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MASKS AND CHARACTERS IN THE MERCHANT OF VENICE AND LOS INTERESES CREADOS

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The many allusions to Shakespeare and some similarities between *Los intereses creados* and *The Merchant of Venice*, such as the garden and law scenes, led me to explore in *Los intereses creados* a possible deep indebtedness to *The Merchant of Venice*. The two plays share themes and formal elements.

In a sense, Benavente's adaptation of the *commedia dell'arte* masks for his characters in *Los intereses creados* reveals the latent *commedia dell'arte* figures beneath Shakespeare's characters. *The Merchant of Venice*, in turn, may be read as a play about concealed "bonds of interest" among "masked" characters. I propose that Benavente recognized this undercurrent of *The Merchant of Venice* and set about writing a kind of picaresque version of Shakespeare's play, a version in which idealism proves so strong that it can redeem even the less noble characters Benavente portrays.

In *Los intereses creados*, Benavente brings to the foreground the mercantile principles ruling society in *The Merchant of Venice* and emphasizes how they can corrupt society as well as its leaders. The question is: how can society be redeemed? In both *Los intereses creados* and *The Merchant of Venice*, love and the Christian ideal are claimed to be enough to save society from such corruption, despite Benavente's obvious skepticism. *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, sequel to *Los intereses creados* first staged nine years later, completes Benavente's response to this view, intimated in his previous scepticism: society can only be redeemed by love for one's country.

As announced in the prologue to *Los intereses creados*, the staging of the play follows the tradition of the Italian *commedia dell'arte* with its "immutable masks", and the conception of the "traditional puppet shows whose characters are worked by coarse threads" not even hidden from the audience, as Walter Starkie notes¹. Crispín describes the play the audience is about to see as

¹ Walter Starkie, *Jacinto Benavente* (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 151.

una farsa guiñolesca, de asunto disparatado, sin realidad alguna. Pronto veréis como cuanto en ella sucede no pudo suceder nunca; que sus personajes no son ni semejan hombres y mujeres, sino muñecos o fantoches de cartón y trapo, con groseros hilos visibles a poca luz y al más corto de vista. Son las mismas groseras máscaras de aquella comedia del arte italiano, no tan regocijadas como solían, porque han meditado mucho en tanto tiempo².

To Starkie, "Benavente has made his characters don masks because the masks immobilize the action of the play", and the audience derives the comic from this stiff mechanism deprived of spontaneity³. It seems to me, however, that the masks have the opposite effect: they encourage a certain spontaneity of action and dialogue, as evidenced in the fact that the Italian *commedia dell'arte* relied on improvisation to a great extent. But they immobilize character development, because the mask reveals exactly the character's personality, and it establishes what we should expect of that character. In any case, I believe, like Starkie, that Benavente succeeds in bringing these puppets to life while, paradoxically, still keeping them within their masked rigidity.

One of the effects of the use of flat, stiff characters, appears to be the recollection of the old view of the world as a stage where men and women perform their parts⁴. This idea is further insisted upon by the masks the characters don, which cast each character in the role the mask encodes. This perception of the world as a stage appears in *The Merchant of Venice* when, charged by Gratiano with worrying excessively about worldly matters, Antonio pleads innocent by declaring: "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano, /A stage where every man must play a part, /and mine a sad one"⁵. While Gratiano admits that he enjoys playing the part of a fool, with its gaiety and laughter, Antonio seems resigned to his joyless, to his grave part.

2 Jacinto Benavente, *Los intereses creados, La ciudad alegre y confiada. Cartas de mujer*. 4th ed. Crisol, 22 (Madrid: Aguilar, 1950), p. 23. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will appear in the text, preceded by LI for *Los intereses creados* and LC for *La ciudad alegre y confiada*.

3 Starkie, p. 151.

4 Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681) fully devotes his *auto sacramental* entitled *El gran teatro del mundo* to this idea: life is a play, cast by God, staged by the World and acted out by human beings, who improvise the roles they have been assigned. Upon conclusion, the World collects everything he issued for the performance, leaving the actors with only their job at the performance—their good deeds—to show for themselves when facing God's judgment of how well they played their roles. Their responsibility lies in how well they play their roles, not in the part itself. Francisco Ruiz Ramón, *Historia del teatro español, I desde sus orígenes hasta 1900*. 2nd ed. El libro de bolsillo, 66, Vol. I (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1967), p. 409.

5 William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, ed. John Russell Brown, 7th ed. The New Arden Shakespeare (1955; 2nd rpt. London: Methuen, 1961), Act I, Scene i, 77-79. All subsequent references to *The Merchant of Venice*, unless otherwise indicated, will be to this edition and will appear in the text, preceded by MV.

The explanation of the other effect of the use of these stiff characters, their lack of individuality, requires a close look at the characters and, in the case of the leads, their development. Starkie compares Leandro to the Innamorato of the *commedia dell'arte*, who, resourceless, always needs the aid of a witty servant⁶. Indeed, Leandro turns for help to Colombina in *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, since Crispín absolutely disapproves of his passion for Girasol. In *Los intereses creados*, Crispín not only supports Leandro and Silvia's love but is "the artificer of the whole fabric", as Starkie describes him⁷. Bassanio's part in *The Merchant of Venice* is similar to Leandro's in both plays. For both Leandro and Bassanio, winning the lady becomes a priority, although they use very different means. The difference between the two authors lies in their adaptation of the role of the servant of the *commedia dell'arte*. Shakespeare turns him into a friend, Antonio, financially able to respond to his friend's needs. Benavente mixes both servant and friend in Crispín, who, in public, naturally assumes the role of the servant typical of the *commedia dell'arte* and of the Spanish picaresque tradition. He, too, is witty and penniless. But Benavente also incorporates Shakespeare's idea of a friend helping the young man in love. Both Antonio and Crispín are older men, beyond the urgency of young love, but able to understand it and ready to help. The relationship between Portia and Nerissa seems the feminine counterpart. Nerissa, too, acts as both a servant and a friend to Portia, with two important differences: Portia does not need financial help and she certainly shows enough wit to understand the situations she finds herself in and to plan a suitable course of action. Thus, Nerissa does not need to display the wit essential to the servant of the *commedia dell'arte* or the rogue.

As has been noted repeatedly, Crispín is descended from the rogue of the picaresque novel tradition springing from *El Lazarillo de Tormes*. He points it out himself when, commenting on the city he and Leandro have just reached while escaping justice, Leandro sees it as a good place to stay for some time. Crispín argues that he would rather not settle there, on the grounds that "es condición de los naturales, como yo, del libre reino de Picardía no hacer asiento en parte alguna, si no es forzado y en galeras, que es duro asiento" (LI p. 25). Starkie reminds his readers of another important fact: nature gave the rogue nothing for survival but his wits, which, to cut out for himself a more comfortable situation, he sharpens against "the stupidity of the rest of

6 Starkie, p. 162.

7 Starkie, p. 157.

humanity"⁸. Undoubtedly, like Lázaro de Tormes, Crispín has to use his wits so that he can "[I]legar a buen puerto" (LI p. 79)⁹.

The perspective of the complementary nature of the characters of Crispín and Leandro brings up another interesting question: its relation to Cervantes and his idea of dividing two opposing aspects of human disposition between his characters don Quijote and Sancho Panza. Marcelino Peñuelas acknowledges that Crispín's description of Leandro and himself as being one because each complements the other and supports the interpretation of the pair as "two, apparently paradoxical, aspects of human personality"¹⁰. Peñuelas also notes the recurrent parallel interpretation of don Quijote and Sancho to deny any similarity between the characters and the works. Personally, I find a tight connection. Like Cervantes, Benavente sought to forge a new synthesis of the ideal and the real by showing their mutual effect: reality is not utterly despicable because the ideal ennobles it, and the ideal is tempered by the flint of reality. The characterization of don Quijote and Sancho, as compared to that of Leandro and Crispín, seems to illustrate this idea.

Starkie describes Leandro as the aristocrat, raised on lofty thoughts. Crispín is described as "a modern Sancho Panza who has lost many of his blithe and debonair qualities in the rough-and-tumble of present-day civilization"¹¹.

Such a blend of reality and ideals in Benavente's plays is best explained through the effect Leandro and Crispín's friendship has on them. In *Los intereses creados*, Crispín resorts to unethical means to facilitate the pair's advancement in society. His machinations, however, are to some extent ennobled because, though initially not so intended, they ensure that Leandro and Silvia's love is allowed to grow. In *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, Crispín completes his redemption by both willingly accepting the sacrifice he is expected to make and leading Leandro out of his apathy.

⁸ Starkie, p. 162.

⁹ This perceptibly echoes the words with which Lázaro describes the respectability he has achieved after he left the last of his masters. He has now settled in Toledo, taking up the responsibility of a steady job and, in his own eyes, the best wife in town. Ironically, he has been appointed town-crier socially regarded as a contemptible occupation, which involves announcing the crimes of those who, convicted, are about to be executed. In addition, he is fortunately married to a good wife, so he overlooks her unfaithfulness with her former master, a clergyman, because of its profitability.

¹⁰ Marcelino Peñuelas, *Jacinto Benavente*, trans. Kay Engler. TWAS, 57. (New York: Twayne, 1968), p. 111.

¹¹ Starkie, pp. 163-64.

In *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, as Starkie puts it, Crispín ceases to be the eager-witted rogue he was in the first play and turns into the conscience of its inhabitants by becoming the ruler of the city-state. He now incarnates Crispín who "rises from the Crispín all men have in their souls" to become the object of their fear and hatred"¹². In Crispín's words:

Sí. Soy el Magnífico... Imagen visible de los que me elevaron... Los Crispines cobardes necesitan un Crispín valeroso que autorice sus picardías; ellos solos no se atreverían a cometerlas. El sello del Magnífico es su absolución. Como en mis tiempos de criado era yo una parte de mi señor y suyas eran las grandezas y más las ruindades, así ahora la Ciudad me necesita para descargo de sus culpas... Y soy yo el elegido. Siempre Crispín, el criado siempre... Pero los pueblos, para mayor sarcasmo, o para engañar mejor su conciencia, a los criados nos llaman señores, nos dan una apariencia de gobierno... y ya es nuestra toda la culpa de las culpas de todos.

(LI pp. 233-34)

Leandro, too, has changed, Starkie remarks. He is no longer "the ideal part of man" he once symbolized, because, "[t]he wealth of his father-in-law has made him flabby and cynical". He neglects his wife, Silvia, and instead, he tries to win the love of the attractive dancer Girasol, for which he would readily "risk ruin and cheat his father-in-law"¹³.

Silvia's change is also worth noticing as well. In *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, Silvia, helpless and disillusioned, watches how Leandro keeps courting the beautiful Girasol. She has nothing left of that Silvia who fled from her father's house to be married to Leandro, contrary to her father's wishes, because, as she had stated earlier: "Yo haré lo que mi padre ordene, si a mi madre no le contraría y a mí no me disgusta" (LI p. 73). What ennobles her is that, in spite of her disappointment about Leandro, she still loves him. Her sorrow after Leandro's death is also ennobled, as Arlequín remarks, by the poetic speech with which Crispín avoids the natural hostility between the two women. Silvia and Girasol have met on their way to offer flowers to Leandro, who has been taken to Crispín's residence to be honoured before his burial. After stating that it would be inappropriate for Girasol to accompany Silvia and himself to pay homage to Leandro, Crispín asks both women to kiss one of the roses that Girasol is going to offer the hero. The rose would then symbolize the complementary nature of the two aspects of love Leandro found in the two women: the pure, ideal love of Silvia and the worldly, sophisticated love of Girasol.

¹² Starkie, p. 169.

¹³ Starkie, p. 169.

The character development of the protagonists just described is part of the paradox already mentioned. They change, but they still appear almost as rigid as the minor characters, who do not develop in both plays. Peñuelas points out that, as an effect of their rigidity and flatness, the characters lack individuality, as Benavente's characters often do. In *Los intereses creados*, to me, the masks the characters wear contribute to their lack of individuality, thus turning their human quality into a conceptual rather than a vital reflection, as Peñuelas points out. He writes:

The characters are generic types, symbols. All, in their complex coexistence with others, wear the mask which circumstances impose on them. In other words, each plays his part in the comedy of life, which in this case is the dual farce of the play: Leandro and Crispín, penniless adventurers fleeing from the law, pass themselves off as a powerful gentleman and his servant, and when Leandro wants to appear as he really is, he cannot; the Captain and Arlequín are the incarnation of the ambiguous and sad roles of the unsuccessful hero and poet; Sirena, bankrupt, who gives grand balls to maintain her position, sees herself forced to act with the shamelessness of a Celestina; Colombina, the former servant, passes herself off as Sirena's niece; Polichinela, once a thief, murderer and galley prisoner, is now rich and respected in the city. Silvia, who represents innocence, candor and ingenuousness, is the only important character who appears without disguise¹⁴.

In *La ciudad alegre y confiada*, Benavente drops the device of the masks. Paradoxically, the characters are no longer alive, even though they develop to a certain extent. Instead, they seem to have become symbols for the author's political ideas, as Starkie rightly observes. It seems to me that the regeneration brought about by the character's defeat and death shows the mutual effect of the ideal and the real at work. Crispín, like Sancho, has moved towards the ideal, but he still perceives reality as it is. He understands that his city, like any other city, cyclically needs a scapegoat to cleanse itself. He willingly accepts the part. On the other hand, Leandro has disappointed him by betraying the only faith, hope and ideal Crispín had found: Leandro's love for Silvia. Crispín succeeds in leading Leandro to his regeneration by condemning the vain apathy in which Leandro had indulged. Leandro then becomes the first hero, when he dies fighting dutifully and courageously for the city.

Benavente, then, incorporates to the *commedia dell'arte* masks the picaresque tradition and elements from *Don Quijote* in his response to

Shakespeare, who also brings about the clash of reality and ideals throughout *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare's presentation is more complex, partly due to the religious confrontation Benavente does not dramatize. Benavente more openly demonstrates skepticism about the influence of the Christian ideal of love already implicit in Shakespeare's message: the bonds of love, however selfish, "of interest", are the only way to achieve the synthesis of reality and ideals which both ennoble the real and tempers the ideal. The values fostered in Belmont result from such a compromise between ideals and reality. Portia takes immediate action to save Antonio because she understands that his death would pose an unsurmountable strain on her marriage, on her ideal love. The lottery Portia's father devised to test her suitors is based on the same philosophy. Unworthy candidates to Portia's hand would not satisfy the demand made by the legend written on the lead casket. In other words, they would refuse to give and risk everything for the apparent plain baseness of lead, which seems too unpromising and even threatening to offer anything worth the hazard. In Venice, the mercantilism governing life jeopardizes the ideal, almost lost in the world of usury, trading, loss and profit. It seems perfectly natural to Salerio that Antonio should be concerned about his material well-being, gained by trading, even at church. Shylock is hated by the members of a Christian community –who believe in love– because he lends money for interest. Evidently, the Christians view trading as completely different from and more morally acceptable than usury.

In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare also includes the picaresque element in his characterization of both Launcelot Gobbo and his old father. I see in Bassanio's portrait, which in this sense is compared to Leandro's, at least one picaresque brush-stroke: he considers his marriage to Portia as a means to pay off his debts. Furthermore, the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte* is also present in the play. John Russell Brown refers to J.R. Moore's remark that Shylock, even though his name does not indicate so, has a few characteristics in common with the "Pantaloon of the *commedia dell'arte*: he is a widower, the head of a household and avaricious, but he is not the ridiculous lover, nor a Magnifico of Venice (such as Antonio)"¹⁵. Benavente did not make his Pantalón the "ridiculous lover" either but kept him more strictly within the tradition of the *commedia dell'arte*, whereas Shakespeare borrowed from other sources to characterize Shylock as a Jew to make him the yardstick with which to measure the Christians.

14 Peñuelas, pp. 110-11.

15 Russell Brown, ed. *The Merchant*, p. xli.

Gratiano's name suggests Graziano, the traditional name for the comic doctor in the *commedia dell'arte*¹⁶. While the role of the doctor devolves upon Portia in the trial scene, Gratiano also follows the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. He resembles the gracioso of the Spanish *comedia* of the Golden Age, who is either a lackey or a rustic servant. In either characterization, the gracioso shares with Gratiano a broad, at times obscene, humour. The rustic type of the *gracioso* can be traced to the *commedia dell'arte*¹⁷. Once again, Shakespeare turns the servant into a friend. Gobbo, according to John Florio's Italian dictionary *A World of Words*, published in 1598, means "croop-backt". I believe, like Moelwyn Merchant, that the name "seems to have intended a family of comic hump-backs, from the Italian *gobba*, a hump, and *gobbo*, a hunchbacked"¹⁸.

Shakespeare's use of the *commedia dell'arte* elements, following the Italian fashion, adds some consistency to the Italian setting chosen for the play. It seems as if Benavente had paid very close attention to even these vague reminders of the *commedia dell'arte* in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and used it for his own purpose. As has already been pointed out, Benavente establishes how he wishes *Los intereses creados* to be read. In Silvia's closing speech, Benavente explains the philosophic meaning of the play. Silvia "translates" the play for the audience when she builds up a comparison between what has just been performed and "las farsas de la vida" (LI p. 148). According to Silvia, the strings that work the puppets are, for human beings, "los intereses, las pasioncillas, los engaños y todas las miserias de su condición" (LI p. 148).

In *Los intereses creados*, Crispín appears as the puppeteer who controls the strings that work the puppets. Crispín manages to create enough bonds of interest with all the other characters so that they find themselves forced to act in a certain way and make the decisions Crispín wishes them to make so that he and Leandro can achieve their aim. For Leandro and Bassanio, the goal is similar: their marriage will provide their security. The means they use are completely different. Bassanio asks for a loan he intends to repay, even though with Portia's money. Leandro just allows Crispín's machinations, which eventually enable him to gain his objective, despite his protestations.

Although the question in *Los intereses creados* apparently is not very clear, it can be argued that the characters take turns to play the role of the puppet

master. However, they are not completely aware of it. The idea of the puppets works precisely in the reverse order in the plays. Crispín consciously works the strings that engage everybody in his own –thus Leandro's– salvation in *Los intereses creados* and in the city's salvation in *La ciudad alegre y confiada*. In the latter play, Crispín knows he is going to die, so he brings Polichinela with him, for the city's good. After trying, he lets Pantalón go. Crispín had previously had a conversation with Leandro, after which Leandro leaves for the battlefield and gives his life for the city. In *The Merchant of Venice*, everybody contributes to the dramatic situation but it is Portia who works out Antonio's delivery, which brings the situation back to normal.

The idea of human duality also appears in *The Merchant of Venice*, where the characters are not what they seem to be. Shylock is not portrayed just as a cruel infidel but as driven to cruelty by the way the Christians treat him, which, in turn, presents the Christians as less merciful, charitable and loving than they believe themselves to be. Nevertheless, it is Shylock's cruelty that provides the tragic elements leading to the climax of the trial scene. Shylock is clearly human and, through him, Shakespeare depicts rather unchristian attitudes towards material well-being, the Jews and one another. Even though they believe they are actually saving Shylock by having him convert, the Christians have earned nothing but the Jew's hatred for their hypocritical behaviour, which they also observe among themselves¹⁹. Shylock accuses the Christians of mistreating their slaves. He resents the way the Christians spurn the Jews. Bassanio's offer to sacrifice everything, even his wife, for Antonio, causes Shylock to wish his daughter had married "any of the stock of Barrabas... rather than a Christian" (MVIV.i. 292-93).

Through Shylock's perception of the Christians, and his interaction with them, Shakespeare can venture the compromising part of the thesis of his play: the imperfections of the Christians, like those of the Jew, stem from their identical humanity. Through Shylock's enforced conversion, the playwright seems to question the belief behind that imposed conversion: despite their imperfections, the Christians can be redeemed by the grace of God, whereas "infidels" are irremediably doomed. Even Jessica believes she can be saved because Lorenzo has made her a Christian.

19 P.N. Siegel makes the point that, through Shylock, Shakespeare attacks the Puritans for their hypocrisy. Siegel argues that an Elizabethan audience would hardly need any direct references to perceive the similarity between Shylock and the Puritan usurers. According to Siegel, usury was largely practiced by the Puritans, since the Jews did not amount to a high percentage of the population in England at the time. P.N. Siegel, *Shakespeare in His Time and Ours* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), pp. 237-54.

16 W. Moelwyn Merchant, ed. *The Merchant of Venice*, by William Shakespeare, New Penguin Shakespeare (1967; 11th rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1980), p. 179.

17 Margaret Wilson, *Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* (London: Pergamon Press, 1969), p. 52.

18 Merchant, p. 179.

However, not even Portia conforms to the Christian ideal. She does take some pitiless satisfaction not only in turning the bond against the Jew, but also in delaying his undoing. This does not exactly correspond to her plea for mercy. Moreover, she is demanding a sacrifice from Shylock when she is not in the least inclined to sacrifice Bassanio. Shylock is censured for the fault he shares with all the other characters: he is unable to be generous, to give without demanding repayment for what he gives, Jeanne Heifetz asserts. The Christians, then, do not conform to their ideals, and a compromise is needed. In Heifetz's words:

...the ideals of Belmont are compromised even in Belmont, and dangerously compromised in Venice. The play's final motion resists the pattern: it is a return to Belmont with the lessons of Venice. *The Merchant of Venice* ends in Belmont, in a compromise of ideals with human reality that forces the audience to question both²⁰.

Essentially, *Los intereses creados* presents the same idea with a picaresque outlook. Leandro and Crispín arrive in a new city with the knowledge gained from wandering and determined to use it for survival. This struggle for material benefit becomes the strife for spiritual regeneration found in *La ciudad alegre y confiada*.

Benavente, then, through the use of the *commedia dell'arte* masks in both plays, highlights his intention of exposing how the passing of time has changed society. *Los intereses creados* and its sequel convey Benavente's attitude towards his sources by showing how Benavente drew from them to state that society, basically the same, has now reached such a degree of corruption that a blood sacrifice, never allowed in *The Merchant of Venice*, is necessary for its regeneration. This is seen from the very opening of *La ciudad alegre y confiada*. Benavente, once again, sets the tone and the purpose of the play in a prologue, recited by Desterrado, whose tone is already far graver than that of Crispín's opening speech in *Los intereses creados*. The reason: "hoy sabe la farándula que es todo el mundo un lugar de miseria, todos los días tristes" (LC p. 155). Moreover, the world "es teatro de tragedia, y si el Arte mismo no puede ser hoy serenidad, si no quiere parecer inhumano, ¿cómo puede ser bufonada sin parecemos un insulto al dolor y a la muerte?" (LC p. 156).

In other words, the prologue to *La ciudad alegre y confiada* already establishes that Benavente's philosophy has taken one step forward since the writing of *Los intereses creados*, where he ends approximately at the same

²⁰ Jeanne Heifetz *Love Calls Us to the Things of This World: The Return to Belmont in The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 45-6.

point as Shakespeare finishes his *The Merchant of Venice*: love is the only way society has to redeem itself. Redemption has to start individually before it can reach society as a whole, and it does so through the Christian ideals of mercy and charity. These are necessary both to counteract a person's innate selfishness and to temper justice. Benavente, Starkie notes, also summarizes his philosophy in Silvia's final words to expose the true sense of the farce: despite "his perpetual pessimism, he [Benavente] always looks ahead to the ideal of Christianity"²¹. I think this is suggested in Silvia's speech by her mention of love, evoking its related concepts of mercy and charity and, more obviously, the idea of the divine share men enjoy, which rescues them from their baseness. Silvia says:

Y en ella visteis, como en las farsas de la vida, que a estos muñecos, como a los humanos, muévenlos cordelillos groseros, que son los intereses, las pasioncillas, los engaños y todas las miserias de su condición; tiran unos de sus pies y los llevan a tristes andanzas; tiran otros de sus manos, que trabajan con pena, luchan con rabia, hurtan con astucia, matan con violencia. Pero entre todos ellos descende a veces del cielo al corazón un hilo sutil, como tejido con luz de sol y con luz de luna: el hilo del amor, que a los humanos, como a estos muñecos que semejan humanos, los hace parecer divinos, y trae a nuestra frente resplandores de aurora, y pone alas en nuestro corazón y nos dice que no todo es farsa en la farsa, que hay algo divino en nuestra vida que es verdad y es eterno y no puede acabar cuando la farsa acaba.

(LI p. 148)

La ciudad alegre y confiada turns to patriotism to fulfill the same redeeming function.

²¹ Starkie, p. 161.

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TAMBURLAINE, THE SCOURGE OF GOD: MEXÍA, MARLOWE AND VÉLEZ DE GUEVARA

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Tamburlaine (or Timur Lang, 1336-1405) is one of those historical characters who have become a legend and a myth¹. History and literature unite in the formation (deformation?) of these characters. This is also the case of Richard II of England, his contemporary, and many others. In this paper I want to show how the figure of Tamburlaine as Scourge of God was used by three different writers.

Pedro Mexia published his *Silva de Varia Lección* in 1540 (43?). Chapter XXVIII of Part I is dedicated to Tamburlaine and has the title: "Del excelentísimo capitán y muy poderoso rey el Gran Tamorlán. De los reinos y provincias que conquistó; y su disciplina y arte militar"². The *Silva* was very well known in the Renaissance, and it was first translated into English in 1571 under the title: *The foreste or collection of histories, no less profitable then pleasant...* Dooen out of French into Englishe, by Thomas Fortescue. London, I. Kynngston for W. Jones, 1571³.

As we can see in the title, the Chapter dedicated to Tamburlaine is a description of his conquests and personality. He was often a *libertador* of oppressed peoples, an "excelente capitán que fue tan sabio y diestro en gobernar su gente que nunca hubo en ella motín ni rebelión notable"⁴. But he was also cruel. A merchant from Genoa who travelled with the army of Tamburlaine dared to ask him why he showed so much cruelty with those who humbly implored his mercy. There comes a short reference to the Scourge of God. It is reported that

1 The relevance of this medieval king is shown by the numerous embassies that visited him. See F. López Estrada: "La relation de l'ambassade d' Henry II au Grand Tamerlan". *Etudes de Lettres*, Revue de la Faculté des Lettres, Université de Lausanne. Recils et voyages hispaniques. Juillet-Septembre, 1992. 28 pgs.

2 *Silva de varia lección*. Madrid: Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, 1933. Tomo I, pp. 413-421.

3 An extract of it was translated and published in 1565-7. The 1571 edition was followed by others in 1576, 1613-19, 1651 and 1656. See A.F. Allison: *English Translations from the Spanish and Portuguese to the Year 1700*. London: Dawson's of Pall Mall, 1974. Entry: Mexía.

4 *Silva*, op. cit. p. 415.