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POLITICS, AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER (NOT IN THAT ORDER):
EDUARDO GÓMEZ GEREDA AND ANTONIO SOLER'S
IMPOSIBLE L'HAIS DEJADO

RESUMEN

Este ensayo analiza la obra *Imposible l'hais dejado*, pieza teatral satírica-paródica escrita por Eduardo Gómez Gereda y Antonio Soler en 1907. Es un ejemplo notable de la sucesión de obras que utilizaron materia del *Don Juan Tenorio* de José Zorrilla, y se presenta tanto a los lectores como a su público con objetivos críticos bien claros. Ya que figura en ella la inversión de los papeles tradicionales de género, funciona como comentario de la dinámica sociocultural que existía entre los sexos. Como paralelo a esto, los dramaturgos también incorporan en su creación a figuras y movimientos políticos del día, así aportando otro nivel a la sátira que resulta ser el logro más memorable de la obra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Imposible l'hais dejado*—*Don Juan Tenorio*—José Zorrilla—Eduardo Gómez Gereda—Antonio Soler—parodia—sátira—roles de género

ABSTRACT

This essay analyzes Eduardo Gómez Gereda and Antonio Soler's *Imposible l'hais dejado*, a one-act satire/parody from 1907. It is a notable example of the proliferation of works that appropriated material from José Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, and it unfolds to both reader and audience with clear critical objectives. Because it features an inversion of the original

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play's traditional gender roles, it serves as a commentary on the socio-cultural dynamics at play in the relationship between the sexes. Parallel to this, the playwrights also tie their creation to contemporary political figures and movements, adding another level of depth to the satire that proves to be the play's most lasting achievement.

KEYWORDS: *Imposible l'hais dejado*—*Don Juan Tenorio*—José Zorrilla—Eduardo Gómez Gereda—Antonio Soler—parody—satire—gender roles

In the fourth act of Part One of Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio*, we find the following brief exchange:

D. JUAN ¿Le arriesgáis, pues en revancha
de doña Ana de Pantoja?
D. LUIS Sí; y lo que tardo me enoja
en lavar tan fea mancha.
Don Juan, yo la amaba, sí;
mas con lo que habéis osado
imposible la hais dejado
para vos y para mí. (*Don Juan Tenorio*, 2372-2379)

With these words we learn that don Juan has succeeded in his plan to seduce doña Ana de Pantoja, and that he has, in the process, “ruined” her, at least in the eyes of don Luis. Numerous components of the Spanish concept of honor insert themselves in this moment, but it occurs with hardly any emphasis—the audience understands without the need for any explanation what don Luis means, and Zorrilla spends no time further exploring doña Ana's fate. He does not even give her a statue in the pantheon in the play's second part. While don Luis does seek to exact revenge against don Juan, by this point it has become more a matter of his own (masculine) pride, and doña Ana has been discarded.²

Eduardo Gómez Gereda and Antonio Soler have taken a slightly altered version of this one line from the *Tenorio* as the title of their second appropriation of Zorrilla (the first having been 1904's *M'hacéis de reir Don Gonzalo*)³, and given this decision and the fact that they have

² For a thorough examination of the topic of honor with regard to don Juan and various key manifestations of the figure, see Mandrell *Don Juan and the Point of Honor*.

³ This play is included in the manuscript that I am currently preparing on appropriations of *Don Juan Tenorio* from the early 20th century (from 1900 through the start of the Spanish Civil War). For an introduction to the mechanisms of parody and satire in these plays, and a study of appropriations of Zorrilla during the period between the premiere of the *Tenorio* and the turn of the century, see Bersett *El Burlado de Sevilla*.

chosen to join the growing group of playwrights who explore the option of gender recoding in appropriations of *Don Juan Tenorio*, one might presume that questions of gender-related honor might perhaps be examined as well. This proves, almost, to be the case, but not in the way that we would think given the source material, and we will be surprised as well at how the authors choose to utilize the title verse at the end of the play.

Imposible l'hais dejado, with music by José Fonrat, premiered at the Teatro de Novedades in Madrid on October 31, 1907,⁴ the same night as two other appropriations of *Don Juan Tenorio*: *Tenorio feminista* (Antonio Paso, with Servet, Valdivia, and Lleó, 1907)⁵ and *Román Osorio* (José María Dotres, 1907). The play has not attracted much critical attention, and the only significant mention of it can be found in the work of Carlos Serrano, who groups it with other thematic successors of Liern's *Doña Juana Tenorio*, "que... serviría de modelo al *Tenorio feminista* de Paso, Servet y Valdivia (en 1907) o al *Imposible l'hais dejado*... de Gereda y Soler, también en 1907" (26). The title page of the play's printed edition claims that it met with "extraordinario éxito," and states that, in terms of genre, it is a "Tontería cómico-lírica, hecha en un acto... de obsecación y á cuadros... como los pantalones de La Cierva" (5). We thus learn two key pieces of information regarding the play—its broad brand of humor, plus its reliance on the contemporary political scene for comedic material. We know immediately that, whatever its reliance on the *Tenorio*, the play will include some form of satiric commentary, given at the very least that the Ministro de Gobernación's plaid pants have been brought into the game from the start. The play develops this sort of satire on numerous occasions, but does not lose sight of its focus on questions of gender, which provide the work's primary material. Furthermore, like many other appropriations of *Don Juan Tenorio* at this point in time, the question of parodic intent remains somewhat secondary, as we shall see. In any case, *Imposible l'hais dejado* stands as a more completely and consistently developed satire of its contemporary world than does the authors' previous foray into the world of don Juan in *M'hacéis de reir, Don Gonzalo*.⁶

⁴ The play is incorrectly listed in the "Espectáculos" section of *ABC* during the first few days of its run as *Imposible la hais dejado*, leading one to postulate a typesetter more familiar with Zorrilla's original text than with the play in question, or who had a vested interest in more traditional orthography. Whatever the source of the error may have been, it was eventually corrected. We note also, as has David Gies, that Zorrilla's original "hais" itself is an alternative usage for "habéis," deployed by Zorrilla to maintain meter (*Don Juan Tenorio* 197n).

⁵ *Tenorio feminista* is an extreme example of the popularity of appropriations of *Don Juan Tenorio*, in that, according to the published version of the play, it opened on that late October night in six different cities in Spain—Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Sevilla, Cádiz, and Cartagena (4).

⁶ One final preliminary note regarding *Imposible l'hais dejado* is that its authors include a brief dedicatory scene in the printed edition of the play, in which Sevillian journalist Rogelio Pérez Olivares receives a new work from Gómez Gereda and Soler. The short comic sequence, in verse, mimics the format of the letter from *Don Juan Tenorio*, but it contributes nothing else of note to the play as a whole.

The opening *cuadro* —“¡Á la cama, á la cama!” (a title that emphasizes the work’s focus on sexuality)—establishes the parameters of the authors’ satire by recoding the bet scene, during which many of the play’s principal mechanisms are introduced. The authors provide an initial depiction of this play’s female *calavera*, Juana Osorio, as well as her servant, Chata (the gender-recoded Ciutti), and the tavern keeper, el Mofletes. Juana finds herself irritated by the noise of a song entering from the street, and we are treated, as in many appropriations of the *Tenorio*, to a slightly revised version of the play’s opening lines:

Cuál gritan esos malditos,
mas puede que alguno *cobre*.
En cuanto escriba este sobre,
también yo voy á dar gritos. (9)

She presents herself as one who will join in the disruption of order when the time is correct, and this exposition of her character introduces qualities she will display during much of the work. Juana seems also intelligent and capable, and she provides as well a point of comparison against which the audience can evaluate her servant, with comical (yet significant) results, while the reverse comparison (servant to mistress) allows insight as well. For example, when Juana has finished the letter and hands it to Chata, she gives her specific instructions on where to deliver it:

Este pliego,
á la calle... la Cabeza,
diez, bajo, centro interior,
casi *pegao* á la escalera.
Te lo dirá la portera.
Es *pá* mi dueño y señor. (10)

Although Chata claims that she has understood “perfectamente,” she cannot retain this information as a cohesive whole, and she repeats it to herself in an aside while making her exit:

La cabeza del señor,
y el centro de la portera,
que han *pegao* á la escalera
los del diez, bajo, interior. (10)

This, and Chata’s other interventions during the scene, allow the audience to comprehend Juana as a woman who knows what she wants, a woman whose successes should come as no surprise given the abilities imbued in her by Gereda and Soler from the play’s outset.

These strengths receive further emphasis as el Mofletes places Juana into the greater context of her sex in the subsequent scene. He praises women and their gifts in the following terms:

...hoy *tóo* el mundo es feminista,
y lo que ustedes no logren,
no hay socio que lo consiga;
porque es cosa ya corriente
y de sabido se olvida,
que en alzándose las faldas
boca abajo la justicia.
Yo voy con estos bigotes
y esta cara y esta pinta
al gobernador... y magras,
ni me dirige la vista.
Se lo pide usted a Vadillo
y se lo dá *deseguida*.
Es decir, se me figura...
¡Caprichos de la política! (11)

As we have noted in analyses of other appropriations of the *Tenorio* in which the issue of gender comes to the fore, what we find here can in no way be defined as “feminism” as we understand the term today.⁷ El Mofletes essentially contends that women have learned to use their sexuality to gain advantage, and thus reveals the principal component of *Imposible l'hais dejado*. The play is full of strong women who assert themselves, while the men seem to have been reduced to roles of shrinking timidity—very much the reverse of matters as displayed in the *Tenorio* (at least up until the play’s final scenes, when we learn that doña Inés has taken agency in the fate of don Juan). The authors immediately undercut (in a small but humorous way) this dynamic of strength, however, by having Juana instruct el Mofletes on the preparations for her pending business with Luisa Legía, this play’s recoded don Luis, during which conversation she requests that he serve them *chatos de Montilla*—thus continuing the vermouth/lime tea/hot chocolate tradition of recoded *donjuanes* ordering either trendy or “weak” beverages. She may be a strong, independent woman, but Juana will still prefer a fruity wine.

The authors introduce the bet scene proper with a musical number presented by “la comparsa de tullidos «La Escrofulosa»” —the stage directions call for an ensemble of four men,

⁷ See, for example, Bersett, *El Burlado de Sevilla* 192-198.

led by a female character in charge (“La Escrofulosa”), in which “El Escrofuloso 1.º, es jorobado; el 2.º, manco; el 3.º, tuerto, y el 4.º, cojo, con la pierna llena de bultos” (13). These men then explain the falseness of their handicaps in turn:

- TODOS Los disfraces son sencillos
 como *ustés* habrán *notao*,
 pues saliendo en calzoncillos
 ya está uno *enmascarao*.
- ESC. 2.º (*Mostrando el brazo en cabestrillo.*)
 Yo no tengo *ná* en el remo.
- ESC. 3.º (*Mostrando un ojo pintarrajeado.*)
 Esto está *falsifícao*.
- ESC. 4.º (*Mostrando las piernas.*)
 Mis bultitos son patatas.
- ESC. 1.º (*Señalando al que tiene á la derecha.*)
 Y éste á mí me ha *jorobao*.
- TODOS Somos cinco vividores
 que vivimos muy felices
 pues á *tóo* el mundo engañamos
 y hasta al alcalde dejamos
 con tres palmos de narices. (13-14)

They refer to their mistress as a “pendón,” claiming that they are “*cansaos / rendíos y abrumaos / de andar por la calle*” with her (13). The authors’ agenda regarding gender roles is further complicated by these elements, as men become weakened (on numerous levels: in reality, in disguise, and due to their submission to a higher female power who exploits them), and another woman is depicted as controlling (and corrupt, here, as well). Their “performance” goes further, though, and reintroduces the political commentary suggested on the play’s title page, and also indicated by el Mofletes in his earlier description of the power of women. Part of the *comparsa*’s routine includes song and dance performed with two *couplets*, both of which describe the weakness and corruption of the government, in which “A nuestro Ayuntamiento / *l’han dejao sin narices*” (15). This is one example of liaison in these *couplets*—the other being a sly reference on the part of the authors to their other don Juan play, *M’hacéis de reir Don Gonzalo*, but having the government rather than don Gonzalo be the source of mocking laughter—and we find numerous other occasions of its use throughout the work as part of the lowered linguistic register of the play’s characters. Although it is just one of the linguistic techniques used to indicate the reduction of language in *Imposible l’hais dejado*, its frequent appearance also serves to prepare us for the appearance of the title line at the end of the play. Furthermore, the presence of the *couplets* here prepares us for a series of refer-

ences to contemporary popular culture that will begin to be developed in the subsequent scene, and continued as the play progresses.

We then meet the recoded don Gonzalo, here named “la de la Plaza de Comendadoras” (reference to an area of Madrid near the Parque del Oeste, as well as don Gonzalo’s title). She requests a mask from el Mofletes —when he gives her one he informs her that “Con eso nadie adivina / si es usted la Fornarina / ó el Obispo de Sión” (16), a jarring (but not surprising, given the nature of these appropriations) juxtaposition of an infamous cabaret performer and a key Madrid religious figure. The former, Consuelo Bello Cano (1884-1915), was notoriously popular during the first two decades of the century, and created scandal in a number of venues,⁸ while the latter occupied an office frequently besieged by conflict and scandal. The authors’ reference to these individuals, taken with later nods to the contemporary world, firmly grounds the play in its present, and continues the construction of satiric observation that pervades the work as a whole and underlines the development of its characters, specifically the female ones, with reference to their more open and “modern” sexuality.

The next person to arrive at the tavern is the new version of don Diego, here renamed (somewhat less cleverly than la de la Plaza de Comendadoras) doña Diega de Noche. We cannot help but note the ironic, though possibly confusing, suggestion of prostitution in the names of both mother figures, or at least some quality of life in the streets, given that they represent more traditional values. As if to confirm this, el Mofletes continues his role of offering the cultural counterpoint to the action of the play, describing Diega in the following terms:

*Pá mí que es esta cotilla
de la secreta... ¡Caray!
¿Si será el Millán Astray
con mantón y con toquilla?* (16)

As in many other appropriations, the don Diego surrogate becomes the voice of conservative values in the recoded world of the play, here implied through comparison to the writer and civil servant José Millán Astray (1850-1923), who at different times would serve as *comisario de policía* and jailer in Madrid.⁹ Diega expresses her anger using the same words

⁸ Pedro Montoliú reports that la Fornarina, a principios del siglo y en el Salón Japonés, protagoniza el primer desnudo integral, pues hasta ese momento las artistas de varietés solían quedarse en el escenario con medias negras y en camisa más o menos transparente. La Fornarina, en uno de los números de *El pachá Bum-Bum y su harén*, se presenta, sin embargo, sin ninguna ropa sobre una gran bandeja de plata llevada por cuatro portadores negros. (71)

⁹ He should not be confused in this reference with his more famous son, also named José Millán Astray (1879-

as don Diego (having descended “á tan ruin mansión”), but alters the latter’s reasoning in a significant fashion. While Zorrilla’s father figure asserts that “no hay humillación / a que un padre no se baje / por un hijo” (245-247), Juana’s mother has other concerns on her mind: “no hay humillación / á que una ya no se baje / por el qué dirán las gentes” (17). Her outrage, which at first might seem moral in nature, like that of her antecedent, remains conservative, but its underpinnings are entirely superficial and selfish. When she refers to the younger generation as “indecentes,” we know that it has more to do with her self-image than with any sense of dogmatic decency. We note, also, the continued importance of beverage as a cultural marking system—Diega orders a glass of Cazalla, a type of anise.

As Juana makes her entrance, we find in the stage directions further detail on those present. Juana has arrived with la Tía Política de Centellas, while Luisa Legía has come in accompanied by la Tía Carnal de Avellaneda, along with several other Tías, whom we might presume carry similar allegorical weight (17). With these characters on stage, the ensuing sequence concretizes our perception of the play as constructed thus far, with its parallel development of the cultural context in general and female sexuality in particular. Luisa confirms the second part of this when she clarifies the background of the bet:

Porque un día,
dije que en España entera
no había nadie que hiciera
las conquistas que yo hacía. (17)

Juana asserts her own opinion, stating that

pá mí que es presunción vana
el que t’hagas ilusiones,
pues pá robar corazones
no hay otra como la Juana. (17-18)

She then launches into her narrative, during the course of which we find most of the targets of satire as well as other elements featured throughout the play—for example, in her travels Juana has become a *coupletista* in Paris, she has held various jobs in Berlin (we underline here

1854), as it would have been too early in the latter’s military career for Paso to be utilizing him in this fashion. The younger Millán Astray would go on to found the Spanish Foreign Legion and be a staunch ally of Francisco Franco, and would be involved in the famous confrontation at the University of Salamanca that brought Miguel de Unamuno’s academic career to an end in October 1936 (see Thomas 353-354).

the concept of a woman working her way through Europe), and, like her Zorrillan antecedent, the victims of her actions run the socioeconomic gamut. Several segments in her speech recode the equivalent verses from the *Tenorio* to underline her sexual exploits:

Los franceses melosos,
las francesas calientes,
yo de curvas atrayentes,
si mis triunfos amorosos
hubieran visto estas gentes!...
[...]
Desde el Príncipe real
ó arrogante general,
hasta el *ninchi* barquillero,
mi amor recorrió ligero
toda la escala social.
Por donde quiera que fuí
las envidias excité,
de los *guindas* me reí,
y á muchos hombres dejé
memoria amarga de mí. (18-19)

Luisa's story, of her feats in France and Morocco, maintains a similar relationship with its source material, and concludes in much the same fashion:

Y cual vos, por donde fuí,
las pasiones sublevé
con el ruido que metí,
á los hombres *disloqué*
y del mundo me reí. (20)

Both women carry with them letters from jilted lovers, to be used to compare their relative success in the bet, and we find that, as should be expected by this point given our knowledge of other appropriations of *Don Juan Tenorio*, their number of victims and acts of disruptive behavior are both excessive and relatively equal in number to each other.

What sets this particular version of events apart from others is the musical epilogue created to underline the question of female sexuality. Juana begins by singing her own praises:

Tengo un encanto en mi cuerpo
 y una gracia y un andar,
 que hechizo al punto á la gente
 sin poderlo remediar.
 No voy por la calle
 que no me echen flores,
 mi cara de cielo
 las hembras me envidian;
 si entorno los ojos
 los hombres me siguen;
 si muy fijo miro
 se obscurece el sol;
 si elevo la vista
 se caen las estrellas,
 mi rostro de fuego
 derrite la nieve,
 no hay nadie en el mundo
 que tenga un palmito
 tan *retegracioso*
 como tengo yo. (21)

Thus, in concrete terms, and with little symbolic or rhetorical obfuscation, we witness an open expression of her sexual self-confidence. She knows that she is attractive, and does not hesitate to use this considerable power over others. Luisa elaborates this even further, and a small excerpt proves sufficient for us to note how both women share this sense of empowerment:

Yo también tengo en mis ojos
 un encanto singular
 que á las gentes enamora
 y hace á las feas rabiar. (22)

It is little wonder, then, that the women around them, those of the older generation in particular, look with such scorn on their words and actions. They break with accepted decorum, and bear little resemblance to their cultural and literary predecessors. It is true that they demonstrate the freedoms embraced by both don Juan and don Luis in the *Tenorio*, at least until the respective demises of Zorrilla's characters, and in doing so reject traditional dogma and authority. These points of contact, though, remain subverted due to the question of their gender. In this they also share little in common with other *doñajuanas*, who

represent other issues entirely—in *Doña Juana Tenorio*, for example, the female protagonists represent a criticism of middle-class acquisitiveness (Bersett, *El Burlado de Sevilla* 195), and their behavior highlights a strong doubt in the moral superiority of women (Gies, “Subversión” 99). Furthermore, as is the case in so many appropriations of the *Tenorio*, especially as time continues to pass, they have no struggle with issues of spirituality or salvation. What matters here is the breaking of taboo, as we witness true female *calaveras* —women who reject traditional values and gender roles, and freely ply their sexuality with no concern for earthly sanction or spiritual condemnation.

In a choice that allows for compression of the source material, the authors here opt to eliminate any reference to a counterpart for doña Ana (who was left “*imposible*” in Zorrilla), and instead have their characters focus the resolution of the wager on Juana’s betrothed: Candidito de Ulloa, a young man living in a monastery, the son of la de la Plaza de Comendadoras. Juana describes their task and the prey, declaring that “A un bello joven novicio / nos vamos a disputar” (22). At this point the authority figures make their (anticipated) objections, and that of Candidito’s mother reinforces the cultural subtext developed in the play thus far:

A mi hijo olvidad ligera
porque os juro ¡vive Dios!
que antes de ser para vos
sera *pá* la Cachavera. (23)

While recoding the corresponding verses from the *Tenorio*, the authors have inserted another reference to a *coupletista*, this one as infamous as the last—Montoliú cites la Cachavera in the same category of scandal as la Fornarina, and even includes a photograph of her in a typically revealing “costume” (71). There remains no doubt as to the class of femininity occupied by Juana and Luisa, with regular and overt allusions to what were, in essence, strippers—these are women who maximize their sexuality to their advantage, and seem to have no remorse about doing so. By embracing this lifestyle, they cut all ties with their forbears, and thus with proper society. Diega, in her rejection of her daughter’s behavior, states the position clearly:

Sigue, pues, loca y ufana
en tu loco frenesí,
mas nunca vuelvas á mí,
yo no te conozco, Juana. (23)

The authors offer us a repetition of the removal of the mask worn by the authority figure as can be found in the antecedent scene in Zorrilla, with similar repercussions of shock from

all present except Juana, who finds no issue with such boldness.¹⁰ Once Diega has abandoned the scene, the rivals declare their intent to make for the monastery to continue their adventures.

We then witness another intrusion of the political world into the play's events, this time reinforcing the qualities of femininity underlined in the previous sequence. As in the *Tenorio*, the rivals have arranged to have each other taken captive, and *Imposible l'hais dejado* chooses again to take advantage of the possibilities of satiric commentary, relating this plot development to the moral and legislative efforts of Antonio Maura and Juan de la Cierva. Luisa explains to Juana (just taken into custody, and claiming, again, that “¡M'hacéis de reír!”):

Amiga, no lo extrañeis,
más mirando á lo apostado
á Maura os he delatado
para que no trasnocheis. (24)

Juana, for her part, responds in kind once Luisa has been taken:

¡Anda ahora y vuelve por uvas!
Por lo visto se conoce
que la Cierva se ha enfadao
porque esto no se ha cerraao
como él ordena, á las doce. (24)

This allusion to key political figures proves not to be an example of merely casual name dropping (as can be the case in some appropriations of the *Tenorio*, or in satire in general) —rather, in citing these names the authors inject a specific resonance that supports an interpretation of the play as forwarding a particular agenda. That is, Gómez Gereda and Soler call into question the role of government and society in the evolution of traditional gender roles. Writing a full century later, Charles Esdaile and Javier Tusell describe the political scene of Madrid circa 1907 in a way that serves to clarify these interjections:

El antifeminismo no fue un producto específico de la era de Maura, pero fue él quien tomó las primeras medidas para velar por la protección de la imagen tradicional de la mujer. Así, bajo la dirección del puritano ministro de la Gobernación del gobierno de Maura, Juan de la Cierva, las diferentes normas municipales promulgadas durante el medio siglo anterior para controlar

10 Regarding the equivalent scene in Zorrilla, see Gies (*Don Juan Tenorio* 124n).

la prostitución fueron complementadas en 1908 por un nuevo código nacional, encaminado a confinar el problema a burdeles autorizados, poniendo así freno a su crecimiento y notoriedad. Mientras tanto, se sufragaban campañas a gran escala contra la pornografía y se intentaba extirpar cualquier forma de conducta impropia por parte de la población femenina. (214)

They go further, examining the question of regulation in reference to nightlife and places of entertainment: “El carácter reaccionario del reformismo de Maura no queda patente sólo en el caso de las mujeres. Los intentos de restringir el horario de apertura de tabernas y cabarets se proponían al tiempo generar una mano de obra más sana y combatir la delincuencia” (214). We should stress here as well that this information would have been common knowledge to the play’s audience—they would need no clarification to understand the dialogue’s subtext, highlighted even further by their familiarity with the source material drawn from Zorrilla. Time and again, this proves to be one of the key mechanisms of appropriation with satiric intent—when one knows the model text well (as any of these audiences would have known the *Tenorio*), any changes to that model will draw attention to the recoded text, giving authors an opportunity to insert clearly delineated commentary in their particular fashion. In this example, the characters’ words and what we know about contemporary attempts to control the activities of the public (women in particular) demonstrate without question that Gómez Gereda and Soler wish to underline the complexities of both the perception and reality of gender issues. Women here do not conform to any traditional paradigm. We have, rather, a clear inversion of gender roles, and not one meant to produce solely comedic effect. Nor does the play establish the inversion only to subvert it later, thus nullifying any sense of “progress” developed in the characters, as we shall see.

The authors emphasize this inversion with another layer of gender-related twists in the play’s second *cuadro*, entitled “El filtro envenenado.” The act opens in a cloister at the monastery indicated during the previous sequence, and the audience witnesses a musical number in which dancing monks respond to a voice they hear coming from outside offering advice on how to experience a more fulfilling love life. The Padre Prior steps in to caution them:

Cerrad vuestros oídos
á impúdicas canciones,
que son la causa á veces
de torpes tentaciones. (25)

Candidito de Ulloa and the musical monks respond to the Padre Prior that he can relax, that they are only praying:

Pidamos al Altísimo
de todo corazón
que nos defienda siempre
del mundo pecador. (26)

Their situation, as men isolated from the world around them, is further emphasized by the response that comes (again, from outside the walls of the monastery) from a choir of women:

«Á las oraciones
cierran los conventos;
¡pobrecitos frailes!
que se quedan dentro.» (26)

Gómez Gereda and Soler thus establish another physical space that delineates differences in gender. In the monastery we now have our first significant interventions in the play from male figures, kept from the world around them, in contrast to the tavern, filled with women who have debated questions of liberal freedoms (as well as el Mofletes, whose function seems somewhat sexless, more that of an indirect narrator and cultural observer). The monastery provides the opportunity for an escape from the perils of that liberalism, from the dangers represented by women. The Padre Prior reminds Candidito of this, asserting that

Dichoso mil veces vos
que vais derecho al Edén
ignorando la ponzoña
de la pérfida mujer. (26)

The question of eternal salvation does, then, enter into consideration —though not for the protagonist. It is her “beloved” who will struggle with this issue, in much the same way that doña Inés does in the *Tenorio*, but Candidito will not bring the conflict (and the resulting opportunity to choose her ultimate fate) to Juana in the same way that his antecedent does to don Juan, as will be demonstrated by this play’s climax.

Candidito, displaying a timidity not usually seen in male characters, especially in don Juan plays, begs the Padre Prior to remain with him, as he harbors some inexplicable fear and does not wish to be alone. His superior assures him that he will not be left on his own for long, as the kitchen helper will be sent to keep him company. Once Candidito is in fact alone, he bemoans his current condition:

No sé qué tengo, ¡ay de mí!
que estoy triste á todas horas;

este silencio me espanta;
este misterio me agobia. (27)

His language and the imagery it carries remind us of doña Inés at the corresponding moment in her trajectory in the *Tenorio*, isolated from the world and unknowingly primed for the arrival of a seducing figure. The kitchen help then arrives, in the form of Brígido, lamenting the lonely boredom of the convent—he claims to need some “jolgorio” (27). Candidito expresses his need for news of the outside world by demanding to know if Brígido has brought with him a copy of that day’s *España Nueva*. This request serves two parallel functions: on an internal level of narrative and character development, Candidito needs information regarding the world beyond the monastery walls, while on another (extratextual) level it symbolizes the play’s ongoing agenda to keep the audience informed of the present, of the reality of Spain as it exists outside the theater in which the play is performed.

As Brígido hands the newspaper to Candidito, a letter from Juana falls out onto the floor, and the play then proceeds to offer its recoding of the antecedent moment from the *Tenorio*. The letter opens in typical fashion, “Cándido del alma mía” (28), but like the rest of the play it is peppered with colloquialisms, as well as further examples of the liaison we have already noted on numerous occasions: “«*M’alegraré que al recibo / de esta t’halles todo bien...*»” (28). The bulk of the letter is presented in the usual format, in both its recognizable model (it appears in pieces during the dialogue between Candidito and Brígido, as in Zorrilla’s original text, as well as other appropriations) and its moments of modernization. For example,

«*Chacho* mío de mi vida.
Imán soñado y querido;
brillante siempre escondido...
en el Monte de Piedad.
Gorrión que nunca saliste
de las faldas de tu madre,
porque decía tu padre
que eso era una atrocidad.
Azúcar cande, sorbete,
tus ojos verdes tristonés
y tus imberbes facciones
me tienen *electrizá*.
Quiéreme siempre, ángel mío,
y no olvides ni un momento
que á las diez de tu aposento
tu Juana te robará...» (28)

In addition to the colloquial and the modern, in particular that she claims to be electrified by him, we find other significant points of characterization and narrative here. Candidito seems to have been protected by his parents like a young woman would have been in a more traditional upbringing, and this remains in keeping with the inversion of gender roles in the play. Also, we note the humorous bit of theatrical self-awareness at the end of the stanza, in which Juana urges Candidito to remember something of which only the audience will be aware, again out of familiarity with the source material. The young man's response to all this is one of piety and fear:

¡Oh, qué filtro envenenado
me dais en este papel!
Yo, en tentación de pecado.
¡Dios mío, libradme de él!
El corazón se me raja
y de una cosa el rumor
oigo que sube y que baja. (29)

While Candidito believes that the sound must be some horrible illusion, Brígido calmly explains, as only a resident of the jaded modern world could do, that it is merely the elevator, bringing Juana up to meet him. In response to her arrival, Candidito must emulate doña Inés, wondering if he is dreaming, and then proceeds to faint. As Juana orders Brígido to help her to carry the unconscious form away, the worldly kitchen servant wonders why he cannot seem to meet someone like her who would do similar things to him. He expresses the other side of the masculine spectrum as that represented by Candidito—while the innocent young man fears this aggressive form of femininity, the older Brígido fantasizes about it, and the authors seem to have juxtaposed these characters to provide more complete insight into the male perspective on the sort of sexuality developed throughout the play, just as Zorrilla did with their respective models.

The stage directions for the play's final *cuadro* ("Para casa de los padres") call for a set that contains "Á la izquierda el clásico sofá, pero de paja, y un lavabo á la derecha" (30). We know that what follows will involve some version of the sofa scene, and Candidito comes out of his stupor in fear of the sort of moral peril that such a scene might entail for him—he worries about temptation and sin, and what his mother will think. We remember her earlier words regarding the *qué dirán* and note her influence on him. When Brígido informs him that he is in Juana's house and that she will return shortly, Candidito throws up his arms and shouts "¡En tus manos me encomiendo!" (30), reflecting both his religious training and his distance from traditional masculine bravura.

The sofa scene begins with Juana's entrance —she tries to assuage his fears, and offers the first of many references to Zorrilla, laced with modern language and trappings:

¿No es verdad, ángel de amor,
que aquí en esta *chaise longue*
ansías que se prolongue
mi estancia a tu alrededor? (31)

What follows consists of a complex recoding of material from *Don Juan Tenorio*, in which Gómez Gereda and Soler utilize numerous modern details and political references, as well as a healthy dose of fairly erotic language. As in other appropriations, Juana responds not necessarily to the internal imagery and symbolism of the verses she recites, but more often to external stimuli (sounds and objects indicated by the stage directions, such as the wash basin mentioned above) that guide her seduction. She begins in the following fashion, reminiscent of the words of don Juan, but resonating with a more present reality:

Esta aura que vaga llena
de espliego y de *pacholí*,
¿no es cierto, alma mía, di,

She continues for two sets of *décimas* that use a rhyme structure slightly altered from that of the original verses, several lines of which serve as representative of the scene as a whole:

Esas dos líquidas perlas
que se desprenden tranquilas
de tus señoras pupilas,
me da reparo beberlas.
Límpiate, para absorberlas,
y que yo, con ansia loca,
pueda secar con mi boca
esa humedad de tu cutis,
y hacer en seguida *mutis*
como el señor Sánchez Toca. (31-32)

While the language here does not prove as explicit as that in, say, *Don Juan Notorio* (1874),¹¹ it contains a more graphic physical quality than that found in the vast majority of appropriations of the *Tenorio*, and it underlines the nature of Juana's feminine sexuality as developed throughout the play. Furthermore, it comes alongside yet another reference to the contemporary political scene, this time with an allusion to Joaquín Sánchez Toca (1852-

¹¹ For analyses of this play and its use of pornographic content, see Gies "Subversión," and Bersett "Polvos sin fin."

1942), a conservative ally to Antonio Maura, who ended his (short) second term as mayor of Madrid on October 28, 1907, just three days before the premiere of *Imposible l'hais dejado*. This sort of up-to-the-minute content lends an immediacy to the play that can be lacking in even the most topical of other appropriations.

Candidito concludes the sofa scene with further familiar material, revised according to the play's agenda with close adherence to the source material and the language of physical sexuality, with a continued, though somewhat less pronounced here, lowering of linguistic register:

A vuestro amor me hice el sordo
porque estaba hecho un jumento;
pero si seguís, presiento
que se va á armar algo gordo...
Tal vez poseéis ufana
un misterioso amuleto,
que á vos me atrae en secreto.
¡Dadme el amuleto, Juana!
¿Pues qué he de hacer si desierta
mi alma pura en vuestros brazos,
y el corazón en pedazos
veréis pronto en una espuerta?
¡Juana, Juana, te lo imploro
por quien te sacó de pila,
ó dame una taza e tila
ó ámame, porque t'adoro! (32)

Aside from the return to lime tea as one of the beverages of choice for characters in early twentieth-century appropriations of the *Tenorio*, we note also the continued relationship between Candidito and doña Inés, both of whom succumb to the attractions of their respective seducers. They revert to the same explanations for their weakness against these advances, blaming external, supernatural sources of power possessed by these individuals —as has happened with doña Inés, Candidito's background, training and piety cannot withstand the influence of Juana's charm and influence.

The play then speeds to an abrupt conclusion with the arrival of Candidito's mother and Luisa Legía, both of whom, outraged at Juana's activities, seek to right the situation in the same fashion as don Gonzalo and don Luis at the conclusion of Part I of *Don Juan Tenorio*. Candidito, although he has just confessed to having given in to Juana's seductive ways, defends his innocence, backed by Juana's acceptance of all guilt for the situation. She has no desire for

further confrontation— having apparently fallen in love with her prey, Juana now wishes to resolve all conflicts. As Candidito witnesses the interactions between the three women, he begins to dance about and shout with joy:

¡Yo estoy loco de contento!

[...]

No os debéis incomodar.

¡¡Esto es mejor que el convento!!

Mamá, me caso con Juana.

Llévame á la Vicaría. (33)

We note that he turns to traditional modes of resolution: marriage sanctioned both by parental approval and official recognition of the relationship by the proper authorities. Luisa, for her part, leaves aside her desire for vengeance, claiming that Juana has found for herself sufficient punishment in the form of matrimony —“Si tal hacéis, os perdono / porque ya tenéis castigo” (33). These disparate views on the institution of marriage represent an apt conclusion to the issues of gender recoding developed in the play, given that a traditionally female perspective is now placed within the arc of a male character, while a “modern” female looks askance at the happy ending offered by the proposed union.

Juana closes the play with the standard plea to the audience, finally arriving at the verse that provides the play with its title:

Y como aquí la parodia

ha tocado ya á su fin,

callad si no os satisfizo

y al pobre autor no decid:

Imposible l'hais dejado...

para poderla aplaudir. (33)

Thus we learn that, in a strictly literal sense, the direct object in the play's title refers not to a woman, but rather to the play itself. One level of the humor of this wordplay stems from its being used to describe only a potential reaction to the play. Yet we comprehend that it must also refer to Juana and her behavior as a woman in the modern world. By most contemporary standards, the authors have created in this character a female ethos that the audience would find “imposible” in practically every way. As we have noted, her sexuality is forceful and concrete —she makes no effort to shroud anything that she does under cover of any type of propriety (at least until the play's climax)—and she is proud of not having to live according to the norms of a patriarchal society.

The play's satire, while focusing primarily in microcosm on the new freedoms available to (and perhaps practiced by) women, reaches a broader target and encompasses the whole of contemporary Spanish culture. The frequent references to present-day political figures serve to remind us that the Spain of the early twentieth century found itself undergoing a struggle between conservative and progressive value systems, one that Spaniards recognized themselves even in the moment, and the authors wish to impress upon their audience the validity of some new ideas. As part of the greater society around them, women and men, the play seems to assert, need not conform to traditionally defined, restrictive guidelines of behavior. While *Imposible l'hais dejado* does not necessarily claim that men should now occupy the roles traditionally reserved for women (Candidito functions more to provide contrast to Juana's forward nature, and also some rather clever comedy), it does allow for an increased flexibility with regard to the established norms of masculinity. He serves one further purpose as well, in more general terms, symbolizing the dangers of overprotection—when one sees nothing of the world, one has no ability to cope with its realities. We cannot help but believe that the females in this imagined world would be more likely to find success there, and in the real world as well if given the appropriate opportunities.

(Note: The printed edition of the play includes some 14 “Couplets para repetir” at the conclusion of the drama proper. These stanzas continue the satire developed throughout the play, and contain numerous other allusions to contemporary figures and events, in particular with reference to Antonio Maura, Juan de la Cierva and Joaquín Sánchez Toca. Two stanzas stand as representative of the poetry as a whole:

—Muy pronto tendré un chico.
—Mirondón, mirondón, mirondón.
—Y éstos, según me dicen,
les va á pasar igual.
La culpa es de La Cierva..
—Que impide trasnochar.
[...]
—Yo tengo mucho frío.
—Mirondón, mirondón, mirondón.
—Y aún me queda este año,
bastante que pasar.
Hasta que salga Maura..
—El fresco no se va. (34-35)

The humor here continues to be at the expense of these figures, and the poetry contains a hint of resignation to the reality that they represent.)

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