

Obituary, Vern Williamsen

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Vern Williamsen proved to me that, in fact, old dogs can learn new tricks. As a graduate student at the University of Arizona in the early 1990s, full of the excitement that a new discipline and new technology provide, I had the privilege of learning this valuable life lesson from Vern. The personal computer was still a bit of a mystery to most, but not to Vern. He had already begun editing and translating Golden Age plays in the leading word processing software of the time, WordPerfect. The number of hours he spent battling formatting codes and diligently filling the screen with the beautiful lines of poetry of those plays demonstrate both his love for the literature and his vision of the power of the medium for sharing that love. When we stumbled, like most of those whose concept of mail involved a person physically dropping it at your door, into the world of networked computers and email, our reach suddenly included, well, frankly, everyone. Vern seized on the idea of an email listserv and, with the help of the university, those interested in the *comedia* had reason to setup their email accounts. It was quite intoxicating to know that one's words could reach scholars whose names were like royalty to a graduate student, within minutes...and a response could be expected to follow shortly. When one of the first catalogs of listerv addresses published our names along with the *comedia* listerv, I felt like I had just published an article. Finally, it was only natural that Vern move into the next act of the Internet, the World Wide Web. His plays, digitized and ready to be shown on an open stage, continue to act in the AHCT archives and give life to plays written so many centuries ago. Now that my students, texting away on their phones, probably see me as an old dog, it gives me comfort to know that there still might be some tricks to learn, just like Vern. Thank you, Vern, for all that you did for me, for teaching me about the *comedia* and life and for all that you did, and continue to do, for Golden Age theater.

Obituary, Vern Williamsen

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1993 was a pivotal year for thinking about how we *comedianes* might use the Internet, including this new thing called the World Wide Web, to disseminate and study the Spanish *comedia*. Gutenberg had already made available a lot of European literature, and Dante and Shakespeare were also available by computer, although in pre-graphic, Unix-based format. I gave a talk in El Paso that year about how the Internet might be of interest and use in our studies, and Meg Greer organized a workshop on the digital *comedia* at Princeton. (I remember that Meg, Sharon Voros, and I were there, but for the life of me I cannot remember whom else!) There were some amazingly grandiose plans, all of which required significant coding skills and significant funding. Meanwhile, Vern Williamsen was just doing what Vern did, working away on his own project, which included typing the entire *corpus* of plays into Mira de Amescua into WordPerfect. I wasn't there, but evidently it was J. T. Abraham's work with Vern that led to the idea of posting Vern's WordPerfect files online. J. T. and Vern then went to work on making available most of the plays currently in the AHCT digital collection, this time in HTML format, and encouraging others to type out the texts of plays. I provided several plays, as did David Hildner, along with a few others. (All these files are are still available on the AHCT website.) Among the early adopters in the service of literary analysis was Miguel Garcí-Gómez at Duke, who devised his own system to take the HTML versions of the plays and make them searchable for a number of analytical purposes (<http://mgarci.aas.duke.edu/cibertextos>). When I took over the maintenance of the AHCT website, I reformatted all the pages (over 2500) and added a search utility on the entire collection. For the most part the AHCT collection has remained the same, and interest in making new plays available on our website has waned in light of the well funded Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes in Spain (<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com>).

On a more personal note, I first met Vern at the MLA in the late 1970s; he seemed to have an encyclopedic knowledge not only of the plays but also of the most amazing trivia regarding the plays, the playwrights, and the culture of Golden Age Spain. We had the chance to get to know both him

and Clara better when we were both waiting for planes at the Providence airport after the 1983 AIH conference at Brown. Of course, the very next year we all met in an empty bank building in downtown El Paso to sign the papers to create and incorporate the AHCT.

Los Guzmanes de Toral: valimiento y rusticidad en un drama lopesco

David Hildner

La obra en la que se centrará el presente estudio merece parcialmente la denominación de “drama villanesco”. *Los Guzmanes de Toral*, comedia atribuida por lo general a Lope de Vega, contiene un buen número de escenas campestres y todos sus personajes cómicos, excepto uno, son aldeanos. Además, el protagonista y su hermosa hermana viven felices en el campo. Sin embargo, su argumento discrepa notablemente del de los dramas campesinos más conocidos, como *Fuenteovejuna*, *El mejor alcalde el rey*, *Peribáñez* o *El alcalde de Zalamea*; en estos suele haber una figura mediadora (muchas veces monárquica) entre algún noble abusivo y los villanos, quienes a pesar de su fuerte sentido de honor, no tienen el poder o el favor para librarse o del abuso o de la condena jurídica. El protagonista de *Los Guzmanes*, por otro lado, es de una antigua familia noble, de manera que puede negociar directamente con el poder. En ese sentido, Payo de Guzmán ofrece paralelos con el noble disfrazado de villano (García del Castañar) en *Del rey abajo ninguno* de Rojas Zorrilla.

Por otra parte, la trayectoria de Payo nos recuerda mucho las comedias de privanza, caracterizadas por C. George Peale como aquellas que involucran a uno o dos cortesanos que suben de fortuna mediante su relación con los monarcas, que sufren una caída, debida muchas veces a la envidia o a la rivalidad, y que a veces recuperan su poderío. “La trama de dichas comedias traza la meteórica subida del valido y su forcejeo por mantenerse en su posición de favor en contra de envidiosos y malévolos” (132). Aunque algunos de los privados en cuestión se han visto obligados a dejar otros reinos por circunstancias políticas (la persecución, el exilio, etc.), casi todos se muestran cortesanos con respecto a las costumbres, la vestimenta y el ingenio. De hecho, en la forma más pura de esta clase de comedias, el espacio cortesano constituye un “laberinto” limitado a ciertos estamentos y sin salida fácil, donde se pierden los que pretenden ganar el favor, por ejemplo, en *Cómo ha de ser el privado* de Quevedo o *Saber del mal y el bien* de Calderón. Como observa el mismo Payo de Guzmán:

¡Ah, palacio! ¡Ah, laberinto
do con cualquier disfraz
gana aquel que sabe menos

y pierde quien sabe más!
 ¡Ah, sueño, tras cuyo encanto
 el alma ciega se va,
 sin ver que tu mayor dicha
 es el saberte dejar! (88)

Secunda esta noción Teresa Ferrer Valls: "La privanza en el favor real del héroe desencadena sin excepción en los dramas de la privanza la envidia y el resentimiento del resto de los cortesanos, muy especialmente cuando quien progresa es de origen humilde . . . o está excluido del círculo de poder que rodea al rey" (14). De hecho, apenas se establece nuestro protagonista como privado, empiezan a conspirar contra él dos cortesanos resentidos.

Esta divergencia con respecto a lo típico del drama de privanza constituye precisamente lo notable de nuestra comedia: aunque están presentes todos los problemas típicos de poder, amistad y lealtad, el privado-protagonista, llamado significativamente Payo de Guzmán, a pesar de su rancia alcurnia, proviene de una aldea. Incluso se denomina a sí mismo villano, cuando, tras una breve estadía en la corte, anuncia su regreso a su tierra: "tengo en mi solar que hacer, / do huelgo de ser villano" (3).

Varios factores complican la trayectoria típica del privado; por ejemplo, el lenguaje de Payo (en ciertos momentos), el traje rústico que mantiene y la denominación de "medio salvaje" que recibe de algunos cortesanos de Alfonso VII, ya que, frente a los intereses creados que suelen exhibir muchos pretendientes y ministros en este sub-género, vemos la "rusticidad" de Payo y de sus acompañantes, junto con su honradez absoluta. Tanto es así que, cuando su hermana visita la corte vestida con el traje típico de las damas nobles, Payo no quiere reconocerla.

Ahora bien, no es esta la única obra en la que se presenta en las tablas de los corrales a unos cortesanos "villanos"; pensemos en los hijos de Juan Labrador, ansiosos de vivir en el palacio del rey en *El villano en su rincón*; en Mireno, supuesto hijo de un pastor en *El vergonzoso en palacio*; o bien en el filósofo Diógenes en *Darlo todo y no dar nada* de Calderón, figura esta que, a pesar de ser erudito y sabio, ha vivido casi como ermitaño en un despoblado hasta que Alejandro Magno lo manda comparecer en la corte para resolver un dilema.

En una ingeniosa variante del procedimiento típico de las comedias de privanza, Payo de Guzmán aparece en el primer cuadro para darle al joven

rey Alfonso VII el parabién por su reciente juramentación. Uno de los cortesanos allegados al monarca le niega la entrada, tomándolo por rústico a causa de su traje asturiano y reprehendiéndolo: "¡Qué grande descortesía! / ¡Sal, bárbaro!" (2-3) Payo, con una mezcla de rudeza y de valentía caballeresca, insiste en besarle la mano al rey, negándose en un primer momento a revelar su nombre y protestando: "¿Importa, señor, / para dársela a un vasallo / el conocer su valor?" (3) A continuación amplía su raciocinio con un símil prestado de las *Coplas* de Jorge Manrique: el rey, equiparado aquí al océano, debe acoger en su seno tanto los ríos caudalosos como los arroyos pequeños, todos los cuales, dada nuestra condición, acabarán en la muerte: "un hombre / que con alma y razon vive, / quando es Rey, que es como el mar, / a todos no a de admitir, si dél se van a amparar?" (4) De ahí procede Payo a explicar su situación vital en un monólogo de 136 versos (en los que falta el adorno culterano de muchas otras relaciones en el teatro de Lope); luego huye de la sala de audiencia con tanta rapidez que ni el rey ni sus ministros logran detenerlo.

Sin embargo, al llegar a su querido solar de Toral, pronuncia otro largo discurso en versos italianizantes al tenor del *Beatus ille* de Horacio y de Luis de León; ahí vemos que emplea imágenes semi-culteranas (lo cual, dicho sea de paso, haría rabiar a cualquier actor moderno que aceptara el papel). He aquí una corta muestra:

En vuestras claras fuentes
hallo las aguas puras y süaves
que en copas transparentes
me ofrece el cielo: y las cantoras aves
me hacen aquí salva
dándome alegres lo que dan al alba. (17)

Se trata, en estas sus primeras escenas, de un personaje que muestra rasgos de rústico charlatán y huraño, de vasallo leal y de filósofo sabio. Su mismo nombre, Payo, deformación de Pelayo, indica, por su parecido con el victorioso de Covadonga, los orígenes montañoses de la Reconquista y, por lo tanto, de la hidalguía más impecable. No obstante, su nombre llevaba connotaciones léxicas de "agreste, villano, y záfio o ignorante", según el *Diccionario de Autoridades*.

En realidad, en esta comedia el dramaturgo hace uso de todos los rasgos positivos y negativos de la rusticidad para caracterizar, no solo al protagonista sino al ambiente de donde proviene. Por un lado, se le

denomina a Payo como "el mancebo / a quien las montañas dan / de Diógenes nombre nuevo" (8). Nótese que el apodo no se lo da solo la corte, sino "las montañas", es decir, toda la región donde habita. Las palabras mismas del protagonista recalcan tal descripción: cuando le preguntan en el Acto 2 por qué conserva el traje asturiano a pesar de su privanza y de los favores que ha recibido del rey, su respuesta exhibe casi por fórmula un tópico predilecto del cinismo y del estoicismo: el que recomienda la indiferencia ante la buena y la mala fortuna. A esta máxima Payo agrega el elemento práctico de que, cuando pierda los privilegios, no tendrá que cambiar de traje: "Por aquesto aqueste traje / no ha de apartarse de mí. / Con él, García, subí; / con él mi privanza baje" (41). Un episodio paralelo lo ha observado Ferrer Valls en otra comedia definitivamente lopesca, *Los Tellos de Meneses, Parte Segunda*, donde el viejo Tello (otro hidalgo rural) se niega a mandar coser trajes cortesanos para sí mismo y para su familia, contradiciendo así el edicto del rey; su motivo es la mutabilidad de la voluntad monárquica, ya experimentada varias veces por este sabio rústico. Dice con cierta ironía: "Que para el tiempo que el Rey / ha de hacer otra mudanza, / y nos mande desnudar / cualquiera cosa me basta" (citado en Ferrer Valls 24). Esta nota filosófica adquiere tanta importancia en nuestra comedia que los ejemplares tempranos llevan el título alternativo: *Cómo ha de usarse del bien y ha de prevenirse el mal*.

No obstante, a pesar de los frecuentes elogios de la sencillez y la honradez montañesas, se dan momentos en que alguno u otro personaje ejemplifica lo "animalesco" de la vida rural, generalmente a través de las figuras del donaire. Por ejemplo, cuando el campesino Tirso, que forma parte del séquito de Payo de Guzmán en León, vuelve a Toral con su amo, se declara "casado" en la corte. Ante la pregunta indignada de su novia Pascuala sobre la identidad de la otra novia, responde: "Con quien? con una sartén / que oí a la puerta chillar, / más bella, en un bodegon, / que tu cara cristalina; / allí dejé mi afición, / y allí hizo su musiquina / baylar mis ojos a son" (19-20). El mismo personaje, durante una visita del rey al solar de Payo, muestra su "descortesía" separando para sí mismo alimentos de la mesa antes de que el rey empiece a comer. El mismo Payo de Guzmán no se exime del todo, como hemos visto, del cargo de zafio aldeano. Más allá de los comentarios arrogantes que suscita su primera aparición en la corte, lo vemos agasajando al rey en Toral, donde, entre otras infracciones del protocolo cortesano, se niega a sentarse al lado del rey: "Perdonar / puede

aqueste atrevimiento / Vuestra Alteza, y pues está / en el campo, echar de ver / que en él servido le han / con voluntad solamente / y al uso de por acá" (26).

Otro factor que distancia *Los Guzmanes* de la típica comedia de privanza es el hecho de que los cortesanos que se oponen a Payo quedan derrotados y perdonados por él para el final del Acto 1. Don Álvaro, el mismo que quiso negarle la entrada al palacio, se alía con otro conspirador para dirigirse a Toral y asesinar a Payo. Los dos lanzan su ataque durante la visita del monarca, por lo cual se les sospecha de intento de regicidio en un primer momento. Sin embargo, cuando confiesan su objetivo verdadero, el rey pone en manos de Payo la determinación de su castigo. Por varios motivos, ante tal situación, Payo responde, con un solo parlamento, a la cuestión del castigo y a la orden de que acompañe al rey a la corte: "Pues si he de yr allá, Señor, / aunque mi bien me quitáis, / a los dos que están aquí / los habéis de perdonar / u no mandarme que vaya / . . . Y les doy mis brazos yo / que así pretendo obligar / su enojo" (29). Se detecta aquí, además de un posible modelo de perdón cristiano o de imperturbabilidad estoica, una estrategia maquiavélica en la expresión "pretendo obligar su enojo"; es decir que Payo intenta evitar con este acto de generosidad una continua hostilidad de Álvaro y Urgel en la corte donde ha de residir.

De este final del Acto 1 en adelante, los conflictos en los que se halla inmerso el protagonista no tendrán mucho que ver con las rivalidades palaciegas, sino con los desacuerdos entre Payo y su señor, en los que el nuevo valido muestra una combinación de franqueza rústica y de sabiduría filosófica. Tres ejemplos:

1) Cuando el rey, ostensiblemente por querer honrar más a su nuevo valido, le ofrece un bastón de general, Payo lo rehúsa, sugiriendo que se lo ofrezca a su amigo García:

PAYO:

Demás que, si tenéis aquí presente
a García mi amigo, donde miro
del muerto Cid el ánimo valiente
y en la fe, gran Señor, a un Cinegiro,
quitárselo sería ynpertinente
yntento. Este es el mío, con que aspiro
a desear vuestro bien. El bastón dalde
y, qual merece su persona, honralde.

Que porque no entendáis que me he escusado
de ir a serviros, gran Señor, pretendo
irme con él tan solo por soldado.

Esto es lo que os ynporta, y lo que entiendo. (38-39)

2) En otro momento, el rey le ordena a Payo que se siente con él a consultar un asunto de estado. Cuando se entera el valido de que se trata de imponerles a los vasallos leoneses un "pecho" o tributo que no podrán tolerar, se levanta en presencia del rey como muestra de oposición:

Echo de ver,

Alfonso, que estas no son
cosas que he de conceder;
y así me levanto en pie,
de ynpidirlas obligado,
solamente porque sé
que si te hablo sentado
a concederlas vendré.

Y respondo que León
no puede ese pecho dar, [. . .]
echando tanbién de ver
que ha sido el no conceder
con lo que aquí me as pedido,
el saber que ynjusto a sido
lo que as querido ynponer. (49-50)

3) Incluso cuando el rey, habiendo vista a Greida, hermana del protagonista, en Toral, se enamora de ella y le propone a Payo una unión matrimonial entre los Guzmanes y la familia real, Payo vuelve a negarse. Sobre todo, no acepta el pretexto ofrecido por el rey de que ha habido casos de matrimonio entre reyes católicos y princesas musulmanas:

PAYO: Si, pero era, Señor, Su Alteza ynfanta
de Sevilla, y agora, en este puesto,
¿qué está mi hermana Greida? Aunque fué tanta
la nobleza que dieron mis pasados
a su sangre, no tiene esos estados.

REY: ¡Yo se los quiero dar, y amor lo diga!
No repliquéis en ello.

PAYO: En este yntento,
[--]perdonadme, Señor, que aquesto diga[--],

no é de venir jamás ni lo consiento. (77).

Tanta es la "terquedad" del protagonista que el rey llega a tacharlo de "necio".

A esta actitud independiente, que a veces raya en desobediencia y que ha sido admirada por escritores como Quevedo por su capacidad de decirles sus "cuatro verdades" a los monarcas, hay que contraponer las múltiples declaraciones de vasallaje leal, en las que Payo, al igual que otros vasallos rurales, ofrece los abundantes productos de sus tierras, sus reservas de oro, e incluso su propio servicio militar. En el caso de Payo de Guzmán, la terca oposición y el ofrecimiento se unen en un mismo episodio: al negar su consentimiento a la imposición de nuevos tributos a los vasallos leoneses, el privado propone lo siguiente:

porque conozcas de mí
 cómo servirte deseo
 te he de dar lo que poseo.
 Quando me trujiste aquí
 diez mil ducados me diste
 con que pusiese mi casa;
 esos de quien dueño fuiste
 tengo, y con mano no escasa,
 pues siempre larga la viste
 en tu servicio, Señor,
 te vuelvo con otros tres
 que en Toral tengo . (49)

Vemos, en suma, que *Los Guzmanes de Toral* ofrece semejanzas y contrastes con otras figuras y situaciones archiconocidas: 1) el "villano en su rincón" (o el hidalgo disfrazado de villano) que evita la corte; 2) el rústico que habla con franqueza hiriente, incluso ante las más altas autoridades (cf. Pedro Crespo en *El alcalde de Zalamea*, Sancho Panza ante los duques y en su "gobierno" de la Isla Barataria); 3) el noble (en este caso, el rey) que visita en una aldea a una de sus habitantes por amor clandestino; 4) el sabio estoico que renuncia a los bienes mundanos por considerarlos efímeros.

De esta amalgama de tipos literarios, ¿qué paralelos se podrían sacar en claro con respecto a las situaciones que nos confrontan a nosotros a principios del siglo XXI en el Occidente industrializado? En primer lugar, habría que evitar la equiparación demasiado fácil entre los estamentos altos

y bajos del mundo dramático con el sistema de clases que nos ha legado el capitalismo. Como advierte muy astutamente Melveena McKendrick:

it is in the delicate balance between between cultural invisibility (failing to see the present in the past because the social circumstances and moral vocabulary are different) and anachronism (treating the past as if it were no different from the present) that the hermeneutical challenge of teaching the *comedia* lies. (30)

En nuestra época la osificación de ciertas distinciones, originalmente económicas, ha ido produciendo elementos “aristócratas” que distinguen a la élite de las clases más bajas, elementos que llegan a dictar la indumentaria, la dieta, los medios de transporte, , etc, pero con ciertas diferencias:

All countries have their elites, who see themselves as special and entitled, and statistics show that people generally mix with and marry others from the same socioeconomic milieu. Social divisions are still there, although they are less fossilized and less visible because attitudes to authority have changed and social patterns are more fluid. (McKendrick, 34)

El género de la comedia pocas veces admite (fuera de la posibilidad común de la salvación cristiana) la igualdad teórica de los seres humanos, sino que atribuye la excelencia del cuerpo y del alma o a la sangre ilustre (como en el caso de Payo de Guzmán) o a la sangre limpia y o a la prosperidad agrícola de los “labradores ricos,” con la suposición complementaria de que la demás población española y europea carece por naturaleza de tales atributos. Por el contrario, a pesar de todas sus desigualdades, el sistema actual es impensable sin la afirmación (teórica, por lo menos) de que las distinciones de linaje no son obstáculos para el medro socio-económico. La estructura estamental representada en la comedia, por lo tanto, siempre ostentará un cariz alienante para muchos lectores actuales.

Sin embargo, a pesar de los límites generales impuestos por dicha estructura, se pueden señalar en nuestra comedia varios momentos potencialmente contestatarios:

- 1) la rapidez con la que Payo abandona la sala de audiencia en el Acto 1, sin pedir licencia del rey, provocando así el comentario de don García: “que ese cor[r]edor / baja no qual viento vano / mas qual rayo volador / en tempestad de verano” (8). Con su fuga, si no desafía abiertamente el centro del poder en palacio, por lo menos da a conocer su repugnancia hacia el mismo. Justo García Soriano llega

a calificar este retrato del valido como políticamente peligroso: "Lo resbaladizo de la materia . . . que, aun tratada con elevación, había de parecer sátira a todos aquellos corruptos y endiosados ministros de Felipe III y Felipe IV, debió de atemorizar luego al poeta. ¿Cómo, sin grave riesgo, presentar ante sus ojos el elocuente espejo de un modelo que con ellos tanto contrastaba?" (citado en Peale, 130).

- 2) la independencia parcial que evoca Payo con respecto al poder monárquico, lo cual tal vez habría recordado a los espectadores originales de la obra los fueros locales y regionales en los que se basaba gran parte de la resistencia política en la península. Cuando su hermana Greida le advierte que el rey podría vengarse de su "libertad" en la audiencia, responde Payo: "Yo soy Rey en mi solar; / su favor ni su desdén / no temo" (20).
- 3) la reserva con la que recibe Payo la visita sorpresiva del rey a su solar asturiano. Cuando éste insiste en cenar con el señor local y sus aldeanos, el anfitrión responde con relativamente poco entusiasmo: "Si así me apretáis aquí / cenaré con vos así / solo por obedecer" (24). Más adelante, le asegura al rey que, "en tanto que aquí estáis / no os faltará un ordinario" (26). Este último sustantivo se define en el *Diccionario de Autoridades* como "el gasto de cada día, que tiene qualquiera en su casa, y tambien lo que come regularmente y sin hacer exceso, ni tener demasía." Por lo tanto, Payo se compromete a cumplir con su deber de hospitalidad, pero de allí no piensa pasar.
- 4) la franqueza con la que Payo se niega a imponerles a los vasallos de León unos nuevos tributos propuestos por el rey. Bien es cierto, sin embargo, que ofrece pagar él mismo el importe de dichos tributos empleando sus propios fondos.

¿Cómo conciliar, en suma, los elementos de resistencia que exhibe Payo y el retrato no siempre halagador del monarca y de la corte con lo que afirma Maravall sobre la comedia barroca: "Resultaba necesario [bajo Felipe III y Felipe IV] mostrar en escena que las diferencias arrancaban de un origen natural; poseían un carácter forzoso e indeleble" (57)? Puede hallarse una explicación parcial en la visión de la comedia que ofrece Catherine Connor, basada en ecos de las teorías del caos y del "doble" o "pliegue" deleuziano, según las cuales pueden co-existir el refuerzo del orden vigente y la crítica del mismo dentro del texto, no en forma de mera yuxtaposición,

sino de señales indirectas y de deformaciones de patrones convencionales . Haciendo analogía con la geometría fractal y con las curvas algebraicas, donde se mezclan lo sinuoso con lo recto, el orden estricto con la imprevisibilidad, Connor propone que “the propagandistic and the subversive co-exist as variables among many possibilities, not in distinct and isolated territories, but rather within a graded, overlapping, and pleated terrain” (377). De tal modo, cada uno de los episodios enumerados más arriba puede encerrar el germen de una sátira (en el sentido greco-romano y humanista de la palabra) bajo la corteza de una conducta o unas palabras aparentemente conformes a la jerarquía social. *Los Guzmanes de Toral* conglomerada una serie de convenciones dramáticas y sociales, como son el *beatus ille*, los peligros de la privanza cortesana, la inanidad de las riquezas y de los honores y la rusticidad de los moradores del campo. No obstante, las yuxtapone y entrelaza de manera que unos ideogramas arrojen una luz insólita sobre otros, produciendo así un drama que satisface las expectativas del público de los corrales y las relativiza al mismo tiempo.

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Virgins to the Rescue: Male Abdication and Female Empowerment in
Angela de Azevedo

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The misogynist moralist writings and financial crises of Early Modern Europe certainly contributed to the depiction of Spanish women as commodities of exchange whose alleged promiscuous appetites and marital aspirations had to be controlled by men. These attitudes help explain why, in the worlds of Angela de Azevedo, men continually and casually intervene in women's lives even in the few restricted spaces seemingly beyond men's control. In *La margarita del Tajo que dio nombre a Santarén*, not only do we see men who have little respect for religious vows, we also witness a male god seemingly more interested in preserving a woman's virginity than her life. In *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen*, God the Father is virtually absent, leaving the title character to defend innocent virgins and save heretical men. Taken together, the dramas reveal a general loss of faith in the ability of men and male deities to protect bodies and souls. As male authority figures abdicate this traditional responsibility, Azevedo borrows from the *galán de monjas* and hagiographic traditions as well as from popular Marian legends and visual representations to develop steadfastly pious and boldly determined female characters ready to fill the void.

Natalie Zemon Davis, in her discussion of the "unruly woman," reminds us that the prevailing ideology in Early Modern Europe attributed men's faults to culture and upbringing, thereby deeming them correctable, whereas female defects purportedly flowed from their physiology and were thus permanent. She further shows how the declining status of women in much of Europe from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries aligned with efforts of nation states to become more dominant forces in the lives of their citizens. She sees men's attempts to subjugate women as parallel to the state's efforts to subjugate its subjects to its social and geopolitical goals (147-51). Despite her numerous examples of female subordination, she nonetheless asserts that the various depictions of the "unruly woman" in art and literature also engendered real life examples of female self-actualization and agency (172-76, 183). Azevedo's Irene, like theoretically any nun, could certainly be classified as an "unruly woman"

since her religious vocation obviates the need for any man to control her movements in an effort to deny her the opportunity for sexual activity. Such a woman, exercising more autonomy in social relations than her secular sisters, poses an especially vexing threat to patriarchal societies that claim to honor female chastity while seeking to restrain those who live by it (Scott Soufas 93).

Citing events more specific to Azevedo's time, Elizabeth Lehfeltdt sees military defeats, trade imbalances, and epidemic disease as provoking a moral vacuum that contributes to a generalized crisis of masculinity on the Iberian Peninsula. These circumstances prompted a search for traditional values (virtue, moderation, military prowess, protection of female sexuality) that many thinkers of the day found lacking among Spain's men. The perceived obligation to defend women contributed to the belief they must be enclosed and kept out of the public eye in order to ensure their chastity (464-68), a notion clearly reflected in Sor Irene's convent as depicted in *La Margarita del Tajo*.

*La Margarita del Tajo*¹

Azevedo combines the *galán de monjas* motif with the hagiographic tale of Irene who is not only held responsible for igniting desire in the already married Britaldo and in her spiritual supervisor, Remigio, but is subsequently sent by God's angel to calm their passions. Britaldo attempts to serenade Irene outside her convent window, but after a thrashing at the hands of the angel, Britaldo meets with her and, upon extorting a vow that she will remain a virgin, renounces his desire. But when she rejects Remigio, her confessor seeks revenge by having her drink a potion that makes her appear pregnant, prompting her expulsion from the convent. Convinced she has broken her vow, Britaldo has his servant, Banán, kill her. Seeing her sanctified body in the parted waters of the Tagus (Tajo), Britaldo and Remigio are inspired to leave on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land while Rosimunda (Britaldo's wife) will await her husband's return in the same convent that failed to protect Irene.

Irene's body functions as a site where the conflicting desires and ambitions of various players, including those of the nun herself, are expressed. Irene, seeking martyrdom, is eager to escape corporeal and terrestrial constraints while the men see or use her body as an instrument of sexual arousal, a visible sign of violated promises to Britaldo and broken

vows to God, and ultimately a catalyst of confession and spiritual inspiration. Aroused by Irene's body, Britaldo and Remigio try to deflect blame, claiming they are at the mercy of forces beyond their control. They want to resist, but the God of Love, they assert, is too strong. This celestial power we may interpret as a symbol of the myriad transformations spurred by the previously mentioned economic insecurity and accompanying moral instability that men cannot navigate.

Although set in seventh-century Portugal, the world evoked by Azevedo strongly resembles her own, one no longer ostensibly governed by immutable divine values, where the prestige of and respect for rank and position are eroded by forces no man can escape or contain. Pushed by this unseen and unforeseeable power, Remigio and Britaldo attempt to regain control over something or someone as a means of compensating for their lost authority. Thus they claim to assault Irene despite themselves. While Irene is violated by earthly forces, she gives consent to and cooperates with God's divine will that she be a martyr. Azevedo, then, portrays her as the only one striving for a heavenly life and working *with* a supernatural power that not only supersedes and defeats all others, but also rewards Irene with the prize she seeks—martyrdom.

The irresistible entity driving the men, identified as the blind God of Love, works through Irene's body and uses her physical attributes to attract them. In a conversation with Irene, God's angel explains:

...el ciego amor te persigue,
y hace de tus ojos flechas
para que a Britaldo tire. (1379-81)²

This description of events seems to exculpate both Britaldo and Irene. Since Love is using the latter's body to arouse the former, they are merely pawns in Love's game. But then, the angel strongly suggests Irene is at fault by commanding her to somehow redirect Britaldo's advances:

Procura a Britaldo hablar,
y su exceso reprehensible
desengaña, porque en esto
sus mejorías consisten. (1422-25)

Here, the angel invokes carnal desire as a sickness that has infected Britaldo and that Irene must cure. As one of several ways God displays his attachment to the traditions and mores of the physical world in this play,

the angel shows himself mindful of the reputations of single ladies who visit men, explaining it will not be a problem for Irene:

...que no se prohíbe
a cualquiera religiosa
que los enfermos visite
en virtud de caridad. (1429-32)

In a soliloquy immediately following the conversation with the angel, it is clear Irene understands and accepts the implied divine judgment against her and her physical attractiveness:

...¿Tú ocasión diste
a pasiones amorosas?
¿A esto has llegado? ¿Es posible?
¡Tu hermosura ha sido causa
tu belleza ha sido origen
de inquietudes tan traviesas, (1447-52)

Tellingly, throughout most of the play, Irene is the only one to accept any responsibility for her actions, intentional or otherwise. But in Britaldo, Maria João Dodman explains, we see the effects of the aforementioned masculinity crisis. At first, he is the perfect example of traditional aristocratic values. But Dodman extrapolates that the riches of the Iberian empire, thought to have effeminized and weakened men, take their toll on Britaldo. His early defeat at the hands of the angel defending Irene, the fact that no woman really pleases him, and his failure to consummate his marriage to Rosimunda all contribute to the image of a less than ideal male. Britaldo shows no regard for women, rank, or religious vows, responding only with increasingly outrageous and aggressive action as the play progresses (Dodman 403-06, 409-12). For example, Britaldo maintains he is being driven beyond the point of self-recognition and invokes Love as the oppressive supernatural force pushing him there:

de amor y de celos rabio,
y en el empeño que sigo
más me pierdo, más me abraso (1877-79)
mas mi voluntad no es mía,
que la tiene cautivada
el ciego amor (que por eso
le llaman el dios tirano, (1964-67)

At one point, Rosimunda calls on her father-in-law, Castinaldo, to intervene. The old man proves to be one of the few sympathetic male characters of the play, saying he understands his son's passion and, adopting a quasi-anthropological approach, claims humans cannot always control their own will (1952-55). Yet Castinaldo reminds his son that what separates man from animals is his ability to use reason to override his feelings (1924-47) and that he still holds Britaldo responsible for failing to control his desires:

...Sólo extraño
 Que no queráis reprimirlos,
 Que no queráis refrenarlos, (1955-57)

Castinaldo even turns poetic, comparing his son's love to a ship on a stormy sea and human reason to the sun that can pierce the clouds obscuring his better judgment (1976-2007). But as Christopher Gascón observes, in Azevedo's world, men inevitably fall short in their mediation efforts and Castinaldo is no different ("Female and Male" 125, 135). Britaldo is adamant that he has tried and failed to stifle his passion and that any further efforts will result in his demise (2009-13). Giving himself over to love and the mission to win Irene's heart, he even threatens his wife and family:

Morid vos, y mueran todos,
 que yo en vivo fuego abrasado
 diré a voces del trofeo (2020-22)
 viva Irene a quien consagro
 mi afecto... (2025-26)

Whether aware of it or not, Britaldo is obviously not thinking straight when he goes so far as to instruct his servant to go to Remigio, Irene's confessor, so that the latter may present Britaldo's affections to Irene in a dignified manner (2358-63). When the servant predicts Remigio's refusal, Britaldo remains undeterred and states he will simply force Remigio to bend to his wishes (2364-68). His scheme never gets off the ground, but the fact he is willing to ask Irene's spiritual advisor to essentially be her pimp shows how far afield he has strayed and how he seeks to emphasize her corporeal traits as a means of tethering her in the material realm. Indeed, the men's unsuccessful attempts to court her translate as a double failure: not only does Irene spurn sexual activity, but in doing so, denies them any

chance to tie her down with the mundane, earthly, motherly responsibilities of raising a child (DiPuccio 390).

Irene will not be constrained by such bodily and terrestrial limits. Obeying the angel, she uses her powers of persuasion and reasonable discourse to dissuade Britaldo from his plan. Britaldo declares his passion and asks she do the same, but instead, Irene gives him a lesson on the difference between “querer bien” and “querer mucho”:

No queréis bien, queréis mucho,
 vuestra queja así se engaña;
 querer mucho y querer bien,
 son dos cosas muy contrarias.
 Querer bien es querer sólo
 lo que a la razón agrada;
 querer mucho es querer más
 de lo que la razón manda. (2556-63)

True love is thus ruled by reason and logic, subduing the urge to enter the sexual realm. Irene proposes to Britaldo an “afecto liso y puro” (2610), in an attempt to guide him to a more ethereal sphere and proffering a more platonic, or at least Neoplatonic relationship: “Amemos a lo divino / come se quieren las almas” (2612-13). Her proposal, accentuating the spiritual over the material, points to Irene’s continued drift away from the corporeal toward a more celestial plane and to her desire for a like existence. Nonetheless, she is not unaware of the effectiveness of a more down-to-earth strategy and so warns Britaldo that God, like any human jealous lover, will protect his bride and that he commits a great wrong against the Almighty and against his own wife if he continues (2644-54). In this way, Azevedo’s angel resembles the Almighty as portrayed in a number of hagiographic and secular dramas in that He is wary and will defend against those who try to attract what He sees as His bride (DiPuccio 384).

Yet the problem may be with God’s questionable priorities, for while He will repel suitors, He refuses to preserve life. As Teresa Scott Soufas points out, God does not follow Irene’s prescription of a love “a lo divino,” preferring to indulge His rage and possessiveness by engaging in physical battle with His terrestrial rival, thus beginning a series of misread circumstances that result in Irene’s death (97), which God presumably has the ability to prevent. His willingness to thwart Britaldo’s attempt to compromise what He sees as Irene’s sexual purity but refusal to preserve

her life paints a portrait of a God who makes female corporeal virginity a condition for martyred celestial existence. Like men of the finite world, the Almighty judges spiritual worth by purely physical means.

Nonetheless, in this episode, Irene initially proves to be a skilled mediator between heaven and earth. She somehow assuages Britaldo's sexual urges, and he asks forgiveness. But in perhaps the most arrogant act of the play, he extracts a promise from her "Que ninguno otro lograra / lo que yo no puedo..." (2717-18). It is, to say the least, an audaciously presumptuous action by a man who wishes to dispense with the mediator role altogether in that he believes he may displace not only other men, but God himself, as if he owned Irene's body and actions. Britaldo puts himself on the same level as the Almighty since he also prioritizes Irene's virginity over her life. In a world where women find some measure of freedom only by committing body and soul to a divine male figure, Britaldo seems determined to violate even that last refuge to regain control over Irene.

Remigio's advances only reinforce the notion of Irene's body as a battleground between male lust and the female vows of celibacy that are supposed to put women beyond male control. As the priest charged with Irene's spiritual guidance and growth, he is a more insidious suitor—due to his abuse of power as well as to his deceit (DiPuccio 393)—who also claims to be a helpless captive of love as he finds himself falling for Irene (2157). In an apostrophe to the nun, he uses familiar imagery to describe his feelings:

Contagio es sin duda amor,
que también se comunica,
a mi corazón se aplica
de Britaldo este rigor;
Ya somos del ciego dios,
Irene, dos los heridos
y pues están dos perdidos, (2160-66)

While the metaphor is not new, we should not overlook how he tries to eschew responsibility for his feelings, claiming to have contracted the malady of love from Britaldo. Remigio's soliloquy at the beginning of act III reveals his inner strife (2744-2899). He adds, this time, that Love is not only blind but insane (2788) and puts forth several reasons it should release him from its grip:

¿No bastaban mis años, (2836)

¿No bastaba mi vida (2840)
 ¿No bastó mi opinion (2844)
 ¿No bastaban maestro
 de Irene? (2848-49)
 ¿No bastó su virtud [la de Irene] (2852)

Azevedo draws Remigio as the most thoughtful character of the play, and as such he clearly considers what he is risking, claims to have hidden his passion for some time (3902-17), but finally resigns himself to the whims of Love as king (2872). After Irene spurns his declaration, Remigio seems no more ready than Britaldo to accept responsibility for his own actions. In the soliloquy subsequent to Irene's refusal (3056-3155), he imagines himself as Love's ally seeking vengeance on Irene, leading him to prepare the potion that creates her simulated pregnancy (3136-45). But by the end of his tirade, Remigio's motives become clearer and more selfish:

...Bien me vengo
 pues de Irene en la opinión;
 acabe su estimación
 con la industria que prevengo. (3146-49)

Near the end of the play, Remigio publicly confesses he concocted the potion and spread the rumor that she has broken her vow (3926-49). Expelled from the convent for her apparent sin,³ Irene's body is forcibly transformed into a living scarlet letter that she cannot simply take off at the end of the day. She must remain a physical reminder of an ostensibly violated promise that leads to her death.

It is a death that cannot take Irene completely by surprise. She tells Remigio early on of her wish to become a martyr (868-903), yet seems uncertain as to how much blame she carries for the series of events that will bestow that title on her. Asking Rosimunda's forgiveness for attracting her husband, Irene says:

Aunque, Rosimunda bella,
 no me conozca culpada
 viéndoos contra mí enojada
 apruebo vuestra querella;
 y sin ser la causa de ella (1580-84)

 perdón os pido rendida (1587)

But then a few lines later:

No niego que a las pasiones
de Britaldo causas di; (1590-91)

However much responsibility she accepts, Azevedo makes it clear that Irene understands and consents to her martyrdom. God's angel appears to her in a dream and informs her Britaldo has ordered her death but does not reveal who will execute the order. He describes the manner and aftermath of her murder in great detail (3669-3712) although the reason is murky, as the divine messenger says only that "El cielo por ti Milagros / infintios ha de hacer" (3713-14). Her joyous reaction, "¡Yo mártir, mi Dios, yo mártir! / ¡A Irene tanta merced!" (3687-88), underlines her voluntary cooperation with the Almighty and her approval of having her corpse treated in the manner the angel foresees. The nun's exclamation at the approach of her assassin seems to indicate she agrees even with divine opinion that prioritizes virginity over life:

Mi honor, señor, defendido
aunque se pierda la vida,
que no hay vida como él es. (3756-58)

All happens as the angel predicts and the remaining characters are witness to the miracle at the conclusion of the drama. The waters of the Tagus part, revealing Irene's body—unmolested except for her fatal wound—on top of a wonderfully adorned coffin and a host of angels singing her praises (4074-4136).⁴

Despite this dazzling dénouement that inspires the remaining characters to devote their lives to God, it is a puzzling conclusion to say the least. Remigio manipulates Irene's body as a means to his own revenge while Britaldo ends her corporeal existence simply because he thought another man had taken possession of it—as if he had the right to her body in the first place. Through her martyrdom, her body is used once again—this time to convey the message of her saintly life that, according to the men at the end of the play, inspires their rather suspect repentance (DiPuccio 393). Yet, their curious penance is for Britaldo to leave a spouse and Remigio to abandon a ministry as they vow to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Banán promises to accompany them. Rosimunda decides to wait for her husband's return in the same convent that could not shield Irene, suggesting a similar course of events may repeat itself. Indeed, as Denise DiPuccio notes, the conclusion implies not only a kind of female interchangeability but also a regeneration or extension of male control over

women's bodies and movement as Irene ascends to a heavenly realm ostensibly under the reign of God the father while Rosimunda shifts from the somewhat restrictive domestic sphere to a convent where, because she remains a married woman presumably still under the control of her husband, she will not enjoy even the modicum of freedom afforded to traditional nuns (389).⁵

The only characters who escape regret and get what they want in the end are Irene and God. Early on she wishes for the celestial, ineffable, transcendent existence of being God's servant that only martyrdom can bring and, through the angel, she knows she will be granted her wish. We can therefore see the men's efforts at seduction as an attempt to keep her grounded, concrete, terrestrial, as it were. Their sexual advances try to entice Irene into an intensely *human* act, and the false pregnancy is interpreted as evidence that she not only violated her vows but that she is unambiguously attached to this world. As Scott Soufas observes, her rejection of the men's advances means nearly all male figures in the play, Remigio, Britaldo, and Banán—all "with the sanction of God himself"—contribute to Irene's earthly demise (103). Yet she finds a way to break the men's hold on her by agreeing to cooperate with the Almighty. It is therefore difficult to agree completely with Teresa Ferrer Valls's assertion that the solution to the problems faced by Azevedo's female characters "es siempre externa a ellos" (240). The realization of Irene's martyrdom is more the result of her understanding and consent, her collaboration with God, than that of any divine, unilateral decree. Azevedo may believe that men cannot be trusted to respect women's spaces and bodies, but she apparently has faith God will reward those who accede to his will while ultimately frustrating, if not punishing, men who seek to thwart the divine covenants between Him and His female creations.

Dicha y desdicha

The substitution of money for nobility and the practice of exploiting female bodies as objects of exchange make virtuous male role models just as rare in *Dicha y desdicha del juego y devoción de la Virgen* as in *La Margarita del Tajo*. Reflecting the dire economic situation many Spaniards of Azevedo's era experience because of national bankruptcies, currency emergencies, and war (Scott Soufas 70), Felisardo is a young man so impoverished by these socio-economic realities and his defunct father's gambling that he has no

dowry for his sister, María, and thus little hope of securing a match for her or assuring his own preferred union with Nuño's daughter, Violante. He only makes things worse by gambling away his sister's virginity to the rich Fadrique—Nuño's favored suitor for his daughter's hand—who is repelled by the Virgin Mary from raping María as she sleeps. In a desperate bargain with the Devil, the demon gets Felisardo to repudiate God and Christianity, but not the Virgin. As the Devil flies him toward Hell, Mary mounts an aerial counterattack, saving Felisardo at the last second. After hearing the story of these miraculous events, Nuño relents and allows the marriages the young people desire as a fulfillment of divine will.

It is my contention that Azevedo's rather dynamic Virgin offers not only a physically vigorous female role model, but also portends a more active part for Mary in the psychological and political realms while pushing theologically accepted boundaries. Preserving the customary maternal qualities of the Virgin, Azevedo, perhaps inspired by quasi-pugilist images of Mary, proffers an empowered Virgin who brooks little resistance against her celestial resolve.

Mary's high-flying heroics, combined with her more traditionally compassionate nature, underline the kind of multifaceted female deity necessary to the maturation process of men who seemingly refuse to grow up. Christopher Gascón borrows from Lacanian theory, and Julia Kristeva's comments thereon, to emphasize the need for a maternal figure to facilitate Felisardo's passage from the Lacanian Imaginary stage—characterized by an infant's realization that psychic desires can never be fully satisfied—to the Symbolic realm where subjects learn to compromise their desires through language and acceptance of laws, limits, institutions and rituals to better integrate themselves into adult society (129). Gascón argues persuasively that Felisardo realizes he cannot achieve his desire of a satisfactory dowry for his sister María or his marriage to Violante by beseeching God the Father. The young man already feels wounded and abandoned by his deceased biological father, who gambled away the family's assets, and believes he has little chance of receiving mercy from a stern God whose laws he breaks by betting his sister's virginity and subsequently renouncing Christianity. Citing Kristeva's work, Gascón shows the essential role the Virgin plays as a mother whose mercy and forgiving nature is instrumental in mediating Felisardo's desires and reconciling him with God the Father (130-33, 135-36, 141).

While it is true Felisardo's only way to the Symbolic realm is through the Virgin's intervention, he nevertheless makes an attempt to leave the Imaginary by dealing with a male authority figure after losing to Fadrique. Unable to face God the Father, Felisardo does not hesitate to invoke the Devil. An act of desperation, to be sure but it still shows Felisardo's willingness to seek succor from a male figure, one he knows may initially grant his wishes, but whose whole *raison d'être* is to deny humans' desire for salvation, thus casting the Devil as the paternal symbol of prohibition *par excellence*. After his loss to Fadrique, Felisardo becomes aware that instant gratification—typically demanded by infants—is impossible. Instead, in his bargaining with the demon, he seeks a contract with rules and obligations he must fulfill in order to attain his prize. Even after refusing the Devil's final condition that he renounces his devotion to the Virgin, Felisardo seems to understand and accept the consequences:

DEM. No ves que estás perdido;
di, ¿por qué no te aprovechas?
FEL. Piérdase todo; a la Virgen
el respeto no se pierda. (2862-65)

Yet as soon as the Devil attempts to fly him to Hell, it becomes clear Felisardo either reneges on his word to accept—or did not fully appreciate—the consequences of his actions. His quick return to the Imaginary order becomes evident as he immediately implores the Virgin to rescue him, much like a child calls out for his mother when unable to navigate an obstacle or to satisfy a need on his own. Disappointed or deceived by yet another male authority figure, Felisardo basically exhausts all adult avenues of solving his problem, becomes overwhelmed, and resorts to the only solution left him—crying out for mommy. Felisardo's crimes and subsequent desperation are emblematic of the play's male figures whose malevolent character, uncaring attitude, or impotent nature contrast with Mary's merciful and redemptive power. Whether in the earthly, celestial, or infernal realm, men bring only vice and damnation.

For Mirzam Pérez, Azevedo uses the male figures as foils to highlight a virtuous and authoritative Virgin in an effort to reinforce monarchical and, specifically, the queen's power.⁶ In service to and enjoying the favor of Queen Isabel de Borbón, wife of Philip IV, from 1621 until the queen's death in 1644, the playwright had a privileged position from which to observe the potentate and court activities (65). Pérez believes Azevedo

draws a parallel between the Queen of Heaven and the Queen of Spain in an effort to reinforce Isabel's military initiatives and her legitimacy as regent (67, 70). Citing the queen's support for court theater, her devotion to the Virgin, and her 1642-44 regency, Pérez contends Azevedo finds royal inspiration to portray Mary as not merely a spiritual entity, but also a flesh and blood woman of action who enjoys a strong cult following among the people (if not the Catholic Church, Gascón 126) and who echoes the woman invoked in the Book of Revelation—who crushes evil in the form of serpents or dragons⁷—by emasculating the Devil who must recognize his own impotence before her might (Pérez 73-77).

Pérez's evidence that Azevedo's Virgin is designed to reinforce Spain's Catholic monarchy is persuasive, yet circumstantial. It is nevertheless clear the playwright's depiction of the Virgin as a potent warrior against evil is in step with popular Marian art of the time (75). These images and the malevolence or absence of Azevedo's male figures contribute to a theological stance that eschews or defies some doctrinal Catholic teachings of the era.

The Virgin's rebuke of the Devil when he attempts to whisk Felisardo to Hell is certainly in step with Catholic teaching that no sinner is beyond God's mercy as long as he lives (2909-14). And although at no time does she claim to displace God the Father's "piedad inmensa" (2919), she is not shy in describing what she adds to divine justice:

Y más con mi patrocinio,
que tiene con Dios tal fuerza,
que como le tenga el nombre
de su parte, no experimenta
de Dios el menor castigo;
y porque, alevoso, veas
la estimación que Dios hace
de mi nombre, de la pena
y culpa que cometió
éste mi devoto, ordena
que quede absuelto,... (2920-30)

This is a Virgin who feels the need to flaunt the sway she holds with the Almighty in front of the demon. She declares Felisardo will not be punished and is forgiven his sins—a power the Catholic Church teaches belongs to God alone but one Azevedo's Mary is apparently empowered to

announce in the absence of any apparent consultation with Him. Moreover, she contends these gifts are granted to the penitent not because he is especially deserving, but rather to show the Devil how much the Almighty favors her. Victory is insufficient. She has to rub his nose in it.

As the Virgin's title "Theotokos" (Mother of God) was declared at the Council of Ephesus in 431 (Warner 105), her role as merciful maternal intercessor was well developed by Azevedo's era (Hall 17-16). But her rank as Queen of Heaven, not officially declared by the Church until 1954 (Pius XII, *Ad Caeli Reginam* 47), is referred to several times throughout the play. Fadrique even promotes her to "emperatriz celeste" (3197) while Felisardo calls her "alta Emperatriz:" (2957), "poderosa Reina" (2961) and, in his moment of desperation, "Reina insigne de los orbes / a cuya gracia suprema / ...todo el mundo se confiesa" (2896-97, 2899). Blending these two roles, the Virgin protects María, as she sleeps, from Fadrique's intended sexual assault. Like a mother, she shames him for contemplating an attack on an innocent and forsaking his vow, and as a potentate might warn a subordinate, dissuades him with the threat of a robust "difensión" of María (3182-3245).

The vigor of this defense—just a verbal warning to Fadrique—in Felisardo's case, takes the form of midair combat that draws on a rich visual cache of the Virgin depicted as ready to do battle with demonic figures to protect the helpless. Various artists created the *Madonna del Soccorso* images which invariably show her in the scene itself or arriving by aerial apparition, wielding a rather large stick, ready to strike a naked, smaller, dark, winged creature—sporting a tail and sometimes armed with some kind of baton or small pitchfork—in order to repel its apparent assault on little children (see figures 1-4).

Marina Warner reminds us that the rise in popularity of images of "the Virgin in Triumph" dates back at least to the Iconoclast heresy and rise of the papal state in the seven and eight hundreds (108-09). The development of her depiction as pugilist and warrior can be traced at least to the legend of Theophilus who sells his soul to the Devil and is saved when the Virgin wrestles the demon to regain the deed to Theophilus's soul. The portal of the twelfth-century church at Souillac, France, marks the first time an action of the Virgin, other than the Incarnation, appears "in monumental art." Visual renditions of the story reappear in diverse media during succeeding centuries. For example, the northern portal of Notre Dame de

Paris displays a Virgin extracting the deed from the Devil at the point of her sword (Warner 323-24, see figure 5). From these images, it is not difficult to imagine the Virgin as combatant. The popular belief she comes to the aid of belligerents ostensibly fighting on God's side is widespread in Spain's kingdoms in Azevedo's day. In images depicting battles during and after the Reconquest, she is seen at times as taking "an active part in defeating the enemy" (Hall 10). In the early decades of Spain's invasion of the Americas, hailed by many for her aid in conquering and converting indigenous populations, the Virgin is even portrayed in one drawing from the c. 1615 *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno* as conjuring a sandstorm to defeat an Incan army (Guamán Poma de Ayala 293). Even if Azevedo did not have occasion to see all or any of these visual representations, *Dicha y desdicha* is certainly imbued with the ideas of the formidable, independent Virgin it evokes. The playwright of course advocates nothing akin to twenty-first century movements to have Mary's status elevated to "Co-Redemptrix" (Hall 9-10). She nonetheless creates a world where God the Father's seeming indifference to his human creations mirrors Reformist ideas of a male deity whose mercy and salvific action cannot be influenced by human behavior (Bouman 806, Wriedt 92). Moreover, Azevedo's Virgin says she proceeds in concert with God, but her actions echo myriad legends and miracle stories where Mary undoubtedly displays abilities usually reserved to God or Christ (Warner 323). In a world of unwilling or unable male figures, Azevedo seems untroubled by casting a bold female supernatural being to step forward.

The men's paralysis is created in large part by their blithe acceptance of the status quo and belief they can (or should) do little or nothing to change it. The reader/spectator can at first feel some sympathy for Felisardo, as his unfortunate situation is not entirely of his own making. We see that his father's actions and the anguish they caused his mother are so painful, he cannot even finish his sentences as he recounts his woes to his servant Sombrero (296-307). But this pity soon vanishes. As Gascón observes, when Felisardo rejects Sombrero's suggestion that might improve his master's situation—going to America to seek riches (355-406)—we are left with the impression Felisardo has already reached the conclusion that any action on his part would be fruitless. He expresses faith in the Virgin (340-47), but seemingly lacks the initiative to do for himself.⁸

It is at best ironic and at worst evil that when Felisardo—a man so obsessed with his sister’s virginity that he battles oneiric intruders to defend it—does take the initiative; he presumes to use María’s body as collateral in some high-stakes game. He may be in line with the prevailing male mindset of the day in assuming quasi ownership of his sister’s body, but such an ideology is intended to limit a woman’s sexual opportunities—thus protecting the family’s (read men’s) honor—until such time as the man can arrange a suitable marriage.⁹ To say Felisardo’s actions are beyond the pale, in that with one act he destroys his family’s honor, endangers his sister’s chances of marriage (thus closing off one of the few avenues to financial security for women), and enables the violation of her body, is certainly to understate the case. Azevedo clearly indicts men’s inconsistent endorsement of virginity: they admire sexual purity in divine, untouchable beings, but still want it available to them in negotiations in the terrestrial realm.

Despite the playwright’s condemnation of this double standard of virginity, she nonetheless upholds traditional Catholic teaching that no sinner is beyond divine help while alive (2911-14), even if God the Father is nowhere to be found. In the aforementioned scene where the Devil attempts to whisk Felisardo to the Underworld, Mary ascends, intercepts the Devil and his captive, battles the demon, and safely returns Felisardo to the stage in a visually stunning theatrical feat that must have necessitated the most complex of *tramoya* acrobatics.¹⁰ This airborne spectacle reflects the popular Marian image of maternal intercessor as well as Azevedo’s intent to portray the Virgin as a resolute warrior. That a man responsible for his own dire predicament renounces the institutional church and God the Father while beseeching a female deity as the only means of succor demonstrates to what degree all characters lose faith in the ability of men—divine or human—to rectify the moral violations they commit.

Nuño, Violante’s father, does nothing to restore this faith. The quintessential father of his monetarily obsessed era, he sees his daughter as little more than a business opportunity. Azevedo does not, however, draw him as totally blind to his Violante’s preference for Felisardo, thus depicting him as even more sinister than a father simply unaware of his daughter’s marital wishes. Nuño is cognizant of Violante’s desires, saying he can sense them even though she says nothing; he simply gives them no weight (De Armas 150-52), believing his will as father overrides hers and that the

opportunity to grow his fortune and his fear of negative public opinion, were he to marry her to a poor man, supersede Felisardo's noble birth and character (2057-96).

Yet, as a sign of his rather flexible moral principles, "...la fortuna / (que tiene sus altibajos) / hace y deshace noblezas" (2153-55), Nuño's interrogation of the young man implies that had Felisardo had sex or concluded an engagement with his daughter, he might relent (2130-39). Nuño's words reflect the view that a woman's primary value, her virginity, remains in men's hands. He clearly fears that if Violante had engaged in intercourse with Felisardo, the father would have little left to offer Fadrique to entice him to marry her. If such were the case, Nuño would feel he has nothing left to lose by granting Felisardo's request.

As it may be difficult to imagine a more insensitive Nuño, Azevedo removes that burden from the reader/spectator in a subsequent scene where he tells Violante of Felisardo's initial good fortune when beginning to gamble with Fadrique then of the subsequent loss not only of all his winnings but of María as well (2606-27). In what may be Azevedo's attempt to make Nuño "one of the most horrible father figures in *comedia* history" (Pérez 72), he sees no need to console his daughter and exclaims "¡no hay más extraña locura!" (2629).

We could consider Nuño less of a character than a stand in for the capitalistic culture taking hold of Spanish society that offers no more apology for its existence than the wind would for blowing or the sun for shining. Nuño simply accepts the status quo, neither showing remorse for his actions nor longing for a better time when virtue and honor were the true marks of nobility. Yet Azevedo does not create him as an indifferent force of nature but rather as a thinking (if thoughtless) human being who simply does not care about even his daughter's happiness. His above-mentioned questions to Felisardo suggest the father's elastic code of ethics could bend toward those of the young man, as Nuño may have been willing to trade Violante's virginity for a face-saving wedding to Felisardo. Yet at no time does Nuño begrudge or even express curiosity about the socio-economic transformations that necessitate his choices, as his narcissistic view keeps him myopically focused on himself, his reputation, and his financial well being. Nonetheless, even these values cannot overcome his impetuosity. Near the end of the play, he threatens his daughter when he finds her in Felisardo's house without her father's permission (3367-72) and

draws his sword on Fadrique when he claims to have another wife and therefore will not marry Violante (3396-3403). Seemingly unaware that if he killed his daughter and prospective son-in-law, he would be endangering his own honor and financial situation, Nuño surrenders to his violent nature. Rosela's epithet for him, "el viejo es endiablado" (3376), has no discernable effect, even after he hears of Felisardo's narrow escape from the Devil. In the end, Nuño remains satisfied with the exculpatory explanation that all had proceeded according to God's will (3682-89).

Fadrique, too, seems content to be led by Providence until distracted by a more advantageous plan. Having made his fortune in America, he returns to Portugal and promises the Virgin to marry the poorest woman of noble birth he can find in exchange for the Holy Mother's rescue at sea during a storm (1019-30). Once on shore, he is enraptured by María's beauty as she gazes upon an image of the Virgin and decides she is the key to fulfilling his vow (1037-64, 1152-56). From there, his moral downfall is quick. Although he feels somewhat indebted to Nuño for covering his father's funeral costs (1220-28), Fadrique really accepts Nuño's offer of betrothal to Violante because it is a financially advantageous match (1294-1311). Fadrique goes from promise breaker to would-be rapist in short order. After beating Felisardo in gambling, he is ready to sexually assault the woman he promised to marry as she lies sleeping near an altar dedicated to the Virgin, dissuaded only at the last moment by her reminder, spoken through María, of his vow (3170-3256).

Like Nuño, Fadrique shows little regret, and less justification, for his actions. Indeed, Azevedo does not seek to complicate his character with soliloquies that expose an inner conflict or yearning desire for another kind of world that favors virtue over wealth. To summarize or explain his actions, Fadrique offers little more than: *los hombres son así*:

Mas como pasado el riesgo
No hay hombre que no se olvide,
No sé si por su riqueza,
Que un rico riquezas sigue,
Puse mi amor en Violante,
Olvidando el voto que hice; (3608-13)
Mas como el deseo incline
al hombre más para el mal
que para el bien y le prive

el odio de la razón, (3617-20)
 determiné aprovecharme
 (¡qué haya quien tal determine,
 y tal destino intente!)
 de la belleza (¡qué crimen!)
 de doña María, pues
 la gané a su hermano; (3626-31)

The general fatalism pervading Azevedo's universe is disrupted only by Violante's rather bold action. Early in the play, Nuño's aptly named daughter invites Felisardo to her house without her father's consent via a written note that she throws to him from a window (651-63) yet admits she cannot express her true feelings to her father or refuse his choice of Fadrique for her (1672-87). Nonetheless, when she learns of her father's intent to marry her to the young man, she hatches an eventually unsuccessful plan to go to Felisardo, instructing her servant to tell her father she has joined a convent (2711-24) and, near the end of the play, makes an impassioned plea for individual free choice in marriage (3330-67).

By contrast, María is drawn from beginning to end as particularly submissive, with no experience in love and so resigned to divine will that the only actions she takes are praying to the Virgin and advising others to acquiesce to Providence when circumstances obstruct their goals (1744-46, 1090, 2050-53, 3014-19, 1940-51). Although Azevedo grants María far less initiative, she depicts her as clearly morally superior to the men and just as static in thought. Felisardo's sister shows no interest in acting on her own behalf and never even wonders if she should. Expressing only relief at the end of the play that the heavens have granted the spouse she wants, she, like virtually every other character, avers no outrage or even disappointment in Felisardo's actions nor questions his right to trade her in the first place. With the exception of the *gracioso* Sombrero, who says he would strike Felisardo were he in María's place (2468-69), male prerogative over women's bodies goes unquestioned.

Violante's actions notwithstanding, Azevedo's strategy in *Dicha y desdicha* seems to be to depict all characters as disinterested in the possibility of different social and moral values and behaviors as are Fadrique and Nuño. This pervasive and apparently willful ignorance of why women's independence may be needed and of how to achieve it indicate the solution is beyond human capabilities, highlighting the necessity of supernatural

involvement especially in the would-be rape scene. María is not just innocent, but possesses a faith not unlike that of a child who trusts her elders to know best how to protect her. Her purity and naïveté, combined with her general ignorance of the world and of Fadrique's immediate intentions while she sleeps, make for an episode of extreme pathos that arouses spectators' fears. Despite the Virgin's action, they are left with the thought of what might have transpired absent the divine intervention.

The central message is one of human and divine, mostly male, impotency in the face of such dire situations. There are seemingly some problems only a female deity can resolve. In the face of a generalized fatalism, human male insensitivity and cruelty, and supernatural male malevolence, the Virgin will do what she must—even physically battling demons and invading dreams—to restore moral order.

Conclusion

While *La Margarita del Tajo* teaches that women's submission to God's will is the surest way to a reward (albeit in the next life) and *Dicha y desdicha* compensates both the rebellious Violante and the devoted María by granting husbands of their choosing, it is difficult to determine exactly what men have to do to be punished in the here and now. A pilgrimage to the Holy Land and traditional marriage hardly seem like just remedies for the many transgressions the men perpetrate or sufficient deterrents to repeating their crimes. While Azevedo offers no sentence satisfactory to twenty-first century minds, she does emphasize the closer relationship to the divine that women enjoy as well as their consent in the adventures that play out. Irene's regular study of scripture and frequent conversations with God's angel certainly signifies a life more moral and a relationship more intimate with God than any of the men can claim. She is informed of and consents to God's plan every step of the way. Woman's mediation between heaven and earth becomes so strong in *Dicha y desdicha* that the divine takes a powerful female form in the guise of the Virgin Mary. If Azevedo cannot conceive of a publishable fitting punishment for male misbehavior, she chooses instead to deemphasize their moral value in order to empower and uplift women's roles in this life and the next.



Fig. 1. Francesco Melanzio, *Madonna del Soccorso* (1494);
Abbey of San Felice, Giano del Umbria, Italy.



Fig. 2. Domenico di Zanobi, aka Master of the Johnson Nativity, *Madonna del Soccorso* (1475-85); Cappella Santo Spirito, Florence.

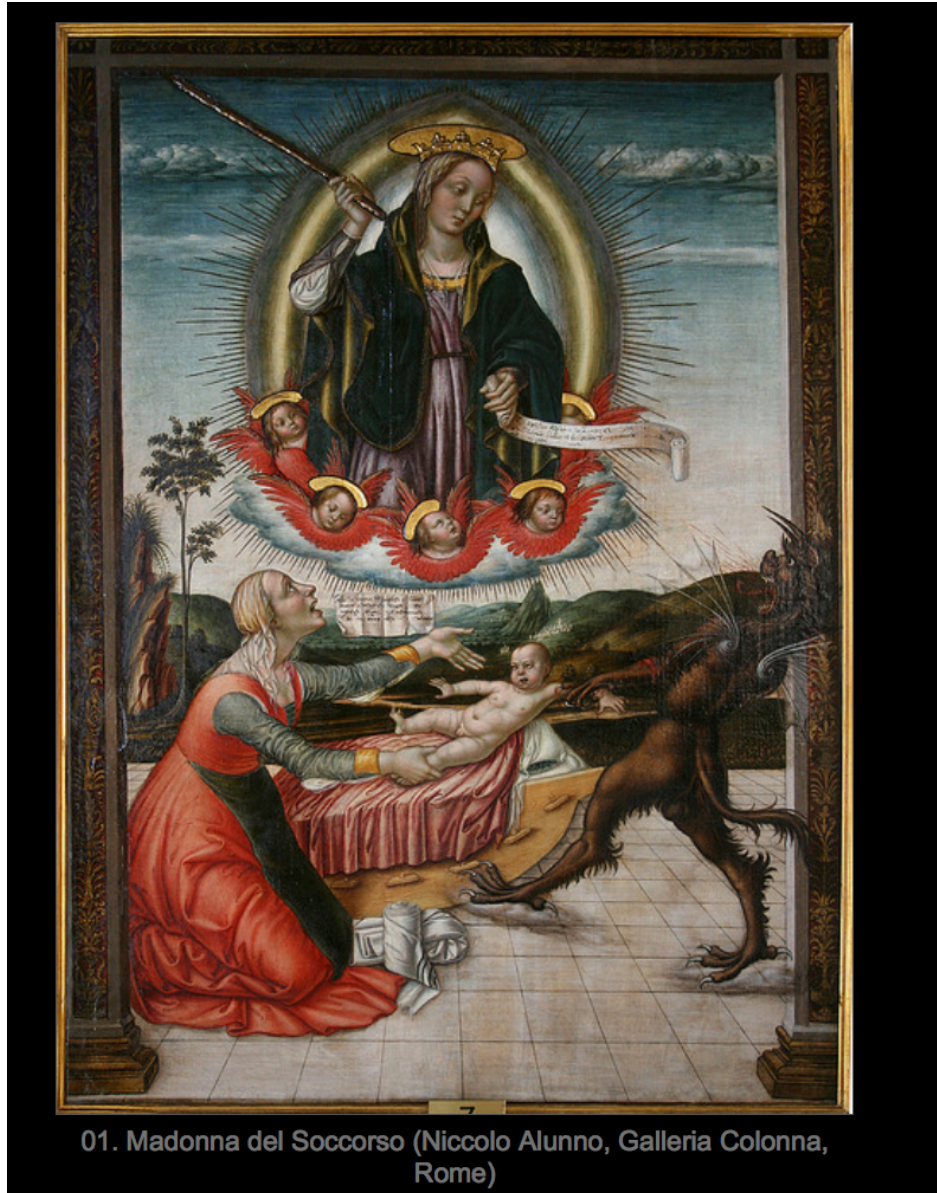


Fig. 3. Niccolo Alunno *Madonna del Soccorso* (c. 1497); Galleria Colonna, Rome.



Fig. 4. Anonymous, *Madonna del Soccorso* (early sixteenth century);
Cappella Madonna del Soccorso, n.p., Italy



Fig. 5. Anonymous, sculpture of the Virgin striking Satan (thirteenth century); north portal of Notre Dame de Paris; rpt. in Warner 323-24.

Notes

¹ It is widely believed Azevedo's three extant works—*El muerto disimulado* is the third—were written during the time of her service at court to Queen Isabel de Borbón. It is not known when she arrived at court, but her service ended upon the death of the queen in 1644 (Scott Soufas qtd. in *Women's Acts* 2). For a different view on dates of composition, see Wade 326.

² All references to the dramatic texts will be given by verse number according to the Scott Soufas edition.

³ Assuming Irene belongs to a Benedictine convent, she undergoes what must be an accelerated expulsion process since the *Rule of Saint Benedict* provides for a truly repentant wayward sister to be readmitted three times before irrevocable expulsion.

⁴ Left unexplained is exactly why Irene earns the title of martyr. Martyrdom is defined by the Catholic Church as “the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith,” but at no point is she asked to renounce it or convert to another. The men who plot against her also ostensibly share this same faith (Catholic Church 2473).

⁵ Why she cannot continue to live under the supervision of her father-in-law is left unexplained.

⁶ See also Warner, xxiii.

⁷ The Virgin even calls the Devil “dragón infernal” (2942) just before her rescue of Felisardo.

⁸ Gascón points out these shortcomings (*The Woman Saint* 141), but goes a bit too far in asserting Felisardo “never supplements his faith with diligence at any point in the play” (142) as the young man does try to negotiate with Nuño to marry Violante in act two.

⁹ The Spanish honor code of this era afforded any nobleman the right to kill his sister, wife, or daughter if suspected of extramarital sex (Mujica xl). For more on the fact and fiction of wife-murder plays in the seventeenth century, see Heiple.

¹⁰ For more on the spectacular effects of *tramoya* plays before and during Azevedo's time at the Spanish court, see Shergold, 264-302.

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Book Review

Archer, Robert, *La cuestión odiosa: La mujer en la literatura hispánica tardomedieval*, Trad. Marion Coderch Barrios, Valencia, Institució Alfons el Magnànim, 2011. ISBN: 9788478226047. 344 pp.

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Esta reciente edición española del ya clásico *The Problem of Woman in Late-Medieval Hispanic Literature* [Woodbridge, Inglaterra, Tamesis, 2005, pp. 227], presenta no solo una traducción del texto, sino una revisión de los planteamientos ya expuestos en el original. La labor de puesta al día del autor y de la traductora Marion Coderch, buena conocedora de la materia, hace que se hayan incluido algunos trabajos que faltaban en el texto inglés, lo que es de agradecer.

Este libro se ha de leer como un complemento a la magnífica colección de Archer titulada *Misoginia y defensa de las mujeres: Antología de textos medievales* de la colección Feminismos (Madrid, Cátedra, 2001) en la que se presentan de manera clara y limpia muchos de los textos que el autor trata en la citada monografía. Archer es buen conocedor del tema de la *querelle des femmes* española. Destacan así sus menos conocidas, aunque igualmente valiosas, ediciones de los textos misóginos catalanes de tradición cortesana: el primero, junto a Isabel de Riquer, recopila unos extraordinarios *maldits y cansós* [*Contra las mujeres: poemas medievales de rechazo y vituperio*. Barcelona: Quaderns Crema, 1998]; el segundo, ya en solitario, recopila la obra completa de Pere Torroella [o Torrellas] [*Obra completa*, ed. Robert Archer, Cosenza, Rubbettino, 2005].

Dado su amplio conocimiento de la diatriba misógina en las tradiciones castellana y catalana, es lógico que insista en la continuidad de temas entre el Aragón y la Castilla del XV en sus estudios. De este modo, el autor parte de los estudios de Alcuin Blamires [*The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993 y ed. *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended. An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992], de Howard Bloch [“Medieval Misogyny.” *Representations. Special Issue: Misogyny, Misandry, and Misanthropy* 0.20, 1987, 1-24 y *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991] y de

Prudence Allen [*The Concept of Woman: The Aristotelian Revolution 750BC-AD 1250*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1985 y *The Concept of Woman: The Early Humanist Reformation (1250-1500)*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2002] de manera que actualiza muchos de sus planteamientos, aunque sea solo por prestarle atención al fenómeno debajo de los Pirineos. Asimismo, y ya dentro del hispanismo actualiza el corpus ya muy anticuado que presentaba Jacob Ornstein, el pionero en la materia en “La misoginia y el profeminismo en la literatura castellana” [*Revista de Filología Hispánica* 111, 1941, pp. 219-32] tal y como reclamaban Julian Weiss [“‘¿Qué demandamos de las mujeres?’: Forming the Debate About Women in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain (with a Baroque Response)” *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, eds. Thelma S. Fenster y Clare A. Lees, Nueva York, Palgrave, 2002, pp. 237-82], Barbara Weissberger [“‘Deceitful Sects’: The Debate About Women in the Age of Isabel The Catholic.” *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*. Ed. Thelma S. Fenster y Clare A. Lees. Nueva York: Palgrave, 2002. 207-35] y el que escribe estas líneas desde hace ya mucho tiempo.

Archer divide su texto en una introducción, seis capítulos y una conclusión. La introducción “Conocer a la mujer” presenta la bibliografía más pertinente al tema en el mundo del hispanismo, el clásico artículo de Michael Gerli [“La ‘religión del amor’ y el antifeminismo en las letras castellanas del siglo XV” *Hispanic Review*, 1, 49, 1981, pp. 65-85], el libro de Michael Solomon [*The Literature of Misogyny in Medieval Spain: The Arcipreste de Talavera and the Spill*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997], María Jesús Lacarra [“Algunos datos para la historia de la misoginia en la Edad Media”, *Studia in honorem profesor Martí de Riquer*, 4 vols. Barcelona, Quaderns Crema, 1986-1991, vol. I, pp. 339-61] Harriet Goldberg [“The Several Faces of Ugliness in Medieval Castilian Literature”, *La Corónica*, 7, 1978-1979, pp. 80-92] o Pedro Cátedra [*Amor y pedagogía en la edad media: estudios de doctrina amorosa y práctica literaria*, Salamanca, Universidad de Salamanca, 1989], entre otros. Este investigador ha echado en falta quizá una mayor implicación con los estudios que le prestan atención a la “cuestión odiosa” en la literatura europea, que se citan, pero cuya profundización hubiera sido, quizá, deseable. Por ejemplo, la metodología de análisis de Prudence Allen, que presenta los mismos cuatro cuestionamientos en todos los autores que trata en sus amplísimos panoramas sobre *The Notion of Woman* (vols. 1 y 2), ya citados. En el primer

capítulo “Nociones de la mujer en la literatura didáctica hispánica” parte Archer de un análisis de textos de carácter gnómico y didáctico: el *Libre de les dones* de Francesc Eiximenis, el *Jardín de nobles doncellas* de Fray Martín de Córdoba, Egidio Romano y García de Castrojeriz, los sermones de san Vicente Ferrer. Archer procura mostrar la inestabilidad del concepto “mujer” presente en estos textos de modo que subraya cómo cada uno de ellos muestra una versión distinta, casi tópica de la “esencia” de las mismas, visiones que, además, están supeditadas a los “fines retóricos particulares de cada uno” (89). En contraste con el amplio número de textos del capítulo anterior, en el segundo, “Sexo mutable, voces vacilantes: el Arcipreste de Talavera”, el autor destaca con profundidad el texto en prosa más conocido dentro de la tradición misógina en castellano: el *Arcipreste de Tavalera* o *Corbacho*. Es este un texto ineludible de la disputa y que Archer analiza con profundidad en cuanto a su relación con la obra de Eiximenis, de Andrés de Luyeres, y al *Grisel y Mirabella* (con respecto a su *Demanda*). Asimismo, trata de la falta de unidad temática de las partes o secciones. Quisiera destacar su originalísima reflexión sobre la *Demanda* y su interrelación con el pasaje del *Grisel y Mirabella* de Juan de Flores (1495) en la que se presentan dos personajes contrapuestos, el misógino Torrellas y la doncella Brazaida. Al final de la novela, una serie de enfurecidas donas destrozan a este misógino Torrellas de manera muy parecida a como las damas de Martínez de modo que “el autor de la *Demanda* imita a Flores en la descripción irónica de este personaje en el que las mujeres utilizan los símbolos del decoro femenino y del virtuoso retiro del mundo —“las ruelas y las aspas”—para pegarle en la cabeza” (126). En el tercer capítulo, “Entre risas: *Lo somni* y el *Spill*”, Archer pasa a prestarle atención a dos textos de la tradición misógina catalana en los que destaca el arsenal argumentario de *Los sueños* de Bernat Metge en el que tanto Tirèsies en contra de las donas como Orfeu, su contrapartida caballeresca, discuten sobre la gula, pereza, vanidad, inconstancia, presunción, de las mismas (140-141). En el caso del *Spill* de Jaume Roig, texto magistralmente analizado en el libro citado de Michael Solomon y por Rosa María Cantavella, se destaca el anecdotario que sirve para trazar una biografía burlesca en la que los casos femeninos presentados sirven para denigrar a las donas en terrenos burlescos. Como resume Archer: “En ambos textos, las suposiciones habituales sobre las mujeres que los protagonistas llevan consigo en tanto que parte de su bagaje cultural común se imponen como verdades por medio del humorismo y de la risa, ya sea

como ideas admitidas a medias y a regañadientes (como en el caso de Bernat) o plenamente asumidas (como en el caso de Roig)” (176). El cuarto capítulo vuelve a ofrecer una visión panorámica de las defensas de las mujeres más importantes del XV. Titulado, “La defensa de las mujeres”, presenta una visión general de la problemática de la defensa desde sus antecedentes, y, sobre todo, a partir de los textos de Juan Rodríguez del Padrón (*Triunfo de las donas*), Álvaro de Luna (*Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres*), Diego de Valera (*Defensa de virtuosas mugeres*) y el mismo Torrellas en su *Razonamiento en deffension de las donas contra los maldicientes*. El quinto y el sexto capítulos se dedican al *Maldezir de mugeres* de Pere Torroella y "El legado del *Maldezir de Mugeres*", cuyas respuestas puede el curioso lector encontrar, casi al completo, en la antología de Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego [*Poesía femenina en los cancioneros*, Madrid, Castalia, 1989, sobre todo, pp. 135-208].

Es una monografía magnífica, que trata un número importante de textos y que, por momentos, vislumbra con sus indagaciones. Archer pretende ir más allá de la dicotomía entre ‘defensores’ y ‘maldicientes’, ofreciendo una aproximación más adecuada a la clave de la cuestión: la definición del término mujer que se puede colegir del estudio detallado del corpus textual. Ahora bien, debemos puntualizar que esta dicotomía la mantienen los propios textos de defensa en favor de las donas a partir de distintas imágenes. Mientras Álvaro de Luna corrige las opiniones inadecuadas del “pueblo movible” (que describe un movimiento paralelo al que desarrolla Prudence Allen), Diego de Valera se presenta como un “defensor” del honor de las donas y Juan Rodríguez del Padrón como un joven cortesano que es corregido en su opinión por una ninfa.

A partir de este excelente estudio se pueden ampliar varias vertientes de la diatriba misógina. En primer lugar, Archer no profundiza, en mi opinión, en el contexto ideológico de la disputa tal y como se desarrolla en la corte que enmarca la mayoría de los textos, la de Juan II de Castilla (1406-1454). Como hemos planteado en nuestra edición del *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres* de Álvaro de Luna (Madrid, Cátedra, 2009), en algunos estudios sueltos (“De cuervos y basiliscos: Alegoría y corte en el *Triunfo de las donas* de Juan Rodríguez del Padrón”, *RILCE*, 20, 2, 2006, pp. 259-73; “Propaganda y difamación: Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, el linaje de los Luna y el arzobispado de Toledo”, *Romance Philology*, 62, 2, 2008, pp. 27-47 y “Mecenazgo y representación: Álvaro de Luna en el *Libro de las virtuosas e*

claras mugeres, el castillo de Escalona y la catedral de Toledo” *Hispanic Review*, 80, 2, 2012, pp. 175-198) y, sobre todo, en una reciente monografía, “*De amor, de honor e de donas*”: *Mujer e ideales cortesés en la Castilla de Juan II (1406-1454)*. Madrid, Editorial Complutense, 2013, la corte de Juan II sirvió como un *locus* de aprendizaje de costumbres cortesés que cristalizaron en la producción de una serie de textos de carácter filógino y autocelebratorio o misógino y satírico en los que tanto la defensa como el ataque a la mujer indicaba e implicaba necesariamente una defensa o un ataque a los valores cortesanos y caballerescos que los produjeron. Lo que inserta ideológicamente esta concreta *querelle des femmes*. De igual modo, se podría profundizar en el análisis del armazón retórico que se esconde detrás de la disputa pues su estructura es la de un debate y tiene mucho de ello. Por ejemplo, parte del humorismo presente en los textos misóginos se puede explicar como un modo de atraer al oyente o lector mediante la ostentación del arte suasoria, del humor y, a veces, también de la grosería como indica Enzo Franchini que es común en los debates literarios en la Edad Media (Madrid, Arcadia de las letras, 2001, p. 13). Como discurso argumentativo, los textos de la querella desde la Antigüedad hasta el Renacimiento presentan un método común proveniente de la retórica clásica, lo que refuerza su origen universitario, su “cortesanía letrada”. Su *telos* o funcionalidad presenta una *argumentatio* que consta de una serie de *probationes* del *genus artificiale* (pruebas que se extraen del objeto de litigio mediante la reflexión) o del *genus inartificiale* (pruebas extratécnicas). En los casos del *artificiale* se establecen *argumenta* que, por un lado, intentan probar una verdad a partir de la *ratiocinatio*, el raciocinio por medio de la presentación de pruebas propias (*probatio* o *confirmatio*) y la refutación de las del contrario (*confutatio* o *reprehensio*). Se distinguen pruebas de hecho (*signa*), por inducción (*exempla*) y por deducción (*argumenta*). Para la refutación de signos valen principalmente las figuras de *inversio* et *absolutio*. Por lo general, el acto de *laudantur mulieres* se articula en torno a un encomio *laudantur generatim* y a otro *ex actis*, a partir de casos particulares. Indudablemente la discusión sobre la naturaleza de la mujer tuvo, bien en un primer plano narrativo, bien en su trasfondo filosófico, la estructura de un debate. Como tal se instruye sobre una *quaestio infinita* (θέσις) (bondad o maldad natural del género femenina) que tiene una naturaleza teórica sin circunstancias concretas en cuanto a persona, tiempo y lugar que podríamos ejemplificar en los argumentos que se desarrollan en la *Defensa de virtuosas mujeres* de

Valera, el *Libro de las virtuosas e claras mugeres* del de Luna o sobre una *quaestio finita* (ὑπόθεσις) que tiene una naturaleza práctica y sí contempla circunstancias concretas y que puede llegar a la consideración de una causa o un "caso" en su sentido legal como, por ejemplo, el juicio a la conducta de Mirabella en el *Grisel y Mirabella* o, siglos después, la discusión de sor Juana sobre sí misma con el Obispo de Puebla. De hecho, encontramos tres posibles tipos de oratoria que contempla el caso: judicial (como en el torrellismo), epidéictica (como se ha mantenido sobre el *Triunfo de las donas*), y deliberativa: "Haec habet partes tres: enumerationem, indignationem, conquestionem" (*De inventione* I. li. 98; vide *Ad Herennium*, II. xxix. 47. 26 *Institutio oratoria* III. v. 5-18) y se recomienda que se convierta en tesis. Este es *grosso modo* el mecanismo de defensa y de disputa, como vemos, mucho queda por explorar de este engranaje retórico.

Aunque todo eso será, sin duda, objeto de futuro estudio dentro de la querrela de las damas en su versión hispánica, sin lugar a dudas, todos los críticos que profundicen en estas cuestiones partirán del libro de Archer, hito crítico indiscutible en el tema.