

# **Beyond Shakespeare and Calderón: Female Subversion in the Plays of Tirso, Webster and Middleton**

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The plays of Tirso (c.1583-1648), Webster (c. 1578-c.1632) and Middleton (1580-1627) present a deeper and more radical feminist focus than those of Shakespeare and Calderón, whose drama has traditionally been a major centre of comparative interest for feminist studies (Fischer 1989; Fotherhill-Payne 1991; Stoll 1991). However, the dramatisation of women in seventeenth-century England and Spain to be seen in Tirso, Webster and Middleton's plays offers new perspectives of drama in general and female subversion in particular (Ortega 1997; Martínez 1998; Cressy 1999; Fumerton 1999).

It is important for an exploration of the feminine to acknowledge first how discussions and representations of women have moved beyond simple male attacks on the sexism of androtexts and have led to new ways of interpretation in spite of the difficulty of "how to integrate a feminist reading into plays written by dramatists who were not only male and who wrote in a time in which male-female relationships would have to be judged as extremely unliberated by today's standards" (Larson: 1991). The representation of women in the plays of Tirso, Webster and Middleton not only marks a significant stage in upholding and subverting previous representations of women on the English and Spanish stage but also allows them to exercise control over a patriarchal world where they assume a subversive role. However, one needs to re-interpret the role of women as well as of the radically dramatised subversive aspects bearing in mind –when we analyse them– the discontinuity and inconstancy (Riley: 1988) of what to be a woman meant in England and Spain in a time of crisis and change.

Things fall apart in Jacobean drama<sup>1</sup>. The dark Jacobean picture brought about a new social consciousness which is reflected in literature and in the church where "Ministers filled their sermons with vivid images of disorder, darkness, sickness and corruption".

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1 As seen in *The White Devil* where "Webster creates a poetic impression of this world with its inherent contradictions", Irving Ribner, «From Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order», *Webster. The White Devil and the Duchess of Malfi*, R.V. Holdsworth (ed.), London, 1975, p. 118.

People, under these conditions, “tried to come to terms with changes that threatened their conception of a stable and enduring social order.” (Wrightson: 1982) Webster and Middleton use the dark side of reality in their plays as a crucial issue (Gunby: 1995) producing “a sense of defeat,...of the futility of man’s achievement” (Ellis-Fermor: 1936) which also characterise their heroines. Personal and social values are reversed in Jacobean drama where they present an undermining and provocative challenge to an old order in its final stages and in need of urgent solutions and drastic changes. In Spain we find a similar negative picture though not so dark and tragic. The social and political crisis was also felt in Austrian Spain (Domínguez: 1973). Decadence –a key concept to understand the seventeenth century in Spain– was especially felt in the towns where industry had flourished in the previous century (Defourneaux: 1983). Calderón’s historical dramas also reflect the turbulence and confrontation of his time as in *El sitio de Bredá* which reveals “ a sensitive awareness of the irrationalities of war and its cost in human suffering” (Loftis: 1987). The Spanish empire on which the sun never set had more shadow than light. It was more insecure and threatened (Nuñez: 2000). This confusion and pessimism are clearly expressed by Don Martín at the end of Tirso’s *Sir Giles in Green Breeches* [‘Don Gil de las calzas verdes’] (1615):

Streets of this court, imitators  
 Of confusing Babel, always trodden on  
 With lies, flatterers to the rich and  
 Critics of the poor, wild;  
 Every hour mischief and vice dwelt  
 In the single storeyed house<sup>2</sup>.

(3.18)

[*Calles de aquesta corte, imitadoras  
 Del confuso Babel, siempre pisadas  
 De mentiras, al rico aduladoras  
 Como al pobre severas, desbocadas;  
 Casas a la malicia, a todas horas  
 De malicias y vicios habitadas.*]

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2 This and all subsequent translations from texts in Spanish are mine. References are to Tirso de Molina, *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, Alonso Zamora Vicente (ed.), Madrid, Castalia, 1991.

Within this dark and negative context, Tirso, Webster, and Middleton made possible a new construct of the feminine beyond the traditional gender barriers. They were more interested in the exploration of female psychology and identity than in the dramatisation of gender struggle. Women in their plays are not only simple victims who complain about their social status but agents of their own destinies and plotters of their own revenge. They invent new forms of living and experiencing the feminine within a feminist-minded drama. In this way, new answers to the 'woman question' are given. There are distinctly modern heroines in Tirso, Webster, and Middleton's dramas who show the inadequacies of the traditional representation of women based on early modern gender struggle "through which resistance to gendered forms of subordination and oppression were articulated" (Howard: 2000) .

However this female opposition and subversion must be viewed from a still male-dominated context as "Actual changes for the better in the position of women at this time were distinctly limited" (Dollimore: 1984). We cannot expect a complete and sudden revolution in the presentation of women in the plays of Tirso, Webster and Middleton. They still suffer from social oppression. They are marginalised in society by the dominant male ideology which tries to adapt itself to the new situation using different strategies to maintain its predominance at any cost. Brachiano, Amnon, De Flores still represent a patriarchal order based on female exploitation and sexual possession. Female heroines like Vittoria, Tamar and Beatrice-Joanna cannot be wives but are partners and plotters of mischief. Women have turned from mothers to lovers revealing more explicit sexual overtones than those seen in previous drama. They are sexually valued as it is this that men expect from them as a consequence of the materialisation of values that the pre-industrialised society brought about.

But they cannot accept such degradation. They cannot accommodate themselves to this new situation. They become aware of the urgent need to free themselves from such alienation using new weapons and to redefine their identity to live fully as women. They must fight men using their own strategies and means to become the new rulers who subvert and contradict male expectations. These tragic heroines should behave like tragic heroes who "...assert [their] freedom against the restrictions imposed by the community, against power as it is embodied in the existing social system". And their "tragic destiny is...also to show, in the process of failing, the power of the individual to represent a daring, an untamability, an inventiveness, occasionally a capacity for love

and self-sacrifice that idealizes [their] own effort to achieve such separate identity” (Hunter: 1997).

In Tirso’s drama women are presented as powerful and intellectually equal to men. They appear morally stronger, more perceptive and wittier than men as in *Prudence in Woman* [‘La Prudencia en la mujer’] (1622) where Don Enrique states that “Queen Doña María is not a woman/ for she knows how to defeat rebels” (1.12). In Jacobean drama there is a more reflexive prototype of heroine deeply concerned with the implications of marked gender differences. Though she may finally be the victim of a patriarchal system, she tries hard to get rid of male tyranny as Isabella does in Middleton’s *Women Beware Women*<sup>3</sup> (1621) reflecting a new female consciousness, and voicing a common female complaint in despair

Can there be a greater misery to a woman,  
That means to keep her days true to her husband,  
And no other man, so virtue wills it!  
But I must needs commit idolatry?  
                                    ...Of the heart-breakings  
Of miserable maids, where love’s enforced!  
The best condition is but bad enough:  
When women have their choices, commonly  
They do but buy their thraldoms and bring great portions  
To men to keep’em in subjection...  
                                    No misery surmounts a woman’s.  
Men buy their slaves but women buy their masters.

(2.2)

It can be considered as a profeminist manifesto which, on the one hand, tries to reflect the negative situation women lived in, and on the other, presents other alternatives for rebellion against such a miserable condition which women could no longer bear though we do not find “a triumphant emancipation of women but at best...an indication of the extent of their oppression” (Dollimore: 1984). Besides Isabella tries to play with the same cards men play using similar strategies. She proposes a more human and

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3       References are to Thomas Middleton, *Women Beware Women*, B. Loughrey and N. Taylor (eds.), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1988.

egalitarian relation between men and women beyond any commercialisation of gender. Tirsian heroines also complain about their state of subordination and suffering that women like Laurencia in *The Lady of the Olive Grove* ['La dama del olivar'] (1614) experience:

And what about us that suffer  
And live as slaves  
Whilst you spoil our pleasures  
Besides with children loaded;  
Whether be silent or rocking,  
A thousand pains of endurance  
Nine months of being pregnant,  
Always with fright and fear  
Of being surprised by childbirth,  
Men leave us the pain  
And they take the pleasure?<sup>4</sup>

[¿Y nosotras que sufrimos  
que hechas esclavas vivimos  
aguándonos los placeres  
vosotros, de hijos cargadas;  
ya callando, ya meciendo,  
mil dolores padeciendo  
nueve meses de preñadas,  
siempre con temor y susto  
de que el parto nos asombre,  
dejándonos cualquier hombre  
la pena y llevando el gusto?]

It is not only the traditional wife's lament once more reproduced and voiced but the awareness of what being a woman historically means and implies as well as the recognition that something must be done for improving the situation of women in early

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4 Tirso de Molina, *La dama del olivar, Obras dramáticas completas*, Blanca de los Ríos (ed.), Madrid, Aguilar, 1962, vol. I, p. 1192.

modern Spain. The idealisation of women who must endure adversity with patience and fortitude still appears in Tirsian and Jacobean plays. The Duchess of Malfi exemplifies female resistance to violence and disintegration. She, like Tirso's Santa Juana, is presented as the idealised female prototype. However, the dramatic stereotype of woman as a model devoted to her role of mother and wife seems to be old-fashioned for a theatre which aimed at showing new ways of being a woman.

“In fact there seems to have been a significant change in attitudes to women in the drama of the second decade of the seventeenth-century” (Dollimore: 1984) as appreciated in the dramatisation of heroines in the plays of Tirso, Webster, and Middleton where the politics of female identity implies a certain ambiguity and indeterminacy for in Tirsian ‘comedia’

male and female protagonists often seem to have acquired the stereotypical characteristics of the other sex. Thus his women are resolute, courageous, intelligent, and manipulatively cunning where his men are passive, timid, fickle, and finally ineffectual. This inversion of masculine, and feminine personality traits is sometimes aided by the convention of the heroine disguised as a man...<sup>5</sup>

Women either try to behave like men or to appear dressed as men to subvert and appropriate male power. In this context of female opposition and rebellion, disguise presents both a threat to male identity and the possibility of redefining the feminine in modern terms. The convention of a woman who dresses like a man was relatively commonplace in the ‘comedia’ reflecting a liberating experience as male clothing facilitated admittance into a world that would otherwise be closed to the female characters.

Carmen Bravo-Villasante, who has discussed in depth this ‘comedia’ convention<sup>6</sup>, suggests that male clothing “is not only used to investigate but also to subvert and to provoke in order to show that women are also equal” (Bravo-Villasante: 1976). But the disguise is not only an instrument to disrupt and mock masculinity for “it

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5 Henry W. Sullivan, «The Incest Motif in Tirsian Drama: A Lacanian View», *Parallel Lives. Spanish and English National Drama 1580-1680*, Louise and Peter Fothergill-Payne (eds.), Lewisburg, Bucknell University Press, 1991, p. 186.

6 She particularly refers to its two most popular manifestations: the woman dressed as a man [‘la mujer tapada’] and the amazon [‘la mujer heroica-guerrera’]. Carmen Bravo-Villasante, *La mujer vestida de hombre en el teatro español*, Madrid Sociedad Española de Librería, 1976, p. 15.

goes deeper than a mere stage trick” (Sullivan: 1991). It becomes a part of the character. It is not, therefore, something merely external. When female characters don male clothes, they change not only in physical appearance, but also in the roles they play as the result of their change of costume moving from passivity to independence. In this way they assume and appropriate qualities that were normally associated more with the masculine than with the feminine.

Tirso’s *Sir Giles of the Green Breeches* carries crossdressing to the extreme as it is much concerned with disguise, mistaken identity and role-reversal. Doña Juana dresses like a man in order to allow her to move freely and to facilitate her plans to revenge her lost honour though the real motivation of her arrival to Madrid is her love for Don Martín and her desire to force him to marry her. As Darst (1974) notes: “the pants Juana wears, which visibly represent her decision to pursue Martin in an active and forceful way, are green, a color representative, not of vengeance, but of hope...” In assuming the role of Don Gil, Juana deceives her lover and her servant, causes two women fall in love with her, and eventually wins the hand of the unfaithful Don Martín. She is much like a female Don Juan Tenorio<sup>7</sup> because throughout the comedy Doña Juana challenges social norms producing tricks [‘enredos’] that finally lead to a climax in which not only Doña Juana but three other characters claim to be Don Gil who is not a character but Doña Juana’s invention. ‘Doña Juana’ and ‘Don Gil’ are the two components of divided self. Thus Don Gil’s “muscatel-like fluting voice” (1.2), and not having a proper beard (1.8) make Caramanchel, the fool [‘gracioso’], suspicious about his real identity. Besides, crossdressing shows the relativity and falsehood of male identity which can be easily appropriated. Male power is not so absolute and rigid. The temporary experience of how to be a man has a positive aspect for reconsidering and reconstructing the female self since it is clear from now on that man cannot be the model for woman in a search for the authentic female self, although neither in Webster and Middleton’s drama nor in Tirsian drama do we find a dramatisation of female roles completely freed from male constraint.

Jacobean drama seldom uses this dramatic device though it is present in *Women Beware Women* when Isabella dons a mask in 1.2 to find out more about Ward, her

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7 Henryk Ziomek’s, *A History of Spanish Golden Age Drama*, Lexington, Kentucky University Press, 1984, p. 100. However Don Juan and Doña Juana show different attitudes and goals, in which the ends always seem to justify the means. While he only seduces, Doña Juana wants to marry the man she loves.

future husband, and to observe him. Despite Flamineo's proposal that Vittoria should be attired "in a page's suit" (4.2.209) to facilitate her escape from the house of convertites, literal crossdressing never occurs in Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) though she determines "to personate masculine virtue" (3.2.135). However the exploration of female identity and its politics reaches a new stage in Jacobean drama with the appearance of the assertive woman who stands for women's rebellion against sexual and social exploitation in a society where women were subordinated to men, and where they were required to accept male domination.

Undoubtedly Vittoria Corombona represents the complete dramatic achievement of the assertive woman. Her theatrical discontinuity can be connected –as Catherine Belsey (1985) argues– with the uncertain subject position occupied by women in the early seventeenth century. She is characterised by ambiguity for she is the white devil, "a combination of beauty and corruption" (Leggatt: 1988). She is determined to be herself and to fulfil her desires and female expectations as she is "above law, and above scandal" (1.2). She is the heroine who fights male prerogatives exemplifying a further development in the women's struggle for getting social relevance and promotion. Vittoria is the unruly woman whose abilities and skills are no-where better shown than in the trial she has to stand for her possible involvement in the murder of Camillo, her husband. But she is well-prepared to face all kinds of accusations. The linguistic manipulation initially carried out by the lawyer through his Latinate diction does not achieve the intended verbal confusion. She sets out to show herself the intellectual equal of her detractors and accusers as she indicates that she understands Latin.

In fact she uses their own strategies and language to defend herself from their strong accusations. Thus "...rhetorical cross-dressing appears to be a conventional means of heightening the illusion of femininity". Furthermore "In *The White Devil*...the simple dichotomy between essential feminine identity and masculine disguise is problematised by metatheatrical presentation...The feminine is clearly a matter of performance here" (Luckyj: 2001) as Vittoria shows in the trial using words and spectacle to free herself from all charges and manipulation. But her male rhetoric is not going to be successful despite her manipulation of language in an attempt to demonstrate innocence. Performance and linguistic crossdressing become deceitful for she cannot fight man's arrogance using his own language of corruption. Transitory gender inversion has proved to be inadequate and fallacious in this case. It has had a negative effect. Monticelso is well aware of it, and will try to destroy her by revealing her real identity because



Vittoria is not what she appears. She is just a whore “Worse than dead bodies which are begged at gallows,/ And wrought upon by surgeons, to teach man/ Wherein the imperfect...She’s like the guilty counterfeited coin,/ Which whosoe’er first stamps it, brings in trouble/ All that receive it.” (3.2). Vittoria suffers verbal rape from Monticelso who abuses her through his verbal power and authority for he cannot allow a partner to share his power and ambition.

Beatrice-Joanna is also accused of whoredom in Middleton and Rowley’s *The Changeling*<sup>8</sup> (1622). It is the tragic tribute she has to pay for attempting to construct her own identity outside patriarchal commands and impositions. She is the prototype of the modern heroine who tries to avoid an unwanted marriage which is a form of male tyranny represented by the castle. She knows it as soon as she shifts her inconstant affection from Alonzo to Alsemero. She cannot love Alonzo in spite of her father’s commands. Therefore she is obliged to find a way to get rid of Alonzo and then to marry Alsemero, her loved one, in order to get control of her own life rebelling against paternal interference in the choice of the man to whom she should be married. But to achieve it requires a radical transformation which, on the one hand, means to appropriate male strategies and strength, and, on the other, to become a different person, a “fair murd’ress”.

Beatrice-Joanna appears as the assertive woman who will use any means to get all ends. She will use force as men do to free herself from Alonzo’s bond since “masculine action is marked not by superior rationality or morality, but by the exertion of force” (Malcolmson: 2001). No man but “kind” and “honest” De Flores can do it better in spite of her dislike and of her first impression which anticipated the tragedy to come. In this way Beatrice-Joanna succeeds in shattering male expectations by challenging domestic authority though once more the masculine has turned paradigmatic in the construct of the feminine. Subversion, therefore, explains much of women’s behaviour in the play which is made up of a series of rebellions: Beatrice-Joanna plots against her father’s plans for marriage, while Isabella plots against Alibius, her husband, and Lollo, her servant, to maintain her freedom and integrity. Moreover the masculine becomes an element of instability and self-revelation in the play. It is De Flores who makes Beatrice-Joanna aware of her sexual possibilities and needs as well as of the danger of uncontrolled sexuality. Her burning passion will explode at De Flores’ request

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8 For T.S. Eliot is “Middleton’s greatest play”, *Selected Essays*, London, Faber, 1980, p. 163,

transforming her into “a whore in affection!” (3.4.146) De Flores complicity and obsession is also hers. Thus the assertive woman in Jacobean drama brings about subversion through sexual transgression which is also a major concern in Tirso’s *Tamar’s Revenge*<sup>9</sup> [‘La venganza de Tamar’] (1621), perhaps the most Jacobean of all Golden Age plays.

The story comes from the Second Book of Samuel and tells of the incestuous passion of Amnon, King David’s eldest son, for his half-sister Tamar, and the subsequent murder of Amnon by his brother Absalom as he is determined to be the new king of Israel contravening his father’s decision. Political ambition and sexual obsession –as in the case of Beatrice-Joanna– transform Tamar’s world into a dark and tragic one, full of torments, melancholy, and madness. It resembles the corrupted state of the dramatic universe of Jacobean plays where nonsense, confusion, and political intrigue rule. Besides women live in a situation of tyranny and exploitation where love only means sexual pleasure. This is the kind of love Amnon feels for Tamar. He, like De Flores, is obsessed with the possession of his half sister to satisfy his instinct. It is a physical need which requires immediate action. Following Jonadab’s advice he carries on with his plan of deceit and abuse for nothing can relieve his pain. To seduce Tamar he tells her of his love and passion for a princess who died asking her half-sister to replace the unfortunate princess in his heart since Tamar resembles her a lot:

My unfortunate princess  
Was an image of your beauty;  
Try to relieve my pain  
In her name be transformed.  
Be my feigned lady;  
Allow me to seduce you  
To serenade, to write, to weep,  
To guard, to force, to praise, to ask...  
Be my artificial fountain  
That gives relief to the sick...

(2.6)

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9 Tirso’s play is one of the earliest treatments of the biblical incest that has continued to be an inspiration for such modern writers as the novelist Dan Jacobson in his *Rape of Tamar*, and the dramatist Peter Shaffer in *Jonadab*. References to the play are to Tirso de Molina, *La venganza de Tamar*, José Hierro (trans.), Madrid, Compañía Nacional de Teatro Clásico, 1997.

*[Mi princesa malograda  
Fue imagen de tu hermosura;  
Suspende mi mal procura  
En su nombre transformada.  
Sé tú mi dama fingida;  
Consistente que te enamore  
Que te ronde, escriba, llore,  
Cele, obligue, alabe, pida...  
Será fuente artificial  
Que alivia al enfermo el mal...]*

He suggests she should be what she is not, and alienate herself in order to fulfil his sexual expectations. Appearances are, therefore, the strategies to follow as she refuses his proposal for she is in love with Joab. Amnon as infected and corrupted as Volpone devises a similar plan to make people believe that he is ill and in need of Tamar's assistance and care. It means more trouble for her as she has to face a tragic dilemma: either to keep her honour or help him to recover from his feigned illness. But there won't be a choice for her since Amnon will finally impose his force and rape her. Once she has been taken and has lost her honour, she is rejected and badly accused through aggressive and wild imagery:

Get out of here!, go away,  
Poison in a golden cup  
Beautiful sepulchre outside  
Harpy with a pleasant face  
And inside a nasty beast.

(3.1)

*[¡Vete de aquí!; salte fuera,  
veneno en taza dorada,  
sepulcro hermoso de fuera,  
arpía que en rostro agrada  
siendo una asquerosa fiera.]*

Amnon repeats Monticelso's accusations against Vittoria in *The White Devil*. Tamar has also been changed into a white devil. Beauty and love have changed to the worst, to villainy and hate. Bloody and violent revenge is the only thing that can restore her honour. Finally, revenge is achieved and she gets justice by challenging a biblical order where indecent sexual assaults against women were not punished. It shows that when women are most abused, they become most active and destructive.

Tirso's drama is also concerned with female subversion as dramatised in *Love's Cure* ['El amor médico'] (1621) where he presents a version of the assertive woman which Esmeralda Gijón (1947) has named the ['antitenorio']. She is the new seducer and trickster who looks for emancipation and professional promotion. The new heroine is characterised by 'aggressiveness', a common dramatic feature shared with Jacobean heroines. Juan Luis Alborg observes that

In the seeming 'aggressiveness' of so many Tirsian heroines there is a vibrating exaltation of women of no little significance. These self-confident young ladies sweep away prejudices –Don't they remind us of those contemporary unruly girls who have been popularised in movies, making them a kind of social explosive?– and they challenge men to be their equals. I'm not sure if as much in importance as in freedom.<sup>10</sup>

Women's subversion is more socially concerned in Tirso than in Webster and Middleton's drama where it is more a personal attitude and disposition. It is about professional prospects for women in society as shown in *Love's Cure*. In this play "What feminism is and whether it can be reconciled with femininity are the intriguing questions". Besides "The feminism-femininity opposition [becomes] the basic motif in the comedy under examination" (Halkhore: 1989). The tension between freedom and limitations is manifested psychologically in the inner conflict of Jerónima between learning and love. She looks for equal intellectual opportunities for women so that they can carry out different jobs –as men do. From the beginning of the play Jerónima shows an obsessive passion for study . But this passion is linked with her feminist aspirations

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10 Juan Luis Alborg, *Historia de la literatura española. Época barroca*, Madrid, Gredos, 1977, vol. II, p. 450.

for freedom and professional promotion since the practice of medicine in the seventeenth century was an exclusive male activity.

Jerónima's competence in this skill is a direct challenge to man's professional control. It can also be seen as an intrusion in a social sphere, which has traditionally been man's redoubt, showing "The novelty caused by a lady taking a pulse and giving out prescriptions" (Hartzenbuch: 1840). She becomes the central figure of the play controlling the whole action and using almost all the other characters as her puppets. She is a nonconformist who introduces a new social role bringing about chaos and confusion as she undermines a traditional social order where a patriarchal ideology has prevailed over feminist claims of equality and promotion. She challenges a world picture in need of change as she dramatises the new possibilities for which women were longing. She is criticising a historical situation which limited the education of women and reduced them to their traditional domestic roles. Within this context she asserts her independence from the beginning making clear her resolution to devote her life to the practice of medicine. She not only voices the women's complaint but also gives an effective and immediate solution:

I follow the north of my inclination  
My master enjoyed hearing me while I was studying  
Can women never cross the narrow line  
between the needle and the cushion?  
Marriage is Algeria, and the woman its captive,  
The arts are liberal because they free  
Those who practise them:  
How would you like me  
To be free and captive at the same time?<sup>11</sup>

(1.1)

*[Yo sigo el norte  
De mi inclinación; ¿qué quieres?  
Mi señor se recreaba  
De oírme, cuando estudiaba  
¿Siempre han de estar las mujeres*

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11 References are to Tirso de Molina, *El amor médico, Obras dramáticas completas*, Blanca de los Ríos (ed.), Madrid, Aguilar, 1962, vol. II, pp. 971-972.

*sin pasar la raya estrecha  
de la aguja y de la almohadilla?...  
El matrimonio es Argel  
La mujer cautiva en él,  
Las artes son liberales  
Porque hacen que libre viva  
A quien en ellas se emplea:  
¿cómo querrás tú que sea  
a un tiempo libre y cautiva?]*

Jerónima has decided to make it in her own way. She chooses emancipation to lead a new life, to be more herself instead of just doing housework. She has decided to cross the line which divides freedom and self-assertion from alienation and subordination. In principle she seems to be pursuing her feminist aims with success. She earns a considerable reputation practising her profession. She is soon appointed professor of medicine at the university of Coimbra. In this way she obtains social recognition and status. But it is important to note that she achieves all this while dressed as a man.

Her decision to become a doctor facilitates her fulfilment as a woman, as a daughter, and as a would-be wife. As a woman, because the liberal arts make her free. As a daughter, because she fulfils her father's wishes when he had given all his support to her decision to study medicine in Coimbra. And as a would-be wife, because she'll be near Gaspar, her loved one. However, it brings in a dependence as love makes her free and captive at the same time. She learns that complete emancipation from male domain is not possible and becomes aware of her own nature and her own inconsistencies: she searches for freedom but cannot be finally free. Besides as P.R.K. Halkhoree (1989) suggests "her intellectual activity is made subservient to love, and used as an instrument for the furtherance of love's designs" as she relentlessly pursues Gaspar, the man she loves, whose indifference has offended her female vanity.

It is in act III that she appears to have undertaken a complete feminist achievement. But at this point we know that what she really wants is to give satisfaction not to her feminist expectations, but female needs of love and tender care. Her remarks make it quite obvious at the end of the play when she states "Don Gaspar is my husband/ deservedly won at the cost of/ much labour, many disguises, and many sighs" (3.20). Jerónima's invasion of the masculine sphere which leads to an appropriation of

masculine roles has proved to be a failure when we realise that it was more a way of trapping the man she loves than of asserting feminine emancipation. Hartzzenbusch has seen a kind of irony in the play as

It is a highly philosophical thought to paint a lady who fights for leaving one's circle, who is ready to compete with men in wisdom, yielding like the less wide-awake to the natural inclination of her sex without taking advantage of her knowledge. For this her beauty and intelligence alone would have been sufficient<sup>12</sup>

The feminist potential of the play seems to have been reduced when we learn that her final goal is just to win Gaspar's heart. However it has been a positive attempt to show the possibility of gender equality and promotion for professional women in modern society.

These dramatic attempts of Tirso, Webster and Middleton's heroines to challenge a patriarchal order –though they have not been as successful as expected– have shown and anticipated new ways of making and experiencing the feminine. They have revealed themselves as “the combination of numerous fantasies, stylisations, adopted stances, as a network of temporary and largely imagined selves...” (Hortmann: 1998). This challenge has united Tirsian and Jacobean heroines in their struggle for social recognition and promotion, pointing to future success in the construct of the feminine beyond male interference and appropriation.

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12 Juan Eugenio, Hartzzenbusch, «Examen», *Teatro escogido de Fray Gabriel Téllez*, Madrid, 1840, note 10.

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