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THE COMEDIA AS POTBOILER: JUAN DE CABEZA'S MATAR POR ZELOS SU DAMA

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OF THE HUNDREDS of existing *comedias*, only a very small percentage has actually received critical attention. Those few that have been studied in greatest depth, such as *La vida es sueño*, *El burlador de Sevilla*, *Fuenteovejuna*, and the like, might be said to represent the most interesting, if not the best, plays in the entire body of *comedias*.¹ Nevertheless, for every famous *comedia*, there are literally scores of lesser known and never read plays. Perhaps their lack of attention is mute testimony to their mediocrity, but they are nonetheless *comedias* and are of critical interest for two reasons. First, they are artistic creations and, as such, deserve to be studied on philosophical grounds as much as any other creation. Second, they are *comedias*, and any sweeping generalization about the nature of the *comedia* should apply to them as well as to any others.

The idea of the *comedia* as potboiler is not new. Sturgis E. Leavitt made the connection many years ago.² Of primary interest in this study, however, is the fact that mediocre *comedias* make up the vast majority of Golden Age Spanish drama, and that they perhaps are closer to a norm for the genre than are the few "star" plays so often cited. Implicit in the very nature of these inferior plays is the use of tried and true formulas sure to please an audience and therefore to make money for the playwright. While such an assertion veers perilously close to the "intentional fallacy,"³ it seems that in this case it is reasonable to assume plays written for the popular stage to make money for the author had to conform to some standards of entertainment acceptable to the *autor* and to the paying audience. Authors are not rewarded by the purchase of tickets for plays that are dull, uninteresting, or unacceptable within the genre involved. Thus, in popu-

lar theater there is a standardization of dramatic formula whether we are speaking of modern American musical comedies or of seventeenth-century Spanish popular drama.

Let us consider, then, the poetic and dramatic structure of one such potboiler, Juan de Cabeza's *Matar por zelos su dama*. For all practical purposes, Juan de Cabeza is himself a forgotten author. In the past fifty years, his name has headed no subdivision of the *MLA Annual Bibliography*. The great Espasa-Calpe *Enciclopedia ilustrada* refers to him only in one brief paragraph stating that almost nothing is known of him.⁴ La Barrera mentions that he was an Aragonese author of limited talent,⁵ and Nicolás Antonio mentions him not at all.⁶ Yet, Cabeza wrote more plays than Racine, and published an entire volume of his twelve plays in 1662.⁷ The index reveals the following plays: *El pretensor de su madre*, *Matar por zelos su dama*, *Los empeños que hace Amor*, *También hay sin amor zelos*, *Engañar para casarse*, *Morir a un tiempo, y vivir*, *La reyna más desdichada y parto de las montañas*, *El galán bobo*, *Galán y esclavo uno mismo*, *Querer por hazer querer*, *No hay castigo contra Amor*, and *Los príncipes de Terolia*. These titles are in no way dissimilar to those of much more famous plays. There is a predilection for works involving love and jealousy, and for plays that revolve around a central irony.

Matar por zelos su dama demonstrates Cabeza's limited dramatic skills. Poetically, the drama is strictly second-rate. The passages of poetry are few and not well integrated into the body of the play. The two images that dominate in the lyrical passages are "cristal" and "plata." "Cristal" is used in connection with water (1a-b, 14a, 25a)⁸ and with a sword (20a). "Plata" is used to represent water (1a, 2b, 14a), the stars in the sky (15b) and snow (27a). Most

of the poetry concerns descriptions of nature, especially sunrise, day, and night, based on tired expressions such as "dorar" to describe the effect of the sun (15b, 27a). Nowhere does Cabeza's poetry reveal any freshness or even great wit, although in his defense we should admit that he makes adequate use of certain poetic devices common to Golden Age poetry: the effective connection through rhyme of such words as "desvelos" and "celos" (e.g., 21a), "suerte" and "muerte" (e.g., 14b), and "honor," "dolor," and "rigor" (e.g., 6b, 20b). In general, it is evident that poetry was not Cabeza's forte, but the dramatic craftsmanship of the times demanded lyric passages, so he did his best.

In fact, Cabeza was not even a very good versifier. There are no sonnets or any other hendecasyllabic verse forms in the entire play. The bulk of the play is *romances* usually alternating with either *redondillas* or *quintillas*.⁹ Moreover, while some of the irregularities of rhyme can be ascribed to poor editing, there are obvious examples of what can only be considered poor craftsmanship, such as rhyming "puèdes" with "mugeres" in a *redondilla* (23a). In addition, there are numerous lapses in the assonant rhyme scheme of the *romance* passages (2b, 18a, 27a, for example). One can either assume that there is a missing line even though the sense is maintained in the corrupted version, or that the bad rhyme reflects a lack of talent on Cabeza's part.

With respect to plot, Cabeza was obviously playing on two common dramatic devices, intentional deceit and accidental misunderstanding, part of what A. A. Parker has called the interplay of Will and Chance.¹⁰ Because the play is so little known, perhaps an exposition of the plot is not out of order. Based on the system used by Professor Parker to highlight the different kinds of actions in *El mayor monstruo los celos*, the following summary presents accidental and chance actions in italics.¹¹ In addition, events occurring before the opening of Act I are found in parentheses.

The scene is in Sevilla. (Isbella, a noblewoman, is falsely accused of dishonor.) Luis, her brother, orders her thrown from a window into the sea. Julio, a servant, throws her into the street instead. *Berenguer, a nobleman from Madrid, passes by at that exact moment.* He invites Isbella to the house of Serafina. (Berenguer is in Sevilla to marry Serafina for her money after having dishonored Matilde in Madrid.) At Serafina's, Matilde, to hide her dis-

honor, and Isbella, as a pretext to enter the house, *independently make up the same story about Berenguer's having dishonored Isbella.* Serafina, to get to the bottom of this situation, gives a key to Mastín, Berenguer's servant, and arranges to have Berenguer enter the ladies' chambers while Serafina hides. Berenguer enters and declares his love for Matilde. *Serafina believes that he is talking to Isbella. Not realizing that he is now talking to Serafina, Berenguer admits that he wants to marry her for her money.* Serafina is furious.

That night, Matilde and Mastín meet in the dark. Mastín believes Matilde to be Juana, a servant. Berenguer enters, and he and Matilde leave Mastín locked in the room. *When Serafina comes to Mastín's aid, he thinks that she is Juana and she thinks that he is Berenguer pretending to be Mastín.* She complains about Berenguer's shabby treatment of her. *Berenguer overhears and thinks that Mastín is another suitor.* He challenges him to a duel until he realizes who Mastín is. Meanwhile, in exchange for a diamond, Juana has let Luis into the house. *Hearing an elaboration of Isbella's first lie, Luis believes that Berenguer has dishonored his sister.* He swears to kill them both. Mastín convinces Berenguer that Matilde is in love with Mastín. Berenguer swears to kill Matilde.

In a duel, Berenguer learns why Luis feels dishonored, and he offers to marry Isbella, if Luis can get Serafina to love him, thus releasing Berenguer from his marriage promise. Back at Serafina's, Isbella tells Serafina that Luis is not her brother but Matilde's lover. *Berenguer overhears, misunderstands, and again promises to kill Matilde.* Luis enters as a servant carrying suitcases. *He and Serafina really do fall in love with each other.* Berenguer lies about having to return to Madrid, planning instead to return by night to Serafina's. Serafina, not knowing that Berenguer has lied, tells Juana that his plan is a fiction in order to arrange for Luis, disguised as Berenguer, to enter the house. *That night, the wrong servants let in both Luis and Berenguer.* In the darkness, Serafina says that she is Isbella and Isbella says that she is Matilde. *Berenguer kills Isbella and Luis kills Serafina.* Luis and Berenguer realize their mistakes and suffer in silence. Luis is happy that his honor is restored. Matilde will enter a convent. Mastín says that the play has a happy ending.

For the sake of concision in the preceding summary, some very minor misunderstandings

were omitted. Still, one is impressed by the magnitude of the web of deceit and misunderstanding. Plot complications on this level are usually the property of comedy, not tragedy, even in the *comedia*. Moreover, the protagonists here are unmarried, also the mark of a comic plot.¹² Yet, despite Mastín's final talk of a "fin dichoso" (28b), this common Baroque pattern of deceit and misunderstanding results in the deaths of two innocent women. There is no Destiny here, only the reactions of characters to the actions of others. Of course, the actions can be quite excessive, and the characters recognize their untoward nature, as when Serafina exclaims, ". . . que a esto llegue una muger" (8b), or when Matilde admits, "a grande pesar me arriesgo. . . ." (11a) In general the characters deal with each other almost always in bad faith, they lie when the truth would do just as well, and they persist in their actions despite good counsel to the contrary.

Characters generally deceive each other for two principal reasons: to conceal a fact or to discover one. For the purpose of concealment, Matilde lies to Serafina to hide her previous dishonor (3b); she covers herself so that Berenguer will not recognize her (4a); Berenguer lies to Serafina to hide the fact that he is only interested in her money (15b-16a); and Serafina creates a deception in order to meet Luis secretly at night (26a). Many more deceptions try to discover something. Serafina lies in order to find out if Berenguer and Isbella are each telling the truth (8b-9a); Berenguer and Luis hide behind tapestries in order to find out if Matilde and Isbella are telling the truth (14a, 15b); and so on. Indirectly, the underlying causes of these deceptions are love (lust), greed, jealousy, and wrath. It is implied that Berenguer promised marriage to Matilde out of love, and Serafina certainly allows Luis to enter her house for the same reason. Berenguer wants to marry Serafina for money, and the same greed on the part of the servants causes Isbella's problems and allows Mastín and Juana to participate as *terceros* in the various deceptions. Jealousy drives Berenguer to want to kill Matilde, and wrath due to dishonor and jealousy (both *celos de amor* and *celos de honor*) is the culminating emotion of the climax in Act III. With the possible exception of greed in a *galán* (greed in servants is legendary), all these motivating emotions are standard in the *comedia*, and their usage here implies no departure from the rule: love is a powerful force over which its victims have no control (22b);

love in women always leads to jealousy (23a); love with women always leads men into problems of honor which are resolved by the self-proclaimed pious wrath of the men (23a).

Some actions of the play seem to have no evident purpose or motivation, or the motivation is not consistent with others in the play. Why, for example, does Isbella make up the story of her dishonor by Berenguer just to make an entrance at Serafina's, especially when such dishonor for Matilde is something to be hidden? Moreover, not only does Isbella create such a story, but she continues with it despite the havoc it wreaks. In some cases, motivation is very weak. In Act III, Luis has to dress up as a servant in order to enter Serafina's house to talk to her. Considering the comings and goings at Serafina's, such deceit is hardly necessary. In other cases, motivation is drawn vaguely or by inference. When we first see Matilde, she tells us in an aside that she is going to lie, but we do not know why. It is only through deduction that we come to understand her past dealings with Berenguer until 7b. Even then, we never know the exact nature of Matilde's complaint. Finally, some motivations can only be ascribed to chance. Berenguer was not motivated, *per se*, to be at Isbella's window at the exact moment of her fall. Chance dictated his presence. The only consistency in these actions is their entertainment value—either they are amusing in themselves, or they contribute to the general confusion.

Indeed, the world of *Matar por celos su dama* is one of relativity and confusion. The characters constantly try to deceive each other. While such deceptions in the area of love are commonplace in the Baroque (even Serafina says that a gentleman should not divulge the nature of his deceptions, 13b), the characters are curiously unprepared for the possibility that someone else is deceiving them, even when they have undergone a previous *desengaño*. Matilde, for example, remarks that men pride themselves on their ability to deceive women (4b), but she continues to believe Berenguer's lies. In other situations, these people seem to feel that their actions will carry no serious consequences. Berenguer just assumes that Serafina will be so miserable after they marry that she will live with him only a month unless she is a fool (10a). None of these characters seem to understand that their *cautelos* are *engaños* to others (cf. 9a, 15a, 16b).

The perceptions of the actions as *cautelos* or *engaños*, true or false, are relative and inde-

pendent of our perceptions of the same actions. One immediate result of such relativity is confusion. As Matilde remarks, “¡Qué caos de confusión/es aquel en que me he puesto!” (5b) Later, when Matilde comes to talk to Berenguer, she ties the concept of love to that of confusion:

De mil zelos abrasada,
confusa en tanto pesar
de aquí he venido a sacar
a Don Berenguer turbada. (11a)

In fact, the level of confusion rises to such a great extent that Serafina begins to doubt even the most easily verifiable fact:

Vamos a ver lo que passa,
Matilde, que en lo que veo,
ni sé si miente el deseo,
ni si es aquesta mi casa. (19b)

Central to the issue of relativity and perception is the role of the senses, especially those of sight, hearing, and touch. As was usual in the tradition of the *comedia*, the eyes play an important, even metaphysical role. The eyes are not only the method of verifying truth, they are also the manner of falling in love, either actively or passively.¹³ But the eyes are subject to *engaño*. Mastín remarks on the power of Isbella's eyes shortly after Berenguer has offered her his protection:

Nosotros
ya procuramos traerla,
sus ojos son su notorio
infortunio, pues de vista
nos perdió, pero es arrojo;
dexar los ojos importa,
quando en tan triste destrozo,
aunque mui hermosos sean,
no me agravia andar sobre ojos. (4a)

Paradoxically, the eyes through which love enters are consequently blinded by the love itself, as Serafina declares:

Sin ojos el amor ve,
buscar a Don Luis es fuerza,
porque si estoi con amor,
estoi ciega, y no estoi ciega. . . . (27a)

Because these characters are aware of the defective nature of the eyes, they sometimes choose to deny what they see, preferring either to regard the sight as an illusion or to discount the sight as totally false. Berenguer cannot believe his eyes that Isabella would press charges of dishonor when he has done nothing to offend her:

Vive Dios, que es fantasía,
y a los ojos ilusión,
que diga Isbella (ha pesar!)

quando tan ageno estoi,
que me obliga tan pesada
essa deuda de su honor. (18a)

Again typical of the *comedia* tradition is the exclamation, “What is this I see?” implying a lack of faith in the eyes. Berenguer's words, “Qué es lo que mis ojos notan!” (1b), are echoed throughout the work (especially 8b). As for simply choosing to deny what one sees, Luis, who believes that his sister died, cannot believe that his eyes now behold her:

Si no están ciegos los ojos,
sin duda es mi hermana aquella,
que acompaña a Serafina;
pero es vana mi sospecha,
pues ya en el espejo undoso,
que bruñe, azora, y platea
tanta margen de esmeralda,
fue arrojada: ¡grave pena! (16b)

As might be expected, if the eyes are subject to error, the ears are more so. Because so much of the action takes place in darkness, it is not surprising that there should be misunderstanding and misidentifications. What is rather more unusual is the extent to which the characters rationalize themselves into these misunderstandings in the face of reason. While “ojos” is central to sight, “voz” is central to hearing. It is a dramatic commonplace that the characters assume that they can recognize each other by voice, and that if they cannot recognize the voice, then it must belong to a stranger, as Isbella implies when she meets Berenguer, a man “con voz que yo no conozco” (1b). The voice is especially important as it relates to the identification of characters in the dark. On some occasions, characters successfully recognize each other by voice: Berenguer recognizes Serafina (16a) and Isbella recognizes Berenguer (27b). On other occasions, characters choose not to believe what they hear, as when Berenguer hears Serafina's voice:

Vive Dios, si no supiera
que se quedó Serafina
en su quarto, que era esta
su voz sospechara; mas
dentro en su quarto se queda. (9b)

When Mastín thinks that he is talking to Juana while really talking to Matilde, he tells her, comically, not to disguise her voice (11b). Again, when Mastín and Serafina mistake each other for Berenguer and Juana respectively, Serafina admits that it is Mastín's voice that she hears, but she assumes that Berenguer is falsifying his own voice: “De su criado la voz/finge, según estoi viendo” (13a; cf. 13a-b).

This last example is an excellent example of *engañar con la verdad*.¹⁴

The voice, however, is not only a personal trait, it is the instrument for the expression of thought in words. Beyond recognizing each other by voice, the characters must decide whether to believe what the others say. The voice is the carrier of lies and flattery. What people say is quite relative to the motives for their saying it. Implicit in this relativity is the power of words themselves. Isbella's deception to gain admission to Serafina's house confirms Matilde's lies. Both are fictitious, but because they are spoken they are possibly true, especially to someone who does not know the truth and who may be predisposed to believe the lie. Serafina says to Mastín, whom she takes for Berenguer:

Pues que vos lo confessáis,
aquesto que estáis diciendo
debe ser verdad. . . . (13b)

Although this statement implies some sort of *a priori* faith in the veracity of the spoken word, characters seem quite selective in the information they choose to believe. Even when Isbella states directly that she was the one Berenguer helped, he continues to believe that he helped the disguised Matilde (5b). Finally, words can also be an incitement to love, and Serafina and Matilde are both witnesses to the power of Berenguer's words of love (7a).

Of the three senses mentioned most often, clearly touch is the least precise. Moreover, the identification of a character by feeling his features can only be said to be comic. Isbella recognizes that there is a man with Serafina by touch:

. . . mas qué miro!
que es un hombre, por las señas
del tacto me ha parecido,
y porque quien soi no advierta,
que soi Matilde diré. (27a-b)

When Mastín is left in darkness, he describes his fumbling sense of touch:

Voime a la puerta llegando,
ya con mis manos la siento,
pero ¿qué es esto? (12b)

At the beginning of Act I, Berenguer discovers that Isbella is still alive by feeling her breathing motion, although he also establishes that the senses are subject to deception: ". . . si el tacto no me engaña . . ." (1b). In Act II, Berenguer laments the inexactitude of the sense of touch on which he must rely in the darkness:

. . . acaso
quando essa pieza miró
el tacto en sombras embuelta,
que un ciego en su confusión
del tacto suele hacer ojos
a costa de su dolor,
estaba Matilde? (18a)

In summary, the senses are not to be either always believed or always disbelieved. Moreover, the pattern of belief and disbelief is not logically consistent. There are many occasions on which characters correctly identify one another: Berenguer and Matilde (12a), and Luis and Serafina (24a), for example. There are other instances in which one character tells the truth and is believed by another: Berenguer believes Isbella's story (2a-3a); Matilde believes Berenguer's story of greed (9b-10a). More common, however, are the cases in which a character believes a lie or does not believe the truth. There are primarily two reactions to a truth that appears to defy reason: the character is either stricken speechless and immobile (4b), or he disregards appearances, choosing to rationalize the disbelief (as an illusion, for example) or to believe that the other character is lying.

While the pattern of belief and disbelief might seem to be capricious, it does correspond to a dramatic imperative that urges the plot along from one complication to the next. The purpose of the belief or disbelief in every case is to complicate the plot. Each recognition, true or not, adds to the confusion, sometimes directly, sometimes ironically. Consider the recognition of Isbella by her brother. Luis does not believe that she is in Serafina's house when he first sees her there, but he does believe the lie about her alleged romance with Berenguer. In the final scene with Isbella, he cannot tell the difference between the voice of his own sister and that of Serafina. Yet, if he didn't believe the lie, or if he realized that the voice was not Isbella's, the play would not have ended as it did. In general, the male characters tend to believe the worst about the female characters (because, we are told, they must protect their honor) whether the worst is true or false. Such a situation is upheld by some scholars on the ground that the suspicion of infidelity is just as damning as the commission of adultery.¹⁵ (Of historical interest is the fact that there are very few murders of wives for adultery, much less for suspicion of adultery.¹⁶ Perhaps they were all done in secret.) Another possible interpretation of such scruples is that they are intentionally and dramatically ironic.

If complications are desirable in this play, ironic complications are prized indeed. Individual ironies collect to form a web of irony that constitutes the entire action. Consider the following rather extensive list of ironic actions and reactions. One servant, Flora, betrays Isbella causing Luis to demand her death, while another servant, Julio, betrays Luis and saves Isbella (2b-3a). Matilde, to cover her dishonor, says that Berenguer has promised marriage to Isbella, and Isbella, as an excuse to enter Serafina's house, makes up the exact same story (3b, 5a-b). Juana rightly tells Serafina that Matilde's story is only a ploy to disrupt the marriage plans (3b), and Mastín correctly warns Berenguer not to pay so much attention to another woman the night before his wedding (4b), but both masters disregard their servants' advice. As Berenguer says, ". . . no puedo hacer otro" (4b). Mastín is able to carry out the clandestine plans of both Serafina and Berenguer because they happen to coincide perfectly (7b). Serafina hears Berenguer profess his love for Matilde but she thinks he is talking to Isbella and is thus confirmed in her erroneous conviction (9a). Berenguer professes his loathing for Serafina to Serafina thinking that she is Matilde, and he lies about loving Serafina to Matilde thinking that she is Serafina (9b-10a, 15b-16a). Serafina pretends to be Juana because Mastín thinks that she is Juana at the same time that she thinks that Mastín is Berenguer pretending to be Mastín (13a-b). Luis, eavesdropping on a conversation between Berenguer and Serafina, believes Serafina's error based on the lies of Matilde and Isbella (16b-17a). Serafina confronts Berenguer with the evidence of his deception: "Ya tus engaños conozco,/ no ignoro ya tus cautelas . . ." (16b), but she is wrong about the exact nature of the deception. Berenguer is able, on the one hand, to promise marriage to Isbella because he is not yet married to Serafina (21b), while on the other hand he is outraged by Matilde's alleged dishonor because she promised to marry him (19a, 22b). Luis, pretending to fall in love with Serafina so that Berenguer can marry Isbella, actually does fall in love with her, and she with him (22a, 23b, 25b). Serafina lies about Berenguer's having lied in order to get Luis into the house, when in fact Berenguer did lie and he too plans to enter the house (26a). That night, Juana lets in the real Berenguer instead of Luis pretending to be Berenguer, and Mastín lets in Luis pretending to be Berenguer instead of the real

Berenguer (26a-c). Serafina thinks that by adopting the identity of Isbella, she can achieve two *desengaños*; likewise, Isbella says that she is Matilde. Luis and Berenguer, intending to kill Isbella and Matilde, respectively, kill Serafina and Isbella (27b-28a). Finally, even the title of the drama is ironic because Berenguer does not kill his lady but Isbella, and Luis does kill his beloved but not for jealousy. In general, all these ironies could have been avoided logically by light, honesty, and good faith.

Berenguer and Luis react to a world of relative perceptions and half-truths by imposing uncompromising and extreme measures to expiate the suspicion of dishonor based on false evidence. It is as though Luis and Berenguer suddenly expected absolutes in a world of shifting values. Berenguer, who cannot believe his own ears and who has promised to marry two women, is nonetheless prepared to murder one of those women because of what his ears heard. Luis, who consistently jumps to conclusions, condemns his own sister to death twice as though her guilt were proven fact. In one sense, the characters, both male and female, follow the model of Cervantes' "curioso impertinente" in that they set up deceptive and contrived situations in order to test other characters. They know that they are tempting temptation (cf. 3a, 6a, 9b), but their irrational desire to learn more overrides common sense. The modern term for their technique is entrapment, and the result is the same: reality, when tested under artificial conditions, fails the test of innocence, but one never knows whether the failure is the result of the reality or of the artificial test.

The murders of Isbella and Serafina respond to a more pervasive irony typical of the *comedia*, the realization on stage of poetic metaphor. In this case, the metaphor is that of love as death, and Cabeza was able to present this metaphor in a consistent manner. Consider the following brief exchange between Berenguer and Serafina in their roles as fiancés:

Ber. Sois, señora, quien me alienta.
 Ser. Tú quien me quita la vida.
 Ber. Yo he de ser tuyo.
 Ser. Que mueras
 es precisso, quando yo
 no he de ser tu esposa.
 Ber. Llevas
 rendida un alma a tus aras. (10a-b)

Again, Serafina to Berenguer:

Que soi Serafina advierte,
 y que te adoro te advierto,

que me matas: aún no acierto
a decir mi poca suerte.
Tu olvido me da la muerte,
dexa ya de aborrecerme,
empieza a favorecerme,
y si quieres acabarme,
o la vida me quita con no amarme,
o la vida me vuelve con quererme. (14b)

Nearer to the moment of the murders, Berenguer and Serafina exchange the following conceit based on “brazos”:

Ser. Pues, dadme, señor, los brazos.
Ber. Los vuestros dadme también.
Ser. Porque con ellos renazco.
Ber. Porque con ellos me animo.
Ser. Miento, pues muero a su daño.
Ber. Miento, pues me dan la muerte. (25a)

Even more to the point are Serafina’s words relating her new love for Luis:

Vn rato sin vida estuve,
y con esperanza incierta,
sola mi muerte fue cierta,
en cuyo fuerte rigor
dixe yo: Grande es mi amor,
pues dura estando yo muerta. (22b)

And again:

ia Don Luis abra la puerta,
quando de amor vivo, y muero. (25b)

Isbella, too, in a double irony because her love for Berenguer is fictional, admits her potential death, this time due to lack of honor, the same reason for which Luis wanted and still wants to kill her. Almost as a foreshadowing, Isbella refers to Berenguer as her “homicida”:

Manchó mi honor en tal calma,
pronunciarlo me desalma,
pero fue mucho rigor
querer robarme el honor
quien antes me robó el alma.
Como me quitó la vida,
por huir del corazón,
dexo a Madrid mi homicida,
mas del que roba es pensión
ponerse luego en huida. (17b)

A further irony lies in the fact that while the metaphors of love and honor as death can and do become realized for the women, they rarely are for the men (although in other plays they do). Even though Luis and Berenguer both speak of their perceived dishonor as a kind of death (Luis calls Berenguer his “homicida”), neither dies, nor, in fact, do they receive any kind of punishment for the senseless murders. While it might be said that Luis has killed his loved one, he does not seem overly contrite: “Pesares, sufrid, sufrid,/ pues el honor se sosega” (28b). As for Berenguer, his loved one

still lives, although she will enter a convent. Mastín’s reference to a “fin dichoso” ironically negates any of the catharsis one might expect from the murders (28b).

Clearly, the unifying feature of this play is its foundation on ironic misunderstanding. An interpretation that might try to extract a logical moral from this morass would try the credibility credence of the reader. If, for example, we were to apply the principles of Professor Parker in his famous article, “The Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Method of Analysis and Interpretation,”¹⁷ especially that of poetic justice, we should conclude that Serafina and Isbella, because they are the ones killed, are responsible for the misunderstandings, that is, that they sinned and that they deserved their punishment. Such is clearly not the case. Nor are we even able to speak of Professor Parker’s punishment by frustration (pp. 697-99), because the male protagonists are minimally or not at all contrite. While it might be possible to assert that the contrivances on the part of the women were errors in judgment, to be fair one must wonder if the men need to take responsibility for their actions at all. Berenguer did contract a marriage for money, jilt Matilde, and kill Isbella, but it appears that he is to walk away unaffected by the entire affair. There is no cogent moral expressed by the actions of this play as they progress in a series of causes and effects.

Closely related to Professor Parker’s idea of poetic justice is his statement, “Spanish playwrights present no victims of destiny or mischance, but only of wrongdoing—their own, or somebody else’s.” (p. 691.) *Matar por celos su dama* is a good counterexample to that assertion. One is overwhelmed by the sheer arbitrariness of the web of actions, by the massive comedy of errors presented here.¹⁸ The characters themselves ascribe their situations to the vicissitudes of Fortune, and mentions of “fortuna” and “suerte” are common (for example, 2a, 4a, 4b, 7a, 17b, 22a). Moreover, heaven and the stars also function in this play as agents of Fortune, as in the expression, “quiso el Cielo” (2b; cf. 3b, 19a, 20b). Other references to heaven and God are clearly not intended to conform to Church doctrine. They are for the most part expletives that have undergone total symbol depletion (“Qué enigmas son éstas, Cielos!” 5a; cf. 5b, 12b, 13a, 13b, 16a, and so on). In a moralistic treatment of the action based on Church doctrine, one would expect much less talk of Fortune and much more as-

assessment of individual blame, as in *La vida es sueño*. Here, it seems that rarely does a character take responsibility for his or her own actions. Despite the incredible amount of deceit, no one admits that such deceit is wrong or that it is in any way unnecessary. No one recants. We gather that the characters consider their actions as guided by Fortune with the strong implication that they cannot do anything about the system.

Action, then, I would submit, is in this play dominant over theme. Several possible morals might be drawn, all implied but never stated directly: that the world is a confused place and that things happen regardless of what people do; that men are wrathful beasts and women are cunning temptresses; that the men in this play have devised a society in which women cannot live safely; that a man's honor is more important than the lives of others; and so on. We view this play as we view life itself, as a series of often confusing situations presented without comment. It is up to the spectator and reader to draw inferences and propose interpretations. These interpretations, like ideas of morality and justice, are personal and subject to disagreement, hence, perhaps, the wide disparity in interpretations of other honor plays.¹⁹ If the center of the study of the play is the action and not the theme, however, perhaps we can agree that this play responds to dramatic principles of *admiratio*, misunderstanding, deceit, the realization of metaphor, and irony.²⁰ We see characters hopelessly caught between contrived appearance and suspect reality, between individual action and blind Fortune, between love and honor. All of these dilemmas provide for dramatic conflict, not only in this play but in the *comedia* in general.

PERHAPS THIS STUDY of *Matar por celos su dama* implies that different approaches should be taken in studying other *comedias*, especially the *dramas de honor*. If the morality and justice of blood revenge is removed as the primary consideration, these quirky plays will present a more coherent, generic structure. The issues of right and wrong might very well turn out to be moot because it is impossible to find a consistent basis for what has been called the "honor code"—suspect wives are not always killed.²¹ Especially should we be wary of accepting these plays as indicative of life in Baroque Spain. There are simply too many data to contradict such an assertion.²² Besides, rarely is the setting for *dramas de honor* con-

temporary Spain. If we cannot distinguish between fiction and reality, then we are no better off than the characters. These plays are dramas, not sermons and not histories, and they were written to entertain a rowdy audience as interested in socializing and flirting as in watching the play. They can best be understood in that context.

NOTES

¹Cf. Morris Weitz, *Hamlet and the Philosophy of Literary Criticism* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964; rpt. 1973), p. 17: "To discuss X rather than Y or Z in any work of art, of course, is to imply that X is worth talking about."

²"Spanish *Comedias* as Pot Boilers," *PMLA*, 82 (1967), 178-84.

³Northrup Frye, "Literary Criticism," in *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. James Thorpe (New York: MLA, 1963), p. 59. For a discussion of the "intentional fallacy" as it relates to the *comedia*, see James A. Parr, "An Essay on Critical Method Applied to the *Comedia*," *Hispania*, 57 (1974), 434-44.

⁴"Juan de Cabeza," *Enciclopedia universal ilustrada europeo-americana* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1908-33).

⁵Cayetano Alberto de la Barrera and Leirado, *Catálogo bibliográfico y biográfico del teatro antiguo español*, ed. facs. (Madrid: Gredos, 1969), pp. 46-47.

⁶*Bibliotheca hispana nova*, 2 vols. (Madrid: J. de Ibarra, 1783-88). Mentioned in La Barrera, p. 47.

⁷*Primera parte de Comedias del Maestro Iuan Cabeça* (Zaragoza: Iuan de Ybar, 1662), cited in La Barrera, p. 47, and José Simón Díaz, *Bibliografía de la literatura hispánica* (Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1967), VII, 10.

⁸References are to the *suelta* edition (Sevilla: Imprenta Real, n. d.). Also known as No. 7 in *Comedias varias de diferentes autores* (Madrid: n. p., n. d.).

⁹The following verse forms are found in the play: *romance* (1a-3a, 3b-4b, 5a-6a, 6b-7a, 7b-8a, 8b-10b, 12a-14a, 14b-15b, 16a-17a, 17b-19a, 23b-25b, 26a-28b); *quintilla* (4b-5a, 6b, 7a-b, 14a-b, 15b-16a, 17a-b, 22b-23a); and *redondilla* (3a-b, 8a-b, 10b-12a, 19a-22b, 23a-b, 25b-26a).

¹⁰"Prediction and its Dramatic Function in 'El mayor monstruo los celos,'" in *Studies in Spanish Literature of the Golden Age Presented to Edward M. Wilson*, ed. R. O. Jones (London: Tamesis, 1973), p. 192.

¹¹Parker, pp. 187-88.

¹²Bruce W. Wardropper, "Lope de Vega's Urban Comedy," *Hispanófila*, Spec. No. 1 (1974), 47-61, including an excellent basic bibliography on Golden Age comedy in note 4, p. 48.

¹³Cf. Frank G. Halstead, "The Optics of Love: Notes on a Concept of Atomistic Philosophy in the Theatre of Tirso de Molina," *PMLA*, 58 (1943), 108-21.

¹⁴"El engañar con la verdad es cosa/ que ha parecido bien . . .," vv. 319-20 of Lope's "Arte nuevo de hacer comedias," in Juan Manuel Rozas, *Significado y doctrina del Arte Nuevo de Lope de Vega* (Madrid: Sociedad General Española de Librería, 1976), p. 191.

¹⁵For example, Américo Castro, "Algunas observaciones acerca del concepto del honor en los siglos XVI y XVII," *RFE*, 3 (1916), 24-29; and Gerald Brenan, *The Literature of the Spanish People* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957),

pp. 280-85.

¹⁶As a case in point, it should be noted that of the more than 15,000 legal proceedings documented in the Calatrava section of the Archivo Real de Toledo (now in Madrid), only ten cases involve wife murder or attempted wife murder, not an enormous number considering that the Archivo covers more than two centuries of grievances.

¹⁷In *The Great Playwrights*, ed. Eric Bentley (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), I, 679-707, esp. 685-92.

¹⁸Cf. William C. Atkinson, "Séneca, Virués, Lope de Vega," in *Homenaje a Antoni Rubió y Lluch* (Barcelona, n. p., 1936), I, 124: "For the inevitable there is substituted the arbitrary, and the reader supping full with horrors is conscious, not of emotional purification, but only of the monotony of the fare. And the greater the arbitrariness, the more awkwardly will moral reflection sit on it."

¹⁹With regard to Lope's *El castigo sin venganza* alone, for example, those scholars finding the Duke's actions justified, if not righteous, include Ramón Menéndez Pidal, "*El castigo sin venganza*: un oscuro problema de honor," in *El P. Las Casas y Vitoria con otros temas de los siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1966), pp. 123-52;

and Geraldine Cleary Nichols, "The Rehabilitation of the Duke of Ferrara," *JHP*, 1 (1977), 209-30. Those who see the Duke's actions as cruel and senseless include T. E. May, "Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza*: The Idolatry of the Duke of Ferrara," *BHS*, 37 (1960), 154-82; and C. B. Morris, "Lope de Vega's *El castigo sin venganza* and Poetic Tradition," *BHS*, 40 (1963), 69-78.

²⁰These are basically the same guiding principles of the *comedia* discussed by Bruce Wardropper, "The Implicit Craft of the 'Comedia,'" in *Studies in Spanish Literature Presented to Edward M. Wilson*, ed. R. O. Jones (London: Tamesis, 1973), pp. 339-56.

²¹The most famous counterexample is Lope's *El castigo del discreto*. See Castro, p. 29, and William L. Fichter's edition of the play (New York: Instituto de las Españas, 1925).

²²For a discussion of reasons not to believe in the historical authenticity of the honor code, see two articles by C. A. Jones, "*Honor* in Spanish Golden Age Drama: Its Relation to Real Life and to Morals," *BHS*, 35 (1958), 199-210; and "Spanish Honour as Historical Phenomenon, Convention and Artistic Motive," *HR*, 33 (1965), 32-39.