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Genesis 31-34 as Spanish *Comedia*: Lope de Vega's *El robo de Dina*

Matthew D. Stroud

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Abstract Lope de Vega's *El robo de Dina*, based upon Genesis 31-34, focuses on the disturbing series of events involving Jacob's daughter, Dinah, and culminating in the mass slaughter of an entire enemy people who were doing their best to accommodate the demands of the Hebrews. The primary focus of this article is not the Biblical story itself, but rather the techniques that Lope used to adapt his source text for a *comedia* audience. From the amplification of the scope of the source text by the inclusion of the story of Laban and Jacob to the depiction of women as objects to be protected, sold, or stolen, this lesser-known play by Lope provides considerable insight into how seventeenth-century Spain viewed the Bible, the history of the Jewish people, the relationships between men and women, and even the *comedia* and Baroque ideals. A striking example of the conflictive nature of Baroque art, *comedia* dramaturgy, and the contradictions prevalent in seventeenth-century Spain, this play offers a mixture of unexpected differences: an act of sexual aggression and sympathy for the perpetrator, the history of the Hebrew people as seen through the poetic and theatrical conventions of the Spanish *comedia*, and simultaneous reverence for and condemnation of the Hebrew protagonists.

Keywords *Comedia* · Early Modern Spanish theater · Lope de Vega · Bible · Dinah · Genesis

The story of Dinah, as told in Genesis 34, is a tale of lust, dishonor, and revenge, plot elements common to many familiar, secular *comedias* (Primorac 1991 1992, 257). The Hivite Shechem sees Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, lies with her,

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and dishonors her. He truly loves her and asks his father, Hamor, to make things right by arranging a marriage. Jacob leaves the resolution of the problem to his sons, who are angry and aggrieved but consent to a marriage provided that Shechem and all the men of his tribe be circumcised. The Hivites agree, but while the men are still recovering from the procedure, Simeon and Levi come to Hamor's tribe and kill all the men, steal their animals and wealth, and enslave their women and children. Fearing retribution, Jacob and his tribe flee to Bethel. His sons receive no punishment for their dishonorable actions and Jacob himself is rewarded with a new name, Israel. This brief source narrative prompts more questions than are answered in the text itself. Dinah never utters a word, so exactly what was her role in the loss of her virginity? Why does Jacob allow his sons to intervene in what was a negotiation of marriage between fathers? Is the action of the sons in providing a false answer to Hamor, deceiving him and his entire tribe in order to slaughter innocent men, not also dishonorable? Why are all the Hivite men killed if only Shechem had dishonored Dinah? What moral lesson is to be gleaned from the fact that if one is a member of the chosen people one can exhibit "ruthless cruelty" (Robinson 1929, 241) and yet escape not only unpunished but endowed with yet another honor from God?

The purpose here is not to provide a Biblical exegesis of this story,¹ but rather to look at the way Lope retells it in *El robo de Dina*. This little-known play has many curious aspects: the event to which the title refers does not occur until the second half of Act 2; Siquén, the perpetrator of the crime against the unwilling Dina, is presented with significant and unaccustomed sympathy; and, like other plays that focus on stories from the Hebrew Bible, it reveres Jewish protagonists at the same time that it revels in the "mean and repulsive" aspects of the episode (Robinson 1929, 241) that also dovetail with the anti-Semitism of Lope's own culture. Since the original material provides considerably less detail and development than one might need for the construction of a full-length *comedia*, Lope must have viewed its brevity as an opportunity for him to add, create, and embellish² in order to set the Biblical incident within a much larger context that draws upon other Biblical stories, Renaissance imagery and mythological references, and conventions typical of the *comedia*. In many ways, the way in which Lope chooses to flesh out the story, and his possible reasons for choosing it as the subject of a play, are at least as interesting as the story itself.

The relation between Siquén and Dina is embedded in the much richer and better-known story of her father, Jacob, who both opens and closes the play and gives the

¹ Although it lies outside the scope of this study, such an exegesis would reveal that there are clearly two source texts, which are probably "two independent narratives, neither belonging to the main line of one of the great traditions, but emanating from the same general circles as J and E" (Robinson 1929, 241). Among the obvious differences are the specification of circumcision as a condition for Dinah's marriage (in I but not II); what happens to Dinah after the seduction (in I she returns to Jacob; in II she is kept in the city until her brothers come for her); and whether the sons as a group (in I) or Simeon and Levi alone (in II) carry out the slaughter. Glaser's study of this play provides considerably more attention to the origins of the Biblical text itself and its interpretation by the early Church Fathers (1964, 317, 319, 320, 325).

² Primorac (1991, 1992, 257–258). Citing Peribáñez, *El caballero de Olmedo*, and *Fuenteovejuna*, Aaron (1977, 12) notes Lope's ability to "structure some of his best plays" on "such meager foundation" as "a scrap of popular poetry or several lines from a medieval chronicle."

work its overall trajectory. The “escenas preliminares,” as Menéndez Pelayo called them (1963, 269), which occupy roughly half the play, serve multiple functions. If one wanted to present a character who embodies the Jewish people as a whole in historical, religious, and cultural senses, it would be difficult to find a more appropriate figure than Jacob. He is not just one of many patriarchs, he *is* Israel as his name is changed after his successful struggle with an angel of God. As examples of both great faith and considerable mischief and deceit, Jacob and his sons represent both the model of the servant of God as well as the untrustworthy, troublesome stereotype ascribed to Jews in Golden Age Spain.

The play opens *in medias res*, as both Jacob’s father-in-law, Labán, and his brother, Esaú, level charges of prior wrongdoing at Jacob and seek revenge, echoing the recurring themes of the source narrative. Jacob has parted ways with his father-in-law and taken off with Lía and Raquel, their children, and a great deal of property. Labán, who is also Jacob’s uncle, is duly outraged: “Hoy verá el cielo y la tierra/la venganza de Labán” (7a). In the eyes of Labán and Assur, the treacherous, deceitful Jacob is a man of “sangre vil” and “[g]randes engaños” (7b) whose blood they hope to shed (7b 8a). Appearing to be most upset over the loss of his household gods, Labán wrongly accuses Jacob of stealing them.³ In contrast to the Bible’s mere mention that Rachel took them (New English Bible, Gen. 31: 19, 34), Lope increases her responsibility for prolonging the conflict within the family by hiding them from both her father and her husband (10a). Raquel is actually quite proud of her cunning when she notes, “es sutil la mujer” and “es fácil engañar/un hombre de enojo ciego” (11b).

Despite these earlier actions that caused such anger and condemnation, Jacob is for the most part described in this opening confrontation in terms of his admirable qualities; the audience is reminded, the first of many times during the play, that he served Labán for 20 years, fourteen of which were spent in order for Jacob to be able to marry Raquel, the object of his love (11a).⁴ Despite the intense love he felt for Raquel at first sight, he did not force himself upon her, but rather submitted himself to the will of her father to an extraordinary degree. When an angel appears to Labán, reveals the special favor Jacob has in the eyes of God, and more pointedly, threatens to slit Labán’s throat (9a), the old man makes peace with Jacob and returns to his own land (11a 12a). Barely has Labán left the scene, however, than Jacob is confronted by an army in the service of Esaú, who is still furious for Jacob’s having stolen his birthright and his father’s blessing. Jacob admits the deception, but he

³ Bato, the *gracioso*, provides additional motive for the theft of these valuable statues by noting that they are made of gold (10b). There is more than a little irony in Labán’s accusation, since he essentially stole from his son in law by removing the spotted goats and black sheep which they had agreed would be Jacob’s (Gen. 29:23 26; 30:32 36), an incident that occurred before the events of this play but with which Lope must have assumed that his audience was familiar.

⁴ Aaron (1977, 12–14) presents a convincing argument that Lope drew his inspiration for viewing Jacob as an admirable model of restraint from a sonnet by Camões, “Sete anos de pastor Jacob servia.” For Glaser (1964, 317), Lope has intentionally transformed the “arch rogue” Jacob “into a simple, upright shepherd,” but his assertion that Jacob is “an unspoiled rustic, persecuted by haughty enemies” seems overbroad. The patriarch’s less than honorable dealings with both his brother and his father in law inform the opening hostilities, and Lope could most certainly have counted on his audience to recall Jacob’s more questionable qualities.

hopes that time has calmed his brother's ire, so, in a foreshadowing of their importance to the resolution of the play, he sends his sons to talk to Esaú to defuse the situation. While he waits for word from his brother, he has the famous encounter in which he wrestles with the angel that confirms his privileged place in the sight of God and confers upon him his new name, Israel (13b). Esaú arrives, but the threatened conflict does not materialize. Jacob shows sufficient deference to his older brother, who pardons him and receives him in a loving embrace (14a–15a).

This opening sequence lays the groundwork for three general aspects of the play.⁵ The first is Jacob's relation to God, who, as portrayed throughout these episodes, is at once violent and vengeful, erratic and irrational, and changeable in his moods and attitudes toward the Israelites. He is definitely not fair or impartial, and appears ready to move past one unfortunate episode after another in order to bestow (or restore) blessings upon his favorite, Jacob, and his descendants. By means of a rhetorical question posed to Lía, the *gracioso* Bato may imply that God neither punishes the innocent nor exonerates the guilty (10b) but, in effect, both of those unjust occurrences come to pass in this play. Despite the cunning and deception shown by Jacob in many aspects of his life, and his acquiescence in the innocent deaths brought on by the trickery of his sons, his successful struggle with the angel, his new name, and the fact that he has looked upon the face of God and prevailed demonstrate that he is a man of courage to whom God shows exceptional favor, a man of courage (“Valor tienes, y valor/de varón,” 13b) who is so forceful and demanding of his God that he should be even stronger against other men. Jacob is far from being just another shepherd; no matter what he does, God is always ready to reward him and threaten or punish those who would oppose him. A significant part of his special status is based upon Jacob's devotion to one God in an age of polytheism. The various modifiers of “God” — “su Dios” (9a), “mis dioses” (9b), “Dios de Abraham” (11a) — along with the mention of Labán's household gods, clearly indicate the existence of multiple deities. Like Spain itself in an era of reformation, Jacob considers himself to be the defender of the true faith. In Jacob, then, Lope found an appropriate protagonist in whom to combine the model of religious piety and the stereotype of the problematic Jew.

The second function of this backstory is to recast the straightforward, prosaic, Biblical narrative as poetic, Baroque drama. Anticipating the promised land of milk and honey (Exodus 3:8), Lope places the action more firmly within the verdant perfection, the “patriarcal idilio” (Menéndez Pelayo 1963, 269), of Renaissance Europe than in the arid reality of Palestine; the “verde prado” (9b) and “sitio tan delicioso” (30a) are nourished by gentle, cooling waters: “perlas deste arroyo manso/con que mitiga el calor” (8a).⁶ Moreover, he describes events with evocative

⁵ In addition, Glaser (1964) views this backstory involving Jacob's dealings with both Labán and Esaú as integral to an overall dramatic narrative of the powerful versus the weak and the rich versus the poor.

⁶ Aaron's central thesis (1977, 15–47) is that the play is structured as a *serranilla* or *pastourelle*, and cites Menéndez Pidal's summary of the main elements of the genre (1946, 226), which include a nobleman, a verdant springtime setting, a shepherdess, love at first sight, doubt on the part of the young woman that a man of such rank could really fall in love with a woman as lowly as she, the insistence of the gentleman, and the violent reaction by her father or brothers, all of which are, indeed, present in this play.

poetry typical of the Spanish Baroque: something as simple as “before nightfall” becomes “primero que raye el horizonte/de oro y púrpura el sol” (12a); a touching kiss of his grandson by Labán takes on the imagery more associated with amorous poetry: “que lleguen estos labios a besaros;/que vuestro abuelo a marchitar se atreve/las rosas de los vuestros en su nieve” (12a); and Jacob welcomes the angel as one greets the sun: “ya coronado de oro/abre al Oriente las puertas./el que agradece a tus manos/los rayos de tu belleza” (14a). Finally, Lope, in keeping with the artistic ideals of the Renaissance, embellishes his work with references to Greek and Roman mythology, references uttered by the Israelites themselves that seem wholly inappropriate in light of the Biblical setting of the source text but that are part and parcel of *comedia* stagecraft. Assur likens Labán’s woes to the “peligros de Scila” (7b), Leazar compares Esau’s horse to “Pegaso” (12b); and Jacob refers to the sun as “coronado Apolo” (36b).

The third purpose of this extensive back story is to establish parallels throughout the play among characters and to endow them with characteristics typical of protagonists in the *comedia*. The positions in which Jacob finds himself allow us to compare and contrast his actions with those of Siquén, Labán, and Jacob’s own sons. Both Jacob and Siquén are presented as princes,⁷ variously characterized as dignified, respected, rational, benevolent, and generous, that is, as archetypes of “the generally admired ideal Renaissance gentleman” (Aaron 1977, 48). Even Dina herself remarks on the generosity and kindness, the *amor* (19b), with which Jacob and his tribe have been received by their hosts. Both men are clearly susceptible to love at first sight. When Siquén first lays eyes on Dina’s beauty near the end of the first act, his reaction, far from being that of a rapist, is no different from that of a typical passionate, impetuous *galán* in such a situation (Menéndez Pelayo 1963, 270; Stanger 1970, 195), or indeed, from that of Jacob when he first saw Raquel: “¡Cielos! Desde que mis ojos/vieron luz, decir no pueden/que tal belleza miraron” (22a).⁸ Siquén’s statement at the end of Act 1, “me llevan unos ojos,/sin querer” (22a) indicates his inability to control his passion for a beautiful woman. Although they choose different courses of action, it is clear that Siquén, like the younger Jacob, is willing to go to extraordinary lengths to obtain the object of his desire.

The scene that provides Siquén the opportunity to pursue his interest in Dina, and one of the most interesting scenes in the play, does not appear in the Bible but is wholly invented by Lope. Act 2 opens with a celebration to worship Astarte, a scene that underscores the divisions between the two tribes and begins to flesh out the character of Dina by providing a motivation for her to “visit the women of the country” (Gen. 34:1), an act that risks the honor of her family. The Hivites that so fascinate Dina are descendants of Abraham through Noah, just as are Jacob and his

⁷ Only Siquén is specifically referred to as “príncipe” in the play, but the tradition of Jacob as a “prince of God” is shown in the King James translation of Genesis 32:28: “as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” Glaser notes that Hamor “was not an absolute ruler” (1964, 323n), implying that both he and his son (and probably Jacob as well) were more like tribal leaders than royal princes as we think of the term today.

⁸ Primorac (1991 1992, 258 262) investigates the theme of beauty as a divine endowment, a provocation to love, an impediment to rational thought, a force that weakens masculine strength, and a marker of essential nobility and integrity.

family,⁹ but here they are described not only as pagans but, curiously, as being somehow Greek. The identification of the Hivites with the gentiles is made clear by two forms of the word *gentil* in the first 30 lines of the scene as well as references to the “dórica labor” of their art and, somewhat surprisingly, the river Hydaspes, the site of Alexander the Great’s successful battle against the Punjabi king Porus (22b). The Israelites observe this “[n]otable fiesta” in amazement and awe at the fine buildings they see: the marble, the capitals, the sculptures (22b). The festival itself is remarkable for its fusion of familiarity and otherness. Astarte is conflated with Venus (“madre del niño Amor,” 24b), and the merriment includes elements more familiar to Lope’s audiences, including a “*baile de gitanas*” (23b) as well as the inclusion of a song, “En las mañanicas,” “que parece arrancado de algún primitivo romancero” (Stanger 1970, 199). The simple, honest wholesomeness of pastoral life contrasts with the opulence and decadence of the Hivites and their “engañados errores” (23a) as the Israelites are clearly cast in a role familiar to *comedia* audiences, that of country folk in the unfamiliar surroundings of city life characterized by corruption and temptation.¹⁰

To appeal even more to a *comedia* audience, Lope has Dina appear at this festival secretly and in disguise, a common scenario in which a female character appears in public without the protection, or even the permission, of the male members of her family (cf., for example, Ángela’s foray into the public square at the beginning of Calderón’s *La dama duende*, 100–12). Just as Siquén responds to a woman’s beauty in a way similar to that of both the Biblical Jacob and a typical *galán*, Dina, too, has much in common with other women both in the Bible and in the *comedia*—she is a young, curious, willful, imprudent, somewhat manipulative, and extraordinarily beautiful¹¹ woman with typically superficial interests (Glaser 1964, 321, 327). Dina’s conflicted reactions to the festival foreshadow her mixed messages to Siquén. Both she and her servant Zelfa¹² dismiss the revelry as “disparates” and “errores” (24b) at the same time that they admire the beauty and finery of the women. Dina specifically contrasts Zelfa’s description of the Hivite women as

⁹ The Israelites are descendants of Noah through Shem and Elam, while the Hivites trace their ancestry through Ham and Canaan (1 Chronicles 1: 8–34). As is also the case with Christians, Jews, and Muslims, faiths born of the same Abrahamic ancestry but with relations fraught with mistrust, even demonization, the two tribes of the play are rather closely related but are subject to perceptions based upon the narcissism of minor differences (Freud 1961, 61).

¹⁰ 23a. The theme of *menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea* is evident when Dina relates to Jacob what has happened and she compares her brothers to Siquén: “profesan/más que la espada el cayado, más que la corte la aldea” (39a). Of course, the usual associations of these two distinct cultures take on different meanings in this context, because the simple, common, faithful rustics in the *comedia* are usually depicted as *cristianos viejos*, while the seductive, sinful city dwellers are more likely to be suspected of having Jewish ancestry (Aaron 1977, 68–69n, citing Castro 1976). The enormous irony here, of course, as is the case in many supersessionist plays, lies in the identification of the Spaniards (“us”) with the Biblical Hebrews, and, the identification of seventeenth century Jews (“them”) with the gentiles (Stroud 2009, 44, 46; Stroud 2010, 89).

¹¹ In addition to Siquén, those who note Dina’s beauty as one of her outstanding qualities include her uncle Esaú (15a), her brother Leví (17a), the *gracioso* Bato (19a), and the shepherd Leazar (19b).

¹² Although one assumes that Zelfa is the Biblical Zilpah, one of Leah’s handmaids who will become one of Jacob’s four wives, in this play she only serves as an object of desire for the *gracioso*, and thus mirrors the position of Dina in her unhappy pursuit by Siquén.

“damas de ciudad” (23b) with herself and her family (“no soy dama;/mi padre y hermanos son/pastores,” 24a), but, practically in the same breath, she wishes she could join them in dancing (23b). Dina’s actions mirror those of her step-mother, Raquel, both of whom cause men to fall madly in love with them (24a), are the cause of hardship and conflict, and actively contribute to the difficulties that men must later resolve with blood (Primorac 1991 1992, 261). Just as Labán’s ire would not have been so great without Raquel’s capricious theft of his household gods, Jacob’s family honor would not have been placed at risk if Dina had not appeared at this festival of Astarte without permission or male accompaniment. Dina’s actions provide both an opportunity for cultural commentary as well as a confirmation of Bato’s earlier pun that Dina is unworthy of her name (“serás Dina en ser mujer,/más serás de Dina indina,” 10b). Siquén sees Dina and offers to accompany her home (26a), but Dina, who is afraid to reveal her identity, rejects his proposition, asks him to leave her alone, and finally tells him that her honor will not allow her either to accept his offer or to reveal her identity. He, as a determined *galán*, is unable to let the matter drop. Lamenting the immense suffering that this sudden infatuation has caused in him, he explains that he has wanted her from the first moment he saw her (26a b). Despite her reluctance, and without knowing anything about her, he asks her to marry him (26b). Dina appreciates his offer she knows of his rank and nobility but again she rebuffs him because to accept would be to court dishonor (27a). She refers twice to his being *gentil* (26b, 27b), thus bringing into play the two meanings of *gentile* and *courteous*.¹³ So deep is his love for her that Siquén is even ready to abandon his gods and accept hers:

Jacob no ha venido aquí
para amistad de los dos,
sino a darme un Dios en vos
viendo que no hay Dios en mí. (27b)¹⁴

The intransigence of the *ingrata*, however, causes his love to turn quickly to anger. Despite the warnings of Alfeo, he conceives a plan to take her by force (28b 29a).

Lope makes it clear that, in this play, problems associated with love are caused by women. In the subplot involving the *gracioso*’s lack of success with Zelfa, Bato brings together a number of familiar associations with love: pleasure, hope, loss, promise, madness, beauty, fear, and unhappiness (29a). A comic scene in which Bato compares all women to snakes (29b-31a) would seem to serve three purposes: to advance the conventional theme of women as the cause of all the problems of men, to call to mind the fall of Adam due to Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden, and to provide some familiar comic relief for the audience that expects such nonsense from the *gracioso*. Just as Bato blames Zelfa for his misery, so too is Dina

¹³ For Aaron (1977), this play on the word *gentil* lies at the heart of Siquén’s failure to marry Dina and join Jacob’s tribe: “the offender, although of ‘genteel’ birth, was one of lesser religious status than they, a ‘gentile’” (50).

¹⁴ Focusing on these verses, which anticipate Lope’s more famous formulation in *El castigo sin venganza* (“sin mí, sin vos y sin Dios,” 1917), Glaser (1964, 327–328) believes Siquén’s most serious flaw lies not in his impetuous actions motivated by love but in his adoration of her as an object of religious devotion, especially in combination with the mortal sins of pride and lust.

shown to bear some responsibility for Siquén's similar plight. She tries to have it both ways. Swept up in the seductive culture and its elegant dress and gay social life, Dina wants to imitate the heathen women while staying true to her faith, her obligations, and the honor of her family, but her actions have set into motion consequences that she cannot control as Siquén repeats his intention to have her: "amor no teme la muerte;/robarte y gozarte intento" (32b).

The actual rape of Dina takes place off stage, during which time the action shifts to the bucolic pursuits of Jacob and his sons, allowing the patriarch another opportunity to repeat his story of having to marry Lía and toil for years before he could marry Raquel (33b 34a), a clear contrast to Siquén's unwillingness to postpone his gratification. With supreme theatrical irony, in which the audience knows more about what is going on than he does, Jacob says that everything seems to be going well for him and his family in this new land (34a). When we again see Dina and Siquén, the damage has been done: Dina rages at the dishonor that Siquén has brought upon her (34b 35b). While the *comedia* is full of instances of noblemen who exercise their rights to enjoy the women in their realms, the only times that this scenario appears to be a problem is when the prince fails to follow through and marry the young woman, as is the case in plays such as *Fuenteovejuna* and *El burlador de Sevilla*. Siquén, however, is no Don Juan who seduces women and then leaves them dishonored. Although he still blames her beauty for his inability to resist, he tries to console her with the honor that he can bestow upon her because he is a prince. Foreshadowing what is to come, he stands by his actions even if they should cause his death, and repeats his offer to marry Dina (34b). Despite this clear way out of a difficult situation, one that in many other plays might be considered to provide for a happy ending, Dina again rejects his offer. In her mind, he has no honor, no nobility to offer her; what he has done to her is nothing less than a "vicio bárbaro" (35a)¹⁵ that, despite his offer of marriage, has brought dishonor upon her entire family.¹⁶ In his own mind, Siquén considers the two already married, and he seems genuinely bewildered by Dina's hostility: why would she pursue revenge and cause untold strife between their two peoples if he, although after the fact, is willing to do whatever it takes to make things right by marrying her (35a b)?¹⁷ As Dina exits, Alfeo, foreseeing that she will denounce him to her father and brothers, notes that he has never seen a love consummated that did not bring with it "arrepentimiento y pena" (36a).

Dina returns home to inform Jacob; the man who was once the one who provoked desires for revenge in others (Labán, Esaú) must now assume the role of the father

¹⁵ Glaser discusses the use of "bárbaro" in other *comedias*, concluding that the term is reserved for "a man who, by giving into lust, places himself beyond the pale of civilized society" (1964, 329).

¹⁶ Primorac (1991 1992, 263) likens Dina's arguments to those of an attorney who systematically counters each of Siquén's reasons for them to marry. Glaser also notes the "air of litigation" present in Dina's retort (1964, 330).

¹⁷ Glaser (1964) believes that this scene represents the moral axis of the play, that of the powerful prince assuming that the poor country girl will automatically want to marry him in order to make things right (331). Moreover, Glaser finds Siquén's position to be that of "a schemer plotting to turn a major crime into a misdemeanor" (328). Primorac (1991 1992, 264) is more in agreement with the view expressed here, that Lope's perpetrator is intended to appear much more sympathetic to the audience than the Comendadores in *Fuenteovejuna* or *Peribáñez y el Comendador de Ocaña*.

who has to deal with the consequences of another, younger man's actions. Her initial statement, "Llegó ya/la infamia y la muerte mía" (37b), coupled with the sight of the emotional and physical state of his daughter, prompts a spate of fatherly questions densely packed with words of grief and foreboding: *triste, pena, ultraje, dolor, afrenta, graves, llanto, maltrada* (37b). Despite simultaneously dealing with the trauma of having been the victim of sexual violence and confronting the problem that her situation causes for her father and her family, Dina admits that she is at least partially to blame ("soy hija tuya,/aunque causa de tu ofensa./Mi culpa es grave..." 38a), but she insists that her actions never crossed into impropriety. Omitting her presence at the party, her interaction with Siquén, his declaration of love for her and his offer of marriage, she alleges that the prince, competely unbidden, acting in a manner that belied his nobility, and cloaking his treachery with love (38b), forcibly removed her to his palace. She struggled, but, as a woman, she was no match for his superior physical force. Overcome with grief and shame after he had raped her, she even tried to kill herself with her bare hands. Contrasting Siquén's barbaric actions with Jacob's own patience with Raquel, she places the revenge for her dishonor in her father's hands: "tu honor y mi afrenta venga" (39a).

Jacob is distraught at the news, but he agrees with her that she is not completely innocent. At the very least, she should not have gone out without a male escort¹⁸; the burden, he says, is greater on women who tempt men to do evil things they know to be wrong because men are unable to resist. Jacob does not excuse Siquén's actions, but he appears to empathize, or at least sympathize, with the young prince because he understands the power that love holds over a young man:

No disculpo al agresor
de aqueste infame delito;
pero en parte lo permito
que ponga la culpa amor. (39b)¹⁹

Jacob's hesitancy to see Dina as the completely innocent victim and Siquén as a purely evil perpetrator who must be dealt with quickly and severely leaves Dina dumbfounded: how could a man who was willing to wait so many years to be with the woman he loved excuse this man who took what he wanted after only an hour (40a)? Her anger even prompts her to challenge his honor and his manhood: if he will not avenge her dishonor, her brothers will, she cries before she storms out (40a), leaving Jacob to ponder what he should do in this complicated scenario of love and honor.

Siquén, meanwhile, proceeds with his plan to marry Dina, and discusses the matter with his father. Emor had hoped to make a better match for his son than this newly arrived daughter of a shepherd, but for Siquén, it was divine providence that

¹⁸ Glaser (1964, 324–325) lays out the medieval and early modern condemnation of Dinah's errors in judgment, citing from Saint Isidore of Seville, Cornelius van den Steen, and Fray Juan de Dueñas. Glaser finds Dinah to be both a sympathetic female character (325) and "as guilty of coquetry as she is of imprudence" (326). Cf. Primorac 1991–1992, 261.

¹⁹ Primorac (1991–1992, 264–265) notes that of the fourteen *redondillas* that comprise Jacob's response to Dina (39a–b), only two deal with the dishonor to the family, while the other twelve lay out the culpability of his imprudent daughter and his sympathy for Siquén.

brought Dina to them. He truly loves her, and he would prefer to marry her than another woman who comes with all the riches of Egypt (41b). Emor gives in and meets with Jacob, who is disposed to accept the marriage. As Primorac implies (1991 1992, 258–259), it seems quite possible that if Siquén had come to Jacob first to ask for Dina's hand in marriage, as Jacob did to Labán, Jacob might very well have accepted and the union would have been considered a good marriage for the Israelites. Jacob tells Emor that he will not make any arrangements for Dina to marry Siquén without first consulting with his sons (42b), who, we remember from their overheated rhetoric during the initial conflict with Labán, are quick to seek revenge rather than to forgive or find another way out of an impasse (“vuestros hijos mayores/de humor sangriento bañarán las flores,” 9b).²⁰ Their sister, Jacob tells them, left the camp to attend the pagan festival in secret and in disguise. Like all women, he tells them, Dina needs looking after by men. Siquén saw her and, with “el ánimo turbado/de la apariencia del placer” (43b), was immediately captivated by her beauty. Dina resisted, cried, sighed, and did all she could to avoid his advances, but Siquén forced himself upon her. The good news, according to Jacob, is that Siquén really does love her and wants to marry her, “con que en efeto satisfecho quedo” (43b). In most *comedias*, the father's satisfaction with the marriage plans would be the end of the matter, but the Bible doesn't allow for that easy resolution.

Jacob is clearly more thoughtful and rational than his sons; for him, revenge is barbaric if there is another way to solve the crisis. In a curious turn of events, Leví asks Jacob to leave his sons alone so that they may discuss the situation among themselves. It is most unusual for an able-bodied father in a *comedia* not only to delegate his responsibility for his daughter's honor to others but to absent himself during the discussion of what to do, yet Jacob agrees, as long as the course of action they choose is “pacífico y conveniente” (44a). The brothers' discussion reveals a great deal about their views of honor and marriage. Dina may believe that her views on the subject should be paramount, but her brothers hold decidedly more conservative views of a woman's role in marriage. In a pointed demonstration of the value of a woman, Dina, whose mistreatment prompted this entire event, is completely absent from the discussion; for Leví, the purpose of marriage is not the joining of two people in love, but the profit and honor to be gained by the family: “¿Qué provecho/se sigue, decidme todos,/de este infame casamiento?” (44b). In the matter of her marriage, Dina is, quite literally, the very definition of the woman as zero-symbol (Lacan 1977, 68); just as Leah could be substituted for Rachel at Jacob's first marriage, Dina is a token of symbolic exchange between men, a placeholder who possesses no content of her own. Her brothers decide to take revenge, but rather than confronting Siquén openly, they devise a plan that is to be kept secret even from their father (44b).

Just as Jacob deceived Isaac, Esau, and Laban, his sons too will show themselves to be cunning and deceitful. Faithful to the Biblical narrative, Leví tells Siquén that they will agree to the marriage on the condition that Siquén and all the men of his

²⁰ Glaser (1964, 333n), citing Gordon (1935), notes the role of the brothers in ancient Near East culture in negotiating the terms of a sister's marriage.

tribe submit to circumcision.²¹ When Alfeo, who throughout the play acts as the voice of reason, wonders what the other men of the tribe will get in return for being circumcised, Siquén replies that he will reward them and exempt them from paying taxes (46a). The Hivite men agree with Siquén's request,²² but just as Siquén believes that everything will be resolved to his satisfaction, he sees a shade dressed in black, clearly foreshadowing death (47a). He is troubled by a fear that all might not turn out as well as expected, that is, he rightly suspects that the Israelites will not keep their word. Dina, meanwhile, is not consoled by the thought of marriage; she will only be satisfied by revenge (47a b).²³ She still sees herself as the completely innocent victim here, despite what her father told her earlier, and despite Zelfa's words of consolation that her marriage to Siquén would erase all stain of dishonor. She hates her intended husband and what he has done to her (48a). While the Hivite men suffer in pain, Jacob's sons, far from joining with them into one, stronger tribe, kill them where they lie, then go on to kill Siquén, slaughter all the livestock, destroy all the houses and estates, and take the women and children as slaves (48b–49a).

The cruelty shown by Dina's brothers shocks the conscience even of other Israelites: Zelfa describes the actions of the brothers as "injusta venganza" (48b), and Jacob is horrified by the lack of respect his sons have shown him: "¿pues esta barba cana/no repetáis?" (49a). Perhaps just as important, at least in the context of this play, is the fact that the central symbolic sign of the covenant between God and his people, and in Lope's Spain the sign of one's adherence to Judaism, is here debased by deception and cruelty and turned into an "excesivo y cruel castigo" (Primorac 1991 1992, 266), a way to weaken, cause pain, and even humiliate the Hivites in preparation for their slaughter by the Israelites. Moreover, while considerable medieval commentary debated the possible justification for the extermination of Shechem, Lope appears to agree with those, like Nachmanides (Fields 1990, 89), who see the slaughter as an overreaction by Simeón and Leví, thus providing sufficient evidence for those in the audience who wish to see Jewish treachery in this play.

Dishonored and humiliated by the "[a]trevimiento extraño" (49a) perpetrated on the unfortunate victims by his ferocious and blood-thirsty sons, Jacob blames Dina for this tragedy: "¡Ah, Dina, sola tú, sola homicida/de toda una ciudad!" (49a). Convinced that the Israelites will be pursued by other tribes and destroyed (49b), he gathers his tribe together and flees. Despite the tragic consequences of the actions of the troublesome, deceitful, and dishonorable Israelites, an angel again appears in the

²¹ In the ancient Near East the rite often had more cultural than religious significance. Most tribes in ancient Canaan practiced circumcision; the Hivites were unusual in remaining uncircumcised (Lewis and Armerding 1979, 700). In the context of this play, the practice is related more to the law, "la mejor del suelo" (45b), than to religion; for the Israelites, of course, law and faith were intricately bound together.

²² For Primorac (1991 1992, 265–66), the fact that the Hivite men would unanimously consent to circumcision just because their prince asked them to is an indication of their love and respect for him, as well as another sign of Siquén's admirable qualities.

²³ Primorac (1991 1992, 266) calls Dina "obsesionada," but it is possible that this insistence on revenge was the only way that Lope could make the Biblical outcome sensible in a *comedia* context. Since the Bible did not allow for a marriage or a peaceful resolution of the dispute, Lope had to create some kind of internal motivation on the part of his characters that would lead to the same outcome.

last scene to rescue Jacob; he commands him to go to Bethel and construct an altar to God (50a). Rubén offers a brief apology for not having relied on God to take his revenge in this matter (49b), but in essence none of the Israelites is held accountable in any way for his or her own actions, a fact made even clearer by the rapidity with which Jacob shifts from the realization of the horror committed by his sons to his faith that he is doing God's work (50b) as the tribe moves on.

As one sees in other *comedias* based upon episodes from the Hebrew Bible, *El robo de Dina* recontextualizes the basic plot elements with other goals in mind. This is not a sermon, of course, but a play, and Lope made every effort to please his audience by recasting the Biblical events in ways that were familiar to the seventeenth-century Spanish theater-going public. Siquén is transformed into an impetuous *galán*, and Dina becomes a capricious and troublemaking *dama*. Jacob, who is by no means an unalloyed symbol of virtue, waffles when confronted with the responsibility of restoring his family's honor. His sons simultaneously assume the roles of the impetuous, aggrieved parties spurred on by a desire for revenge and contemporary anti-Semitic stereotypes: they are devious, deceitful, cunning, and cruel. Lope skillfully combines elements drawn directly from the Biblical narrative with themes, characters, and techniques that are part and parcel of Lope's *comedia* stagecraft: the treatment of women as objects to be taken or protected; transgressions that provoke angry and violence reactions; the vast difference between the expected behavior of a *galán* and that of a father; the inclusion of a subplot involving a *gracioso* and copious amounts of back story that provide additional information that also parallels the actions of the protagonists; the (usually unfortunate) consequences of deception regardless of the perpetrator; and the sheen of Renaissance references to Greco-Roman mythology and culture and Baroque flights of poetry. It was always a challenge for Spain to adopt the mantle of *verissima Israel* while simultaneously condemning the descendants of Israel, the Jews it felt compelled to expel in 1492. In this play, Lope attempts to thread the needle as he presents Jacob as a flawed model of moral behavior while at the same time revealing in his children a pattern of contemptible behavior central to the anti-Semitic bias that suffused early modern Spanish culture. That Lope should choose to construct a *comedia* around this particular incident, especially since it involves a Biblical heroine of such marginal importance,²⁴ might be further evidence of yet another Christian attempt to take certain aspects of Jewish culture and religion and turn them around to use as proof that the Jews are everything the Christians in early modern Spain thought them to be. At the same time, as far as one can tell from this episode, there is no atrocity that will condemn one if one acts in the name of God, a philosophy not so different from that of imperial Spain as it sought to defend Roman Catholicism in Europe and bring Christianity by force to both Muslims in Africa and the indigenous peoples of the Americas. In its role as defender of the true faith, Spain relied upon a belief in the promise that God definitely takes sides to benefit his favorites and that the empire had supplanted the descendants of Jacob as the Chosen People of a God who would favor Spain in its imperial and Catholic endeavors, punish all those who stood in

²⁴ Primorac (1991 1992, 257). Glaser (1964, 315) also remarks on the odd choice to focus on Dinah rather than the more "obvious choice" of Rachel.

opposition, and excuse any excesses Spain committed as it carried out its political and religious project of global hegemony.

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