San Jose State University

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Spring 1977

Venereal Disease and the Gracioso: A Look at Moreto's El desdén con el desdén

Anne Fountain, *San Jose State University*

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following of a fixed and unvarying social ritual."

[15] Eric Bentley, "The *Comedia*: Universality or Uniqueness?," *HR*, 38 (1970), 147-162.

[16] The contradiction inherent in the pursuit of personal ideals and the dictates of Christianity are clearly expressed by Curtis Brown Watson in *Shakespeare and the Renaissance Concept of Honor* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1960): "To excel in virtue, to aspire after a moral perfection which ignored the cardinal Christian virtues of piety and humility and the cardinal Christian doctrine of man's sinful and fallen nature, was the chief goal of Renaissance pagan-humanist ideals. Nor were the writers of that age unaware that they were trying to reconcile two moral systems fundamentally irreconcilable." pp. 102-103.

[17] "Honor in Spanish Golden Age Drama, Its Relations to Real Life and to Morals," *BHS*, 35 (1958), 198-210.

[18] "Al hombre colérico y mal suffrido no le conviene ser cortesano; porque si todas las affrentas y disfavores y sinsabores que á uno hazen en la corte se para á las pensar y piensa de las vengar, Téngase por dicho que en solas las que recibió en un mes terná que vengar en diez años," *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea*, ed. M. Martinez de Burgos (Madrid, 1915), pp. 87-88.

[19] The classic study is Herschel Baker's *The Dignity of Man* (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), Chapters XI and XV.

[20] See Stephen Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1972), Chapter IV.

[21] Baker warns about this self-imposed limitation: "In an age of shifting and dislocated values like the Renaissance, no man could assess himself solely in religious, philosophical, or economic terms," p. 275.

[22] Baker, pp. 248-249.

[23] "Coriolanus — and the Delights of Faction," *The Hudson Review*, 19 (1966), p. 186.

[24] I am thinking of, for example, *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña* where the lord-vassal relationship is of critical importance in the interpretation of the play.

[25] This error is seen as a "tragic mistake" by A. Irvine Watson in "*El pintor de su deshonra* and the Neo-Aristotelian Theory of Tragedy," in Bruce Wardropper's *Critical Essays*, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

[26] Castiglione has a long and varied discussion on love in the fourth book of *Il Cortegiano*. Love in an old person is generally admitted, but under certain limitations: "Ma se ancor poi che son vecchi, nel freddo core conservano il foco degli appetiti e sotto-pongon la ragion gagliarda al senso debile, non si po dir quanto siano da biasmare; ché, come insensati, meritano con perpetua infamia esser connumerati tra gli animali irracionali, perché, i pensieri e i modi dell'amor sensual son troppo disconvenienti all'età matura," ed. Giulio Preti (Torino, 1960), p. 417.

[27] Alberti Teneti in *Il senso della morte e l'amore della vita nel rinascimento* (Torino, 1957), quotes several texts to document the fact that once arrived at a mature age, man should leave the ambitions of life and enter a period of contemplation and "ravvedimento," p. 141.

[28] Bruce Wardropper in "Poetry and Drama in Calderon's *El médico de su honra*," *RR*, 49 (1958), 3-11, suggests that the play is a "complex metaphor." For a discussion along the same lines, see C. A. Soons, "El problema de los juicios estéticos en Calderón: *El pintor de su deshonra*," *RF*, 76 (1964), 155-162.

[29] I have discussed Gutierre's attempts at a solution to his problem in "Crime and Responsibility in *El médico de su honra*," in *Homenaje a William L. Fichter*, ed. D. Kossoff and J. Amor y Vázquez (Madrid, 1972), pp. 127-137.

[30] See J. G. Peristiany, ed. *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago, 1966).

[31] It is relevant to recall at this point that what Aristotle called magnanimity "is the virtue that concerns itself with the right attitude towards the most important of all external goods — honor, or the recognition of one's own excellence." Moreover, "magnanimity is the only virtue that cannot lapse into vice through excess," Maurice B. McNamee, S. J. *Honor and the Epic Hero* (New York, 1960), p. 1.

[32] In this connection, it is useful to mention that the virtuous Castañar in *Del Rey abajo, ninguno* also contemplates murder although convinced of his wife's innocence. Castañar is prevented from making a definite decision because of the author's use of a *deus ex machina* device.

[33] "La discreción de don Lope de Almeida," *Clavileño*, 2 (May-June, 1951), 1-10.

[34] Watson's basic premise, that Calderón derived from the Spanish neo-Aristotelian theorists the concept of tragedy in which "The tragic hero should be neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but should be as virtuous as the plot permits," p. 212, automatically removes Juan from the list of perverse individuals.

[35] Manuel Ruiz Lagos has written several essays on the importance of painting in Calderón's theater, among which is "Una técnica dramática de Calderón: la pintura y el centro escénico," *Segismundo*, 2 (1966), 91-104.

VENEREAL DISEASE AND THE *GRACIOSO*: A LOOK AT MORETO'S *EL DESDEN CON EL DESDEN*

ANNE FOUNTAIN, Peace College

One of the most intriguing characters in Moreto's *El desdén con el desdén* is the *gracioso* who goes by the two names Polilla and Caniquí.[1] This comic figure who makes his appearance from the very start in Act I, Scene 1 as Polilla and then introduces himself under the assumed name of Caniquí in Act I, Scene 5 has a dominant role in the play. And since the comedy is noted for its meticulous construction and disciplined art"[2] it is reasonable to conjecture that there may be some underlying and unifying significance to the two names of the *gracioso*. It is the contention of this paper that one concept which relates the various facets of Polilla-Caniquí to each other and to the drama as a whole is the lowly and stigmatic subject of venereal disease, something which stands in perhaps intentional contrast to the courtly setting of the drama and the nobility of the main characters. Before examining the Polilla-Caniquí role and why venereal disease may be a motif for the *gracioso*, however, it might be wise to review the action of the play.

Carlos, the Count of Urgel, arrives with his servant, Polilla, at the palace of the Count of Barcelona, where he finds that Diana, the Count of Barcelona's beautiful daughter disdainfully rejects all suitors. At first uninterested in Diana, Carlos, upon being spurned by her, falls in love and determines to win her hand. Eventually by meeting Diana's disdain with an equal, but feigned, disdain, Carlos succeeds, having been helped along the way by the maneuvers and manipulations of his servant, Polilla-Caniquí.

Now let us look at the Polilla-Caniquí character more closely. In the very first scene of the play Polilla is found joking with his master in a fashion which points out the meaning of Polilla as "worry" or "care."

> Pues, señor, ¡polilla fuera!
> Desembucha tu pasión;
> y no tenga tu cuidado,
> teniéndola en el criado
> polilla en el corazón.[3]

Here the *gracioso* claims that with Polilla as a servant, Carlos need not have "polilla en el corazón." Later in the first act when Carlos and his servant are discussing ways in which Polilla can penetrate Diana's defenses and thus aid his master, Polilla replies to the question of whether he can infiltrate or not: "¿Yo Polilla no soy? ¿Eso previenes? / Me sabré introducir en sus camisas" (542-543). In this way Polilla has, in a sense, made the promise to move from the "heart" of his master to the bosom of his mistress-to-be, and he has shifted from the meaning of Polilla as "care" to the meaning of Polilla as "moth." Further, the reference to Diana's "camisa" hints not only at the *gracioso's* salacious nature, but also at

the new name he is to invent, Caniquí.

When Polilla does present himself to Diana, complete with costume as a "love doctor" and with comical attempts at Latin, he prefaces his appearance with the line, "¡Plegue al cielo que dé fuego mi entrada!" (646), and he establishes himself as one from the New World (Acapulco) who wishes to cure a "mal de amor." When Diana asks about the cure for "mal de amor" Polilla answers that he can cure "al que es franco" which means both "the French disease" (syphilis) and "generous in payment," with "ungüento blanco" which refers to both the mercury based ointment thought to be a cure for syphilis and to the silver coins called "ungüento de México."[4] The thinking continues in the vein of the consequences of physical love when Polilla says:

> Amor es quita-razón,
> quita-sueño, quita-bien,
> quitapelillos también
> que hará calvo a un motilón.
> (711-714)

Here Polilla suggests that love may be "quitapelillos" in the sense of "flatterer" and in the sense of "losing one's hair," and that love might cause even the "motilón" (or lay brother in a convent, who was required to have a circular haircut) to become bald, references to the fact that hair loss is a characteristic of advanced cases of syphilitic suffering.[5] It is only shortly thereafter that Polilla gives himself the new name of Caniquí, and boasts of having acquired "intimacy" with Diana.

In Act II, with Polilla-Caniquí now pretending to work on Diana's side as she attempts to lure Carlos and then leave him, the wordplays again turn to baser elements, as the *gracioso* mentions, in connection with his master, "emplasto de ranas" an ointment of mercuric oxide used for treating syphilis and "polvos de Joanes" another pharmaceutical term for mercuric oxide.[6] All the while that Diana and Carlos speak of the fevers, passions, and fires of love on a higher plane, Polilla-Caniquí has in mind the consuming fires of the disease designated in France as the "fuego español."[7]

In Act III we do not hear any more of Polilla-Caniquí's wise-cracks about the cures and ointments for love's ailments. The emphasis now is on the conversations between Carlos and Diana and on the restraint that both are attempting to show. Only at the very end, and when he is paired off with Laura, does Polilla-Caniquí revert to a joke about his name, as he suggests that everyone shake himself carefully since "polilla" is present.

Thus far venereal disease has been seen chiefly as a fixation in the mind of the buffoon, but there are other ways in which it relates to the Polilla-Caniquí figure. The name Polilla itself suggests one who like a moth is drawn irresistibly to the flame, and Polilla as "care" or "uneasiness" might suggest the symptoms of one suffering venereal distress. Caniquí comically claiming to come from Acapulco and immediately thereafter speaking of the "mal de amor" might be supposed to have brought a case of syphilis with him from the New World.[8]

Further, *Syphilus sive Morbus Gallicus* (Syphilis or the French Disease), a work published in 1530 by the Italian physician, Fracastor, may provide the background for seeing yet more of Moreto's play in association with venereal disease. It was Fracastor, who in a poem written in Latin hexameters, gave the name Syphilis to a shepherd who was punished with venereal affliction for his insult to Apollo (the sun god). The disease was named for the shepherd and because of the tremendous success of Fracastor's work, the name came to replace previous appelations for venereal disease.[9]. If, following the classical allusions in *El desdén con el desdén*, Carlos is seen as Diana's mythological as well as real counterpart, then he can be said to correspond to the Apollo of Fracastor's poem, and Polilla-Caniquí can be imagined as the blaspheming and afflicted figure. While there is no proof that Moreto ever read Fracastor's work or even that members of his audience did, the great popularity and the number of editions and translations of *Syphilus sive Morbus Gallicus*, especially in the sixteenth century, make possible the conjecture that Fracastor's ideas were "in vogue" as late as 1654, the publication date of *El desdén con el desdén*, and that Fracastor's writings may have been part of the general cultural backdrop of Moreto's work.[10]

NOTES

[1] Polilla means both "moth" and "uneasiness" or "care." *Caniquí* is the word for a type of thin cotton cloth of the type which might be used for women's undergarments.

[2] Bruce W. Wardropper, "Moreto's *El desdén con el desdén*: The *Comedia* Secularized," *BHS*, 34 (1957), 9.

[3] All quotes from *El desdén con el desdén* are from the Francisco Rico edition published in Madrid by Clásicos Castalia in 1971. This quote is from page 66, lines 40-44. Subsequent quotes from the play will be indicated in the text by line number.

[4] Lines 700-701. Rico's footnotes on page 97 explain the meaning of the wordplays.

[5] See the corresponding footnote on page 98 of the Rico edition.

[6] The items in quotes come from lines 1200 and 1815 respectively. Although the term "emplasto de ranas" may sound strange, live frogs were indeed used in producing a mercury unguent thought to heal syphilis. See Theodor Rosebury, *Microbes and Moral* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), p. 47.

[7] Ludwig Pfandl, *Cultura y costumbres del pueblo español de los siglos XVI y XVII*, 2nd Spanish ed. (Barcelona: Editorial Araluce 1929), p. 173.

[8] There has been much debate over whether America was the origin of venereal disease. The important thing to remember here is that at the time of Moreto's play many people were likely to associate venereal disease with the New World. Great outbreaks of the disease had ravaged Europe shortly after the return of Columbus and his men, and one of the most popular remedies for syphilis was guaiacum, a wood indigenous to the West Indies. For an indication of the importance of guaiacum in the sixteenth century see Bruno M. Damiani's Critical Transcription of Francisco Delicado's "El modo de adoperare el legno de India Occidentale," in *RHM*, 36 (1970-71), 251-271.

[9] Girolamo Fracastor, *Syphilis or the French Disease*, trans. Heneage Wynne-Finch (London: William Heinemann Medical Books Ltd. 1935), p. 41.

[10] For mythological aspects of *El desdén con el desdén* see the introduction in the Rico edition. This same introduction also suggests (page 43) that the date of composition for Moreto's play is quite close to the date of publication.

"EL HORTELANO DEL PRADO": TIRSO OR DON ANTONIO SIGLER DE HUERTA?

HAROLD G. JONES, University of Missouri-Columbia

Recently, Ruth Lee Kennedy has suggested that the pseudonym "el Hortelano del Prado" refers to Tirso de Molina.[1] She then fills in some gaps in Tirso's biography on the basis of the activities attributed to this "Hortelano" in a *vejamen*. I would propose an alternate interpretation. There are