



---

## Deceit, Desire, and the Limits of Subversion in Cervantes's *Interludes*

ANNE J. CRUZ

---



f the minor theater of the Golden Age, only Cervantes's interludes have sustained much critical attention.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to the routine conventionality of the *entremeses*, *loas*, *bailes*, *jácaras*, and *mojigangas* collected by Emilio Cotarelo y Mori, Cervantes's *entremeses* are surprisingly original and complex, engaging many readers by their so-called spontaneity (Honig xiii) and "sparkling realism" (McKendrick 138). A closer look, however, reveals that the interludes instead question the possibility of reproducing unmediated desire all the while deferring formal closure. In so doing, they anticipate by some three hundred years postmodernism's disbelief in master narratives and its acknowledgement that "realist" representation does not evoke reality except as nostalgia or parody (Lyotard 74).<sup>2</sup> Yet even Cervantes's

<sup>1</sup> Besides those cited in this article, there are several recent studies on Golden Age minor theater; see among them, Javier Huerta Calvo, the fine collection of essays in *Criticón* 37 (1987), and the editions by Luciano García Lorenzo. Little has been written on individual playwrights other than Cervantes; for Luis Quiñónez de Benavente, see Hannah E. Bergman and Christian Andrés; for Calderón, E. Rodríguez y A. Tordera.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between postmodernism and theater of the Golden Age has been addressed recently by, among others, Catherine Connor (Swietlicki) and Edward H. Friedman. See their essays in the special edition, *Gestos: Teoría y Práctica del Teatro Hispánico* 17 (1994), edited by Anne J. Cruz and Ana Paula Ferreira.

*género chico* cannot entirely break away from the normalizing roles assigned to theatrical production by seventeenth-century Spain's social systems. Their indeterminacy notwithstanding, the *entremeses* remain, in the end, only partially successful in deferring cultural authority and control.

With its multiple points of origin, Cervantes's literary production, narrative and dramatic, destabilizes its referent and rejects a fixed signifier recognized and accepted by members of a shared code of communication. But the price paid for not adhering to the "correct" rules of genre, as Cervantes concedes in the prologue to his *comedias y entremeses*,<sup>3</sup> and as Lyotard warns, is that there can be no guarantee of an audience:

As for the artists and writers who question the rules of plastic and narrative arts and possibly share their suspicions by circulating their work, they are destined to have little credibility in the eyes of those concerned with 'reality' and 'identity'; they have no guarantee of an audience. (Lyotard 75)

Nonetheless, the rules of the generic game, at least for the interludes, were not established *a priori*. William Shaffer Jack attempted their outline in his 1923 dissertation, "The Early Entremés in Spain: The Rise of a Dramatic Form," followed three decades later by Eugenio Asensio's monumental *Itinerario del entremés desde Lope de Rueda a Quiñones de Benavente*. Jack explains that the term "entremés" was itself confusing: originally a banquet course or dish, it first assumed theatrical meaning as a term that described platforms with allegorical scenes, the *carros* that bore them in processions, and the political and religious festivals that occasioned them (13).

Neither the allegorical *carros* nor the celebrations have any connection to the dramatic form as we know it other than to acclimatize the term in Spain, although they contained the seeds of what would become *autos sacramentales* (15). It was not until the mid-seventeenth century that efforts were made to define the genre; Manuel Antonio de Vargas thus speaks of *intermedios* as an addition or substitution for some part of the *comedia*. For Jack, then, the interlude's main at-

<sup>3</sup> Cervantes's ironizing prologues continually block our attempts to reach any "true" meaning in his works. It is therefore impossible to take seriously his insistence on the similarity of his *comedias* and *entremeses* to others currently being staged on the grounds that his also follow the expected decorum and rhyme scheme, and lack any exaggerated foolishness. Indeed, he seems to contradict himself in the dedication to the conde de Lemos, where he blames their rejection on the actors' preference for "obras grandes y de graves autores," unlike his more moderate approach (*Entremeses* 95).

tribute was its dependency: "as a literary form, the *entremés* was always a secondary and dependent *genre*. There is no authentic record of its having been looked upon in Spain in any other light" (26).

According to Jack, the *entremeses*, interpolated between acts and paid for at approximately 300 *reales* a piece, had a purely diversionary function. Written mainly in prose, their purpose was to fill in the spaces between the *comedia*'s acts so the public would not become restless.<sup>4</sup> However, Asensio admonished that the interlude should not be reduced to a few unchanging characteristics, since its indeterminacy is due precisely to its admixture of elements from other such genres as the folktale, the *facecia*, and the picaresque novel (25). Recently, Evangelina Rodríguez and Antonio Tordera have noted that the *entremés* gains autonomy by resisting its mere placement between the acts of a more significant dramatic form. As Mary Gaylord makes clear, this autonomy relies on the "principle of interruption" of the genre itself (86). For Rodríguez and Tordera, the interlude's main function and value, once separated from its dependence on the *comedia*, is laughter—a comicality that, however, despite including an "elemento distorsionador e incómodo," is nevertheless ultimately realigned with the conservative morality of the dominant culture (25).

The interludes' distortional and troubling aspects have not escaped the critics, who continue to grapple with Cervantes's reworking of the genre's conventional themes. Stanislav Zimic, for instance, agrees with Amelia Agostini de del Río (90) that the author's minor works, like his novels, "ejemplarizan" albeit within a narrower and strictly comic venue. He proposes an exemplary reading of all Cervantes's writings, "si por ejemplaridad se entiende la exaltación, explícita o implícita, de la razón, del sentido común, de la virtud y de la moralidad" (444). In a thoughtful essay on Cervantes's aesthetics of reception, Nicholas Spadaccini opts instead to ascribe a subversive poetics to the interludes, reinterpreting the canon and circumventing its normative impulse through their publication and consequent private readership (1986; 166–167).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Timoneda (in his *Cornelia*) and Lope de Rueda were the first to utilize prose for the theater, with the latter establishing the genre's vividly popular style. According to Jack, the playwrights' use of prose was due to the speed with which the pieces were written (92). Of the twelve interludes in Lope de Vega's 1609 *Primera parte*, only one is in verse.

<sup>5</sup> Spadaccini seems to accept too readily that Cervantes had lost interest in staging his comedias and *entremeses* and decided to publish them instead. Cory Reed reminds us that the author's wish to "darlas a la estampa" explains why they were published, but not why they were left unstaged (64–65).

There is no doubt that, along with their experimentation with the genre, Cervantes's interludes share with his other works a transgressive compulsion to exceed formal and aesthetic limits and challenge dominant ideology (Reed 68; Gaylord 84). But if the interludes' questioning of the social order intends to subvert Golden Age theater's political hegemony, this does not mean that their carnivalesque tone succeeds in breaching the comedia's closed morality. While a Bakhtinian reading of the genre certainly illuminates the manner in which popular culture mocks official ruling, what needs to be stressed is that, by forming part of such carnivalesque rituals as fairs, town festivals, parodies, and farces, all of which appropriate "low" humor, the interludes offer an institutionalized escape valve, and thus participate fully in social control (Stallybrass and White 16).<sup>6</sup> Official state culture, therefore, simultaneously maintains and is maintained by the celebration of popular rituals that follow the liturgical calendar of the Catholic church.

Nor does the private reading of the interludes as published texts rather than performed works disconnect them from a Jaussian horizon of expectations, offering the individual reader the occasion to laugh at the "deceiving idealism" of official culture, as Spadaccini claims (1986; 167).<sup>7</sup> In his prologue, Cervantes explains that he decided to publish his comedias only after he was unsuccessful in staging them. He informs us that he is writing a play called *El engaño a los ojos* which, if he's not deceiving himself ("si no me engaño" [94]), he hopes will be better received than his previous plays. In the dedication to the conde de Lemos that follows, he praises the actors' wisdom in rejecting his plays and paying attention solely to "obras grandes y de más graves autores," but immediately undercuts their choice by doubting their judgment: "puesto que tal vez se engañan."

The warnings about so many *engaños* prepare us for the interludes' indeterminacies, ambivalences, and ambiguities, characteristics that will be exploited by Cervantes in his reworkings of the

<sup>6</sup> In problematizing Bakhtin, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White base their arguments on the questioning of carnival as "licensed release" by Terry Eagleton, Roger Sales, and George Balandier; their conclusion, that "the dialectic of antagonism frequently *turned* rituals into resistance", even when there had been no opposition previously, involves carnival in the ever-changing dynamics of power relations (13–16).

<sup>7</sup> "Through pranks, jokes and other kinds of antidotes to the conventions of language and thought, and through a series of what Pierre Macherey calls 'voids and absences,' those 'popular' comic pieces bypass the horizon of expectation of the theater-going common-man [sic] and afford the perceptive reader the possibility of laughing at the deceiving idealisms of official culture" (167).

genre. Indeed, the title of this purportedly unfinished comedia, *El engaño a los ojos*, addresses several levels of deception that take place, even if his plays do not. At the same time that it reaffirms the truism that a realistic representation succeeds by deceiving (through mimesis) a willing public, the title alludes to the playwright's dilemma, who deceives himself into thinking that this time, his plays will be enthusiastically received. Yet because his is not a complete self-deception, Cervantes also pokes fun at the actors' gullibility, suggesting that they have been hoodwinked by the other playwrights' self-importance. However, as we shall see, the ultimate *engaño a los ojos*, is that attempted by the entremeses themselves; left unstaged, they will nevertheless foist their *engaños* if not on the public, then on the reader, who unsuspectingly awaits the conventional thematics typical of the genre.

If the price paid by Cervantes for transgressing the rules of the game is the absence of a (viewing) public, he is vindicated by the interludes' not being subjected to conformist consumption and reproduction through theatrical clichés. For while the *género chico* was allowed to air such potentially threatening social issues as fear of *conversos*, conjugal honor, and government inanity, all of which were censored in the comedies (Profeti 40), the interludes' repetitiousness stressed their comic elements and rendered them harmlessly familiar. As an example, the anonymous interlude, *El marido flemático*, relies on the light-hearted sparring that the public had come to expect of the old man/young wife motif.<sup>8</sup>

The wife's initial comments and the several jokes targeting the old man's doddering ineptitude set up the skimpy plot:

¿Yo casada con viejo? ¿Yo he venido  
á padecer con un matus-marido? . . .  
A poderse vestir de una visita,  
páreceme que fuera gala eterna  
y se llamara tela sempiterna.

Yet the entremés turns less on the incongruous relationship between the mismatched pair than on the wife's uncontrolled sexual appetite. When her young lover appears, he discovers another man hiding in the house, and angrily slaps the wife:

Pienso que es una infame, una insolente  
que no hay mesón que admita tanta gente  
y que merece aquesta manotada.

<sup>8</sup> From the *Navidad y Corpus Christi festejados* (Madrid 1664), it appears as No. 267 in Cotarelo y Mori (623–626).

Acknowledging not only that he is aware of her adulterous behavior, but that he stands to gain from it, the *vejete* cynically requests that her face not be slapped, since this will ruin the merchandise. The lover pulls the hidden man out from his hiding-place, who in turn drags a chain of men with him. The old man again jadedly responds to his wife's infidelities: "¿No veis que os molereis con tanta gente?" After the visual punchline in which all the acting company's male members appear on stage as the wife's lovers, the play ends with the requisite dance, and all join in to exclaim "Nadie ha reñido."

The *entremés's* emphasis on the cuckolded lover in his role of *burlador burlado* rests comfortably with the audience, who enjoys a good laugh at the old man's collusion in his own dishonor. The laughter elicited by the male protagonists' reactions, however, stems from the interlude's misogynist core: if the men have made fools of themselves, it is because of the woman's sexual excess. The interlude gives the public what it wants; it neither questions nor condemns masculine behavior, but simply makes it a consequence of female infidelity. Its last line, "nadie ha reñido" naturalizes the social perception of women as perennial cheats and men as their suffering cuckolds. Bringing the play full circle, the line comments on its reitability: no one has fought, because in the end, everything remains the same; the interlude's theme, and the social situation it is meant to represent, reoccurs repeatedly on stage and in real life.

Cervantes's *entremeses* instead intend to ironize the relations between men and women and between different social groups. Not embarrassed to publicly claim his authorship, he challenges the interludes' perceived inferiority by "novelizing" his versions with the revolutionary psychological and structural complexities that distinguish his narrative fiction (Reed 69), therein ensuring their rejection as stageable theater. By publishing the interludes, Cervantes in fact negates the critical view that attributes to them a "realist" aesthetics, and instead highlights their artifice: "yo pienso darlas a la estampa para que se vea de espacio lo que passa apriessa y se dissimula o no se entiende, cuando las representan" (*Viage del Parnaso*, 202). Moreover, his ironic commentary renders incomplete any interpretation based on a single performance, since the act of reading displaces performance by granting the reader control over the time, place, and mode of reception; reading a text presupposes the likelihood of rereading, of multiple interpretations based on multiple readings.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Spadaccini points out the negative results that ensue from reading the interludes: "Unlike the spectator who is distracted by songs, music and lascivious dances which often end the performance of an *entremés* in a theater, the reader is deprived of those multiple sensorial experiences. He must be content to imag-

The interludes' publication thus permits a spatial ordering that would, of course, remain invisible to a viewing public. What is most significant, however, is that their publication reveals the interludes' incompletely subversive nature, indefinitely deferring the possibility of any social change. In particular, the texts' linear arrangement exposes Cervantes's exploitation of women's oppression for satirical purposes even as he denounces their treatment by a patriarchal society.<sup>10</sup> By beginning the series with *El juez de los divorcios* and ending with *El viejo celoso*, Cervantes delineates the interludes within a framework of female roles of deceit and disillusion that points to the limits of the genre's transgression.

For some critics, the first interlude exudes typical Cervantine irony as the judge resolutely washes his hands of the ill-married couples who plead for divorce, leaving the narrative open ended with no definitive conclusion. *El viejo celoso* likewise ends with the estranged couple reconciling solely to appease the *alguacil* recently arrived at the scene. Mary Gaylord observes that, contrary to the comedias that close with a wedding, the social order imposed at the end of the entremeses does not result from reason as the logical sequence of cause and effect, but obtains at its cost; the metatextual reading points instead to a lack of any causality, to an illogical rhythm of opposite desires (91). Yet despite their disinterest in effecting an ideologically coherent resolution, both the first and the last entremés bring down the curtain on the musical theme of *la noche de san Juan*, linking them to the celebrations of Midsummer night's eve. Associated with both fire and water, the original pagan festival was transposed to the Christian saint John the Baptist, and combines harvest and fertility rites (Frazer 177–178; 720–732). The festivals of fire celebrated throughout Spain provided young girls the chance to seek out lovers, as the rituals of jumping over or dancing around bonfires guaranteed that they would marry within the year.

By the sixteenth century, the date had also become the legal occasion for the annual signing and renewal of contracts for domestic servants. The saint's day therefore commingles the carnivalesque inversions associated with cycles of renovation and religious festivals

---

ine a joyful ending to the play while remaining conscious of the fact that basic conflicts are left unresolved" (166).

<sup>10</sup> Although space does not allow me to comment on all of them, Cervantes's ambivalent portrayals of female protagonists are also evinced in his other entremeses. Thus, Eugenio Asensio finds Leonarda of *La cueva de Salamanca* an inconsistent protagonist, but attributes this to generic convention: "El entremés, para acabar en alborozo festivo, suele olvidar o descuidar otras consideraciones como la lógica del carácter" (*Entremeses* 22).

pertaining to both the pagan and the liturgical calendars, with the mercantilist perception of human relations that reflects the changing social order of what once was a primarily agricultural society. Beneath their apparent irresolution, the interludes reveal an economic subtext through which the (dis)order of the social body identified with the carnivalesque and expressed through women's sexual desire is subsumed under a new symbolic order that represses desire, displacing and substituting it with monetary exchange.

In *El juez de los divorcios*, the judicial system comprised of *juez*, *escribano*, and *procurador*, and representing the law, written language, and rational discourse, evaluates four cases to determine sufficient cause for divorce. The interlude transgresses dramatic order by presenting not a denouement, but a continuous displacement of couples, each of which cedes its place to another reiterating the same mismatched circumstances and whose resolution is postponed indefinitely. Theater's immense popularity—especially that of the comedies—helps to explain why Cervantes's interludes were rejected by the public: while the *comedia's* obsession with familial and conjugal honor required a grand wedding finale that ensured its closure, his interludes propose instead a thematics of separation, articulated in terms of woman's desire, that comments on the changes in personal relations brought on by the new economic order. In that these relations reflect an ambiguous moral and economic exchange, they also serve as metaphors for the unequal interactions between audience and *entremés*: Cervantes's interludes offer far more than the public is willing to purchase.

From the opening scene, the female protagonists of the *Juez de los divorcios* are identified by the disruption caused by their vociferous narration of the cases, their shrill voices instantly shattering the social calm. The first case involves a conventional *entremés* couple, a young woman asking for a divorce from an old man: "Porque no puedo sufrir sus impertinencias ni estar contino atenta a curar todas sus enfermedades que son sin número; y no me criaron a mí mis padres para ser hospitalera ni enfermera" (98).<sup>11</sup> The interlude's dialogue illustrates how legal discourse becomes contaminated by the language of the marketplace. Mariana's outcries are met by her husband's pleas to lower her voice so as not to create a scandal: "por amor de Dios, Mariana, que no almodonees tanto tu negocio; habla paso, por la pasión que Dios pasó; mira que tienes atronada a toda

<sup>11</sup> This and all following citations are taken from Nicholas Spadaccini's edition of the *Entremeses*.



la vecindad con tus gritos" (97–98). However, the verb he employs to describe her complaint, "almodonees," derives from the Arabic *almodovar*, "lugar donde reside con su audiencia el gobernador de una tierra, y alli despacha y libra los pleytos" (Covarrubias, *Tesoro* 100). In criticizing her loudness, the vejete denigrates her twice: he minimizes her arguments by comparing her to a typically raucous Arab functionary, while chiding her for not restraining herself in deference to Christ's suffering, a rebuke that alludes to the perceived behavior of New Christians, thereby associating her with a despised marginal group.

Critics have noted that the verb may also derive from *almoneda*, the Arabic term for auction and, what is most appropriate to the *entremés*, a public sale of goods won in battle.<sup>12</sup> Both meanings work in the text to reify the woman through the comparison to an Other, whether in the stereotypical role of a loud Arab functionary, or equally stereotypically, as a strident New Christian merchant. Yet, in her grievance against the perpetuity of marriage vows, Mariana's own discourse becomes allied with the increasing commodification of religious rituals, as she expresses her desire that marriage be reduced to the equivalent of a renter's contract: "En los reinos y en las repúblicas bien ordenadas había de ser limitado el tiempo de los matrimonios, y de tres en tres años se habían de deshacer, o confirmar de nuevo, como cosas de arrendamiento, y no que hayan de durar toda la vida, con perpetuo dolor de entrambas partes" (98). Ironically, it is not the church but the state that silences her by sentencing her to continue in the marriage, precisely because she must honor the terms of its contract: "Callad, callad, nora en tal, mujer de bien y andad con Dios, que yo no hallo causa para descasaros; y pues comistes las maduras, gustad de las duras" (103).

When it is the next couple's turn, the *procurador* also restricts the woman's speech, warning her not to speak ill of her soldier-

<sup>12</sup> According to Covarrubias, "la venta de las cosas, pública, que se haze con intervención de la justicia y ante escrivano y con ministro público, dicho pregonero, porque en alta voz propone la cosa que se vende, y el precio que dan por ella . . . 'Almoneda es dicha el mercado de las cosas que son ganadas en guerra, e apreciadas por dineros cada una quanto vale, etc.'" (101). In his edition, Spadaccini notes that modern editors Juan Bautista Avalle-Arce and Eugenio Asensio have modified the *editio princeps* from "almodonees" to "almonedees": "en el sentido de poner (o pregonar como) en almoneda." Domingo Yndurain, for his part, believes that the original term should remain, since it recalls "al-madenees" in its meaning of "machaques" (97). In its polyvalence, Cervantes's choice is eminently justified.

husband: "hablad más comedido señora, y relatad vuestro negocio sin improperios de vuestro marido" (102). Rather than confronting her, however, the husband appropriates Guiomar's reasoning: if he agrees with her arguments, he may, in fact, be released from the marriage which he compares with captivity in the Tetuan *mazmorras*, a Cervantine in-joke shared with those familiar with the author's life experiences. The soldier thus turns his wife's legitimate charges against his indolent behavior into a barrage of ill-tempered nagging, disregarding her exemplary wifely virtues: "¿Qué se me da a mí que seáis casta con vos misma, puesto que se me da mucho, si os descuidáis de que lo sea vuestra criada, y si andáis siempre rostrituerta, enojada, celosa, pensativa, manirrota, dormilona, perezosa, pendenciera, gruñidora, con otras insolencias deste jaez, que bastan a consumir las vidas de docientos maridos?" (105–106) In his efforts to convince the judge that the divorce should be granted, the soldier appears to side with his wife and craftily "confesses" his failings as spouse.

Similarly, the third case begins by the husband, a surgeon, asking for a divorce from Aldonza de Minjaca, his wife. Although none of the surgeon's four claims for separating from his wife offers any solid evidence against her ("porque no la puedo ver más que a todos los diablos"), they are given full weight by the *procurador*, who solemnly asserts "bastantísimamente ha probado su intención" (107). When the wife attempts a response by alleging four hundred reasons on her part, the judge immediately cuts her off: "Señora, señora, si pensáis decir aquí todas las cuatrocientas causas, yo no estoy para escuchallas, ni hay lugar para ello" (107). Eliminating the wife altogether, the fourth case relies solely on the testimony of the husband, a ganapán or boorish laborer known for accepting demeaning physical tasks. The entremés projects his defects on the woman, as he accuses his wife of an evil disposition, in spite of having rescued her from a life of sin by marrying her and buying her a stall in the marketplace. That the ganapán believes he can present his case in her absence bespeaks the degree of silence imposed on the wife.

In all four cases, then, the women have been reduced to either silence or absence; despite the low social value of the husbands' occupation, each time they speak, the judge and the *procurador* pay strict attention. In contrast to the women's loud shouts, which are derisively received, the husbands' arguments convince the judge to postpone his final decision. The men are not seriously demanding separation from their spouses; instead, they threaten the women

with divorce only so as to tame them into becoming quiet, abnegated wives, resigned to their husbands' abuse. But the women are not without blame in the charade: by alleging violation of their marriage contract—indeed, by conceiving of marriage as a contract—they have already converted its sacramental value into one of material exchange, reducing its spiritual and emotional currency to physical and economic satisfaction. Mariana thus expects her dowry to guarantee her sexual pleasure, while Guiomar equates her husband's virility to his earning potential, refusing to call him a "man" because he spends his time gambling and writing poetry instead of working to support the family.

The *entremés* critiques the legal system as well, revealing its equally pragmatic motivations: when the judge happily accepts an invitation to a party given by a reconciled couple, wishing that all couples were as peaceful, the *procurador* cynically reminds him that divorces and reconciliations are their bread and butter, after all: "Desa manera, moriríamos de hambre los escribanos y procuradores desta audiencia; que no, no, sino todo el mundo ponga demandas de divorcios, que al cabo, al cabo, los más se quedan como se estaban, y nosotros habemos gozado del fruto de sus pependencias y necesidades" (109). It is not coincidental, therefore, that the *procurador's* mercenary motives dovetail with the self-interest of the reconciled couples. The interlude's ending is predicated on the inverted values of an increasingly materialist society that compromise ethical and moral standards. The song's last line, "que vale el peor concierto / más que el divorcio mejor," sums up the play's unresolved (and unresolvable) dilemma: that the social good is judged by what, above all, is good for business.

The interludes' irresolution stems also from their carnivalesque origins. The low-class popular types that are a staple of the genre (in the *Juez de los divorcios*, the *vejete*, *soldado*, *cirujano* and *ganapán*) require no proper name, and although three of the wives are individualized by their given names, all remain subordinated to their husbands' social position. Despite the apparent role inversion between men and women by which the latter demand their spousal rights, matrimonial order is never subverted, since the divorces are not granted, but deferred. Rather, in proffering the advantages of marital reconciliation on economic grounds, the interlude's unresolved ending becomes the most severe judge of social transgression.

Stressing its contextual relationship with *El juez de los divorcios*, the last interlude of the series, *El viejo celoso*, restates the licensed complicity of carnival inversion in the repetition of the final song's

refrain, "Las riñas de san Juan / todo el año paz nos dan." Again, the inversion contains a much more complex and ambiguous meaning than the conventional entremeses that later take up the jealous old husband/young bride motif, such as *El marido flemático* described above. In the odd couple of Cañizares and Lorenza, the interlude reifies the woman's worth solely as exchange value. Both are bitterly disappointed: when Cañizares complains to his *compadre* that he lives in fear of Lorenza's finding out what she's missing, the friend sympathizes, "Y con razón se puede tener este temor, porque las mujeres querrían gozar enteros los frutos del matrimonio." to which Cañizares responds, "La mía los goza doblados" (264). The old man's pun on Lorenza's "doubly" enjoying the fruits of matrimony bemoans the loss of the doubloons expended on a young wife as well as his spent sexual energies, the "doblados" graphically alluding to the old man's improbable intumescence.<sup>13</sup> Lorenza, for her part, complains that the old man's wealth hardly covers the price of her sexual frustration. The interlude's duplicitous main thrust is not, however, as a morality tale, but in the way the entremés reworks the literary cliché to question artistic representation as subversion.

Lorenza's apparent sexual transgression is homologous to Cervantes's incomplete rupture of generic convention, a rupture, nonetheless, which denotes the interlude's irresolution and allows the author to call into doubt the effectiveness of representation to stand in for the real, for unmediated desire. The dubious nature of representation is illustrated by the leather tapestry in which the neighbor Ortigosa smuggles in a young lover for Lorenza, embossed with four fictional protagonists from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (itself an ironic continuation of Boiardo's *Orlando innamorato*): Gradasso, Mandricardo, Rogero and Rodamonte [sic]. Both concealing and calling attention to Cañizares's amatory competitor, the tapestry functions as an inverted ekphrasis in that it brings to "life" the static representation of a literary figure. As the tapestry unfurls, its portrait of a cloaked Rodomonte is visually transformed into a real, flesh-and-blood lover, one who, we are led to believe, will soon satisfy the virginal wife's dormant desires, as Lorenza realizes that until this very moment, she had been deceived into accepting a passionless marriage.

<sup>13</sup> The pun has been interpreted to refer to Cañizares's impotency alone; see Fernández de Cano y Martín for a close reading of the interlude's erotic language.

While these figures may seem out of place in an interlude, even one by so ardent an admirer of Ariosto as Cervantes, their failed love affairs—indeed, their very number—evoke the four quarrelsome husbands in *El juez de los divorcios*, thus drawing our attention to the similarities between the entremeses and the *romanzo*. In the same way that the Italian author's ironic intranscendence undermines the chivalric codes of Boiardo's epic, Cervantes's ambiguity destabilizes the interludes' conventions, exemplifying what A. Bartlett Giamatti has called "the inability of words to give a true account of deeds, the incapacity of constantly shifting illusions to give a true image of reality" (*Orlando Furioso* xxxvi).<sup>14</sup>

Cervantes's reference to Ariosto's four warrior-lovers, while brief, should not be construed as arbitrary: their exploits illustrate the gap between chivalric ideals and actual behavior, a theme intensely and constantly explored by both authors (Hart 40). In Ariosto's poem, all four characters are implicated with one another in their competition for the loves of the same women and through their continuing battles against each other and against Orlando, the "hero" of the romance. Gradasso, who quarrels with Mandricardo for Orlando's sword, is later killed by Orlando. Mandricardo fights Rodomonte for Doralice, and dies in a battle with Rogero. Rodomonte is rejected by Doralice and Isabella (the latter actually tricking him into killing her), only to be murdered by Rogero. Arms and love degenerate into madness, for according to Giamatti, Ariosto's poem proves that "the only cure for love is sanity, or death" (xxxvii). Unlike *Don Quixote*, which empathizes with its mad knight, Cervantes's interlude follows generic decorum by degrading its protagonists. In its hilarious choice of the ferocious Rodomonte as the prefigurement of the young boy smuggled in by the go-between, and the implausible comparison of Cañizares to the love-struck Orlando, the interlude further undermines closure, not only by parodying the *romanzo*'s deferral, but by ridiculing the very concept of amorous desire among its lowly protagonists.<sup>15</sup>

The scenes where the *romanzo*'s fierce combatants face one another for their lady loves are thus reduced and debased to the neigh-

<sup>14</sup> For Ariosto's influence on Cervantes, see Chevalier and Hart, although neither has addressed the appearance of these protagonists in Cervantes's interlude.

<sup>15</sup> Cervantes might also have had in mind Rodomonte's misogynist diatribe after Doralice's rejection, an attack more likely forthcoming from Cañizares as

bor's sneaking in the young lover. And although Cañizares is the only one who does not witness the youth's entrance, the scene immediately following, which purportedly unites Lorenza with her lover, is meant only to be heard by Cañizares and the audience. As such, it not only places in doubt the very possibility of a "truthful" representation, but the truth value of all representation. Critics are divided as to the *entremés's* "immorality" (Asensio 24), but most assume that the sexual encounter between the young boy and Lorenza actually takes place; Melveena McKendrick, for instance, describes the interlude as ending with Lorenza "fornicating noisily off stage with a stranger, in a scene so bawdy that the censor must surely have been nodding" (138). The barred door that screens the scene from the audience, however, serves also to bracket consummation, as it impedes any visual confirmation of the sexual act either by the old man or the audience. Adding to the confusion, Lorenza's precocious niece Cristina repeatedly responds with the erotically codified expression "*locuras y niñerías*" when Cañizares insistently queries the noisy happenings behind the door. The interlude thus intends both a denial and an affirmation of the supposed sexual goings-on and, by extension, of representation itself, as it simultaneously fosters and checks the husband's, as well as the public's, credulity.

In a virtuoso performance playing on the irrealities of both desire and deceit, Lorenza taunts Cañizares that his suspicions are true, that she has flaunted moral convention even as the interlude flaunts the conventions of the genre: "*que no son sino veras, que en este género no pueden ser mayores*" (271). When Cañizares enters the bedroom, the women douse him with the same perfumed water with which Lorenza has bathed the "*angel pintado,*" her lover's celestial beauty again rendered through representation as a pictorial image, a displacement of the young woman's desire. The blasphemous baptism not only defiles Cañizares's honor, it obstructs his view in the process. As the young boy darts from the room, Lorenza changes her story. Tearing her hair, she proclaims her innocence and denounces Cañizares's distrust: "*Mirad en lo que tiene mi honra y mi crédito, pues de las sospechas hace certezas, de las mentiras ver-*

---

he becomes aware of Lorenza's attempted adultery: "*Né lunga servitù, né grand'amore / che ti fu a mille prove manifesto, / ebbono forza di teneti il core / che non fossi a cangiarsi almen si presto. / Non perch'a Mandricardo inferiore io ti paressi, di te privo resto; / né so trovar cagione ai casi miei, / se non ques'una, che femina sei*" (*Canto XXVII.118*).

dades, de las burlas veras y de los entretenimientos maldiciones! Ay, que se me arranca el alma!" (272) Despite her earlier taunting, she now denies the old man's accusations, who declares himself fully undeceived by her deception: "Vive Dios, que creí que te burlabas, Lorenza!" (272).

Cervantes's interlude thus calls into question whether Lorenza's desire obtains through the representation of fulfillment (the interlude's dramatic denouement), and whether Cañizares is in fact the victim of the very cuckoldry he invents for himself (the moral of the literary cliché). Moreover, by introducing Lorenza's niece Cristina as her amoral understudy, the interlude both reiterates and parodies its capacity for self-reproduction since Cristina is even more willing than Lorenza to fulfil her desires. However, like the May/December marriage, which threatens to disintegrate under the heat of Midsummer festivities, yet manages to remain together the rest of the year through mutual deception, the interludes respond only partially to their own questioning of representation. Unable to dissolve completely the conventions of the genre, they are equally incapable of breaking fully from societal strictures, caught as they are within the circularity and deception of desire.

In Cervantes's rendition of the morality tale, all the players are implicated in a series of deceptions and reversals that remain unstaged and unresolved. Like Lorenza and Cristina, who endlessly await the arrival of a hidden lover before they can attempt to subvert the marriage code, Cervantes's *entremeses* look forward to a public capable of deciphering their ambiguities and deceptions. Yet similarly to the unbroken marriage code and for all their indeterminacies, the interludes never fully transgress generic rules. Instead, their unresolved endings merely stave off the ultimate finality of the social order by deceiving the readers into repeatedly reiterating the characters' unattainable desire.

---

---

## WORKS CITED

---

---

- Agostini [Bonelli] de del Río, Amelia. "El teatro cómico de Cervantes: Conclusion. El espíritu y el arte cervantino en los Entremeses," in *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 45 (enero-agosto 1965):65–116.
- Andrés, Christian. *Luis Quiñones de Benavente: Entremeses*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1991.
- Ariosto, Ludovico. *Orlando furioso*. A cura di Emilio Bigi. Vol. 2. Milano: Rusconi, 1982.
- . *Orlando furioso*. Stewart A. Baker and A. Bartlett Giamatti, eds. Indianapolis; New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968.
- Asensio, Eugenio. *Itinerario del entremés desde Lope de Rueda a Quiñones de Benavente*. Madrid: Gredos, 1965.
- Bergman, Hannah E. *Luis Quiñones de Benavente y sus entremeses*. Madrid: Castalia, 1965.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *Entremeses*. Eugenio Asensio, editor. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1987.
- . *Entremeses*. Nicholas Spadaccini, editor. Madrid: Cátedra, 1990.
- . *Viage del Parnaso y poesías varias*. Elias L. Rivers, editor. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1991.
- Chevalier, Maxime. *L'Ariosto en Espagne (1530–1650). Recherches sur l'influence du "Roland furieux"*. Bibliotheque de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes Hispaniques. Bordeaux: Feret et fils, 1966.
- Connor (Swietlicki), Catherine. "Postmodernism *avant la lettre*: The Case of Early Modern Spanish Theater," in *Gestos: Teoría y Práctica del Teatro Hispánico* 17 (1994):43–59; guest editors Anne J. Cruz and Ana Paula Ferreira.
- Cotarelo y Mori, Emilio. *Colección de entremeses, loas, bailes, jácara y mojigangas desde fines del siglo XVI á mediados del XVIII*. Madrid: Case Editorial Bailly/Bailliére, 1911.



- Covarrubias, Sebastián de. *Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española*. Barcelona: Horta, 1943.
- Fernández de Cano y Martín, José Ramón. "El vocabulario erótico cervantino: algunas 'calas al aire' en el entremés de *El viejo celoso*," in *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 12 (Fall, 1992):105–115.
- Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. New York: MacMillan, 1978.
- Friedman, Edward H. "Postmodernism and the Spanish *comedia*: The Drama of Mediation," in *Gestos: Teoría y Práctica del Teatro Hispánico* 17 (1994):61–78, guest editors, Anne J. Cruz and Ana Paula Ferreira.
- García Lorenzo, Luciano. *Los géneros menores en el teatro español del Siglo de Oro (Jornadas de Almagro de 1987)*. Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura; Instituto Nacional de las Artes Escénicas y de la Música, 1988.
- Gaylord Randel, Mary. "The Order in the Court: Cervantes' *Entremés del juez de los divorcios*," in *Bulletin of the Comediantes* 34 (1982):83–95.
- Hart, Thomas R. *Cervantes and Ariosto: Renewing Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Honig, Edwin. "Foreword," in *Interludes. Miguel de Cervantes*. New York: New American Library, 1964.
- Huerta Calvo, Javier. *Teatro breve en los siglos XVI y XVII*. Madrid: Taurus, 1985.
- Jack, William Shaffer. *The Early entremés in Spain: The Rise of a Dramatic Form*. Published dissertation, Philadelphia, 1923.
- Liotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. Theory and History of Literature, vol. 10. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- McKendrick, Melveena. *Theatre in Spain: 1490–1700*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Profeti, María Grazia. "Condensación y desplazamiento: La comicidad y los géneros menores en el teatro del Siglo de Oro," in García Lorenzo, 33–46.
- Reed, Cory A. "Cervantes and the Novelization of Drama: Tradition and Innovation in the *Entremeses*," *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* (11) 1991:61–86.
- Risa y sociedad en el teatro español del Siglo de Oro*. Actes du 3e. Colloque du Groupe d'Etudes Sur le Théâtre Espagnol. Toulouse 31 janvier–2 février 1980. Paris: CNRS, 1980.

- Rodríguez, Evangelina and Antonio Tordera. *Calderón de la Barca: Entremeses, jácaras y mojigangas*. Madrid: Clásicos Castalia, 1982.
- Spadaccini, Nicholas. "Writing for Reading: Cervantes's Aesthetics of Reception in the *Entremeses*", in *Critical Essays on Cervantes*, Ruth El Saffar, ed. Boston: Hall, 1986. 162-175.
- Stallybrass, Peter and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Zimic, Stanislav. "La ejemplaridad de los entremeses de Cervantes," in *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, 61 (1984):444-453.