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

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following of a fixed and meaningless social ritual.”

12 Eric Bentley, “The Comedae of Universal-
ity or Uniqueness,” II R, 30 (1970), 147-182.

13 The contradiction inherent in the pursuit
of personal ideals and the dictates of Chris-
tianity are clearly expressed by Curtis Brown
Watson in Shakespeare and the Renaissance
Concept of Honor (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963):
“Thus in art as in the world of honor, the
idea of a social correction and the cardinal
Christian doctrine of man's sinfulness are
agonized over, either by the writer of that
age unaware that they were trying to reconcile two moral systems
fundamentally incompatible,” pp. 102-103.

14 “Honor in Spanish Golden Age Drama,” Its
Relations to Real Life and to Morals,”
would assess himself
the writers of that age unaware that they
were trying to reconcile two moral systems
fundamentally incompatible,” pp. 102-103.

15 Eric Bentley, “The

16 Watson’s basic premise, that Calderón derived from the
Spanish neo-Aristotelian theorists the concept of tragedy in
which one idea, the heroe, is good by nature but bad because
of its nature, this is the case with the
play’s discursive structure, p. 213, automatically
removes Juan from the list of previous individuals.

17 “A Look at Moreto’s El desden con el desden”

18 Manel Ruiz Lugos has written several
essays on the importance of painting in
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19 VENEREAL DISEASE AND THE GRACIOSO:
A LOOK AT MORETO’S EL DESDEN CON EL DESDEN

By Anne Fountain, Peace College

One of the most intriguing characters in Moreto’s El desden con el desden is the gracioso who goes by the
names Polilla and Caniquil. This
comic figure who makes his appearance from the very start in Act I, Scene 1 as Polilla and then introduces
himself under the assumed name of Caniquil in Act I, Scene 5 has a dominant
role in the play. And since the
cast is noted for its meticulous con-
struction and disciplined art, it is
reasonable to conjecture that there may be
some underlying and satisfying
significance to the two names of the
gracioso. It is the contention of this paper
that one concept which unites the various
definitions of Polilla and Caniquil is
the only virtue that cannot lapse into
external disease, something which stands
out in intentional contrast to the
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the new name he is to invent, Caniqui.

When Polilla does present himself to Diana, complete with costume as a "love doctor" and with comical at­tempts at Latin, he prefaces his appearance with the line, "Plega ai ete que de fuego mi entrelata" (664), 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 "al que es franco" which means both "the French disease" (syphilis) and "generous in payment," with "unguiente blanos" which refers to both the mercury-based ointment thought to be a cure for syphilis and to the silver coins called "unguiente de Mexico." The thinking continues in the vein of the consequences of physical love when Polilla says:

Asm ira jugando, quitame esta quita jueves, que hara salva a un motilón.  

(711-714)

Here Polilla suggests that love may be "quita pelillos" in the sense of "plaiter" and in the sense of "losing one's hair," and that love might cause even the "motilón" (or lay brother in a convent, who was required to have a circular hairstyle) to become bald, references to the fact that hair loss is a characteristic of advanced cases of syphilis. 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 pretends to work on Diana's side as she attempts to lure Carlos and then a poem written in Latin hexameters, "Cura de 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 Fracastor's poem, and Polilla-Caniqui can be imagined as the blushing and afflicted figure. While there is no proof that Moreto ever read Fracastor's work or even that members of his audience did, the great popularity and the number of editions and translations of Syphilis, or the French Disease, especially in the sixteenth century, make possible the conjecture that Fracastor's ideas were "in vogue" as late as 1564, the publication date of El desden con el desden, and that Fracastor's writings may have been part of the general cultural backdrop of Moreto's work.

NOTES

1. Polilla implies both "moth" and "unguiente" or "ointment." Contenus is the word for a type of dark red cloth of the type which might be used for women's underwear.

2. Emilio W. Worgenropper, "Moreto's El desden con el desden: The Comedy Semantically," BHS, 84 (1957), 9

3. All quotes from El desden con el desden are from the Francisco Rico edition published in Madrid by Blas de Corts in 1571.

4. This quote is from page 98, lines 40-44. Subsequent quotes from the play will be indicated in the text by line number.


6. This item in quotes comes from lines 150 and 151 respectively. Although the term "emplasto de ranas" may sound strange, leeches were indeed used in producing a mercury ointment thought to heal syphilis. See Theodor Rosicky, Microbes and Moral (New York: Viking Press, 1974), p. 47.


8. There has been much debate over who America was the origin of syphilis disease.

10. The important thing to remember here is that at the time of Moreto'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 guaiacum, a wood indigenous to the West Indies. For an edition of the importance of the guaiacum in the sixteenth century see Bruce M. Herrmann's Critical Transcription of Francisco De Lobo's "El modo de abreviatura e legno de India Occidentale," in RM, 31 (1970-71), 261-267.


12. For the most important aspects of El desden con el desden see the introduction in the Rico edition. This same introduction also suggests (page 48) that the date of composition for Moreto's play is quite close to the date of publication.

"EL HORTELANO DEL PRADO": TIRSO OR DON ANTONIO SIGLER DE HUERTA?

HAROLD C. JONES, University of Missouri-Columbia

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 segment. I would propose an alternate interpretation. There are...