits my attention;  
 but the day has ended,  
 which will reduce the risk.  
 I am fomenting a great sin  
 but my weakness is forgiven  
 taking into account my mistress'  
 feeling, her husband's apathy  
 and the fruits of my trickery;  
 which is such that if she heeds  
 my counsel to satisfy her desire,

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136. Irene's funnily anachronistic self praise for having accomplished the impossible is based on bringing together two opposite extremes: the supposedly super chaste wife of Preste Juan, who is the mythical king of a mystically exotic Christian kingdom, and the Don Juan-esque protagonist of a Lope de Vega play.

I will have subjected, in persuading her,  
 the wife of Prester John  
 to the wooer of Membrilla. (My trans.)

The *graciosa* as *alcahueta*, as we have seen, was a frequently used comical pattern of the role in early modern Spanish theater.<sup>137</sup> A familiarized public would have laughed since the unsavory activity itself, its description or justification, always provoked such a reaction.<sup>138</sup> Two motivations move this practice, material greed and pride in expertise. The latter is highlighted in this and the following segment (“y en mi maña el rendimiento”), although greed will not be long in appearing. Irene explains:

Si él viene, doy por lograda  
 su pasión, aunque alborote  
 la quinta su voz honrada,  
 porque está tan perdigada  
 la puede hacer gigote.  
 ¡Con qué elegante oración  
 he movido su inquietud!

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137. Irene, unlike the Flora studied in Rojas Zorrilla’s *Primero es la honra que el gusto*, is hardly an *alcahueta fiel*. That is, her greed overcomes any worry about adverse consequences to her betrayed mistress. As Irene’s behavior confirms, the role offers a wide range of versatility while always remaining comical.

138. It would be just about impossible to gauge, at this distance in time, which version the *graciosa fiel* or the *graciosa infiel*, would have elicited more laughter from predominantly popular early modern Spanish audiences.

No hay honra a mi tentación...  
 Señores, la persuasion  
 es grandísima virtud.  
 Si está el príncipe en tocar  
 Esta guitarra, ¿qué espera?  
 Muy diestro debe de estar,  
 pues ha sabido templar  
 la prima con la tercera.  
 Mas considerando estoy  
 en lo poco que me envía,  
 que un sus no ha sido hasta hoy;  
 ¿Si acaso piensa que soy  
 alcahueta de obra pía?  
 Si nada se le derrama  
 del bolsillo, en su trompeta,  
 ¿qué dirá de mi la fama?  
 Que el perro de la alcahueta  
 es mayor que el de la dama.<sup>139</sup> (97b)  
 If he comes, I assume he'll have his way

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139. Harping back to her previous soliloquy, which ends in the proscribed world of prostitution, Irene uses the term *perro*, then used for the non-payment of a prostitute's services, to express her fear of not being paid. Irene's words, worried about her reputation, reflect her concern that her deception would then be greater than that effected on her *ama*.

even if her honorable voice  
sounds throughout the villa,  
because she is so winged (wounded)  
he can make her mince meat.  
With my most elegant speech  
I have touched her indecision!  
No honor can resist my temptation...  
Gentlemen, persuasion  
is a very great virtue.  
If the prince wants to play  
this guitar, what is he waiting for?  
He should be a good player  
because he's tempered  
the first string with the third.  
But I'm considering  
how little he sends me,  
which has been very little until now.  
Does he think perhaps  
that I'm a charity go-between?  
If nothing spills out of his pocket,  
what will fame, with its trumpet  
say of me?  
That the go-between's dog

is bigger than the lady's. (My trans.)

In terms of comical input, this segment doesn't skip a beat. The initial hunting image is appropriate, and inserts an always funny sexual strain via its culinary/sexual parallel ("perdigada" and "gigote"). She then gloats because no honor can resist her elegant speech. She ironically informs the audience in magisterial terms that persuasion is a great virtue addressing it directly ("señores"). The musical image that follows, centered on the guitar, with its poetically acclaimed feminine form, is decidedly sexual, and she stresses that visual comparison by punning on the instrument's strings. She indicates that the prince must be a great guitar player because he has tempered the first string ("*prima*" of course also means cousin, referring to Aurora) with the third string ("*tercera*" also means go-between). Then Irene comically dissolves any idea that her actions are selfless by addressing their greedy roots, her monetary expectations. She is unhappy with what she has received so far, since Demetrio has given her practically nothing. But she mostly worries, with laughable irony, about her fame,<sup>141</sup> which she fears will be diminished if she is tricked by Demetrio.

It is interesting to note here how much importance Irene places on her ability to sway Aurora. It becomes even more intriguing, on a socio-cultural level, if we carefully analyze her discourse on the art of persuasion. As witnessed moments later, she is "selling" her discursive ability. This *alcahueta* gift is present throughout literary history. Already in *El libro de buen amor*, where we find the first *alcahueta* prototype, the only character that escapes Trotaconvento's verbal trickery is the lady who refuses to listen to her. Subsequent Celestina-types use this oral ability to convince "innocent" *damas* to partake in socially unacceptable forms

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141. The irony resides in her allusion to the "trumpet of fame," alluding not to heroic feats but to her lowly vocation.

of male/female relationships, but none that I know of dwells as openly as Irene, on discursive persuasion itself. Her insistent self-praise, in this regard, underscores a pride in an ability that renders her superior to those of a higher status, thus revealing the vulnerability of the dominant elite that she discursively subordinates. There is, perhaps, an implied class/war sentiment that the predominately popular audience might well have laughingly grasped. It could be said, as Blommaert explains in her article dealing with language ideology, that in this theatrical text:

(1) [T]he authors, just like any other language user in any other communicative context, are unable to express what they want to communicate in a fully explicit way, (2) that therefore their texts leave implicit most of the assumptions they expect their readers to share with them, and (3) that a careful analysis of those implicit assumptions will reveal a common frame of reference or ideology. (191)

Irene's discourse gives us a platform from which to question the notion of an early modern Spanish society totally at peace with its rigid, socio-economic segmentation.

The last fragment has the *graciosa* explaining why she's going to honor her agreement with the prince despite the dearth of monetary rewards for her efforts. In the process of explaining her decision, Irene offers a rich/poor socio-economic panorama that is unhappily universal and timeless. Irene explains:

Ruines somos yo y cualquiera;  
 por ser rico le soy fiel,  
 sin darme; y si pobre fuera,  
 por mucho que el pobre diera,  
 no hiciera nada por él;  
 porque el rico, aunque no da,



da esperanza y se le fía,  
y el pobre, aunque dando está,  
pensamos que no tendrá  
para darnos otro día.  
Mas divertirme no puedo,  
que aunque está a oscuras, alerta  
conviene estar al enredo. (97b)

I am despicable and so would anybody be  
I'm loyal to him, while receiving nothing  
because he is rich; and if he were poor,  
no matter how much the poor devil gave,  
I would do nothing for him,  
because the rich man, without giving,  
gives hope and one gives him credit,  
and the poor man, even if he is giving,  
we think he will not have enough  
to give us another day.  
But, I cannot distract myself,  
Because, although it is dark,  
I should be alert to the entanglement. (my trans.)

Irene's explanation of her role as go-between turns out to be, funny as it is in its admitted despicability, the unchristian expression of a social reality: that the poor always get the short end of the stick. Buffered by its greedy source and by the comical ambience in which it is offered, it

could not help but have had an impact on a predominantly popular and, by definition, poor audience. As Laura Bass explains, “the *comedia* not only made money, which was necessary for funding the public hospitals, it also explored the nature of money and the changing symbolic practices—including the theatre itself—that accompanied the market’s rise” (776). As already indicated, when the stock comic figure is openly speaking to a predominately popular audience, as occurs here, the discourse has the potential for expressing a socially charged content.

As opposed to the message noted in Irene’s praise of the go-between’s persuasive powers, in the present case the *graciosa*’s political message is as explicit as it can be. Even as she herself comically and even cynically, takes advantage of it, Irene proclaims a universal reality that her lower-class audience could readily understand and vociferously second: to wit, that the rich, whatever the circumstance, will always win out over the poor. There could scarcely be a more direct and more radical proclamation.

In the remainder of *La fuerza de la ley*, the *graciosa* is briefly funny on occasion in the process of implementing her *alcahuetería* through an almost impenetrable maze of *enredos*. For example, at one point she says:

Ya es seguro mi interés;  
 cadena me dará, pues  
 le eslabono yo el amor. (97c)  
 Now my payment is assured;  
 he’ll give me a gold chain because  
 I’ve linked him with his love. (my trans.)

She refers, of course, to the *cadena* that since *La Celestina* had become the gold standard of *alcahueta* achievement. Another amusing moment is her abandonment of her mistress out of self-interest, always comically expected in such maids. She explains:

¿Yo seguirla? No hare tal,  
 escurro por otro lado:  
 que si el príncipe ha de darme,  
 contra mí es irle a la mano. (99b).  
 Me follow her? I will not,  
 but rather go this other way;  
 because if the prince is going to pay me,  
 I'll not get in his way. (my trans.)

These humorous snippets add to the comical density that is indispensable in the early modern Spanish tragi-comical *comedia*.

Irene's comical contribution to *La fuerza de la ley* allows for much comment on the social impact of her discourse. So much so, that I have not dwelled extensively, as I have done in my other analyses, on her rich potential for eliciting laughter via her non-verbal aptitudes. It would not be difficult, given the extraordinary length of her last 'speeches', to point out moments in which her winks, gestures and body movements would have themselves been funny or would have intensified the comical impact of her words.

## Conclusion

In summary, the *graciosa* of Moreto's *La fuerza de la ley* adds greatly, both in quantity and variety to the indispensable comical content of the play. The significance of her contribution is obvious from the number of lines that the playwright gives her, which, limiting myself to her

three major interventions, constitute a significant percentage of the play's more or less 3000 verses. I have addressed the variety of her humorous discourse in detail because I selected the play and the character to exemplify the social range and significance that *graciosa* input can achieve. It is interesting, to begin with, that Irene's three main interventions are among the longest in the play, and that two of the three address the audience directly, breaking theatrical illusion. The length involved tells of the playwright's inclination to allow the character, beyond adding to the quantity of funny material contributed, to fully develop whatever socially relevant topics she touches upon. The theatrical-illusion-breaking procedure, importantly singled out as a unique prerogative of the stock comic figures, always grants a special degree of relevance to the character's words. In such cases, foregoing the illusory world of his artistic creation, the playwright purposely brings his audience's real present to the forefront. By doing this, it suggests that the message was pertinent to the audience's here and now, and this is why closely analyzing *graciosa* discourse with language ideology theory reveals a non-official source for understanding the issues involved. On three separate occasions in this play, Irene's discourse regarding social matters that are still relevant today are seen as seriously problematic even back then. This is so despite the social buffer of self-mocking hilarity in which the stock comic figure invariably presents things. The medium of self-mocking laughter was, *sine qua non*, the only way these controversial topics could reach the public domain that theater embodied at that time.

## Conclusion

The intent of my study of five *graciosas* was to highlight the female stock comic figure's potential significance in early modern Spanish theater. I established five reasons why she would logically have played an important role on the stage and my hypothesis was that, based on them, I would prove that the *graciosa* is a most important character that has never been fully recognized. The bulk of my work consists of an analysis of their comical input in order to confirm that the characteristics I identified were, in effect, present in their roles. Their comical discourse offers convincing proof of that compliance, which justifies, in turn, the scholarly need for a greater focus on the *graciosa*.

The five *graciosas* passed with flying colors in terms of the first of those reasons: their important contribution toward satisfying a popular theater's requirement of a significant comical dimension. As noted, Celia, Clara, Isabel, Flora and Irene are crucial to the humorous aspect of their plays. In the case of Celia and Clara, from Lope de Vega's *La dama boba*, their combined funniness allows, besides, for a qualitative note: the great versatility that the role potentially encompasses. Isabel from Calderón de la Barca's *La dama duende*, challenges the play's official *gracioso* in terms of the time spent on stage. Even in the performances of Rojas Zorrilla's, Flora from *Primero es la honra que el gusto*, and Moreto's, Irene, from *La fuerza de la ley*, their net comedic input is sufficient to require serious consideration of their role.

It can be gainfully argued, then, that the recurrent *graciosa* possesses the potential for ascertaining the comical density of any given play. In this sense, she is often the key that determines which element predominates of the tragi-comical equation that characterizes early modern Spanish theater. For example, in many plays in which she appears she almost automatically offers the possibility of an amusing secondary plot in which she and the *gracioso*

perform an ongoing parody of the main plot's love theme. Bakhtin's study on carnivalesque humor served to better understand the truly social reason behind the public's demand for a high-comedic level in these plays and it also served to understand much *graciosa* humor that stems from this tradition.

The second aspect underscored in my in-depth analysis of my subjects' comical discourse sought to exemplify its reflection of a clearly feminine perspective. It is of course not surprising that a female character such as the *graciosa* would have a woman's point of view on the issues presented on stage. But her decidedly popular identification and speech is what differentiates her from that of the high-class female characters in a play. To a great extent her social status liberates her from the restrictions idealistically imposed on the noble protagonists that she serves, who are almost invariably reluctant to openly defy the social *status quo*.

The female stock comic figure's 'freedom' to express feminine discontent with women-restricting traditional patriarchal customs is, as I have sought to highlight, the almost exclusive domain of the *graciosa*. It is a license for popular, subversive commentary on patriarchal hegemonic mores that the *gracioso*, a male, could not wholeheartedly voice. The 'freedom' of expression provided by her social status also allows the popular *graciosa* to cast a critical eye on the behavior of noble women, as witness Isabel's critique of merry-widows. Her discourse, when analyzed using language ideology theory, offers a more holistic view of how women in early modern Spanish society dealt with the social impositions forced on their daily lives. In general, the female stock comic figure's discourse uniquely provides a recurring outlet for women's broad discontent with heavy-handed restrictions on their bodies and conduct. It may seem in many cases like a voice futilely clamoring in a silently unheeding desert. However, it is a voice that, in its own way, perhaps mapped out the then as yet unexplored route to a liberating oasis.

The third reason for a study of the *graciosa* is the coincidence of her role and the first appearance of women on stage which allowed me to take into account a facet of humor that is often overlooked in a theater with a pronounced lack of stage-directions: the non-verbal. This form of humor, from facial expressions to full-body movements, is undoubtedly as old as comedy itself, but its performative aspect, which I have explained using Judith Butler's theory, could only be poorly transmitted by unknowing young boys. This all changed with early modern Spanish theater. It must be stressed that the physical humor granted the popular *graciosa* has a much wider range of non-verbal expression of the feminine than the straight-laced *damas* could ever contemplate.

The introduction of real women upon the Spanish stage brought an extraordinary gender authenticity whose main mode of expressivity was the popular *graciosa* who could accurately transmit female mannerisms. My analyses of the humorous output of the five *graciosas*, properly highlights the heightened comicality afforded to actresses playing that part. Not all coincidences are purely accidental. As a case in point, it is no coincidence, I believe, that the appearance and rapid development of early modern Spanish theater's stock female comic figure occurs with real women gaining access to the stage. This allows us to perceive, if only theoretically, the concrete starting point of actresses interpreting the role, and gives us a platform from which to study the character's evolution throughout subsequent theatrical history.

The fourth reason advising a need for a deeper understanding of the *graciosa's* discourse perhaps represents the most enabling element in her characterization: the theatrical-illusion-breaking access to the spectators that she shares with the *gracioso*. This capacity to momentarily step out of her role to directly address the public in its present time and space, grants her a special extra-theatrical quality within the *dramatis personae*. Its relevance is heightened by the

popular character of both *gracioso* and *graciosa* and the no less popular make-up of early modern Spanish audiences. This extra-theatrical communication in plays that almost invariably offered noble hegemonic settings could open up channels for social critique that has not been seriously considered before.

In this regard, the aim of my analyses of *graciosa* comical discourse sought to highlight its distinct feminine slant when openly addressing the audience. The *graciosa* possesses, to a significant degree, a singular potential by being both popular and female in her meta-theatrical projection. The male stock comic figure could not believably present women's issues directly to the spectators. It was a function that became the prerogative of the *graciosa*, as witness Flora of Rojas Zorrilla's *Primero es la honra que el gusto*, or Irene of Moreto's *La fuerza de la ley*. With her, that privileged channel of communication with the plebian public attains its feminine voice, a unique phenomenon in European theater of that time. Bristol's study on the English clown helped to clarify how this character's ability to step out of the play and into the here-and-now reality of the audience also gives her discourse a there-and-then validity that helps us to better understand early modern society.

The fifth and final reason for focusing on the *graciosa* was that of the unique seating arrangement of the Madrid playhouses. The *cazuela*, the segregated popular women's section, would be a factor in the female stock comic figure's speech. It would potentially be so by offering the *graciosa* a precise target, represented by a large kindred segment of the audience, for the popular feminine perspective on issues that she embodies. I believe that my analysis of the comical speech of the five *graciosas* studied clearly justifies that expectation. It is most clearly visible when the popular *graciosa* speaks directly to the popular audience, but it is also readily detectable, as I have highlighted, throughout her discourse.



The influence of the *cazuela* upon the female stock comic figure's discourse begins with the playwright himself having to be aware of its reaction could make or break a play. With the *graciosa* as his main instrument of direct or indirect contact with the popular female *cazuela*, the dramatist was constrained to have her offer, to one extent or another, a popular feminine message. In plays where family honor is the main theme and women are seen as a vital component of it, the *graciosa's* message is unique. As noted in my analyses, that message was often at great odds with noble, patriarchal hegemonic standards, especially when women's issues were involved.

In conclusion, the in-depth analysis of the female stock comic figures, in the four *comedias* studied, fulfill its stated mission. The five reasons initially posited for the need of this often overlooked character's significance is demonstrated using concrete examples. My work renders numerous occasions in which the deployment of a language ideology perspective affords insights into the sociological importance of her discourse that, in turn, has proven to yield a more complete view of the issues that concerned early modern Spanish theatergoers. It therefore provides, although through eclectic sources, a more holistic view, a non-official view, of that society. In line with my initial hypothesis, the *graciosa* as a recurring female comic figure has been proven to be a crucial character, one worthy of much further attention in the theater of early modern Spain.

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