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**TIRSO'S *DON GIL DE LAS CALZAS VERDES*:  
THE FLUIDITY OF GENDER AND THE MARGINALIZED  
GRACIOSO**

Critical discussion of comedy generally includes references to character types: the young lovers, the older father figure who offers opposition to the desired union, the buffoon who enters periodically to provide comic relief or to make some critical commentary on a dramatic situation. Since the theatre of antiquity, these stock figures have repeatedly appeared on the stage, admittedly in different situations, but ultimately functioning to a large degree in the same capacity. Nonetheless, the classification of characters according to "types" can over-simplify the study of a given text, significantly limiting the possibilities that a specific character may possess. Walter Sorrell recognizes this difficulty: "we often refer derisively to a character as a type when a playwright fails to give life to one of his figures, when he fails to draw a profile that lifts the type into a personalized human sphere" (29).

Northrop Frye points out that the structure of comedy calls for the use of types. At the end of the comic plot a new society will form that will comply with the expectations of the audience and all will live happily ever after. This resolution implies that the true life of the comic characters begins after the performance has ended and that there is therefore no need for significant character development in the creation of the hero and heroine. Frye does comment, however, that the term "type" is not pejorative, but one which the structure of comedy demands:

Hence when we speak of typical characters, we are not trying to reduce lifelike characters to stock types... all lifelike characters, whether in dream or fiction, owe their consistency to the

appropriateness of the stock type which belongs to their dramatic function. That stock type is not the character but it is as necessary to the character as a skeleton is to the actor who plays it. (172)

Despite this explanation, I am not certain that such consideration is given to the clown figure. The comic type is not usually seen to possess more possibilities than his stock skeleton allows. His character tends not to be considered from any other angle which might shed new light on his complexity and strength. The scheming clown is included to serve his function — to provide comic relief — no more, no less. While it is true that the typical buffoon type affects the progression of the plot to a certain extent — revealing secret information to the wrong person, losing important letters or finding lost letters and delivering them to the wrong person — these foibles all belong to his repertoire. He is still very much playing his role, with his personal character and the other functions that he potentially serves receiving little attention.

The essence of theatre and of the theatrical experience relies on the presence and participation of the audience. There is a dependent and reciprocal relationship between actor and spectator. For one to fulfil his/her function, the other must also exist. A mutual recognition is therefore implied and expected. The members of the audience validate the presence of the actors on the stage merely by witnessing the performance and, the actor, in turn, acknowledges the role of the audience in bringing to life the dramatic text.

The relationship between the clown figure and the audience has always been strong. The theatrical comic type evolved from a long history of folkloric celebrations, ancient theatre and the medieval theatre of the people.<sup>1</sup> The consistent element in these various manifestations is the presence of the comic figure who controls, deceives, and disrupts the accepted order, while constantly engaging the audience in his manipulations. Whether he is a cunning slave, a stupid booby, or a

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<sup>1</sup> For more information regarding the evolution of the comic type, please see Richard Lawrence Hunter, *The New Comedy of Greece and Rome* (Cambridge UP, 1985), F. H. Sandbach, *The Comic Theatre of Greece & Rome* (Chatto & Windus, 1977), Joseph Spencer Kennard, *The Italian Theatre: From its Beginnings to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (Benjamin Bloom Inc., 1932).

scheming side-kick, I believe it would be difficult to encounter a work where the spectators do not relate sympathetically to the comic figure's endeavours.

Despite the many theories which have been presented throughout the centuries, comedy and laughter are ultimately about receiving pleasure and achieving a state of well-being.<sup>1</sup> Whether such pleasure is viewed from a theory of superiority, inconsistency or relief is almost insignificant: the preferred theoretical position may define the effect differently, but it does not change the nature of that effect. For this reason, I will try to argue here that the *gracioso* is much more than simply the most comical of the characters on the stage. He is, rather, someone with whom the audience easily identifies, a character whose position as outsider intrigues the spectator who is also somewhat excluded from the proceedings on the stage. At times, the *gracioso* is the go-between who informs the spectators of the progress of events, but mostly the clown type appeals specifically to the audience's desire for merriment and gaiety and through him its participation in the performance becomes significantly more active.

In many *comedias* the *gracioso* is able to realize a certain status in characterization, transcending the boundaries of the conventional *dramatis personae*. Indeed, the issue of transcendence is very much tied to the figure of the fool. The existence of class structure and social divisions are themes which surface time and again in the *comedia*, but these same issues are not confined to theatre history alone:

Culture draws various boundaries between classes (or even castes) of people, for example, those between different kinship, occupational, and ceremonial groups. The cultural whole made by all of these people often (at least when the group lives settled in one place) corresponds to a geographical area with a boundary that demarcates it from a no-man's land...or from the area of others who do not belong to the group and are hence in one way or another not fully human...Many fools have strong connections with these cultural and social boundaries, which they are felt to transgress, though the transgression is allowed. (Willeford 132)

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the main theoretical perspectives on humour and laughter, see John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously*, (University of New York Press, 1983).

If we agree that such a transgression is allowed, the affiliation between theatrical fool and audience can be better understood. In a structured, orderly world, the fool occupies a marginalized position. His role is to remain peripheral, even if at times individual *gracioso* characters are granted a somewhat more central position. Ironically, however, it is this position of marginality which permits the *gracioso* to move freely between various types of existences. He may be the simple-minded clown whose failure to understand the most straightforward situations elicits laughter from the audience, or he may be the scheming type whose confusions and deceits help to construct and manipulate a complicated plot, the intricacies of which the audience, and not the other protagonists, is fully aware.

The clown type therefore enjoys a fluid existence which resists easy classification. In the Spanish tradition the *gracioso* is often the confidant, entrusted with crucial information or duties; the manipulator, whose calculating ways control the behaviour of those around him; and the clownish figure whose word plays and confusing ways undoubtedly serve to entertain and delight many members of the audience, relating to the audience's need for gaiety and temporary disruption. Through him the spectators are able to take delight in the subverted reality, only to take comfort in the final recovery of the anticipated one. In *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, Tirso de Molina presents us with a foolish type whose function may be difficult to define due to his individuality and the resistance he offers to being limited to a stock figure's existence.

Curiously, in this play we are presented with two servant characters: the first, Quintana, will function principally as the sophisticated side-kick whose behaviour and intellect raise the character above the typical clownish level, while the second *gracioso*, Caramanchel, plays exactly that — the fool whose presence is purely based on inciting the laughter of his audience. Why Tirso would choose to include two types of clowns merits consideration. I propose that he understood the relationship between the outsider figure and the audience, acknowledging that the dynamic existing between the spectators and the marginalized character is a unifying one which completes the people's theatrical experience.

Before considering this *gracioso's* role in the play, it is necessary to "set the stage". Doña Juana has arrived in Madrid

dressed as a man in order to keep her presence a secret from the man who betrayed her in Segovia, don Martín.

When first we meet Quintana, he is pleading with his mistress, doña Juana, to enlighten him as to their eventual destination, the reasons for their voyage and for Juana's masculine disguise. He has faithfully followed Juana because he wishes to protect her, since he does not think it fitting for a woman to travel alone:

Aclara mi confusión,  
si es lástima te he movido;  
que si contigo he venido,  
fue tu determinación  
de suerte que, temeroso  
de que si sola salías,  
a riesgo tu honor ponías,  
tuve por más provechoso  
seguirte, y ser de tu honor  
guardajoyas... (I, 45-53)

Once Juana reveals her story of betrayal, Quintana leaves her, having agreed that she will be the first to establish contact with him.<sup>1</sup>

In the following scene Caramanchel appears, quickly introducing a touch of comic relief. Immediately, in fact, Caramanchel informs Juana that he needs a master for he is alone and he is hungry. So miserable is his luck, he tells her, that "si el cielo los lloviera [los amos], / y las chinches se tornaran / amos, si amos pregonaran / por las calles, si estuviera / Madrid de amos empedrado, / y ciego yo los pisara, / nunca en uno tropezara, / según soy de desdichado" (I, 263-270).<sup>2</sup> This hu-

<sup>1</sup> While Quintana proves himself to be a trustworthy confidant and accomplice for doña Juana, he also demonstrates an intellectual capacity which surpasses that of the typical clown figure. In convincing don Martín of doña Juana's great distress and desperation at having lost him, Quintana helps by telling Martín that the woman he betrayed is with child. His vivid and elaborate description of her tragic state and of her eventual death is quite convincing and is a wonderful display of this character's varied ability. See II, 427-456 and III, 1-152).

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that at this point Caramanchel goes on to list the various masters he has had the misfortune to serve. His account recalls the tragically comical plight of the picaresque character Lazarillo.

morous account of his pathetic existence identifies him to the audience as the one who will introduce comic relief in the rest of the *comedia*.

Caramanchel provides several moments of foolery, as he repeatedly expresses his uncertainty and confusion regarding the sex of his master.<sup>1</sup> Again, Doña Juana has arrived in Madrid disguised as a man in order to keep her presence a secret from don Martín, the man who had betrayed her in Segovia. Not only has she assumed a man's identity, she has also taken on the very name that her estranged lover has adopted — don Gil. Caramanchel's preoccupation with her ambiguous sex becomes the issue from which his foolery will stem, as he repeatedly conjures up the androgyne image throughout the rest of the play. Indeed, as we shall see here, this clown figure's presence does not merely introduce moments of foolery and gibberish, although at first glance this may appear to be the case. Doña Juana's decision to disguise herself as don Gil is a disturbing element for this comic servant and the anxiety he feels brings to the forefront the problematic issue of female identity.

The common convention of a woman dressing as a man in order to right a wrong done to her is used to great effect in Tirso's work. The assumption of a new identity is certainly not unique to Spanish drama nor is it exclusive to theatre.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was a typical practice of medieval popular festivals which continues in our own society during Halloween and Mardi Gras celebrations. Regardless of the historical period in which these new identities are adopted, the spirit which surrounds the "re-birth" is one of joy and merriment. The reincarnation of the self does not necessarily represent a rejection or a hiding of the former self, but rather a temporary new identity which permits the individual to go beyond the boundaries to which society and chance have confined him/her:

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<sup>1</sup> Although Caramanchel is a typically foolish character, it should be pointed out that he does manage to complicate the progression of the plot. He is the one who mistakenly gives the letters addressed to don Gil (don Martín) to doña Juana, giving her the opportunity to discover what plans don Martín has made in his pursuit of another woman (II, 692-730).

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive treatment of the use of disguise, see Carmen Bravo-Villasante, *La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español: siglos XVI-XVII* (Sociedad General Española de Librería, S. A., 1976).

The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles. (Bakhtin 40)

Doña Juana's decision to take on the identity of a man therefore recalls not only the plots of several other works, but also the various carnival celebrations outlined by Bakhtin and Julio Caro Baroja.<sup>1</sup> Despite the popularity of this theme, its treatment in this play raises interesting questions in terms of the fluidity of gender identity. However, in my analysis of doña Juana's new situation and the resulting gender confusion which perplexes no one but Caramanchel, I turn now to the work done by some feminist theorists and their discussions of female identity.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler poses some telling questions; "Can we refer to a 'given' sex or a 'given' gender without first inquiring into how sex and/or gender is given, through what means? And what is 'sex' anyway?" (6). The issue of gender and the acquisition of gender identity is a perplexing one which feminist critics have pondered for years from various perspectives. Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (267) makes clear her belief that the society in which a woman lives determines and constructs her fate. The views and beliefs held by that society will confine the woman to a certain sphere and will not allow her much opportunity to change or challenge that station. Luce Irigaray writes that women are sentenced to a silent and powerless existence due to their status as "products" and "commodities" to be owned, used and exchanged by men (*This Sex* 84).

The positions held by various thinkers are numerous, and Butler questions this inundation of criticism. Every attempt to define gender and sex establishes as its base a polarity between male and female. To grant an object or person a definition or a label implies that there is an *other* from which that object or person differs. Butler challenges this "necessary" binary sys-

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<sup>1</sup> Caro Baroja's book provides a thorough historical and cultural study of various carnival celebrations held throughout the calendar year in various areas of Spain. See *El Carnaval: análisis histórico-cultural* (Taurus, 1965).

tem of identification, suggesting that opposing terms and conceptions exist primarily because not to have them would result in unintelligible genders which fail to abide by the laws that have created them:

The cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of "identities" cannot "exist" -- that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender. (*Gender* 17)

Not to conform to the injunctions set out by society is to introduce an element of instability into a system predicated on definite, structured and compulsory codes of behaviour and appearance.

Caramanchel calls attention to this element of instability in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*. While no one else is suspicious of doña Juana's assumed identity, Caramanchel is never completely convinced that the person he has been hired to serve is definitely male or female despite the breeches "he" wears and the love "he" seeks from doña Elvira. On the contrary, Caramanchel is preoccupied with the ambiguity of his master/mistress and voices his confusion on various occasions:

Ninguno ha habido  
de los amos que he tenido  
ni poeta ni capón;  
pareceisme lo postrero... (I, 504-507)  
¡Qué bonito  
que es el tiple moscatel! (I, 535-536)

While at first this *gracioso* is intrigued by his master's ambiguous appearance, his feelings progress from amusement and curiosity to uneasiness and fear:

Aquí dijo mi amo hermafrodita  
que me esperaba; y vive Dios, que pienso  
que es algún familiar, que en traje de hombre  
ha venido a sacarme de juicio,  
y en siéndolo, doy cuenta al santo oficio. (I,724-728)

Amo, o ama,  
despídome: hagamos cuenta.  
No quiero señor con saya  
y calzas, hombre y mujer;



que querréis en mí tener  
juntos lacayo y lacaya.  
No más amo hermafrodita;  
que comer carne y pescado  
a un tiempo, no es aprobado.  
Despachad con la visita,  
y adiós.

(III, 655-664)

Doña Juana's skill in shifting between several identities calls into question the social construction of gender. As Butler writes, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender* 25). Doña Juana's manipulation of her behaviour and appearance therefore suggests that gender is not necessarily fixed but can be rather subject to personal expressions and interpretations.

With her disguise the scorned young woman has blurred the lines which separate male and female identity. She has temporarily liberated herself of the restrictions to which her physical form has enslaved her. Butler suggests that the fabrication and appropriation of a new gender identity, as done by transsexuals and drag queens, should not be viewed as a mockery of one's identity, but rather as a mockery of the confinement that the concept of identity imposes: "this perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization..." (*Gender* 138). However, in the case presented by Tirso, doña Juana's manipulation of her identity is not done with the intent of liberating herself in Butler's sense. Her goal in donning men's clothing is not to gain power or access to prohibited levels of society, but to entrap the man who has dishonoured her and to force him to live up to his promises. We should recall that at the end of the play, when her goal has been achieved, "don Gil" happily puts away her green breeches and accepts once more the dress and life of doña Juana, thus complying with the existence permitted to her by the dominant culture.

Regardless of the motive behind her actions, what interests us is the constant attention given throughout the play to the issue of her appearance. Although Caramanchel's almost obsessive preoccupation with his master's true sex was undoubtedly included with the intent of providing comic relief, his commentaries can be seen to offer much more. It is my suggestion

that with his apparent nonsense, the *gracioso* proves himself to be the most insightful of the characters.

The other characters involved in this comedy have all been fooled by doña Juana's multiple roles. When dressed as don Gil, she is the gallant and gentle man whose delicate ways enchant the women and men around him/her (I, 936-943 ; II, 917- 921; III, 316-324). When dressed as doña Elvira, she is once more successful in gaining her company's confidence and admiration (II, 247-254). There is a critical point in the third act when doña Juana realizes that her scheme is beginning to fall apart. Doña Inés, to whom "don Gil" has professed his love, has just read a letter written by her supposed suitor that doña Juana has written to herself, as doña Elvira. Enraged at this apparent betrayal, Inés threatens to have "him" punished when suddenly doña Juana brilliantly changes identity before Inés' very eyes. Doña Juana, dressed as don Gil, now claims to be doña Elvira. S/he explains the reason for the masquerade:

Por probarte,  
y ver si tienes amor  
a don Miguel, pudo el arte  
disfrazarme; y es así,  
que una sospecha cruel  
me dio recelos de ti.  
Creyendo que a don Miguel  
amabas, yo me escribí  
el papel que aquel criado  
te enseñó, creyendo que era  
don Gil quien se lo había dado... (III, 527-537)

Doña Inés has a difficult time believing this tale and asks Juana/Elvira/Gil to change into a dress so as to put to rest her doubts (III, 557-564).

Doña Juana's costume/identity changes are consistently successful. Although on certain occasions her various "audiences" express some confusion or doubt about who she really is, ultimately, they all accept her/him as being either Elvira or Gil. The clothing she wears is the pivotal issue which defines her identity. When she wears breeches, she is a man. When she wears a dress, she is a woman.<sup>1</sup> Her success can be attributed to

<sup>1</sup> With respect to the issue of identity, Matthew Stroud presents a psychoanalytic study of *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, writing: "Mascu-

the need, in a binary society, to fit everyone into a certain slot. We all must be either male or female. Any attempt to mix the two identities makes people anxious and this new "hybrid" is usually shunned in some way because it does not follow the "Law". Butler writes that "in effect, the possibility of multiple identifications (which are not finally reducible to primary or founding identifications that are fixed within masculine and feminine positions) suggests that the Law is not deterministic and that 'the' law may not even be singular" (*Gender* 67). Following this principle, every person with whom doña Juana comes into contact allots her the sexual identity which best corresponds to the reality they themselves wish to live. For the women who have been smitten by "his" ways, she is a man. For the men who admire "his" astute behaviour, she is also a man. And for the women who need a friend in whom to confide, she is doña Elvira.

While it is necessary for the characters of *Don Gil* to grant doña Juana/Elvira/don Gil a specific identity at every moment, Caramanchel appears to be the only person who is capable of accepting the fact that this man/woman figure may possess qualities deemed natural in both sexes. There is no doubt that this comic servant finds his master's ambiguity confusing and somewhat disturbing, but unlike the others, he at no moment asks for proof of her sexual persona. He merely accepts that his don Gil may have a combination of various attributes. For example, because Juana doesn't have a beard, he wonders, "capón y con cosquillas?" and, making reference to the fact that don Gil does not have a patronym, Caramanchel observes, "Capón sois hasta en el nombre" (I, 519). With respect to this, Matthew Stroud points out that "he is perfectly willing to accept that there is more than one kind of male or female" (69). Instead of defining her existence in any determinate manner, Caramanchel is content with seeing her as a sexless figure (I, 806-808).

Doña Juana's skilful gender manipulation destabilizes the patriarchal norms with which her society identifies. That is to

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linity and femininity, then, are functions of the Symbolic; they are one's response to the Law, the Name-of-the-Father... Sexuality is strictly an ordering, a legislative contract that all human beings are required to enter into if they are to become participating members of human society" (*The Perception of Women* 67).

say, she manages to disempower the phallic stability of her surroundings. She is capable of being both male and female and is extremely convincing in each of her roles. This crossing of the limitations of gender introduces an instability and yet it is done with ease, and as Butler contends, this instability is not only acceptable but natural, for the identification process is always an ambivalent one, capable of being subverted at any time:

This "being a man" and this "being a woman" are internally unstable affairs. They are always beset by ambivalence precisely because there is a cost in every identification, the loss of some other set of identifications, the forcible approximation of a norm one never chooses, a norm that chooses us, but which we occupy, reverse, resignify to the extent that the norm fails to determine us completely. (*Bodies* 126)

Caramanchel allows himself to see more than one person in his don Gil. While expressing a typical anxiety toward his ambiguous master, he is willing to accept the hybrid identity with which he is faced and incites laughter with every reference he makes to it. Only he takes note of the inconsistencies in his new master but he appears to be capable of accepting that his don Gil may possess a combination of characteristics that are usually allotted to either one of the two sexes. Although his comedy is rooted in the anxiety he feels about don Gil's true identity, he, unlike the other characters, never assigns a persona which best suits his reality. His own fluid nature and existence allow him to see and accept more than one possibility in any given instance. With his silly puns and word plays, therefore, this clown figure proves himself to be the most insightful protagonist on the stage. As a character whose existence is dictated by the role he must perform, this *gracioso* does not truly form a part of the society which he serves. He is excluded, like most *graciosos*, from the final proceedings and is left aside in the shadows while the others join in the typical concluding festive celebrations. But as the least "human" of the characters he curiously exhibits a sensibility lacking in the others. Is he merely a stock type included to incite laughter? Perhaps, but according to this analysis he represents a type who acts against the typification of others, therefore violating and revealing the arbitrariness of what people label as "natural".

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