Venereal Disease and the Gracioso: A Look at Moreto's El desnél con el desnél

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The concept of honor, as Castiglione has described in his *The Courtier,* is fundamentally irreconcilable with the Christian virtues of piety and humility and the ceremonial values of the court. In a world where the vassal relationship is of critical importance, the notion of personal integrity or uniqueness is questioned. Maggiora de aldea, in her work on *Poetry and Drama of the Spanish Golden Age,* comments on the complexities of reconciling two moral systems in the context of Renaissance humanism. Its relations to real life and to morals are explored in various texts, including Calderón’s *El médico de su honra,* which is noted for its thematic concern with the theme of honor in drama. The action of the play is centered around the character of Polilla, a comic figure who makes an appearance in the courtly setting of the drama and the nobility of the main characters. Before examining the Polilla-Caniqui role in the play, it is essential to consider the various facets of Polilla as a character. The play *El médico de su honra* is a complex metaphor, and the themes of honor and shame are discussed in the context of the play’s setting. The character of Polilla is a catalyst for the development of the drama and the unfolding of events. The play is noted for its meticulous construction and disciplined art. It is reasonable to conjecture that there may be some underlying and justifying significance to the two names of the graciosos. The courtship of the paper that one concept which relates the various facets of Polilla-Caniqui to each other and to the drama as a whole is the lowsly and stagnant subject of venereal disease, something which stands in some intentional contrast to the courtly setting of the drama and the nobility of the main characters. Before examining the Polilla-Caniqui role and venereal disease may be a motif for the graciosos, it might be wise to review the action of the play. The Count of Urgel, arrives with his servant, Polilla, at the palace of the Count of Barcelona, where he finds that Diana, the Countess of Barcelona,-has been betrothed to her, falls in love and determines to win her hand. Eventually by meeting the countess Diana's disdain with an equal, but vanished, disdain. Carlos succeeds, having been helped along by the maneuvers and manipulations of his servant, Polilla-Caniqui. Now let us look at the Polilla-Caniqui character more closely. In the very first scene of the play Polilla is joined with his master in a fashion which points out the meaning of Polilla as "worry" or "care." "Quis, si?n, polilla feral. Desembucha in pasto, y no tenga tu cuidado, teniendo en el criado polilla en el corazón." Here the graciosos claims that with Polilla as a servant, Carlos need not have "polla en el corazón." Later in the first act when Carlos and his servant are discussing ways in which Polilla can penetrate Diana's defenses and thus aid his master, Polilla replies to the question of whether he can infatuate her or not: "Yo Polilla no soy, y no preveno/Me ha de asustar con sus caricias" (542-543). In this way Polilla has, in a sense, made the promise to move from the "heart of his master" to the bosom of his mistress-to-be, and he has shifted from the meaning of Polilla as "care" to the meaning of Polilla as "nackth." Further, the reference to Diana's "caritas" hints not only at the graciosos' salacious nature, but also at

**VENEREAL DISEASE AND THE GRACIOSO: A LOOK AT MORETO'S _EL DESDEN CON EL DESDEN_**

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One of the most intriguing characters in Moreto’s *El desden con el desden* is the graciosos who goes by the names Polilla and Caniqui. This comic figure who makes his appearance in the very start in Act I, Scene 1, as Polilla and then introduces himself as the assumed name of Caniqui in Act I, Scene 5, has a dominant role in the play. And since the comedy is noted for its meticulous construction and disciplined art, it is reasonable to conjecture that there may be some underlying and justifying significance to the two names of the graciosos. The courtship of the paper that one concept which relates the various facets of Polilla-Caniqui to each other and to the drama as a whole is the lowsly and stagnant subject of venereal disease, something which stands in some intentional contrast to the courtly setting of the drama and the nobility of the main characters. Before examining the Polilla-Caniqui role and venereal disease may be a motif for the graciosos, it might be wise to review the action of the play. Carlos, the Count of Urgel, arrives with his servant, Polilla, at the palace of the Count of Barcelona, where he finds that Diana, the Countess of Barcelona, has been betrothed to her, falls in love and determines to win her hand. Eventually by meeting the countess Diana's disdain with an equal, but vanished, disdain. Carlos succeeds, having been helped along by the maneuvers and manipulations of his servant, Polilla-Caniqui. Now let us look at the Polilla-Caniqui character more closely. In the very first scene of the play Polilla is joined with his master in a fashion which points out the meaning of Polilla as "worry" or "care." "Quis, si?n, polilla feral. Desembucha in pasto, y no tenga tu cuidado, teniendo en el criado polilla en el corazón." Here the graciosos claims that with Polilla as a servant, Carlos need not have "polla en el corazón." Later in the first act when Carlos and his servant are discussing ways in which Polilla can penetrate Diana's defenses and thus aid his master, Polilla replies to the question of whether he can infatuate her or not: "Yo Polilla no soy, y no preveno/Me ha de asustar con sus caricias" (542-543). In this way Polilla has, in a sense, made the promise to move from the "heart of his master" to the bosom of his mistress-to-be, and he has shifted from the meaning of Polilla as "care" to the meaning of Polilla as "nackth." Further, the reference to Diana's "caritas" hints not only at the graciosos' salacious nature, but also at

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When Polilla does present himself to Diana, complete with costume as a "love doctor" and with comical attempts at Latin, his prelude to his appearance with the line, "Plagal a ete que de fuen mi entrada" (668), and he establishes himself as one from the New World (Acapulco) who wishes to cure a "mal de amor." When Diana asks about the cure for "mal de amor" Polilla answers that he can cure "il que en fuen" which means both "the French disease" (syphilis) and "generous in payment," with "unguento blanco" which refers to both the mercury based ointment thought to be a cure for syphilis and to the silver coins called "unguento de Mexico." The thinking continues in the vein of the consequences of physical love when Polilla says:

Amor es quita-raclos, quita-miedo, quita-bien, quitapechitos también que haría solto a un motillo. (711-714)

Here Polilla suggests that love may be "quitapecchitos" in the sense of "fright" and in the sense of "losing one's hair," and that losing might cause even the "motillo" (or lay brother in a convent, who was required to have a circumpilar haircut) to become bald, references to the fact that hair loss is a characteristic of advanced cases of syphilis suffering. It is only shortly thereafter that Polilla gives himself the new name of Caniqui and boasts of having acquired "intimacy" with Diana.

In Act II, Polilla-Caniqui now pretending to work on Diana's side as she attempts to lure Carlos and then leave him, the wordsplay again turn to base elements, as the previous mentions, in connection with his master, "emplasto de ranas" another pharmaceutical term for mercuric oxide. All the while that Diana and Carlos speak of the fevers, passions, and fires of love on a higher plane, Polilla-Caniqui has in mind the consuming fires of the disease designated in France as the "fuego español."9

In Act III we do not hear any more of Polilla-Caniqui's wise-cracks about the cure and ailments for love's ailments. The emphasis now is on the conversations between Carlos and Diana and on the restraint that both are attempting to show. Only at the very end, when he is paired off with Laura, does Polilla-Caniqui revert to a joke about his name, as he suggests that everyone shake himself carefully since "polilla" is present.

Thus far venereal disease has been seen chiefly as a fixation in the mind of the buffoon, but there are other ways in which it relates to the Polilla-Caniqui figure. The name Polilla itself suggests one who like a moth is drawn irresistibly to the flame, and Polilla as "eas" or "unsuspected" might suggest the symptoms of one suffering venereal distress. Caniqui, comically claiming to come from Acapulco and immediately thereafter speaking of the "mal de amor" might be supposed to have brought a case of syphilis with him from the New World.

Further, Syphilis being Morbus Gallicus (Syphilis or the French Disease), a work published in 1530 by the Italian physician, Fracastaro, may provide the background for seeing yet more of Moro's play in association with venereal disease. It was Fracastaro, who in a poem written in Latin hexameters, gave the name Syphilis to a shepherd who was punished with venereal affliction for his insult to Apollo (the sun god). The disease was named for the shepherd and because of the tremendous success of Fracastaro's work, the name came to replace previous appellations for venereal disease. If, following the classical allusions in El desden con el desden, Carlos is seen as Diana's mythological as well as real counterpart, then he can be said to correspond to the Apollo of Fracastaro's poem, and Polilla-Caniqui can be imagined as the blushing and afflicted figure. While there is no proof that Moro ever read Fracastaro's work or even that members of his audience did, the popular quality and the number of editions and translations of Syphilis into Italian, especially in the sixteenth century, make possible this conjecture.

Fracastaro's writings may have been part of the general cultural background of Moro's work.10

NOTES
1 Polilla means both "moth" and "omelette" or "fry." Content is the word for a type of tall rototh clock of the type which might be used for women's undergarments.
3 All quotes from El desden con el desden are from the Francisco Rico edition published in Madrid by Gaspar Castaño in 1617.
4 The quotes from the play are indicated in the text by line numbers.
5 In lines 10 and 101 Moro's footnote on page 90 of the Rico edition.
6 The items in quotes come from lines 126 and 3335 respectively. Although the term "empleasto de ranas" may sound strange, frogs were indeed used in producing a mercury-based ointment. See Theodore Roosnburg, Microbes and Moral (New York: Viking Press, 1977), p. 47.
8 There has been much debate over whether America was the origin of venereal disease. The important thing to remember here is that at the time of Moro's play many people were likely to associate venereal disease with the New World. Great outbreaks of the disease had ravaged Europe shortly after the return of Columbus and his men, and one of the most popular remedies for syphilis was a guaiacum, a wood indigenous to the West Indies. For an elucidation of the importance of guaiacum in the sixteenth century see Bruno M. Damiani's Critical Transcription of Francesco De D'elvogi's "El modo de alivio e legno de India Occidentale," in BHM, 31 (1970-71), 261-271.
10 For all the preceding reference to the results of venereal disease see page 15 for the date of composition in the Rico edition. This same introduction also suggests (page 15) that the date of composition for Moro's play is quite close to the date of publication.

"EL HORTELANO DEL PRADO"; TIRSO OR DON ANTONIO SIGLER DE FUERTA?

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Recently, Ruth Lee Kennedy has suggested that the pseudonym "el Hortelano del Prado" refers to Tirso de Molina. She then fills in some gaps in Tirso's biography on the basis of the activities attributed to this "Hortelano" in a sejornen. I would propose an alternate interpretation. There are...