

THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN SOME MAJOR PLAYS  
OF  
JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCON Y MENDOZA

by

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## FOREWORD

The importance of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón in Spanish dramatic literature of the Golden Age and his significant contribution to the development of the comedy of character make him and his work an extremely interesting subject for study. Although not so prolific a writer as other dramatists of this period, Alarcón wrote with precision and clarity. His style is free from excessive "Gongorism," and his plays are polished to a degree unusual in his time. The characters in Alarcón's plays, especially the men, are for the most part clearly delineated; his plots are interesting and well developed. Both the characters and the plots reveal the author's high moral standards.

Nine major plays were used as the basis for this study of the women in the work of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. These plays were chosen by Isaac Núñez de Arenas for his three-volume edition, Comedias Escogidas de D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Madrid, Real Academia Española, 1867. The plays are Los pechos privilegiados, No hay mal que por bien no venga, Ganar amigos, Mudarse por mejorarse, Los favores del mundo, Las paredes oyen, El tejedor de Segovia, El examen de maridos, and La verdad sospechosa. The introduction to the first volume and the commentaries found at the end of each play were written by Isaac Núñez de Arenas. Footnote references to the dramatic works discussed in the study were based on this edition.

The plays in this collection comprise more than one third of the total dramatic work of Ruiz de Alarcón.

According to Antonio Castro Leal, Alarcón's dramatic production may be divided into four periods. None of the plays used in this study was written during Alarcón's first period, from 1601 to 1612, during which he wrote comedias de enredo, or plays of deceit, after the fashion of the time. During the second period, 1613-1618, in which he stressed the comedy of character, he produced five of the plays used for this study: Las paredes oyen, Mudarse por mejorarse, Los favores del mundo, Ganar amigos, and La verdad sospechosa. The third period, that of the heroic comedy, 1619-1622, contained Los pechos privilegiados and El tejedor de Segovia. The last period, 1623-1625, the shortest in time and the least productive, gave us two of the plays used here, El examen de maridos and No hay mal que por bien venga. Castro Leal comments that the plays of this period are "more human, more real, and are animated by a vital irony."<sup>1</sup>

In general, the Spanish drama of the 17th century was written in verse, with three acts of approximately three thousand verses, or lines, and used as a basis for action anything and everything suitable for staging: the Bible and mythology, lives of the saints and ancient history, chronicles and medieval legends, Italian novelle and pastoral romances, and current events. The drama of the Spanish Golden Age was the Spanish life of the 17th century. The term comedia, very much like the English word "play," included all dramatic works with the

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, su vida y su obra, p. 74.

exception of the autos, coloquios, entremeses, farsas, alegoricas, etc.<sup>1</sup> These were short dramatic works frequently given before, between the acts, or following the production of a three-act comedia.

The plots of Alarcón's plays are based upon the usual themes of his time: love, honor, and intrigue. The settings for all of the plays used in this study are urban; however, in one, Ganar amigos, the last half of the play takes place in a small village and the surrounding country. The characters of these plays include all types from royal personages to servants and villagers. While, as previously mentioned, the men in these plays are stronger, more clear-cut characters than the women, nevertheless, Alarcón has developed some interesting feminine personalities in his dramatic work.

The comedia española of the 17th century was a product of its times as is any development or change in a country's literature. As the public demanded, so the dramatists wrote. Lope de Vega said of himself that he was a "money-making sinner," meaning that he wrote his plays as the rabble demanded. The comedia was

. . . destined solely to satisfy as best it might the taste of an ignorant mob that had few scruples as to the means employed. . . . These are the elements which its public never wearied of and never ceased to demand: motion, quick succession of romantic incidents, surprises, abrupt turns brought about by chance or caprice, not logic; repetition of the same intrigues and the same characters,

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 67.

or better of the same types reproduced over and over.<sup>1</sup>

The types of plays included in this "new drama" were the comedias históricas, or heróicas, celebrating national themes and events; comedias de capa y espada, dealing with the upper bourgeoisie or lower aristocracy; comedias palaciegas, whose principal characters were reigning monarchs or high aristocratic personages; and comedia de carácter, developed principally by Ruiz de Alarcón. The latter plays portrayed a social type: the liar, the slanderer, the liviana, and so forth.<sup>2</sup>

With Alarcón the Comedia, though retaining its distinctive features, trends notably toward the comedy of manners and character. His obvious concern with ethics, the philosophic bearing of his themes, the regular structure of his plots, his moderate use of exciting incidents, and lastly his regard for style, all make him the most classic, in the French sense, of the dramatic writers of the century. He would certainly be the best understood and appreciated by a modern French audience.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ernest Mérimée, A History of Spanish Literature, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>George Tyler Northup, An Introduction to Spanish Literature, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup>Ernest Mérimée, op. cit., p. 358.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Julio Jimenez Rueda, there were two types of women in Madrid in the 17th century. The first were those whose entire life was centered in the home, and who took no part in public activities except those of the church. "Las damas respetables" lived a protected life; their primary concern was for family and church. When they appeared on the streets, their faces were covered, and they were attended by a dependable servant or by father, brother, or husband.

The second type were the frivolous ladies whose lives were filled with intrigue and deceit, and an overwhelming interest in love. These ladies rode out in their carriages, took walks in the park, attended the theater, always accompanied by a companion or servant, with faces half-covered, and their eyes and thoughts concerned with meeting interesting men. They, too, were devout and attended religious ceremonies, but one might suspect that their concern was not entirely upon the saving of their souls.

A lower stratum of this second group would include the ladies denounced by Alarcón in several of his plays in which, through the words of a character, usually the gracioso, he scorned rapacity and wickedness of women in and around the court. In La verdad sospechosa Tristán, the wise and learned gracioso, gave Don García, freshly returned from school, a graphic picture of the type of women in Madrid who sold or gave their favors freely. He compared these women to stars, constellations, or planets, according to the "brilliance" with



which they displayed their favors:

. . . . .  
 En el vicio, la virtud  
 Y el estado hay diferencia,  
 Como es varia su influencia,  
 Resplandor y magnitud.  
 . . . . .  
 Sólo te diré de aquellas  
 Que son, con almas livianas,  
 Siendo divinas, humanas;  
 Corruptibles, siendo estrellas.  
 . . . . .  
 Estas, con la conjunción  
 De maridos placenteros,  
 Influyen en extranjeros  
 Dadivosa condición.  
 . . . . .  
 No todas dicen verdad  
 En esto; que mil talmadas  
 Suelen fingirse casadas,  
 Por vivir con libertad.  
 . . . . .  
 Hay una gran multitud  
 De señoras del tusón,  
 Que, entre cortesanas, son  
 De la mayor magnitud.  
 Siguen tras las tusonas,  
 Otras que serlo desean;  
 . . . . .  
 La buscona no la cuento  
 Por estrella, que es cometa,  
 Pues ni su luz es perfeta,  
 . . . . .  
 . . . que el dinero es el polo  
 De todas estas estrellas.<sup>1</sup>

And again in the words of the gracioso, in Las paredes oyen, Alarcón expressed himself on the rapacity of women:

. . . . .  
 Que hay mujer que en el engaño  
 Que en esta noche previene,<sup>2</sup>  
 Librados los gustos tiene  
 De los deseos de un año;

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, ed., Comedias escogidas de D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Vol. 3, pp. 354-357.

<sup>2</sup>The eve of San Juan, or Midsummer's Eve.



. . . . .  
 . . . la viuda disfrazada,  
 Que entre galas de casada  
 Hurta los gustos de boda;  
 . . . . .  
 Una sarta de doncellas,  
 De quien son las manos bellas  
 Engazaduras de plata;<sup>1</sup>

In Los favores del mundo,<sup>2</sup> and in Mudarse por mejorarse<sup>3</sup>

Alarcon referred, again through the graciosos, to this quality in women.

Quite naturally, the ladies of the first group, "las damas respetables," would not be suitable material for the stage. Their lives were much too colorless to project across the foot-lights. So it is not surprising that the feminine characters in the plays of the 17th century were patterned after those of the upper stratum of the second group.

Two of the social mores of the peninsula seemed to be undergoing some questioning and change during this century. They were the right of women to choose their own husbands, and the education of women. In Alarcón's plays, the right to choose one's husband seemed to have his approval. Don Beltrán, in La verdad sospechosa, seeking Jacinta's hand for his son, spoke to her before he discussed the matter with her father. Doña Flor, in Ganar amigos, with the sanction of the King, selected the Marqués for her husband. Only after she had manipulated affairs so that the Count proposed to her, and she had accepted him, did

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 32.



advantageous to come as Midas than as Narcissus."<sup>1</sup>

Again, in El examen de maridos, Narcissus was mentioned with other characters of classical mythology. In Doña Blanca's long speech in which she told Doña Ines the false story of her mistress' hopeless love for the Conde, she said:

. . . . .  
 Ese Narciso en la paz,  
 Que por sus prendas hermosas  
 Es de todos envidiado,  
 . . . . .  
 Que si él es galán Adonis,  
 Es ella Venus hermosa.  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . y en la mano Juno  
 Muestra la encendida antorcha;  
 . . . . .  
 Porque con tanto secreto  
 Su nuevo dueño enamora,  
 Que viendo todos la flecha,  
 No hay quien la alfabá conozca.  
 . . . . .  
 Pues como en el verde, abril  
 Marchita el helado Bóreas  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . de que goza  
 El marido mas bizarro  
 Que ha celebrado la Europa.

And, a few minutes later, having set her trap, she exclaimed:

Ya ha sembrado la discordia.  
 Pues soy, despreciada Juno,  
 ¡Muera París y arda Troya!<sup>2</sup>

Doña Ana, in Ganar amigos, during her long explanation to the King in which she accused the Marqués of defiling her, made several references to mythological characters. Among them

<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-239.

are the following:

.....  
 Los rayos aguardaba de la aurora,  
 Banandome las urnas de Morfeo  
 En las dulces corrientes del Leteo,  
 .....  
 Luego el traidor Tarquinio  
 Me dejó en cambio la tiniebla oscura;<sup>1</sup>

In Los pechos privilegiados, Leonor referred to "amante Jupiter," and a few lines later she spoke of

..... no la ira  
 Del fuerte Alcides el Centauro Neso  
 Cuando ciego de amor, por Deyanira  
 Despreciando la vida perdió el seso.<sup>2</sup>

In El tejedor de Segovia, Teodora referred to Atalanta,<sup>3</sup> and later was called one of "las romanas matronas" by Don Fernando when she had shown great bravery in freeing him from the Count. In Mudarse por mejorarse, Doña Clara showed evidence of classical learning in her advice to Leonor:

Ver, que el Marqués multiplica  
 Diligencias y paseos,  
 Y examina tus criados  
 De tus dichos y tus hechos,  
 Centinela de tu vida,  
Argos de tus pensamientos;<sup>4</sup>

Another evidence of an educated woman came from Celia, the maid of Doña Ana in Las paredes oyen. Celia appeared to be well informed, for when Doña Ana protested that she should not show Don Juan her love for him for fear that he might think

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 406-409.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 133.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 129.

her liviana, Celia said:

Celia: ¡Liviana dices, después  
De dos años que por tí  
Ha andado fuera de sí!  
Bien parece que no ves  
Lo que en las comedias hacen  
Las infantas de Leon.

Doña Ana: ¿Como?

Celia: Con tal condición  
Ó con tal desdicha nacen,  
Que en viendo un hombre, al momento  
Le ruegan, y mudan traje,  
Y sirviéndole de paje,  
Van con las piernas al viento.<sup>1</sup>

This, undoubtedly, was intended by Alarcón to point sharply to Lope de Vega's Los donaires de Matico, in which the character, Matico, proved to be la Infanta Juana who had dressed in masculine attire to pursue her faithless lover.

The technique of having a maiden, dressed as a man, pursue a lover who had abandoned her was very frequently employed by other dramatists<sup>2</sup> of Alarcón's era. Alarcón did not make use of this technique in any of the nine plays under consideration. Disguise was used by Doña Ana and by Teodora in El tejedor de Segovia, but not for the purpose of following a faithless lover. In El examen de maridos, Doña Blanca and her servant, Clavela, disguised themselves to perpetrate a deceit, and to start a rumor. For some unexplained reason, a gracioso in Mudarse por mejorarse went to the heroine's home dressed as a woman.

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., p. 481.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Lope de Vega, Los donaires de Matico; Tirso de Molina, Don Gil de las calzas verdes; etc.

A favorite motif of the heroic comedias of the 17th century was that of pundonor. Defending the family honor, and especially that of daughter, sister, or wife, to the point of death for the offender and sometimes even death for the offended woman, was a recurring theme. In Alarcón's plays, however, the question of pundonor was not frequently introduced. It was present in several plays but was not a major issue, and was not even found in three of the nine plays studied, i.e., Las paredes oyen, Mudarse por mejorarse, and El examen de maridos. In the first two, the leading ladies were widows; therefore, there was no father nor brother nor husband to guard their honor. Pundonor was an important part of the plot in Ganar amigos, Los pechos privilegiados, El tejedor de Segovia, and in No hay mal que por bien no venga. It was a lesser issue in La verdad sospechosa and in Los favores del mundo.

#### THE LIFE OF JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCÓN y MENDOZA

Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza, who has been ranked as one of the four great dramatists of the Spanish Golden Age, was born in Mexico City during the latter part of the year 1580, or at the beginning of the year 1581. His father, Pedro Ruiz de Alarcón, an administrator of the silver mines in Taxco, and his mother, Doña Leonor de Mendoza, both belonged to distinguished Spanish families. According to Antonio Castro Leal, Juan had four brothers, Pedro, Gaspar, Hernando, and García.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 22.



Very little is known of Alarcón's life. It is known that in 1596 he was enrolled as a student of Canon Law in the University of Mexico where he studied until April, 1600. In August of this same year, he sailed for Spain to continue his legal studies at the University of Salamanca. As Juan's father was poor, his expenses were paid from a fund established by one of his relatives, Gaspar Ruiz de Montoya, an alderman of Seville, "for the sustenance of students and pious works."<sup>1</sup>

Alarcón received the degree of Bachelor of Civil Laws in December, 1602, from the University of Salamanca. He then, apparently, enrolled in courses for the degree of Licentiate of Laws. According to the records, Alarcón terminated his work at the University of Salamanca on June 24, 1605, without receiving his degree, although he had completed the courses. Possibly he could not afford the fees required by the university for graduation, nor the expenses of the customary social festivities which accompanied the receiving of a degree.<sup>2</sup>

In one of his early plays, La cueva de Salamanca, Alarcón expressed his pride in having attended the University which he called "esa celebrada Atenas." A fellow student, Bricián Díaz Cruzate, in a "testimonial" reported Alarcón as a careful, intelligent, and diligent student. From the picture he painted of student life in this play, one might gather that Alarcón was also rather well acquainted with the lighter side of university

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 24.



life, the jokes and the lawless activities of typical students.

According to Castro Leal, Alarcón's interest in literature, which no doubt had its beginnings in the University of Mexico, was strengthened and deepened during his stay at Salamanca. It was here that he began his first efforts at writing.

In the year following the completion of his studies at Salamanca, Ruiz de Alarcón practiced law in Seville. On the fourth of July, 1606, he took part in an out-of-door celebration at the village of San Juan de Alfarache. Alarcón was chosen judge of a poetry contest, and was given the name of Don Floripando Talludo, Príncipe de Chunga. His contribution to the contest was a poem, "Consolando una dama que le sudaban las manos." It is of interest that Miguel de Cervantes acted as secretary of this same contest.

Lope de Vega, prolific writer of the new type of comedy, was becoming well known as the leading dramatist of Spain. Doubtlessly Alarcón attended the theater in Seville and was familiar with the popular plays of the time. Some of his early plays, El semejante a sí mismo, La industria y la suerte, Ganar amigos, had their settings in Seville. It is very probable that he began his writing of drama while he lived in this city.

In June, 1608, Alarcón returned to Mexico, arriving there in August. In February, 1609, he was granted a degree of Licentiate of Laws by the University of Mexico. He then applied for the degree of Doctor of Laws, and was even exempted from expenses involved, but for some unknown reason he did not take the degree. While in Mexico he probably completed La cueva de

Salamanca, which he had begun in Spain, perhaps wrote all of El semejante á sí mismo, and may have written other plays which he revised or completed upon his return to the peninsula.

Upon his arrival in Spain, in the fall of 1613, Alarcón went to Madrid. His career as a dramatist began shortly after he arrived in this city. There is little information about the dates of the writing, or of the performances of his plays. According to Caroline B. Bourland, Fernandez-Guerra judges El semejante á sí mismo to have been the first of Alarcón's plays performed in Madrid. It, perhaps, "was intended as a compliment to the Marquis of Salinas because of the eulogy it contains of the latter's services to the city of Mexico."<sup>1</sup>

In 1628, the Parte primera, a collection of eight of Alarcón's comedias was printed. In his dedication, Alarcón said that all eight of the plays had been presented on the stage before 1622, when this book was first sanctioned. Castro Leal said that Las paredes oyen was on the stage in 1617, and he was sure that it had been performed before that time.<sup>2</sup> He believed that Las paredes oyen might have been the last of the eight in the Parte primera to have been written. The plays contained in the Parte segunda, printed in 1634, were twelve in number, and were written between 1619 and 1625.

Since his return to Spain in 1613, Alarcón had been trying

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<sup>1</sup>Caroline B. Bourland, introduction to Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Las paredes oyen, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 38.

to secure a post from the King whereby he could use his training and earn his living. Thirteen years later, in June, 1626, he was appointed Prolocutor in the Council for the Indies. His position at first was that of substitute, which entitled him to fill the first vacancy among the permanent prolocutors. This vacancy occurred in 1633, but his duties must have filled his time completely, because after he took office he wrote, apparently, only four minor lyric poems.<sup>1</sup>

In comparison with other dramatists of his time, Alarcón was not a prolific writer. He is credited with 25 comedias, while Lope de Vega is said to have written 1,500; Tirso de Molina, 400; and Calderon de la Barca, at least 120.<sup>2</sup> Achieving success and recognition in the face of such tremendous competition was undoubtedly a harsh struggle. That he succeeded to some extent is evidenced by the fact that Ganar amigos was played before the Queen in October, 1621, and Siempre ayuda la verdad was played for the King in 1623.<sup>3</sup> With success came the dislike and jealousy of his contemporaries which resulted in bitter attacks against Alarcón both as a person and as an artist.

Although Juan Ruiz de Alarcón's whole life and personality must have been tremendously affected by his physical deformity -- he was a hunchback -- and by the scorn, mockery, and abuse he received at the hands of his jealous contemporaries, the nine

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<sup>1</sup>Caroline B. Bourland, op. cit., p. x.

<sup>2</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.

plays used as a basis for this paper show very little evidence of bitterness. Lope de Vega, who apparently could not stand rivalry, along with Quevedo, Góngora, Salas Barbadillo, and others, published satires and epigrams against Alarcón, mocking him as "poeta juanetes," "hormilla para bonetes," "nació con arzones como silla." Alarcón's relationship with those with whom he came in contact as a man of letters was pleasant, courteous, but restrained, aloof; some attributed this restraint to pride, conceit, and haughtiness.<sup>1</sup> He had probably found it necessary to keep himself somewhat aloof as a protection against "man's inhumanity to man" born, in his case, of his physical deformity.

There is very little evidence that Alarcón took notice of, nor made any reply to these attacks. His forbearance seems remarkable. Occasionally, however, he avenged himself with his pen, as in the characterization of Don Mendo in Las paredes oyen who was thought by Fernandez-Guerra to be a composite character drawn from Góngora, Suarez de Figueroa, and the Count of Villamediano.<sup>2</sup> In Los pechos privilegiados, Alarcón replied sharply to an attack pointed at him by Lope de Vega in the dedication of his Los españoles en Flandes. In Los pechos privilegiados, Alarcón replied by directing his attack at Lope, scorning him for his immoral life and for his jealousy, addressing himself to "that one who, forgetting the defects of his soul, mocks with

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>2</sup>Caroline B. Bourland, op. cit., p. xi.

ridicule those defects which another has in his body."<sup>1</sup> These lines were followed by a beautifully written passage on the law of compensation:

Dios no lo da todo a uno;  
Que piadoso y justiciero,  
Con divina providencia  
Dispone el repartimiento.  
Al que le plugo, de dar  
Mal cuerpo, dió sufrimiento  
Para llevar cuerdamente  
Los apodos de los necios;  
Al que le dió cuerpo grande,  
Le dió corto entendimiento;  
Hace malquisto al dichoso,  
Hace al rico majadero.  
Provida naturaleza,  
Nubes congela en el viento,  
Y repartiendo sus lluvias,  
Riega el árbol más pequeño.<sup>2</sup>

The last and worst of the attacks came in 1623. Alarcón had been asked to write a poetic description of the festivities in honor of the marriage agreement between Prince Charles of England and Maria of Austria, sister of Philip IV. Secretly, Alarcón enlisted the help of a number of fellow poets since he was not particularly skilled in the exaggerated, flowery language used at that time for eulogies. The poem, evidently a very bad one, appeared under his name, and brought down upon his head a barrage of cruel and mocking comments and epigrams by Lope, Quevedo, Góngora and others. This inhuman treatment did not seem to bring forth any reply from Alarcón.<sup>3</sup>

Later, five years after Ruiz de Alarcón had ceased writing

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>3</sup>Caroline B. Bourland, *op. cit.*, pp. xiii-xiv.

for the stage, Lope de Vega, in his Laurel de Apolo, made a weak attempt to apologize for his cruelty. Lope asked Apollo to search for Ruiz and suggest that he "no olvide el Parnaso por América, ni la ambrosía por el chocolate, sino que escriba muchas comedias más, como la de El mentiroso, y la de El examen de maridos, en la que se examinó de docto artifice. . . ."1

In spite of his many handicaps, physical and personal, the contemporaries of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón attributed to him the qualities of a man attractive to women. In the many satires written against him, Alarcón was linked with at least three and possibly more women in his life between the years 1617 and 1623. However, the identities of the ladies who loved him have "remained cloaked in the mantle of Time's anonymity."<sup>2</sup> One was a beautiful socialite, another a lovely but mercenary lady (pura buscona), and a third one of possibly some academic standing. The latter may have been Doña Angela de Cervantes, mother of the "presumably illegitimate" daughter to whom the dramatist left the major portion of his estate.<sup>3</sup>

El pasajero, by Suárez de Figueroa, Corcovilla, by Quevedo, El sutil cordovés, by Salas Barbadillo, and Fiesta de la boda de la incasable malcasada, also by Barbadillo, are some writings which indicated Alarcón's attractions as a lover. In El sutil

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>2</sup>Ruth Lee Kennedy, "Contemporary Satire Against Ruiz de Alarcón as Lover," Hispanic Review, April, 1945, 13:145.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.



cordovés, Barbadillo mocked Alarcón and described the woman as a daughter of a teacher, a "dama populista." In Fiesta de la boda de la incasable malcasada the lady, a "veritable bluestocking," feeling herself mentally superior to her husband, preferred to marry a hunchback.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that Alarcón deliberately answered one of these satires, or perhaps all of them, in his Las paredes oyen in which the protagonist, Don Juan, not only had his name, but was also physically unattractive. Because of his kind, gentle, and wholly honorable character, Don Juan won the beautiful Doña Ana (which, in real life, Alarcón did not do), defeating the handsome, but ill-spoken Don Mendo.

In his will, Alarcón bequeathed the greater portion of his estate to "Doña Lorenza de Alarcón (hija suya y de Doña Ana de Cervantes) que vivía con su marido don Francisco Girón en la villa de Barchín del Hoyo, en la Mancha."<sup>2</sup> There is no record of the birth of his daughter, nor of the identity of Doña Ana de Cervantes.

Ruiz de Alarcón died on August 4, 1639. He was buried in San Sebastian, his parish church. The cruelty of his fellow man followed Alarcón even to his grave. The chronicler, Pellicer, in his Avisos históricos, noted his death with the words: "Murió don Juan de Alarcón, poeta famoso así por sus comedias como por sus corcovas, y Relator del Consejo de Indias." (Died, Juan de Alarcón, a poet famous for his comedies as well as for his hump,

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth Lee Kennedy, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>2</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 52.



and Relator in the Council for the Indies.)<sup>1</sup>

## DISCUSSION

### Los pechos privilegiados

Elvira, proud, self-respecting, honorable heroine of this play, is the highest type of first lady in Alarcón's plays. She was loved by Alfonso, king of Leon, although he was promised to the daughter of the Count of Castilla. Alfonso, unable to restrain himself, asked his favorite at the court, Rodrigo, to arrange a clandestine meeting for him with her. Rodrigo refused and, as a result, lost his position at the court. Ramiro, a less honorable privado, however, carried out the King's orders. Although Elvira was in love with the King, she refused his request saying,

Si arriesgara  
La opinión ¿que me quedara,  
Teniendo amor que negar?  
Públicamente me vea  
Si la mano quiere darme;  
Que si no, yo he de guardarme  
De quien mi infamia desea.  
Y adiós Ramiro, que viene  
Gente.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier in the scene she had remarked:

• • • • •  
Que si tal sangre y fama  
Para esposa me juzgó  
Pequeña, me tengo yo  
Por grande para su dama.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 21-22.

<sup>3</sup>Loc. cit.

The traditional pundonor motive, frequently found in the Spanish drama of the Golden Age, also played an important role in this work. This "point of honor" required the male members of a family to defend to the death, if necessary, the honor of the women. Elvira's father, Count Melendo, had been told of Ramiro's bribing Nuño to let him into Elvira's room at night. The Count and Don Bermudo, Elvira's brother, lay in wait and were fully prepared to kill the intruder to protect the honor of Elvira. When they discovered that it was the King, the Count extracted from him the promise that he would forget Elvira. The noble Count had faith in the King's word, but Elvira's real feeling was evidenced by her, "Ah, falso!"<sup>1</sup> When the King apologized to her, Elvira answered,

Por ser efeto de amor  
Perdono el atrevimiento...  
(Ap. Mas el propósito, no.)<sup>2</sup>

Elvira, although disturbed, did not become emotional in the scene in which Ramiro and Alfonso entered her room.

Elvira: ¿Quién está aquí?  
Rey: No te alteres; que yo soy.  
Elvira: ¡Ay de mí! ¡Qué atrevimiento!  
Rey: Señora...  
Elvira: ¡Qué confusión!  
Rey: Escucha.

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 45.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

Elvira: Si de mi padre  
 Conocéis el gran valor.  
 ¿Cómo á un exceso tan loco  
 Os atrevisteis los dos?

When the King gallantly assured her that he would give up his life just to see her, she asked calmly,

¿Cómo entrastes? ¿Quién abrió?<sup>1</sup>

Elvira also had human traits which made her very real and likeable. When Rodrigo spoke to her in behalf of Don Sancho, and suggested that she accept him as his intentions were honorable while those of Alfonso were not, she became quite angry.

. . . . . Rodrigo,  
 Mucho me espanta y ofende,  
 Que os arrojeis atrevido  
 A decirme que pensáis  
 Que de liviana resisto;  
 Que esa licencia le toca  
 Solo al padre ó al marido,  
 Y al deudo cercano apenas;  
 Y vos, ni sois deudo mío,  
 Ni mi esposo habéis de ser.<sup>2</sup>

One might wonder if Elvira were angry because Rodrigo had stepped out of his proper role, or if it hurt her to hear that Alfonso's intentions were not honorable.

Later, she determined to see Alfonso again to give him one more chance to ask her to marry him and, if he did not do so, she planned to tell him of her decision to marry Don Sancho. At this time she told Leonor that "resistencia" was a human trait,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 40-41.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 86.

but that the power to love was divine; therefore, it had superior force. She was prudent enough, however, to have Leonor, her sister, and Jimena, Rodrigo's old nurse, with her when she met Alfonso:

Tú, Leonor, irás conmigo  
Y por más seguridad  
Irá Jimena también.<sup>1</sup>

Elvira was uncertain, distressed, hopeful, and fearful at the same time:

Por una parte esperanzas,  
Por otra, Leonor, temores,  
Me acobardan y me animan  
Con afectos desconformes.<sup>2</sup>

Virtue won the battle. Alfonso agreed to marry Elvira, and he gave Rodrigo permission to marry Leonor.

Leonor, sister of Elvira, played the role of second lady in Los pechos privilegiados. She, like her sister, was proud, self-respecting, and capable of a deep love for Rodrigo. Her part of segunda dama was almost as strong as that of Elvira's.

When Rodrigo informed Leonor that he must leave and that he could not marry her, nor give a reason for his actions, she tried, womanlike, to persuade him against his will. When he still refused to tell her, she interpreted the situation in her own way and emphatically asserted that his desertion either had a trace of deceitfulness, was caused by a dishonor brought upon him or upon her, came from finding serious defects in her, or was

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 119.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

prompted by the fact that his love had not been very strong.

When all effort on her part failed to move him to explain, -- honor-bound to the King, Rodrigo could not explain -- she became cold, hurt, and angry, and tried to retaliate, saying

Partid pues: que estando ausente  
Poco pienso padecer;  
Que es muy fácil de perder  
Quien me pierde fácilmente.<sup>1</sup>

Jimena was the most unusual and most interesting of all Alarconian criadas. She was the old nurse of Rodrigo who gave him all the maternal love, advice, and protection that a real mother could have given. When Rodrigo left the court and went to his home in Valmadrigal, Jimena greeted him with

Mi Rodrigo ¿qué tenedes?  
Esfogad conmigo el pecho,  
Si vos, miembra que del mío  
Vos di el primer alimento.  
Ama vuesa so, Rodrigo;  
A nadie el vuesto secreto  
Podedes mejor fiar;  
Que como madre vos quiero.

Later in the same conversation, she assured him

E que so fembra, me ofrezco  
A magollar a puñadas  
A quien vos praza, los huesos;  
Que en toda muesa montaña  
Non ye leon bravo é fiero  
A quien yo, con los mis brazos  
Non de la muerte sin fierro.<sup>2</sup>

Jimena was a villana, picturesque, outspoken, good-hearted, but always fiercely concerned about and protective of

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., p. 26.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

Rodrigo. She had no respect even for the King when he threatened her boy. The King, in love with Elvira, hid in the woods and heard a part of a conversation between Rodrigo and Elvira. Having misconstrued what he heard, Alfonso came out from hiding and threatened to kill Rodrigo. Jimena, who was not above eavesdropping on whatever she felt was important to Rodrigo, came out from her hiding place, and seized the arms of the King -- a rash and very unlikely act on the part of a subject. When Alfonso asked her for an explanation of her act, Jimena answered,

Rey, el mío fijo  
Deflendo, non vos ofendo.<sup>1</sup>

Of Jimena, Leonor and Elvira said,

Leonor: Resuelta es la villana.

Elvira: Es á lo menos  
Desengañada.<sup>2</sup>

Jimena was the only character in any of these nine plays who spoke in dialect. As Los pechos privilegiados was one of the very few plays of Alarcón which had some of its scenes away from urban setting, this dialect was probably Alarcón's effort to inject local color. This play opened in a village of Leon which was not given a name. The latter half was located at Valmadrigal, Rodrigo's home, where Jimena lived. The dialect was difficult to read, and, according to Castro Leal,

... el lenguaje antiguo que usa y que, más que arcaísmo, sugiere rusticidad -- fabla convencional de los dramáticos del siglo xvii que no se fabló nunca --

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 79.



es como una barrera sutil, pero infranqueable, que impidió a Alarcón llegar hasta su verdadero ser.<sup>1</sup>

In his discussion of this play in the three volume work, Comedias Escogidas de D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, Isaac Núñez de Arenas wrote

Después de Rodrigo, el personaje que descuella, es su ama Jimena, creación caprichosa y original, aunque no fuera mas que por el dialecto que habla, tan ajeno de la unidad de lenguaje que naturalmente pide todo drama, como propio del lugar en que se coloca la escena. ¿Pero qué importa (no acertamos a ser severos), si parece que estamos oyendo hablar a Don Alfonso el Sabio y contemplando en aquella humilde mujer la bondad, entereza y bravía virtud de la mas rica fembra de Castilla?<sup>2</sup>

Jimena's acts of loyalty brought the King's declaration of "privilegio de nobleza" to those "pechos" which nourished the descendants of the noble family of Villagomez, a supreme tribute to both Jimena and Rodrigo.

No hay mal que por bien no venga

The three women of the second drama under discussion are not the strong, outstanding characters found in other plays by Alarcón. One does not feel in any of them the strength and gentleness of Doña Ana, nor the wisdom and kindness of Celia in Las paredes oyen. They lack the vivacious personality of Jacinta in La verdad sospechosa, and they certainly lack the audacity of Doña Blanca in El examen de maridos, as well as that

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 146.



of Julia in Los favores del mundo. The personalities of Leonor and Constanza are vague, and one is left with a blurred impression of them as individuals. The reader is hardly aware of the servant, Inés. The presence of these women neither advances nor retards the action of the play.

In the opening scene of No hay mal que por bien no venga, Leonor, the primera dama, is protesting her father's disapproval of Don Juan as a suitable husband. Although deeply in love with Don Juan, she was completely dominated by her father. One might wonder if she were bemoaning her hopeless fate because she could not marry Don Juan, or because she could see no way out of the subjection under which her stern and unsympathetic parent held her. In talking to Inés, her servant, in the first scene in which they appear, Leonor said,

Leonor: De sujeción tan penosa  
¿Cuándo libre me veré?

Inés: Cuando la mano te dé.

Leonor: Nunca seré tan dichosa.<sup>1</sup>

Leonor was loyal to Don Juan until she was overwhelmed by Don Domingo's tale that Don Juan had deceived him by renting him a house which Don Juan did not own. Don Domingo did not know that Leonor knew Don Juan, so she felt that he had no ulterior purpose in disparaging him as her father had. She even suspected that her cousin, Constanza, had base motives when she tried to make her see Don Juan's faults. Leonor remarked,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 166-167.

¡Ay prima! no has penetrado  
De mi padre los intentos:  
Trazas son y fingimientos,  
Que fabrica su cuidado  
Los delitos con que afrenta  
A don Juan por no casarme;<sup>1</sup>

And later,

No puede ser, no, Constanza;  
Hablada vienes sin duda  
De mi padre, y en su ayuda  
Solicitas mi mudanza.<sup>2</sup>

But when she was convinced of the truth of the tales about her lover, Leonor was haughty, proud, and scornful toward him.

. . . . .  
¡La mano pretende mía  
Quien da tan franca licencia  
De murmurar su opinión?  
Teniendo yo por marido  
A quien tanto la ha perdido,  
¿Mereciera estimación  
Ni aun de vos? No soy tan necia,  
Que quiera darme a entender  
Que estimará a su mujer  
Quien su mismo honor desprecia.  
Idos de aquí, persuadido  
A que ya de vuestro amor  
Solo me queda el dolor  
De haberos favorecido.<sup>3</sup>

As was true of several of Alarcón's heroines when trouble or disaster came, and there was likely to be physical combat in the presence of the lady, Leonor reacted with the hyperbole, "Yo estoy muerta!"<sup>4</sup>

Constanza, on the other hand, was more practical and more objective about Don Juan and her cousin's burning love for the

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 292.

young galán. She more readily believed and accepted the slanderous, but true, stories about Don Juan's activities than did Leonor. Constanza was not blinded by love. As was customary with all of Alarcón's second ladies, Constanza, too, won a husband -- the eccentric Don Domingo de Blas. During their courtship, however, Constanza cleverly poked gentle fun at Don Domingo, el acomodado.

- Constanza: Si diré, mas sin creer  
Que lo haréis; que os puede ser  
De alguna incomodidad.
- Don Domingo: Engañada estáis, por Dios,  
Que el gasto mas opulento  
Hiciera yo muy contento  
Por cualquiera de las dos.
- Constanza: ¿Por mí también?
- Don Domingo: La beldad  
Que en vos miro lo merece.
- Constanza: Querer á dos os parece  
Sin duda comodidad.<sup>1</sup>

Inés was a stereotyped criada. As in the case of other maids, she too was the confidante of her mistress, acted as a guard for her when Leonor talked with Don Juan at her window, and gave her advice and encouragement to marry Don Juan.

This was truly a man's play. The three women appeared very briefly and spoke comparatively little. This fact, no doubt, accounts for their not being developed into strong, forceful characters. In the short fourth scene of Act I, Leonor had four speeches, and Inés, three. In the equally short sixth

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Nuñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, pp. 215-216.

scene of this act, each spoke three times. In the second scene of Act II, Leonor and Constanza had relatively long speeches. Leonor spoke five times, and Constanza, four in this scene which covered three pages. In the longer third scene of this act, Leonor spoke seven times, Constanza, six, and Inés, once. Curiously enough, the ladies did not appear again until the close of Act III. In the ninth scene of this act, Leonor and Constanza talked briefly to the Príncipe. In the tenth scene they appeared but said nothing; and in the eleventh scene, the last of the act, each spoke once. Inés had only seven speeches in the entire play -- a decided contrast to the 60 speeches which Celia had in Las paredes oyen.

#### Ganar amigos

Doña Flor, central feminine figure of this play, was probably one of the least admirable of Alarcón's leading ladies. She was emotionally unstable, deceitful, and selfishly concerned with securing the best advantage for herself. Her brother, Don Diego, was possibly largely responsible for Doña Flor's conduct. He so rigidly and unsympathetically enforced his right to control her that he almost forced her to lie to him.

At the opening of the play, Doña Flor wanted to encourage the attentions of the Marquis don Fabrique, and was afraid that the presence in Seville of Don Fernando, a former lover, would spoil her chances. She asked Don Fernando to promise that he would not tell anyone that he had known her before. She said that she feared that, should the old scandal which had forced her

to leave Cordova, be known in Seville, her brother's chances of securing a position at court would be harmed. Her real reason was that she feared she would lose the love of the Marquis if he should learn of the scandal. She assured Don Fernando, however, that she still loved him and that she would meet him secretly.

Don Fernando was seen by Don Sancho, brother of the Marquis, at Doña Flor's window. Don Sancho, seeking to protect his brother's honor, challenged Don Fernando, and was killed in the ensuing battle.

This new scandal upset Don Diego almost to the point of frenzy. Doña Flor revealed her duplicity when she explained to her brother that she had expected the Marquis that night. She had planned a rendezvous with him, hoping to force a declaration of marriage from him. In addition, she had hidden three persons in her room so that if the Marquis should declare his intention to marry her, she would have witnesses to prove it. If he indicated that he did not have any matrimonial plans, these witnesses would help her to force him into marriage.

Doña Flor lied to Don Diego when he questioned her as to the identity of the man at her window:

Ni rostro, ni voz, ni talle  
Conoci.<sup>1</sup>

Then Don Diego questioned her truthfulness, which showed that he had had former occasions to doubt her word:

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 339.

¿Cómo sabré que tu lengua  
Me ha referido verdades,  
Flor?<sup>1</sup>

Thinking of his right as guardian of her honor, Don Diego  
said,

Muestra, y piensa que no rompe  
Mi espada tu pecho infame,  
Porque no digan que empleo  
Por la mujer á vengarme.<sup>2</sup>

The Marquis, after the death of his brother, rejected Dona  
Flor as liviana:

Resuelto, Ricardo, estoy.  
Ni recado ni paper  
De esa liviana infiel  
Me des ya.<sup>3</sup>

Later, however, he admitted that he had spoken hastily, and that  
he still loved her, but was committed to his vow.

The ease with which Doña Flor lied was shown when Encinas,  
Don Fernando's servant, went to her for news about his master  
who had fled after the murder. When Don Diego came home  
unexpectedly, Doña Flor, fearing her brother's wrath upon finding  
her alone with a man, explained that Encinas was looking for a  
job. Later, as Encinas was repeating this story to Don Fernando,  
he commented upon the deceitfulness of women in general and of  
Doña Flor in particular:

. . . . . mas no hay quien finja  
Artificiosos remedios  
En desgracias repentinas  
Como la mujer.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 339.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 357.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 368.



Doña Flor's life and conduct were governed completely by her selfish desire for a distinguished husband. Early in the play, while engaged in conversation with her brother, she excused her indiscreet actions by saying that

.....  
 Si al fin sus continuas quejas  
 Si al fin sus bizarras partes  
 Correspondencia engendraron  
 En mi pecho, no te espante.  
 Que por doña Ana te he visto  
 De tu valor olvidarte,  
 Regar la tierra con llanto,  
 Romper con quejas los aires...  
 Pues si eres hombre, Don Diego,  
 Y la fuerza de amor sabes,  
 :.....  
 ¿Que mucho que una mujer  
 Contra su poder no baste...<sup>1</sup>

Doña Flor seemed to feel that honor -- the commanding force in the lives of the caballeros -- should yield to the conveniences of love. This would explain her lack of repentance, early in the play, for the scandal that she had caused in Cordova by being alone with Don Fernando, and her plotting to trap the Marquis into marriage. But at the close of the play Doña Flor seemed to have matured. She freed Don Fernando from his promise of secrecy so that he could save the life of the Marquis. She fully realized that by doing so she would expose herself to scandal because of her previous affair with Don Fernando; she also knew that the public would learn that it was he who was at her window on the night that the brother of the Marquis had been killed. Because of her "noble generosity" the King granted Dona Flor the right

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 335.



to choose whom she would for a husband.

Mudarse por mejorarse

"Doña Clara es viuda, y es/ Senora de sí" are the words with which Don García explained his frequent visits to the house of Doña Clara, first lady of Alarcón's Mudarse por mejorarse. Since it was not customary for a man to visit freely the house of his beloved, it was evident that Don García must have felt it necessary to offer an explanation to his friend, Don Felix, and to the audience. Because she was a widow, Doña Clara, like Doña Ana in Las paredes oyen, was able to receive her lovers without chaperonage, and like Lucrecia in the latter play, Leonor, the orphaned niece of Doña Clara, could meet gentlemen more easily and openly that would otherwise be true.

Doña Clara, in love with Don García, was jealous of Don García's attentions to Leonor, but it did not seem to be a bitter jealousy motivated by the fear of losing him. She was wholly surprised when Don Felix told her of his love for her. She did not respond to him, but admitted that she was jealous of her niece, and tried to interest him in Leonor. In this way she hoped to destroy Leonor's interest in Don García. Unlike other Alarconian heroines, Doña Clara seemed to be entirely faithful to one man, and it did not occur to her to encourage Don Felix. Leading ladies in other plays did not hesitate to encourage two suitors at the same time. Had Doña Clara felt that the rivalry between her and her niece was really serious, she might have encouraged Don Felix in order to have another suitor in case the

younger woman won Don García.

Doña Clara did feel a strong sense of responsibility for her young niece who had come to live with her. She spoke harshly to the Marquis, her relative, when she found him speaking alone with Leonor:

¿Cómo, si soy sangre vuestra,  
Mi deshonra procuráis?  
¿Mi sobrina requebraís,  
Cuyo honor está a mi cuenta,  
A excusas mías? Mi afrenta  
Bien claro desto se arguye;  
Que de testigos no huye  
Quien justos hechos intenta.  
Y así, Marqués, perdonad:  
Y pues a mi casa a honrarme  
No venís, el visitarme  
De aquí adelante excusad.<sup>1</sup>

Out of her wisdom, experience, and maturity, Doña Clara gave to Leonor sound advice on how to handle the Marquis:

Si es verdadero su amor,  
Si casarse es su deseo,  
Tu esquivaza y tu pecado  
Darán más fuerza a su fuego;  
Y si engañarte pretende,  
Pruebe el rigor de tu pecho:  
Darás lustre a tu nobleza  
Y castigo a sus intentos.<sup>2</sup>

Doña Clara was a well-rounded study of a good woman, faithful in love, a jealous aunt, clever and experienced. She lacked the personal sweetness and charm of Doña Ana of Las paredes oyen, and her role was not so dramatically important as that of Doña Ana.

<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

Leonor was a beautiful young girl, inexperienced in the arts of love. Her lack of experience, however, was counteracted by a natural talent in this field. Leonor had never before had a suitor and, as was natural, her head was turned by the exciting attentions of an older man, Don García. The fact that Don García was her aunt's lover undoubtedly added to the excitement, and she was fascinated by the secret code for communication which Don García had invented.

Leonor was a clever young lady, flirtatious by nature, but shrewd. Don García had rationalized his making love to her by saying that it was wise to change the object of one's affections in order to better oneself. Leonor answered,

Pues siendo así,  
Y que os tengo, don García,  
Por cuerdo, y dejáis mi tía  
Por mejoraros en mí,  
Perdóneme vuestro amor;  
Que a resistir me prevengo,  
Hasta que sepa si tengo  
Otra sobrina mejor.<sup>1</sup>

In the third act of the play, Leonor seemed to recognize that she was in love with the idea of love rather than with Don García. In discussing the matter with Mencía, the maid, she said,

No sé cómo es la pasión  
De que fatigar me veo,  
Que me animo en el deseo  
Y tiemblo en la ejecución.<sup>2</sup>

Leonor was one of Alarcón's heroines whose head ruled her heart. It was obviously not a feeling of guilt for causing her

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 20.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

aunt unhappiness, but the opportunity to make a better match that led her to discard Don García in favor of the Marquis. She was wise enough to follow the advice of her aunt in her treatment of the Marquis. When he tried to see her while her aunt was away from home, she spoke severely to him. In her own mind she questioned that his intentions were honorable, feeling that if they were

.....  
Siendo negocio tan llano,  
Que para este intento fuera  
Ella la mejor tercera,  
Viendo lo mucho que gano?<sup>1</sup>

When he had assured her that he truly loved her and wanted to marry her, she, with a great display of dignity and self-respect suggested,

Con doña Clara mi tía . . .  
Tratad estas intenciones,  
Porque las justas acciones  
No huyen la luz del día.<sup>2</sup>

Mencia, the servant of Leonor, followed the usual pattern of servants in the plays of Alarcón. Older and more experienced than her young mistress, Mencia exerted a great deal of influence over Leonor. Obviously she did not feel that Leonor should have any moral scruples over accepting the attentions of Doña Clara's lover:

Si él mismo vino á rogarte,  
Cuando es tu mal tan cruel,  
Que tú has de buscarlo á él  
En dejando él de buscarte,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 146.  
<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 147.

¿Para qué es la dilación?  
 ¿De qué sirve resistir  
 A lo antiguo, si no asir  
 Del copete la ocasión?<sup>1</sup>

Mencia was bold, as shown when she advised Leonor,

Determinarte procura,  
 O ser feliz desconfía;  
 Que nunca la cobardía  
 Dio abrazos a la ventura.<sup>2</sup>

She was also an opportunist. When the Marquis came to Leonor while her aunt was away, and Leonor was attempting to compel him to leave, Mencia whispered to her,

Déjale por Dios decir,  
 Y gasta el tiempo en oír,  
 Que gastas en porfiar.<sup>3</sup>

The role of servant in Mudarse por mejorarse was not so strong as in some other Alarconian plays, but Mencia was a well-drawn personality whose role, although not large, was well defined.

#### Los favores del mundo

Anarda, adored by many suitors, was the beautiful and wealthy heroine in Alarcón's play, Los favores del mundo. She, in common with many leading ladies of the Spanish Golden Age, fell in love at first sight. She had been courted by the Príncipe, and had responded to his attentions. However, after she had seen Don García attack and almost kill Don Juan, a friend

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

of hers, Anarda was immediately attracted to the young galán. When Julia, the second lady of the play, asked if she still loved the Prince, Anarda replied,

Nunca tan necia te vi.  
 Quien vio el forastero, di,  
 ¿Como otro dueño querra?  
 Aquel bizarro ademan  
 Con que la espada sacó,  
 El valor con que venció,  
 Y dió la vida a don Juan,  
 La gala, la discreción  
 En darme disculpa, el modo,  
 Gentileza y talle, todo  
 Me ha robado el corazon.<sup>1</sup>

Anarda was completely frank and open in her desire to further her acquaintance with Don García. When he had left her following their first meeting, she asked the gracioso of the play, Hernando, innumerable questions about his master. She also made sure that it would be possible for Don García to find her home. To accomplish this, she said to Julia, referring to Hernando,

Dile, Julia, que nos siga,  
 Como que sale de ti.<sup>2</sup>

Anarda, however, was completely deceived by the false Julia. She trusted Julia with a message for Don García which was meant to bring from him a proposal of marriage. After giving her the message, Anarda expressed her trust in Julia.

Un ejemplo de amistad  
 Miro en ti.<sup>3</sup>

In brief, Julia was to tell Don García confidentially that Anarda loved him. Julia used the opportunity, however, to try to further

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 264.



herself with Don García, telling him that Anarda was to marry the Príncipe. Later, Julia suggested that Anarda leave the house at night to escape the anger of the King when she refused to marry the Count. The purpose of this suggestion was to make Don García believe that Anarda had gone for a rendezvous with the Prince. The trusting Anarda then said,

Mucho tu amistad me anima;  
Que es una amiga fiel  
La joya de mas estima.<sup>1</sup>

Anarda spoke frankly and frequently of love to Don García whom she loved, and even before she knew his intentions. Long conversations on the subject of love, apparently, were common with women of the theater of the 17th century.

It seemed a bit forward and juvenile of Anarda to ask the Prince to place Don García in prison so that she might intercede for him, secure his freedom, and thus win his favor. This bit of plotting did not seem consistent with the usual pride and aloofness of ladies of the theater of this era. As a rule they seemed more confident of their own beauty and power.

As the segunda dama of this play, Julia was a most unpleasant person. She worked hard to weave nets of deceit around all of the major characters, centering her lies upon Anarda in an effort to keep her from marrying the hero, Don García. She was even more unpleasant than Doña Blanca in El examen de maridos, although in the fabrication of lies they were alike. Doña Blanca was not lying against a friend, however, as was Julia. Doña Blanca was

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 313.

avenging herself upon a lost love, which somehow seemed less wicked than Julia's deliberate efforts to spoil the life of her own cousin, Anarda, who trusted her implicitly. Julia said she was desperately in love with Don García, but she was not very convincing in either her declarations or her actions. Jealousy of her beautiful cousin might well be the motive for her baseness.

Generally speaking, in the comedia of the Spanish Golden Age, the second lady helped the heroine against the unwelcome desires of her guardian. In this case Julia, knowing that Anarda's uncle wanted her to marry the Count, offered to help him gain his wishes. First, she told Don García that Anarda was really in love with the Prince; then she informed the Prince that Anarda loved Don García, and that he would never win her affection, even if he allowed her to marry Don García. Later she revealed to Anarda that the King had threatened to force her to marry the Count or, failing that, send her to a convent. When Don García asked Julia about Anarda, she told him that her cousin had gone out for a secret meeting at night with the Prince. Then, to spare him from an unhappy marriage, Julia offered, most brazenly, to marry Don García. Don García, however, saw through Julia's tricks and did not accept. At the conclusion of the play, Anarda married Don García, still unaware of her cousin's duplicity. Don Juan, blinded by his love for Julia, married her, also completely unaware of her bitter, jealous nature.

It is worth noting that Ruiz de Alarcón was not a moralist in the strictest sense of the word. He did not always punish the guilty in his plays. In this work Julia, the jealous, almost

vicious second lady not only received no punishment for her misdeeds, but rather was rewarded in that she married Don Juan who loved her devotedly. Apparently none of the other characters in the play was even aware of her deceit. In La verdad sospechosa, Don García blithely and even gaily lied his way through the play and then won the beautiful Lucrecia for his wife. Don Juan, in No hay mal que por bien no venga, was not punished for receiving money under false pretences; he was given the opportunity to become a hero for his country and he, too, won the lady of his choice. In still another play, El examen de maridos, Doña Blanca was not brought to account for her lies nor for spreading false rumors, but won a Count for her husband. Don Mendo, in Las paredes oyen was actually the only person in the nine plays studied who received punishment for his wickedness. He was rejected by both Doña Ana and Lucrecia at the conclusion of the play. This is interesting in view of the fact that Las paredes oyen was the only biographical play of the nine, and Don Mendo, supposedly patterned after the enemies of Alarcón, was the rival of Don Juan who undoubtedly represented Alarcón himself.

#### Las paredes oyen

Doña Ana, the charming heroine of Las paredes oyen, held a social position unusual in the Spanish drama of the 17th century in that she was a widow. Because of this, she was free from the customary guardianship of father, brother, or husband. She came and went at will, received suitors in her own home without the presence of a third person, had no need to resort to secret

meetings at her window, nor to plot intrigues for meeting her suitors. Her independence of thought and action gave a modern flavor to this play which was quite striking.

Deeply in love with Don Mendo, Doña Ana went to Alcalá de Henares to offer a novena which she had promised, hoping by this means to assure herself of Mendo's unchanging love. Although he begged her not to go, swearing the constancy of his love for her, she was not swayed from her purpose. Both her independence of action and her consideration for others were shown by her agreement to return secretly to Madrid for the celebration of San Juan's eve. Her maids were downcast at the thought of being away from Madrid on this all-important occasion, and she promised:

Pues pierdan, Celia, el pesar;  
Que por la posta en un coche  
Conmigo entonces vendrán;  
Porque se alegre mi gente,  
Gozaré secretamente  
De la noche de San Juan,  
Y, volveréme a la aurora.<sup>1</sup>  
A proseguir mis novenas.<sup>1</sup>

Her innate kindness and concern for others was also revealed later in the play when Don Juan and the Count, disguised as coachmen, reported to Doña Ana that her regular coachman could not serve her because he was "rendido a un dolor cruel." Her first concern was expressed as follows:

Doña Ana: ¿Tanto es su mal?  
Don Juan: No podrá serviros hoy,  
Doña Ana: Pésame.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 376.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 436.

Tempering her independence of thought and action was her circumspect behavior. When Don Mendo wanted to go to Alcalá de Henares with her, she refused to let him, and when he offered to see her to the carriage upon her departure, she told him,

Si alguno en la calle os ve,  
Sospechará lo que ahora  
Ha sospechado mi prima.  
Quedaos y salid despues.<sup>1</sup>

Doña Ana's maturity and self-control were shown in her reaction when she received final proof of Don Mendo's duplicity. Lucrecia, her cousin, had gone to Alcalá with a letter written by Don Mendo in which he praised Lucrecia above Doña Ana. Doña Ana calmly received the news while Lucrecia was present:

Doña Lucrecia: ¿Qué dices de ese papel?

Doña Ana: Si estás viendo, prima, aquí  
Lo que el ha dicho de mí,  
¿Qué quieres que diga del?  
Pierde el cuidado cruel,  
Que te obliga a recelar  
Cuando así me ves tratar,  
Si es cosa cierta el nacer  
La injuria, de aborrecer,  
Y la alabanza, de amar.  
Mas cansada te imagino;  
Entra a reposar un rato;  
Que para hablar de tu ingrato,  
Sera tercero el camino.<sup>2</sup>

That she was deeply upset was shown in the scene with Celia immediately following;

Ven, ven á ayudarme  
A lamentar mi tormento;  
Presta tu voz a mi aliento;  
Que en desventura tan grave,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 427.

Por una boca no cabe  
A salir el sentimiento.<sup>1</sup>

Doña Ana's self-control, dignity, and self-respect were evident later in the scene with Don Mendo. He had followed her to Alcalá and expressed surprise that she was cold toward him. She was reasonable, calm, and unyielding. She told him frankly that she was aware of his deceit, and quoted his own words both from the letter and from the conversation that she had heard through her window on the eve of San Juan. Her high standards were revealed by her complete scorn of Don Mendo when she saw him as he really was, and by the reprimand that she gave Beltrán, the gracioso, when he spoke ill of Don Mendo in her presence. No matter what she thought of Don Mendo, she would not listen to the gossip of a servant.

Although Doña Ana possessed probably the most noble and worthy character of all of Alarcón's women in these nine plays, she was also given many human qualities which made her believable and loveable. Like most Spanish dramatic heroines of the period, she was "abrasada con amor," and seemed to have no other concern in life than that of love. She was impressed with good looks, and was critical of Don Juan at the beginning of the play because he was so unattractive:

¡Ay, Celia, y qué mala cara  
Y mal talle de Don Juan!<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 429.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 363.



Later she asks,

¿Cómo puedo yo querer  
Hombre cuya cara y talle  
Me enfada solo en miralle?<sup>1</sup>

Doña Ana displayed sensitivity, superficial, perhaps, but very human, when she became very angry at Don Mendo's uncomplimentary remarks about her to the Duque. As deeply as she loved Don Mendo at the opening of the play, she hated him at the close. Quite humanly she desired vengeance:

Que del todo se ha rendido  
El amor a la venganza.<sup>2</sup>

Doña Ana, unlike many heroines of the period, had a subtle sense of humor. In the first scene, Don Juan had come to pay his respects and to say goodbye to her. At this time he also declared his love in order to ease his own distress. He assured her that he had no hope of winning her, that she needed to say nothing, that she should just listen to him. After his passionate declaration of love, he was amazed when she merely bade him farewell.

Doña Ana: Pues, señor don Juan, adíos.

Don Juan: Tened, ¿no me respondeís?  
Desta suerte me dejáis?

Doña Ana: ¿No habeís dicho que me amáis?

Don Juan: Yo lo he dicho, y vos lo veís.

Doña Ana: ¿No decís que vuestro intento  
No es pedirme que yo os quiera,  
Porque atrevimiento fuera?

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Nuñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 403.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

Don Juan: Así lo he dicho y lo siento.

Doña Ana: ¿No decís que no teneis  
Esperanza de ablandarme?

Don Juan: Yo lo he dicho.

Doña Ana: Y que igualarme  
En méritos no podeis,  
¿Vuestra lengua no afirmo?

Don Juan: Yo lo he dicho de ese modo.

Doña Ana: Pues, si vos lo decís todo,  
¿Que quereis que os diga yo? (Vase)<sup>1</sup>

That Doña Ana could be influenced by kind words, and was frank enough to admit it, was revealed in her conversation with Celia:

No niego, que desde el día  
Que defenderme le oi,  
Tiene ya don Juan en mí  
Mejor lugar que solía,  
Porque el beneficio cría  
Obligacion natural;  
Y pues, el rigor mortal  
Aplacó ya mi desden,  
Principio es de querer bien  
El dejar de querer mal.<sup>2</sup>

It can be concluded from the foregoing discussion that the development of Doña Ana's character and personality seemed to follow a more natural, and more womanly course than did the unfolding of the personalities of other Alarconian leading ladies. Doña Ana's reluctance to tell Don Juan that she loved him, her sharp reprimand of Beltrán when he spoke disparagingly of Don Mendo, her greatly disturbed emotional state each time that she learned more of Don Mendo's duplicity may all be attributed to

<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 368-369.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 433.

the depth of her love for him, and her difficulty in putting him out of her heart. It seemed to take a great deal of effort on her part to convince him, as well as herself, that she wanted nothing more to do with him just prior to her return to Madrid. It goes without saying that after his attempted violation of her on the return trip she had less difficulty with her wayward heart.

Lucrecia, the secondary figure of Las paredes oyen, was less striking, less outstanding, and weaker, dramatically than Doña Ana. She was younger, more emotional, and less stable than her cousin. Lucrecia loved Don Mendo, also, and believed that he loved her. Because Doña Ana was her cousin and confidante, Lucrecia had more freedom in this comedia than was customarily allowed to young, unmarried girls. There was but one reference in the entire play to the customary male protective influence. Lucrecia reported to Doña Ana that

...  
 Pedí a mi padre licencia  
 Para venir a Alcalá,  
 Y porque estabas tú acá,  
 Me ha permitido esta ausencia.<sup>1</sup>

Lucrecia showed herself jealous of her beautiful and more experienced cousin when, upon finding Don Mendo with Doña Ana just before the latter's departure, she said, suspiciously,

Del vestido de color,  
 Lo pregunto la ocasión,  
 Porque de irte a acompañar  
 Lo indica el tiempo y lugar,  
 Y fuera galante acción.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 426.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 382.

She was soothed into believing that Mendo came to Dona Ana's home only upon the hope that she, Lucrecia, would be there. Later, when the Count, who was hopelessly in love with Lucrecia, told her the truth of Mendo's feeling for her, she rewarded him by promising

Mas vive cierto, señor,  
Que si me has dicho verdad,  
Te dara' mi voluntad  
Lo que te niega mi amor.<sup>1</sup>

This seemed to point out that with Lucrecia, at least, love, while an all-important subject of discussion and conversation, was not necessarily essential to marriage. Lucrecia's head ruled her heart.

On the other hand, one might question Lucrecia's motives when she went to Alcalá to show Dona Ana the letter written by Don Mendo. In this note the latter praised Lucrecia and belittled Doña Ana. Lucrecia said that she felt it would be deceitful to keep it from Doña Ana, but she might be hoping that Don Mendo would turn to her if Doña Ana became angry and disillusioned enough to drop him from her life. Doña Ana probably also questioned Lucrecia's motives. When Lucrecia asked, "What do you think of this letter?" Doña Ana replied briefly, then changed the subject. At the close of the conversation, Doña Ana asked Lucrecia to leave her, to which the latter replied:

Lucrecia: El obedecerte es ya  
Forzoso. (Vase)

Doña Ana: Como el matarme.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 390.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

At the conclusion of the play, however, Lucrecia showed strength of character when she, too, scorned Don Mendo who had turned to her after losing Doña Ana:

Las paredes oyen, Mendo.  
Mas puesto que en vos es, tal  
La imprudencia que queréis,  
Ser mi esposo, cuando habéis  
Hablado de mí tan mal,  
Y no pienso ser tan necia  
Que esposa pretenda ser  
De quien quiere por mujer  
A la misma que desprecia;  
Y porque con la esperanza  
El castigo no aliviéis,  
Lo que, por falso, perdéis,  
El Conde, por firme, alcanza.<sup>1</sup>

Celia, the servant of Doña Ana, was older than her mistress. She, not swayed by the winning and personable appearance of Don Mendo, favored Don Juan as a suitor, and wished she could persuade Doña Ana to look kindly upon him:

Celia: ¡Ah desdichado don Juan!

Beltrán: Ayúdale.

Celia: ¡A Dios pluguiere  
Que mi voluntad valiera!<sup>2</sup>

In the following selection from a conversation with Doña Ana, Celia showed her good sense and her ability to see below the surface the real worth of Don Juan:

Doña Ana: Celia, si don Juan tuviera  
Mejor talle y mejor cara!...

Celia: Pues ¿cómo en eso repara  
Una tan cuerda mujer?  
En el hombre, no has de ver

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 512.  
<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 369-370.

La hermosura ó gentileza:  
 Su hermosura es la nobleza,  
 Su gentileza el saber.  
 Lo visible es el tesoro  
 De mozas faltas de seso,  
 Y las más veces por eso  
 Topan con un asno de oro.  
 Por esto no tiene el moro  
 Ventanas: y es cosa clara  
 Que, aunque al principio repara  
 La vista, con la costumbre  
 Pierde el gusto ó pesadumbre  
 De la buena ó mala cara.<sup>1</sup>

On the eve of San Juan when Celia and her mistress were watching the festivities from their window, Doña Ana ecstatically exclaimed that Don Mendo was destined for her because his was the first voice she heard. Celia replied, "Sí, mas á don Juan nombró."<sup>2</sup> And Celia was almost happy to point out to Doña Ana, after they had heard Don Mendo slander her, "No ama quien habla así;/El te engana."<sup>3</sup>

Celia also showed a touch of hurt vanity when she indicated that she had not liked Don Mendo since the night that she overheard him refer to her as "old woman":

Que desde que estando un día  
 Viéndote por una reja,  
 La cerré, y me llamo vieja,  
 Sin pensar que yo lo oía...  
 Tal cual soy, no lo querría  
 Si el fuese del mundo Adán.<sup>4</sup>

In several instances, Don Juan addressed her as "Celia, amiga," showing his kindness and his regard for her. Like Doña

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 433.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 402.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 403.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 431.



Ana, he considered her more than a servant. There was no indication in the play that Don Mendo even considered her as a person. It was natural that Celia should favor Don Juan over Don Mendo.

Celia's liberty to speak more freely than most servants was shown in her scolding Doña Ana for reprimanding Beltrán. Celia was afraid that this sharp speech to Beltrán indicated that Doña Ana still loved Don Mendo. She also scolded Doña Ana for not telling Don Juan of her love for him, and, with a touch of irony, she reminded Doña Ana at the conclusion of the play of her critical words about Don Juan's appearance. This freedom of action and speech on the part of a servant extended even to Celia's asking for and receiving permission to read the letter sent by Don Mendo to Lucrecia.

Alarcón's characterization of Celia is one of the most complete and strongest portrayals in the nine plays studied.

### El tejedor de Segovia

Teodora, the leading lady, was not a wealthy, pampered lady of great social standing at the beginning of this play. Because of a traitorous scheme of the Marqués Suero Pelaez and his son, Count Don Juan, Teodora's lover, Don Fernando Ramírez, had been forced to flee from the court and had taken refuge in the city of Segovia, disguised as a weaver. Teodora, whose real name was Doña María, had escaped with him. They lived quietly and peacefully in Segovia until some of the activities of the court were brought to this city. Count Don Juan, who had been the lover of Don Fernando's sister, Doña Ana, saw Teodora and fell in love

with her, not aware that she was of noble birth.

It is worth noting that Teodora was a circumspect young lady. When the Count tried to force an entrance to her house one night, she refused him admittance until he tricked her. Don Fernando, who was in the house at the time, challenged the intruder and in the ensuing quarrel killed two of the Count's servants. Don Fernando was put into jail, and Teodora was hidden by the gracioso, Chichón. Later Don Fernando escaped from jail and took most of the inmates with him. They fled from the city and formed a band of highwaymen of which Don Fernando was chosen captain. Teodora, loyal and loving, went with the band, disguised as a man.

Motivated by her love for Don Fernando, Teodora bravely and cleverly tricked the Count when, later in the play, she and Don Fernando had fallen into his hands. She pretended to yield to the wishes of the Count, and even implied that she had loved him all the time. She then asked permission to kill Don Fernando. When the sword was given to her, she managed to slip it to Don Fernando, and then she ran for her life.

Except for the one scene described above in which Teodora suddenly emerged as a woman of action, this feminine character had a shadowy substance. She seemed to react like a docile puppet, pulled along and jerked into action only by the will of Don Fernando. When she was not "on stage," the reader forgot her completely, and she did not seem to occupy the minds or guide the actions of the other characters in the same manner as Doña Ana of Las paredes oyen, or Doña Ines in El examen de maridos. One

reason might be that El tejedor de Segovia was more a heroic comedy than a comedy of character. Whatever the reason, Don Fernando seemed to be more concerned about the honor and fate of his sister, Doña Ana, than he was about Teodora.

Doña Ana, long lost sister of Don Fernando, lived, disguised as a labradora, far from her native surroundings -- the court. Her lover, Count Don Juan, had established her in the village after her family had been forced to flee from the court. That the Count and his father had been instrumental in bringing disgrace to her family did not seem to diminish Doña Ana's love for him. Or, perhaps it was that she had no one to whom she could turn after her father was killed and her brother, thinking her dead, had fled. In either event, in her first appearance on stage, Doña Ana was lamenting her love for the Count and his unfaithfulness. In conversation with her servant, Doña Ana said,

Doña Ana: Florinda, de suerte estoy,  
Que me falta el sufrimiento.

Florinda: En tan justo sentimiento  
Ningún remedio te doy.

Doña Ana: Después de tanta firmeza,  
/ Tan repentina mudanza!  
Después de tanta esperanza,  
/ Tan desdenosa tibieza!  
Cosas son...<sup>1</sup>

When the outlaws came to Doña Ana's home to rob her, Garcerán, friend of Don Fernando, approached her with words of love. She refused him vehemently, and scorned him bitterly for

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 80.

calling himself noble when he tried to take advantage of a defenseless woman:

Garcerán: Digo que muelro;  
Y pues que desespero  
De poder obligarte,  
Ni te admires, ni culpes la fe mía,  
Si emprendo por vivir tal grosería.

Doña Ana: Primero en mil pedazos  
Me verás dividida, que en tus brazos.<sup>1</sup>

Her pride was aroused when Don Fernando suggested that any labradora would exalt herself by allowing a nobleman to love her. She replied,

Y si, por dicha, el traje os ha engañado,  
Y le igualo en nobleza acaso, ¿despero  
Que de mi condolidos  
Deis a mi mal, piadosos los oídos?<sup>2</sup>

Then Doña Ana gave a lengthy account of her misfortunes and of those of her family at court. From this speech Don Fernando was convinced that Doña Ana was his sister whom he had thought dead.

The pundonor element was very evident in this play. Before Don Fernando fled from the court at the time of his father's disgrace and death, he had forced his sister, Doña Ana, to take poison to prevent her being defiled by the Count. She, miraculously, recovered and escaped. In the closing scenes of the play, Doña Ana was protected and avenged by her brother who compelled the Count to marry her, after which Don Fernando killed him. In accordance with Alarcón's pattern, this second lady found a worthy husband in Garcerán, whom she had earlier scorned so

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 82.  
<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

bitterly. Such a change of heart -- or of head -- was not uncommon among the ladies of Alarcón's plays.

Florinda was the servant of Doña Ana who had escaped from the court with her mistress and was loyally serving her in her reduced circumstances. Her role and, as a consequence, her personality, were not very forcefully drawn, nor were they very important to the play. Florinda spoke in only one scene throughout the play.

In the first scene in which Doña Ana and Florinda were presented, when Doña Ana was lamenting her sufferings in the cause of love, Florinda rather cynically stated,

¿Qué así se enfía,  
En medio del querer bien,  
Un hombre? Mal haya, amen,  
La mujer que en ellos fia!<sup>1</sup>

Florinda was the advisor and friend of Doña Ana. Her loyalty was unquestioned. Her disguise as a labradora, as well as that of Doña Ana, and Teodora's disguise as a man, were two of the few times Alarcón used this device.

#### El examen de maridos

True to the traits and training of ladies of Spain, Doña Inés, leading lady of El examen de maridos, was governed by the wishes and precepts of her father, even after his death. In his last testament, he had advised her,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 81.

Antes que te cases.  
Mira lo que haces.<sup>1</sup>

According to Spanish tradition, the father or brother of a young lady selected a suitable husband for her. As a rule, she had very little to say about the choice and accepted her lot whether she loved the man or not. Because of her father's advice, Doña Inés decided to break the traditional pattern and choose her own husband. Even more unusual than this was the method of selection that she had determined to follow, i.e., to hold an "examination" of prospects. Each of her suitors was to submit a written list of his qualifications and reasons for which he felt that he should be chosen. Anyone could enter the contest, but only if he promised not to resort to arms if he were not selected, and not to question the decision. Doña Inés planned to analyze each suitor's qualifications impartially and unemotionally, and decide upon the most highly qualified. She determined that her head and not her heart should rule in this matter. Her plan of procedure seemed cold and unfeminine, but her reasons for discarding each contestant as his name came up for consideration were wholly feminine and, in some instances, amusing. One of the candidates, Don Juan de Vivero, for example, was rejected because of his propensity for gambling. Doña Inés, therefore, felt that

El que jugó, jugará;  
Que la inclinación al juego  
Se aplaca, mas no se apaga.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 268.



Don Juan de Guzmán was eliminated because he was the one "que, ayer traía una banda verde, al cuello," and "este se barra por necio":

No se consulte otra vez,  
Porque es falta sin remedio.<sup>1</sup>

Another of the suitors, Don Gómez de Toledo, was reputedly bad tempered, but Beltrán, an old friend of Doña Inés' father explained

Mas dicen, que aquella furia  
Se le pasa en un momento,  
Y queda apacible y manso.

To this Doña Inés replied with wry humor,

Si con el ardor primero  
Me arroja por un balcón,  
Decidme, ¿de que provecho  
Después de haber hecho el daño,  
Será el arrepentimiento?<sup>2</sup>

Don Guillén de Aragón was dropped from the contest because of his singing. This attribute would have been all right if he sang only when asked. Several others were eliminated from the contest because Doña Inés did not like the sound of their names.

Another touch of humor, a quality not too frequently found among Alarcón's ladies, was noted in the discussion about the Count Don Juan. Beltrán had informed Doña Inés that this suitor was a very wealthy gentleman, a native of Andalusia. Then he listed some faults:

Beltrán:        Dicen que es dado á mujeres.

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 272.

Doña Inés: Condición que muda, el tiempo:  
Casara, y amansara  
Al yugo del casamiento.

Beltrán: No es puntual.

Doña Inés: Es señor.

Beltrán: Mal pagador.

Doña Inés: Caballero.

Beltrán: Avalentado.

Doña Inés: Andaluz.

Beltrán: Es viudo.

Doña Inés: Borradle presto;  
que quien dos veces se casa,  
O sabe enviudar, ó es necio.<sup>1</sup>

After much deliberation, the two finalists in the strange contest were Count Carlos, whom Doña Inés did not love, but who had no faults, and the Marqués, whom she did love, but who, she believed, had hidden defects.

The contest, instigated by her father's advice, was reminiscent of the "choice by chance" conducted by Portia in Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. Portia's elimination of her suitors had the same quality of scorn for their faults, and the same humor in the comments on their weaknesses. Portia rejected one suitor because his skin was too dark; of another, she said, "God made him, therefore let him pass for a man."<sup>2</sup>

Doña Inés was strong willed and determined. When Count Carlos, one of the suitors, attempted to dissuade her from holding

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup>William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, Act I, scene 2.

the examination, she replied:

Antes que mi pensamiento  
Se mudara el norte frío.<sup>1</sup>

True to her word, Doña Inés accepted Count Carlos when she thought that he had won the debate which was to decide between the last two contestants. He convinced her, however, that although he won the debate, he did not win the lady because his argument was that the one loved, although he had defects, should be married. Since his opponent had defects, the Count was really winning the debate to make it possible for Doña Inés to marry the choice of her heart, the Marquis. So her heart, by accident, won over her head.

Doña Blanca, as the second lady of the comedy had a slightly different role from the customary one in Alarcón's plays. She was the rival, not the friend -- or even the pretended friend -- of Doña Inés. Following the firm belief that all was fair in love -- any deceit, any dishonesty was excusable if it were done in the name of love -- Doña Blanca went disguised as a servant to the home of Doña Inés to avenge herself on the Marquis who had ceased his attentions. Her vengeance consisted of dropping hints that he had "hidden defects" that were entirely repulsive. To keep Doña Inés from learning her true identity, Doña Blanca told her that her mistress was deeply in love with Count Carlos, another of Doña Inés' suitors. Because she could not win him, her mistress planned to go into a nunnery. It was for this reason

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., p. 223.

that she was selling her jewels. Doña Inés, however, shrewdly sent a servant to follow Doña Blanca home to learn her identity.

The Count was much astonished to learn of Doña Blanca's undying love for him, but he also followed the precept that all was fair in love. To avenge himself upon Doña Inés who, he knew, preferred the Marquis to him, Carlos went to Doña Blanca and declared his love, much to her surprise. Thus he won her with one visit! Doña Blanca's head ruled her heart.

Doña Blanca was not a particularly likeable person, and the reader was not especially concerned if her plotting and scheming would win a husband for her or not. The explanation of the Marquis as to why he withdrew his attentions from her revealed an unpleasant trait in Doña Blanca. When he was poor, she scorned him; when he became rich through inheritance, she was eager to marry him.

Of Doña Blanca, one critic wrote,

... su conducta pone en la comedia una interesante nota de sobresalto que amenaza con destruir, de un momento a otro, aquella buena inteligencia que el ordenado juego de las normas y convenciones parecía haber asegurado. Pero, así es el amor.<sup>1</sup>

Clavela is a typical criada. She aided and abetted Dona Blanca in her deceits and plots. She was even willing to demean herself in order to ensure the success of Doña Blanca's scheme of revenge. Clavela applied for a position in the home of Doña Inés, saying that she had been a servant in the home of the Marquis' mother, but had been forced to leave in order to avoid his

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<sup>1</sup>Antonio Castro Leal, op. cit., p. 185.

unwelcome advances. Doña Blanca freely discussed her private affairs and nefarious schemes with Clavela, again stressing the intimate relationship which existed between mistress and servant in Alarcón's plays.

Mencia, the maid of Doña Inés, was a much more likeable person than Clavela. Mencia did not take part in vicious lies and deceptions; there was no occasion for her to do so, since Doña Inés was not involved in intrigue. The maid appeared in only three short scenes with her mistress and in each of these scenes she had only one speech. Her other appearances were in three minor scenes with Ochavo, the gracioso of the Marquis. In the scenes with her mistress, Mencia had only one speech of note -- the very first one of the play. In the following passage she not only gave friendly advice and counsel to Doña Inés, but also introduced the situation to the audience:

Ya que tan sola has quedado  
Con la muerte del Marques,  
Tu padre, forzoso es,  
Señora, tomar estado;  
Que en su casa has sucedido,  
Y una mujer principal  
Parece en la corte mal,  
Sin padres y sin marido.<sup>1</sup>

Mencia's attitude toward Ochavo, the gracioso, was one of scorn for his attempted lovemaking. These scenes added a touch of rude humor to the play, and revealed Mencia as plain-spoken, practical, down-to-earth, and unromantic -- at least where Ochavo was concerned.

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., p. 181.

Mencia's character, portrayed in six short scenes, was stronger and more clearly cut than that of some other women who appeared in more scenes throughout an entire play.

### La verdad sospechosa

The beautiful Jacinta and her friend Lucrecia were members of the wealthy upper class of Spanish society. When they went shopping, as they did in the opening scenes of this play, Jacinta's maid went with them. Young ladies of the 17th century in Spain had to be chaperoned when they appeared in public in order to observe the rules of society.<sup>1</sup> Marriage plans for Jacinta had been arranged by her father, although it would seem that her wishes had been consulted. It was necessary for Jacinta to resort to intrigue and a secret meeting with Don García was arranged by having her friend Lucrecia invite the young man to her balcony. This, however, was not a deceit to prevent Jacinta's father from knowing of it, but rather to prevent her lover, Don Juan, from learning of his rival.

Jacinta seemed to be one of the more calculating of heroines, or at least practical to the point of letting her head rule her heart. She was engaged to Don Juan at the time she met Don García in the Platería. She was frankly attracted to him, but she did not want to lose Don Juan until she was sure of another's hand

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<sup>1</sup>It is worth noting that chaperons were often as untrustworthy as their mistresses. A striking example of this situation is found in La Estrella de Sevilla, often attributed to Lope de Vega.



in marriage:

Hase de ofender  
Don Juan si llega á sabello;  
Y no quiero hasta saber  
Que de otra dueño he de ser,  
Determinarme a perdello.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier, speaking of Don Juan's suit as lost because he was forced to delay their marriage until he was established at Court, she had said, "I do not approve of dying constant to an impossible aspiration."<sup>2</sup>

That Jacinta was a sagacious young lady was also shown in her comment when, having agreed to look at Don Deltrán's son from her window, she said to Isabel,

Veré solo el rostro y, talle;  
El alma que importa mas,  
Quisiera ver, con hablalle.<sup>3</sup>

Jacinta was one of Alarcón's more high-spirited young ladies. She flirted outrageously with Don García whom she had met by pure chance in the Platería. She knew that she could do so as long as Lucrecia and Isabel were with her. She asked him many personal questions such as, "Are you an American?" and, "Are you careful with your money?"<sup>4</sup> When he said that love made any man generous, she remarked, and this is only her fifth statement to him,

¿Luego, si decís verdad,<sup>5</sup>  
Preciosas ferias espero?

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 392.

<sup>4</sup>To the Spanish of this period, an American was anyone who had been to South America. It was also a common belief that anyone who had been to South America returned to Spain fabulously rich.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 366.

She graciously accepted his offer of a gift while decorously refusing the gift. In saying goodbye, García requested,

Y para amaros, me dad  
Licencia.

Jacinta answered,

Para querer  
No pienso que ha menester  
Licencia, la voluntad.<sup>1</sup>

Later in the play Jacinta became confused because she did not realize that Don García thought her name was Lucrecia, and that Lucrecia was named Jacinta. She was human enough to become jealous when she thought that Lucrecia was falling in love with Don García, although Lucrecia denied it:

Lucrecia: Gracias, Jacinta, te doy,  
Mas tu sospecha corrige.  
Que estoy por creerle, dije;  
No que por quererle estoy.

Jacinta: Obligaráte el creer,  
Y querrás, siendo obligada;  
Y así es corta la jornada  
Que hay de creer á querer.

Lucrecia: Pues ¿qué dirás, si supieres  
Que un papel he recibido?

Jacinta: Diré que ya le has creído,  
Y aun dire, que ya le quieres.<sup>2</sup>

Jacinta's wisdom is evident once more at the close of the play. Don García, still believing that she was Lucrecia, tried to convince her that he loved her. When he begged the gods to make her believe him, Jacinta replied,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 368.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 461-462.

¿Qué importa que verdad sea,  
 Si el que lo dice sois vos?  
 Que la boca mentirosa  
 Incurra en tan torpe mengua  
 Que solamente en su lengua  
 Es la verdad sospechosa.<sup>1</sup>

Lucrecia had the position of the secondary lady, friend and confidante of Jacinta. Like most feminine characters in the drama of Alarcón, Lucrecia was haughty and proud of her social rank and family name. In helping Jacinta to meet Don García secretly at her window, Lucrecia wrote him a letter asking for a rendezvous that evening. She began her note, saying, "An imperious motive prompts me to break the reserve which my rank imposes upon me."<sup>2</sup>

Lucrecia, on the whole, was a loyal friend of Jacinta and sincerely tried to help her win the man she loved. But she, too, was human. Because the confused Don García kept referring to Jacinta as Lucrecia, the latter began to believe that he did love her. She was a bit suspicious of Jacinta in these lines:

Don García:      Aquella noche, senora,  
                     Que en el balcón os hable,  
                     ¿Todo el caso no os conte?

Jacinta:            ¡A mí en balcón!

Lucrecia: (Ap.)                    ¡Ah traidora!  
                     . . . . .  
                     ¡Ved qué amiga tan fiel!<sup>3</sup>

As the secondary figure, Lucrecia had the beauty, wealth, and social position of the leading lady, but was not so sparkling,

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<sup>1</sup>Isaac Núñez de Arenas, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 398.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 470-471.

nor had she so vivid a personality as Jacinta.

Isabel was the typical, trusted servant of Jacinta. She knew all the secrets of her mistress, freely gave advice and counsel, acted as a "look-out" or spy, and helped plot the intrigues and secret meetings of Jacinta and Don García. Isabel was not an outstanding character in this play. She was not developed so fully as the old nurse, Jimena, in Los pechos privilegiados, nor Celia, criada in Las paredes oyen. The few lines she had were good, but it would take no great amount of acting ability to perform this part. Isabel did not add humor nor a third love affair to the plot of the play as some of the servants did in other Alarconian dramatic productions.

#### SUMMARY

Ruiz de Alarcón, like other playwrights of the 17th century, used few women in his plays. Of the 122 characters in the nine plays chosen for this study, only 28 were women. Of the 28, one could say that only seven or eight were roles of outstanding dramatic merit. Some of the strongest roles which, no doubt, actresses of any era would be eager to play included Doña Ana in Las paredes oyen, Celia, the servant in the same play, Jacinta in La verdad sospechosa, Doña Flor in Ganar amigos, Jimena, the old nurse in Los pechos privilegiados, Julia in Los favores del mundo, and Doña Blanca and Doña Inés of El examen de maridos.

The feminine characters in Alarcón's dramas fell into three classes: the leading lady, the secondary lady, and the servant. The heroine as a rule was beautiful, wealthy, of high social

standing, governed by rigid mores which were enforced by father, brother or husband. Love was the only subject of her thoughts, conversation, and dreams. She either was falling madly in love, only to be thwarted by some obstacle, or was suffering from the pangs of an unrequited love. Her days were spent in weaving intrigues or nets of deceit to trap some unwary lover, or to fool an obdurate father or brother. These first ladies of the Alarconian comedia, for the most part, were intelligent, clever, charming, witty, and well-versed in the art of attracting the opposite sex. With few exceptions, they did not seem to possess feminine tenderness or warmth, or a genuine interest in or unselfish concern for others. Some of them were coldly calculating young ladies whose heads ruled their hearts in spite of their passionate declarations of love. Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch is quoted as saying,

... pero la mayor parte de las mujeres pintadas por Alarcón aparecen de mezquina índole y facciones comunes; obran mal a sangre fría, su travesura carece de gracia, dicen que aman y su amor no se ve: defecto grandísimo porque entibia muchas escenas bien discurridas versificadas por otra parte.<sup>1</sup>

The second lady of the drama was usually a close friend and confidante, a relative, or sometimes a rival of the heroine. She often was at a disadvantage -- had less beauty, wealth, or charm -- but seemed to enjoy her role as "second fiddle." As a rule she, too, won a desirable husband in the battle of love,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted from Julio Jimenez Rueda, Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y su tiempo, p. 217.

although frequently he was "left over" from the many suitors of the first lady.

The third feminine role was that of the trusted criada, or servant. Often older than the leading lady, the criada was usually more practical, realistic, and wiser than her mistress. More than a servant, these women were the friends and confidantes, advisors and counselors of their mistresses in the matter of love and intrigue. They acted as spies and look-outs in keeping father or brother unaware of the meetings of mistress and lover. The servant had the same relationship with her mistress that the gracioso held with his master. In some plays the criada was a part of a third love affair, usually with the hero's gracioso, but as a rule she was scornful of men and completely untouched and unmoved by the blandishments of the buffoon. This relationship provided a comic note for the drama, as her rejection of her suitor was often blunt, frank, and uncolored by flowery phrases.

The criadas had a remarkable liberty of speech with their mistresses, as did the graciosos with their masters. This is an evidence of the basically democratic nature of the Spanish people. Extremely class conscious as to social position, wealth, and family honor, they were completely cognizant of the rights and dignity of the individual, no matter to what social group he belonged. The mistresses, without being consciously aware of it, so innate was this quality, fully respected the servant's right not only to think for herself but also to express herself freely.

Ruiz de Alarcón's feminine characters fell in and out of



love with amazing rapidity -- amazing in view of the fact that when they were in love, their anguish seemed bottomless and never-ending. A chance meeting and an offer of a gift in the Platería, a title of nobility, a show of courage and daring are enough for a lady to fall madly in love. Jacinta, in La verdad sospechosa met Don García in the Platería and he immediately occupied all her thoughts, although she had been engaged to Don Juan for some time. Doña Blanca, the second lady in El examen de maridos, spread the false rumor that she was madly in love with the Count in order to get revenge on the Marquis whose ardor had cooled. The Count heard and believed the story, went to see her, and she immediately transferred her affections to him. Anarda, in Los favores del mundo, saw the hero fight and almost kill a friend of hers, and yet she, too, immediately fell deeply in love with him.

It was interesting to note that among all the feminine characters of the nine Alarconian plays studied, there were no older women -- not a mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, elderly aunt nor cousin. Some of the stronger male characters were men of age: Don Beltrán, father of Don García in La verdad sospechosa; Don Diego, old uncle of Anarda in Los favores del mundo; Conde Melando, father of Elvira and Leonor in Los pechos privilegiados; and others. The reason may be two-fold: the mother, for example, was held in highest esteem by the Spanish people. With marriage she attained a dignity not compatible with the theater; as a mother she was regarded -- and she regarded herself -- as apart

from the frivolities of the outside world. The second reason may lie in the fact that in the heroic comedies the chief roles were those of men and the young galán was usually the protagonist. An important objective in life for these men, second only to obtaining and defending their honor, was love. The object of such a love, at least for theatrical purposes, would have to be a young, beautiful, and responsive lady.

With a few exceptions, the feminine characters in Ruiz de Alarcón's comedies were not the clearly drawn, outstanding people of high moral persuasion that his men were. Perhaps this dramatist knew men better than women. It would seem quite reasonable that with his physical deformity, his shyness, and his aloof personality, his experience with women would be slight -- in comparison, at least to that of Lope de Vega, whose amours were extravagantly notorious. Alarcón seemed to stand off and contemplate his ladies from a distance. Evidently his knowledge of court life and his natural intelligence taught him that ladies were not always good and beautiful; they had human faults and were capable of low form of behavior. For example, Doña Blanca and her servant, Clavela, in El examen de maridos, deliberately lied and spread false rumors to gain their own selfish ends. Julia, in Los favores del mundo, practiced one deceit after another for questionable reasons. She may have done it for love, as did Doña Blanca, but Julia was not very convincing in her bid for the hand of Don García. Her actions seemed to be the result of a naturally malicious and jealous disposition. In Mudarse por mejorarse, Leonor calculatigly and deliberately encouraged

the attentions of her aunt's lover. Then, just as calculatingly and deliberately, she rebuffed him and turned to the Marquis because he had a title and was wealthy.

Doña Ana, leading lady of Los paredes oyen, was one of Alarcón's most clearly delineated and most admirable feminine characters. The fact that she supposedly is modeled after Doña Angela de Cervantes,<sup>1</sup> mother of his illegitimate daughter, may account for his careful, complete, and understanding portrayal of Doña Ana.

Some of the women who seem to fade into the background and who are not clearly and strongly defined as personalities are Leonor and Constanza in No hay mal que bien no venga; Florinda, in El tejedor de Segovia; Inés in Ganar amigos; Inés in Los favores del mundo; Teodora in El tejedor de Segovia; and Mencía in El examen de maridos.

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<sup>1</sup>Ruth Lee Kennedy, "Contemporary Satire Against Ruiz de Alarcón as Lover," Hispanic Review, April, 1945, 13:145.

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THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN SOME MAJOR PLAYS  
OF  
JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCON Y MENDOZA

by

FRANCES L. MCKENNA

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Nine major plays were used as the basis for this study of the women in the work of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón. These plays were chosen by Isaac Nuñez de Arenas for his three-volume edition, Comedias Escogidas de D. Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, published by the Real Academia Española in 1867. The plays were Los pechos privilegiados, No hay mal que por bien no venga, Ganar amigos, Mudarse por mejorarse, Los favores del mundo, Las paredes oyen, El tejedor de Segovia, El examen de maridos, and La verdad sospechosa. The introduction to the first volume and the commentaries found at the end of each play were written by Isaac Nuñez de Arenas. Footnote references to the plays discussed in this study are based on this edition.

Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza was born in Mexico City during the latter part of the year 1580 or at the beginning of the year 1581. Very little is known of his life. He studied law at the University of Mexico and later at the University of Salamanca, Spain. In 1613 he settled in Madrid where his career as a dramatist began.

Parte Primera, a collection of eight of Alarcón's plays, was printed in 1628; Parte segunda, printed in 1634, contained twelve plays which were written between 1619 and 1625. He received a government position in 1626 and after this date he apparently wrote only four minor lyric poems.

Ruiz de Alarcón has been called the most classic of the dramatic writers of the 17th century. His comedies were, for the most part, comedias de carácter, portraying a social type, such

as the liar, the slanderer, and so forth. He used few women characters. These fell generally into three classes: the leading lady, the secondary lady, and the servant. With a few exceptions, the feminine characters in Alarcón's comedies were not the clearly drawn, outstanding people of high moral persuasion that his men were.

Alarcón's women represented a variety of personalities. Doña Ana, the widow in Las paredes oyen, was the warmest, most womanly of the heroines; Jacinta, of La verdad sospechosa, was lively, sparkling, flirtatious to an extreme. Leonor, in Mudarse por mejorarse, Doña Flor, in Ganar amigos, and Doña Blanca in El examen de maridos, were unscrupulous ladies who seemed to feel that in the battle of love any means to gain their ends was justifiable. Julia, of Los favores del mundo, was deliberately vicious in her plans to thwart the love affair of her close friend, Anarda.

For the most part the servants followed the lead of their mistresses in personality and character. If the mistress was good, devout, faithful and loving, so was the servant; if she was tricky, deceitful, light-minded, so was her criada. Celia in Las paredes oyen, and Jimena, the old nurse in Los pechos privilegiados, were the two most outstanding of the criadas.

The education of women was a subject of debate during the 17th century and judging from his plays, Alarcón seemed to be in favor of formal instruction for women. He also seemed to favor the right of a woman to choose her own husband, another controversial question of his time.

Two very common motifs used by his contemporaries, pundonor and women in disguise, were not used to any great extent by Alarcón.

The role of women in these plays has proved an interesting study. For a man who apparently did not know many women well, Alarcón has developed in Doña Ana, of Las paredes oyen, Jacinta, of La verdad sospechosa, and in Celia, Doña Ana's criada, well-rounded, wholly believable characters.