

Trinity University

Digital Commons @ Trinity

Modern Languages and Literatures Faculty
Research

Modern Languages and Literatures Department

Fall 1977

Social-Comic Anagnorisis in *La Dama Duende*

Matthew D. Stroud

Trinity University, mstroud@trinity.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.trinity.edu/ml_l_faculty



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Stroud, M.D. (1977). Social-comic anagnorisis in *La dama duende*. *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, 29(2), 96-102. doi:10.1353/boc.1977.0008

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Modern Languages and Literatures Department at Digital Commons @ Trinity. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Languages and Literatures Faculty Research by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Trinity. For more information, please contact jcostanz@trinity.edu.

Revista de filología española, 34 (1950), 137-50.

¹⁵ For a discussion of "optical" illusion deriving from the Greek romance see Stanislav Zimic, "El 'engaño a los ojos' en las bodas de Camacho del *Quijote*," *Hispania*, 55 (1972), 881-86.

¹⁶ *Historia etiópica de los amores de Teágenes y Cariclea*, Traducida en romance por Fernando de Mena, ed. Francisco López Estrada (Madrid, 1954), p. xxviii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁸ Kohler, p. xxxix, notes the "evocation des mythes d'Icare, de Phaëton, de Pasiphaë, allusions à Anaxarte, Faustine, Lucrece, Marc Aurèle, Messaline, Poppée, Semiramis, Troie et Ulysse, etc; et e vide, qui lui avait enseigné une partie de ces fables, se trouve nommé..."

¹⁹ Lope consistently evokes the proverb through the play: vv. 2194, 2200, 2297, 3070, 3072. F. C. Hayes deals with the proverb and the play in his article "The Use of Proverbs as Titles and Motives in the *Siglo de Oro* Drama: Lope de Vega," *Hispanic Review*, 6 (1938), 305-23.

²⁰ "pues como el cavallo en Troya / pudiera meter los Griegos." — vv. 469-70.

²¹ "Pero es mucho que me engañen / aquellos ojos á mí, / si pudieran ser bastantes / a hazer engaños a Ulises?" — vv. 1701-04, already cited is "Que a tí se passa / de Ulises el espíritu." — vv. 2544-45.

²² William L. Fichter in his review of Kohler's 1934 edition of the play, *Hispanic Review*, 3 (1935), 261-64, indicates these burlesques of Góngora (acknowledged by Kohler in the 1951 version, p. xliii): "las congeladas lágrimas que llora el cielo..." vv. 726-27; "En campañas de sal pies de madera / por las remotas aguas estampara," vv. 733-34; "quando dora el blanco Toro / que paze campos de grana? / (Que assí llamava un poeta / los primeros arrebales)," vv. 1225-28.

²³ "Vino griego," Kohler notes, p. 193, is one of a number of famous Neapolitan wines. "Remarquar que 'hablar en griego' signifie également: 'parle de façon incompréhensible.'"

²⁴ The "locos" of v. 3244 are Federico and Ricardo who have just paid Tristán an additional sum to kill Teodoro. Tristán here varies the spelling of Serpalitonia and exuberantly adds three names not in the tale he told Ludovico: Xipatos, Atecas and Filimoclia.

²⁵ In the last verse of Diana's guarded sonnet, "Amar por ver amar, embidia ha sido," Kohler cites, p. 45, the direct influence of Petrarch. The second tercet of the sonnet reads: "Ni me dexo forçar, ni me defiendo; / darne quiero a entender, sin dezir nada; / enténdame, quien puede; yo me entiendo" (vv. 562-64; italics mine). Kohler: "Ce vers est la trad. littérale d'un vers de Pétrarque (CV, 17): 'Intendami chi puó, ch' i m'intend'io.'"

²⁶ Kossoff, interestingly, combines in the one volume his edition of *El perro* with one of *El castigo sin venganza*, juxtaposing in this way the lighter and more tragic aspects of the honor theme in Lope. Edward M. Wilson and Duncan Moir characterize *El perro* as a "dark comedy." *A Literary History of Spain, The Golden Age Drama, 1492-1700* (London and New York, 1971), p. 52.

²⁷ Francisco Ynduráin, "Lope de Vega como novelador," in *Selección de clásicos* (Madrid: Editorial Prensa Española, 1969), p. 158.

²⁸ Alan S. Trueblood, *Experience and Artistic Expression in Lope de Vega* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 160-62.

²⁹ For López Pinciano's commentary on *reconocimiento* see the *Philosophía antigua poética*, ed. Alfredo Carballo Picazo, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1953), II, 25-39.

³⁰ See n. 11.



SOCIAL-COMIC ANAGNORISIS IN LA DAMA DUENDE

MATTHEW D. STROUD, Trinity University

La dama duende has become quite a puzzle. Barbara Mujica, in her article, "Tragic Elements in Calderón's *La dama duende*,"¹ discusses several ele-

ments of Calderonian tragedy in a work which she ultimately defines as "comedy in its highest sense," (p. 328) and she finds implicit social criticism in its

vaguely happy ending. Robert ter Horst refutes the idea of comedy and tragedy as leading a double life by saying, in effect, that comedy is potential tragedy which is averted by "anticipating or delaying the conclusions to which tragedy leaps,"² but then he goes on to claim that Don Manuel is the protagonist of the drama, and not Doña Angela, thereby denying any of the social criticism of the honor code which Ms. Mujica found. Essentially, there are two problems which are brought up here: 1) what is the nature of the suffering and the complications of the play, and 2) what is the meaning of the play. The suffering of the play is validated for both the characters and the audience by means of an *anagnorisis*, or recognition of what has happened. It is at the point of *anagnorisis* that the two aforementioned problems converge.

The dramatic sequence as proposed by Calderwood and Toliver is from *praxis* to *pathos* to *anagnorisis*, that is, from action through its consequences to a state of knowledge concerning the action's essential quality.³ In the *comedia*, every action has a reaction which results in a climax of synthesis and recognition of transcendent values, a moral purpose already noted by Alexander Parker.⁴ This sequence is applicable for both comedy and tragedy, as well as tragicomedy. The fact that there is suffering is not in itself tragic. Basing herself on another article by Mr. Parker, Ms. Mujica affirms that "we may consider *La dama duende* in a sense as much a tragedy as a comedy, for the characters are entangled in a complex system of social values which makes each one both the victim and the tormentor of the others." (pp. 303-304) What she, as well as Mr. Parker, are describing is not so much the quality of tragedy in Calderón as the quality of *pathos* or melodrama,⁶ for the suffering

and complications come about through non-tragic *praxeis*. What we have here is not so much tragic *hamartia* as comic *hamartema*, both of which may translate as "mistake," but which are fundamentally different in scope.⁷ Tragic *hamartia* springs from the untenable position on the part of the tragic hero either to act against the prevailing law and order or to lose his identity.⁸ Since he is endowed with an extraordinary moral character, he ends up, knowingly or not, acting against the higher order, thus bringing about his necessary demise. Comic *hamartema*, on the other hand, is not the life and death situation of the tragic hero, but is the mistake or action of a protagonist who is still within society, who does not respond in reaction to the cosmos, but to society. The comic *hamartema* is totally societal; it is the action of customs, not of laws. The fact that the *hamartema* brings about a complication of the plot is nothing more than the necessary *pathos* resulting from the *praxis*. It is true that in Calderón's case, the theme of honor can be material for tragedy, comedy, or tragicomedy. Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the comic ambient in which these actions take place.

Comedy, as an interaction of types rather than individual eccentricities,⁹ produces no one sterling character who stands above the others in his virtue. This is certainly the case in *La dama duende*. Angela is the victimized widow, forced into seclusion through no fault of her own, but only because society has such a low opinion of young widows:¹⁰

... encerrada
sin libertad he vivido,
porque enviudé de un marido,
con dos hermanos casada.

(I, 389-392)¹¹

Yet she is not a total victim, because she does disobey her brothers by going out

disguised to mingle with the people at Court. Don Manuel is the successful man of arms who has come to Madrid to take a post there, but he is not wholly virtuous. He is a little slow mentally, somewhat irresponsible (he missed the baptism by an hour), and, on at least one occasion, a coward (II,916-917). Don Luis is the *galán* who seems to fail at whatever he does: "No hay acción que me suceda/ bien, Rodrigo." (I,294-295) Don Juan and Doña Beatriz are the same general types as Luis and Angela, but less extreme. Juan is the gallant young man in pursuit of his desires and his honor at the same time; she is the young woman imprisoned in the house of her cousin because of her love for an unknown man who happens, ironically, to be Juan. Angela and Beatriz are victimized women; Luis, Juan, and Manuel are honor-bound *galanes*. The characters in general are more caricature than personality.

The primary action (*hamartema*) of the plot is Angela's mischief in going against not only the orders of her brothers, but of the prevailing society. But, as Ms. Mujica points out, her mistake is only the result of society's forcing her to live a sequestered life at an early age (p. 305). The action, then, is socially defined. Angela is not pitting herself against God or the devil, or even against any laws, but simply against social convention and custom. The suffering which is engendered is diffused through the society (to Luis, Juan, and Manuel) causing them to create mistakes of their own. If Angela had not gone out that day, for example, Luis would not have followed her (his *hamartema*) and would not have had the initial altercation with Manuel. Juan would not have come to Luis' aid and there would not have been the ensuing recognition of Manuel's status in the household, a fact which rankles Luis:

lo que más siento es que sea
mi hermano tan poco atento,
que llevar a casa quiera
un hombre mozo, teniendo,
Rodrigo, una hermana bella,
viuda y moza. . . .

(I,320-325)

The plot *anagnorisis*, that is, the recognition of Manuel, has not yet resolved the thematic *pathos*, that of Angela's plight as the young isolated widow. But the resulting *pathos* and *anagnorisis* of Luis' doubt are put off until Act III, allowing time for the only other main dramatic sequence to take place.

Angela, to find out if indeed the houseguest is the same man who helped her escape from Luis, decides to go through a sliding panel into Manuel's room. The impetus behind this action does not have quite the deterministic force that Ms. Mujica ascribes to it, however, when she states that "doña Angela will use every trick of coquetry in order to free herself from the situation to which she is condemned." (p. 311) Angela's reasoning is much less involved:

Un necio deseo
tengo de saber si es él
el que mi vida guardó. . . .

(I,624-626)

Nor is it necessarily true that, "after discovering Manuel, doña Angela no longer ventures out simply for the sake of venturing out, but directs her passion toward don Manuel. She no longer escapes to the Court, but to don Manuel's room." (Mujica, p. 312) Actually, we don't know what she is doing when she is absent from the stage. But there is no doubt that she has at least added her visits to Manuel's room to her mischievous repertory.

As a result of Angela's action, she writes a letter to Manuel. He mistakenly thinks that she is Luis' wife and Cosme thinks that she is some spirit or demon.

These false *anagnoriseis* of the situation are in themselves motivation for much of the action of the rest of the play: Manuel's constant though passive search for the truth, and his reluctance to show his mounting love for Angela. During an attempt to steal Manuel into her room, after an abortive attempt in which Cosme is mistaken for Manuel, Luis interrupts the two, and challenges Manuel to a duel, thus reinserting the *pathos* generated by the first primary *praxis* into the *pathos* of the second primary *praxis*. Luis loses the use of his sword, thus stalling the potentially dangerous conclusion to the dispute between Luis and Manuel, allowing Manuel time to find out the truth and offer Angela his hand. In view of the comic nature of the *praxeis* and the *pathoi* up to this point, for Luis and Manuel actually to have fought to the death would have created an outrageous tragicomedy, as outrageous in its injustice and nonsense as *À secreto agravio, secreta venganza* is in its unjust, nonsensical ending.

In general, then, the two interwoven pathetic sequences are nothing more than an improbable series of circumstances, as Angela herself admits:

porque caso extraño fuera
que un hombre en Madrid viniera,
y hallase recién venido
una dama que rogase
que su vida defendiese,
un hermano que le hiriese
y otro que le aposentase.
Fuera notable suceso,
y aunque todo puede ser,
no lo tengo de creer
sin velo.

(I, 554-564)

The plot *anagnoriseis* show nothing which borders on tragedy; melodrama and *pathos*, yes, but not tragedy. The outcome is as felicitous as the actions are facetious. There is the customary

multiple marriage and all supposedly ends happily. However, we are still left one major *anagnorisis* short: society still calls for young widows to be secluded. Within the play itself, there are recognitions of this custom as good and as bad, and it is important now to look into the *anagnoriseis* which uphold the individual and those which uphold the society.

Only two *anagnoriseis* affirm the individual over the system, yet those two mark the end of six different secondary *praxis-pathos* series: Angela's asking Manuel for help, Angela's entering Manuel's room, her writing a letter to him, her falling in love with him, her trying to steal the portrait of the woman which she found among Manuel's possessions, and her setting up a tryst with him. In Act II, as Manuel prepares to run the *duende* through to prove whether she is human, Angela admits:

Yo confieso que lo [soy],
y aunque es delito el querer,
no delito que merezca
morir mal, por querer bien.

(II, 1051-1054)

Indeed, to die for having loved well is on the surface one of the greatest breaches of poetic justice. Only in a society where marriage was a contract and not a spiritual bond could love even be considered in any way a crime. Angela, unlike the other characters in the play, is human and not a slave to the norms of the nobility. This particular dramatic moment would never have occurred had she not entered Manuel's room in the first place and had she not returned to find the portrait. Her crime is love.

The culmination of the love action of the play, and therefore its prime *anagnorisis* comes at III, 755-762:

Mi intento fué el quererte,
mi fin amarte, mi temor perderte,
mi miedo asegurarte,

mi vida obedecerte, mi alma hallarte,
 mi deseo servirte,
 y mi llanto, en efecto, persuadirte
 que mi daño repares,
 que me valgas, me ayudes y me
 am pares.

Here we have the plight of the woman who, constrained by a rigid society, is forced to use deceptions and underhanded tricks in order to make any sort of self-assertive overtures to the man of her desires. Ultimately, it is necessary to flee to the protection of the same man who almost ran her through just to satisfy his own curiosity. Angela's mistake here, her comic *hamartema*, was in being her own go-between. Considering that generally *alcahuetas* could expect some form of social punishment if discovered, Angela came out all right, but only by undergoing a role-name change from mischievous woman to wife. By the time she makes the change, she has, in effect, lost her former name and identity for the sake of society, a society which does not appreciate her as a clever individual intellect (she is almost killed as a result) but only as a sex object or a docile silent wife. The difference between woman as sex object and woman as human entity is precisely the underlying cause of the incest motif, which Edwin Honig finds in the play.¹² If Luis and Juan had known it were Angela and not just a woman-as-sex-object which they were following, their own senses of right would have forestalled the possible incestuous overtones. Instead of following Angela the person, they were following Angela the female body. Angela is accepted back into the society only if she denies her own female individuality.

There are five *anagnorisis* which uphold the system. Angela, who has gone against the system by disobeying her brother and going out in disguise, admits that it was not right to have in-

volved the passer-by Manuel, even though she does cover the blame somewhat by the reason of temporary insanity:

Yo fui
 necia en empeñarle así;
 mas una mujer turbada
 ¿qué mira o qué considera?

(I,438-441)

Later, in Act II, Angela makes a judgment which is somewhat surprising in light of her own willingness to go to extremes for the sake of love. In talking to Luis, who is distraught over his cousin's disdain for him, Angela advises him to

Dar tus penas al olvido;
 que querer aborrecido
 es morir y no querer.

(II,266-268)

This advice is given by the same person who caused Beatriz to remark, in amazement, how Angela has caused Manuel

... que se halle
 luego con una dama
 tan hermosa, tan rica y de tal fama,
 sin que sepa quién es, ni dónde vive
 (que esto es lo que tu ingenio le
 apercibe),
 y haya, [vendado] y ciego,
 de volver a salir y dudar luego,
 ¿a quién no ha de admirar?

(II,646-653)

This perspective by Beatriz of Angela's actions certainly puts Angela's words to Luis in doubt.

Of course the most obvious system-reinforcement comes at the end when Angela, having made her mischief, ends up being protected by Manuel, and he offers his hand in marriage. However, it is worthwhile in these two related recognitions of responsibility to consider at what point the *praxis* of this *anagnorisis* occurred. Manuel is for the first time confronted with the choice of leaving or defending Angela (as op-

posed to the veiled lady) when he finally realizes that she is not Luis' wife but his sister (III,767). The pathos which results from that discovery is indeed typical of Manuel's vacillations:

Pues ¿qué es lo que pretendo?
 si es hacerme traidor si la defiendo;
 si la dejo, villano;
 si la guardo, mal huésped; inhumano,
 si a su hermano la entrego.

(III,781-785)

Naturally, he chooses the noble thing to do, but it is not an emotionally satisfying moment — after all, we're talking about marriage and he weighs it as though it were a problem of abstract philosophy. He is still objectifying Angela just the way he did when he helped her as she, disguised, was fleeing from Luis. It is not Angela he cares about; it is the image of his honor. When he gives her his hand in marriage, it is true that he is doing the noble, socially dignifying (if individually troublesome) thing to do, but it is nonetheless true that his duty in this case, as with most of Manuel's actions, is marked by an acute bloodlessness and lack of conviction. He does the correct thing but only by seeing that any other course of action would cause him to lose that ultimate bloodless, brittle commodity, honor.

When Manuel finally closes all the wounds by giving his hand to Angela (III,847), it is noteworthy that Angela has no more lines in the play. Her part in it, the love, the spontaneity, has been subsumed by contractual society. The point of the lackluster quality of this particular multiple marriage is brought home further by Cosme who, after Isabel has been given to him like a prize heifer, says, in effect, "Oh, boy! What a pity I don't have time to get drunk:"

Cosme. . . — Dime, ¿estaba
 borracho? (A Don
 Manuel.)

D. Manuel. Si no lo estás,
 hoy con Isabel te casas.
 Cosme. Para estarlo fuera eso;
 mas no puedo.
 Isabel. ¿Por qué causa?
 Cosme. Por no malograr el
 tiempo
 que en estas cosas se
 gasta. . . .

(III,862-868)

Cosme's marriage to Isabel, uninteresting secondary thing that it is, is buried beneath commonplaces about Cosme's drunken nature. This is the extent to which society is upheld in the *anagnoriseis* at the end.

One other character who deserves some attention is Luis. In Act I, Luis bemoans his fate:

Si riño y mi hermano llega,
 es mi enemigo su amigo.
 Si por disculpa me deja
 de una dama, es una dama
 que mil pesares me cuesta:
 de suerte que una tapada
 me huye; un necio me atormenta;
 un forastero me mata;
 y un hermano me le lleva
 a ser mi huésped a casa,
 y otra dama me desprecia.
 De mal anda mi fortuna.

(I,300-311)

In itself, this speech is nothing more than an exposition of his *pathos*. Luis is never capable of making any discoveries about himself because he is a total archetype of society: his discoveries must be made for him by an outside party; in this case, by us the viewers. Why would Luis have all these terrible things happening to him? He has been unlucky in dueling, love, lust, and his status at home. Surely these qualities do not befit such an upstanding member of so iety, yet within the context of the play he is a loser because he lacks the capacity to go against the system. He is so bound up in this Golden-Age

version of *machismo* that he can't act on his own if he wants to. He is a pawn of society, a victim of his own nobility and, as such, he is unable to reap the rewards gained by taking risks. Luis never acts, he only reacts, like the fossil society of which he, of all the characters of the play, is the most sterile representative.

In conclusion, the action of *La dama duende* is indeed comic. It may from time to time border on the melodramatic, but it does not border on the tragic. The idea that suffering is always tragic is a gross oversimplification of the term. The protagonist, the prime mover of the action, is Angela. As Mr. Honig sums it up, "Angela is the principal actor, and . . . the ethos she acts in is the social ethos of comedy instead of tragedy. . . ." (p. 133) Despite the rigid system of which she is prisoner, she does finally escape, although it must necessarily be through marriage. The ultimate *anagnorisis*, left for the audience to make, concerns the nature of a society which prizes honor over love, form over content, men over women. The play is not a direct social satire, because Angela's escape comes about through existing socially acceptable means, but neither is it a panegyric to the existing society, since none of the societally defined members ends up in enormous happiness. The play just ends, leaving us to decide whether the characters are truly happy in accepting, without question, the mores of their society.

NOTES

¹ KRQ, 16 (1969), 303-26.

² "The Ruling Temper of Calderón's *La dama duende*," BCom, 27 (1975), 68-72.

³ James L. Calderwood and Harold E. Toliver, "Introduction to Comedy," in *Perspectives on Drama* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 171. For an Aristotelian discussion of *anagnorisis*, see Gerlad F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard

Univ. Press, 1957), p. 349ff.: "The other moment or structural form of the complex tragic change is 'recognition.' Its definition, as we said, is given in parallel with that of peripety, and likewise contains the basic word *metabole*: it too is a change, this time from ignorance to knowledge." Aristotle's concept of *anagnorisis* was strictly character-defined, although he obviously was aware that the audience was coming into certain knowledge, which provoked his "fear and pity." For the purposes of this article, I include both character-defined and audience-defined recognition under the heading of *anagnorisis*.

⁴ "The Spanish Drama of the Golden Age: A Method of Analysis and Interpretation," in *The Great Playwrights*, ed. Eric Bentley, I (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970) pp. 679-707.

⁵ "Toward a Definition of Calderonian Tragedy," BHS, 39 (1962), 222-237.

⁶ See, for example, Robert B. Heilman, "Tragedy and Melodrama: Speculations on Generic Form," in *Tragedy: Vision and Form*, ed. Robert W. Corrigan (San Francisco: Chandler, 1965), pp. 245-257.

⁷ For a further discussion of *hamartia* and *hamartema* in Aristotelian terms, see William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), pp. 39-51, and Else, p. 189: "And then we recall that Aristotle later (11.52b11) defines the tragic *pathos* as a *praxis phthartike e odynera*; and still further that the *pathos* is often brought on—and better so than otherwise—by a *hamartia*. The tragic error is "big" (*megalen*, 13.53a16) in its dimensions and consequences for the characters of the play. It leads to death, wounding, blinding, or the like: i.e. the *pathos*. The comic *hamartema*, on the other hand, is small, has to do with 'no-account' people, and does not involve pain or destruction to them."

⁸ Compare the concept of necessary suffering in Roger L. Cox, "Tragedy and the Gospel Narratives," YR (Summer 1968), 552.

⁹ Wimsatt and Brooks, p. 49.

¹⁰ Cf. ter Horst, p. 68, who points out that Angela is also in hiding until her late husband's debts are sorted out.

¹¹ All references are to Angel Valbuena Briones' edition of *La dama duende* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1954).

¹² Edwin Honig, "Flickers of Incest on the Face of Honor: *The Phantom Lady*," in *Calderón and the Seizures of Honor* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 110-57.