

The Burlesque Comedy of the Spanish Golden Age: Parody, Nonsense, and Carnival¹

La comedia burlesca del Siglo de Oro: parodia, disparate y Carnaval

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[*Hipogrifo*, (issn: 2328-1308), Volumen extraordinario, 1, 2018, pp. 79-95]

Recibido: 18-09-2017 / Aceptado: 17-10-2017

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.13035/H.2018.extra01.07>

Abstract. This paper offers an approach to the main features and conventions of the burlesque comedy of the Spanish Golden Age, a *corpus* formed by about fifty parodic plays that were performed during Carnival and on St. John's Day as part of the court festivals celebrated in the Royal Palace or in the Buen Retiro palace complex. These two features (theatre of Carnival and courtier theatre) are the main key when analyzing these plays. The primary function of these pieces is to provoke laughter within the aulic audience –the king and his noblemen. To achieve this goal, authors of burlesque comedies use all of the resources at hand, including both scenic and verbal humor. The plays are marked by an absurd wit, and they bring on stage a carnivalesque world turned upside-down in which everything (including characters, plots, literary motifs, and dramatic conventions) is grotesquely parodied, brutally degraded, and made comical.

Keywords. Theater; Burlesque Comedy; Golden Age; Parody; Nonsense; Carnival; Humour; Laughter.

Resumen. En este trabajo se ofrece un resumen de las principales características y convenciones genéricas de las denominadas *comedias burlescas* del teatro

1. This work is part of project FFI2014-52007-P, «Authority and Power in the Theatre of the Golden Age. Strategies, genres, images in the first globalization», Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, Government of Spain. Directorate General of Scientific and Technical Research. National Programme for Fostering Excellence in Scientific and Technical Research. It has been translated into English by Felix K. E. Schmelzer.

español del Siglo de Oro. Se trata de un corpus formado por unas cincuenta piezas dramáticas paródicas que se representaban por Carnaval, y también por San Juan, formando parte de fiestas cortesanas celebradas en Palacio o en el Buen Retiro. Estas dos características (teatro carnavalesco y teatro cortesano) constituyen una clave esencial a la hora de abordar el estudio de estas obras. Su función primordial es conseguir la risa de ese espectador cortesano (el rey y sus nobles) y para ello los autores utilizan todos los recursos a su alcance, en el doble plano de la comicidad escénica y la comicidad verbal. Estas piezas de jocosidad disparatada muestran sobre el tablado un carnavalesco «mundo al revés» donde absolutamente todo (personajes, temas, motivos literarios y convenciones dramáticas...) queda grotescamente parodiado y degradado.

Palabras clave. Teatro; comedia burlesca; Siglo de Oro; parodia; disparate; Carnaval; comicidad; risa.

Burlesque comedies (*comedias burlescas*; during the Golden Age they were also called *comedias de disparates* [nonsense comedies], *comedias en chanza* [pleasantry comedies], or *comedias de chistes* [funny comedies]) are parodic plays that were performed during Carnival, on Shrove Tuesday, and on St. John's Day as part of the court festivals celebrated in the Royal Palace or in the Buen Retiro palace complex. We do not know if these performances later moved to the *corral* (the courtyard theatre). The genre is thus characterized in two ways, as theatre of Carnival and as courtier theatre. The primary function of the burlesque comedy is to provoke laughter within the aulic audience —the king and his noblemen. To achieve this goal, authors of burlesque comedies use all of the resources at hand, including both scenic and verbal humor. The plays are marked by an absurd wit, and they bring on stage a carnivalesque world turned upside-down in which everything (including characters, plots, literary motifs, and dramatic conventions) is grotesquely parodied, brutally degraded, and made comical.

The characteristics of the burlesque comedy of the Golden Age have been understudied, but since the 1980s the genre has attracted the attention of a growing number of researchers. In recent years, burlesque comedy has been significantly reevaluated by a number of scholars, including Arellano², Borrego Gutiérrez³, Casado Santos⁴, Deffis de Calvo⁵, Di Pinto⁶, García Lorenzo⁷, García Valdés⁸, Holgueras Pecha-

2. Arellano, 1995, 2002, 2003a, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2013.

3. Borrego Gutiérrez and Bermúdez Gómez, 1998; Borrego Gutiérrez, 2013 and 2014.

4. Casado Santos, 2010, 2012 and 2013.

5. Deffis de Calvo, 2009.

6. Di Pinto, 2002, 2005 and 2009.

7. García Lorenzo, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1994a and 1994b.

8. García Valdés, 1987, 1991, 1994 and 2001.

rromán⁹, Huerta Calvo¹⁰, Mata Induráin¹¹, Profeti¹², Serralta¹³, and Taravacci¹⁴, among other authors. Recently, GRISO (Grupo de Investigación Siglo de Oro), a group of researchers at the University of Navarra directed by Ignacio Arellano, began a project whose goal is to publish the complete corpus of the burlesque comedies that are known to date. We have begun work on nearly thirty modern, critical, and annotated editions of these curious dramatic works¹⁵.

Burlesque comedies are of great interest because they are the opposite of the «serious» plays of the Golden Age. The edition by GRISO of the complete corpus of these texts, in progress at the moment, constitutes a first step, necessary for a posterior analysis by the critics of the plots, structures, devices, and applications of the comical, in short, a systematic study of all the burlesque comedy's characteristics. About fifty burlesque comedies have been preserved, although some of these (*Angélica y Medoro* [*Angelica and Medoro*] and *Don Quijote de la Mancha resucitado en Italia* [*Don Quixote of La Mancha Resuscitated in Italy*], both by unknown authors; *El rey Perico y la dama tuerta* [*King Perico and the One-Eyed Lady*], by Diego Velázquez del Puerco; and *El muerto resucitado* [*The Deceased Resuscitated*], by

9. Holgueras Pecharromán, 1989 and 1999.

10. Huerta Calvo, 1986, 1998, 2001, 2006 and 2007.

11. See Mata Induráin, 1999, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2009a, 2009b, 2013a, 2013b, 2014 and 2015, among other works.

12. Profeti, 2013.

13. Serralta, 1976, 1980a, 1980b, 1991 and 2004.

14. Taravacci, 2001.

15. The following titles have already been published: *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro. El Hamete de Toledo. El caballero de Olmedo. Darlo todo y no dar nada. Céfalo y Pocris*, ed. Ignacio Arellano, Celsa Carmen García Valdés, Carlos Mata and M.ª Carmen Pinillos (Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 1999). *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo I, Anónimo, *El rey don Alfonso, el de la mano horadada*, ed. Carlos Mata Induráin (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 1998); *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo II, *Los amantes de Teruel. Amor, ingenio y mujer. La ventura sin buscarla. Angélica y Medoro*, ed. GRISO directed by Ignacio Arellano (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2001); *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo III, *El cerco de Tagarete. Durandarte y Belerma. La renegada de Valladolid. Castigar por defender*, ed. GRISO directed by Ignacio Arellano (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2002); *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo IV, *Las mocedades del Cid. El castigo en la arrogancia. El desdén, con el desdén. El premio de la hermosura*, ed. Alberto Rodríguez (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2003); *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo V, *Los Condes de Carrión. Peligrar en los remedios. Darlo todo y no dar nada. El premio de la virtud*, ed. GRISO directed by Ignacio Arellano (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2004); *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo VI, *El rey Perico y la dama tuerta. Escanderbey. Antíoco y Seleuco. La venida del Duque de Guisa y su armada a Castelamar*, ed. GRISO directed by Ignacio Arellano (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2007); *Comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro*, tomo VII, *El Mariscal de Virón. No hay vida como la honra. El robo de Elena. El muerto resucitado*, ed. GRISO directed by Carlos Mata Induráin (Madrid/Frankfurt, Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2011); *Dos comedias burlescas del Siglo de Oro: «El Comendador de Ocaña». «El hermano de su hermana»*, ed. Ignacio Arellano and Carlos Mata Induráin (Kassel, Reichenberger, 2000); and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Céfalo y Pocris*, introd. Enrica Cancelliere, ed. Ignacio Arellano, New York, IDEA, 2013. The introductions to these works provide a detailed analysis of a great number of the comedies and an updated bibliography. With regard to a provisional catalogue of titles and authors, see Serralta, 1980a.

Lucas Merino y Solares) belong to the eighteenth century, a fact that gives an idea of the success of this dramatic subgenre.

Burlesque comedy coincided with the peak of courtier theatre, achieving its greatest splendor during the reign of Philip IV. We know that Jerónimo de Cáncer and Juan Vélez de Guevara's *Los siete infantes de Lara* [*The Seven Infants of Lara*] was performed in 1650; Monteser's *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Gentleman from Olmedo*] in 1651; Monteser, Solís, and Silva's *La renegada de Valladolid* [*The Apostate Woman from Valladolid*] in 1655; Calderón's *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*] in 1660 (probably); *Don Domingo de don Blas* [*Don Domingo de Don Blas*], by an anonymous author, in 1671; Matos Fragoso, Diamante, and Juan Vélez de Guevara's *El hidalgo de la Mancha* [*The Nobleman from La Mancha*] in 1673; *Las bodas de Orlando* [*Orlando's Weddings*], by an anonymous author, in 1685; *El rey don Alfonso, el de la mano horadada* [*King Alfonso, the Prodigal*], by an anonymous author also, in 1686; and so forth.

The growth of the genre must be interpreted in the context of the success of other modalities of the comical since the beginning of the seventeenth century, including burlesque romances; jocular dialogues; dramatic genres such as *entremeses*, *mojigangas*, *vejámenes*, and *pullas*; and madmen's festivities. Recent analysts have emphasized burlesque comedy's affinities with the *entremés* (short farces), especially the *entremés burlesco* (*Entremés de los romances* [*Interlude of the Folk Ballads*], *La infanta Palancona* [*The Princess Palancona*], and *Melisendra* [*Melisendra*] are some examples)¹⁶. Some of the burlesque comedies were probably improvisational (*Escarramán* [*Escarraman*] and *La creación del mundo* [*The World Creation*], a lost co-production of Luis Vélez de Guevara and Calderón, are two examples), but some of the more elaborate and complex works cannot be the result of improvisational techniques (for example, *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*] or *Darlo todo y no dar nada* [*Give it All, and Give Nothing*]). Arellano, who has studied spontaneous burlesque, emphasizes that some burlesque comedies were integrated into a literary academy (*El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*], part of the *Obras* [*Works*] of Francisco Bernardo de Quirós, is an example)¹⁷. Some works are anonymous. In general, the authors are not first rate, with the exception of Calderón, the author of *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*]. Jerónimo de Cáncer was one of the most prolific authors of the genre, as was Vicente Suárez de Deza. Other authors of burlesque comedies are Juan Vélez de Guevara, Francisco Antonio de Monteser, Francisco Bernardo de Quirós, and Pedro Lanini Sagredo.

THE BURLESQUE COMEDY AND CARNIVAL

The burlesque comedy is essentially carnivalesque. The plot is riddled with so many inversions of the typical schemes of «serious» comedies that it reaches an absolute rupture of decorum: all the codified situations of the *comedia nueva*

16. See Gómez, 2001. With respect to the origins and literary modalities of the burlesque that characterize the *comedia de disparates*, see García Valdés, 1991, pp. 33-40 and Huerta Calvo, 2001.

17. Arellano, 2002, pp. 113-117.

(the Spanish theatre of the seventeenth century) are inverted. García Lorenzo has characterized these plays as «works directly related to the Carnival [...] the comedy of illusion, gallant and heroic, the 'world upside down' of burlesque comedy. These comedies provide a little revenge for a public weary of beauty, perfection, heroic and poetic justice»¹⁸. Arellano emphasizes how carnivalesque techniques are used in such comedies:

A main feature shared by all these degradations: their closeness to models inserted into the comic grotesque Carnival. [...] The burlesque tone is marked by certain Carnival elements reflected in the intensity of some lexical fields: scatology, food, physiological functions, parasites. [...] They are low-style references (similar to the concept of burlesque as *turpitudō et deformitas*, in the words of Cicero) that collide with the decorum attributed to characters of serious comedies (kings, princesses, admirals)¹⁹.

The technique of the world turned upside-down that is so characteristic of the carnivalesque shapes these works. Not only do the playwrights use typical carnivalesque forms and motifs such as excessive eating and drinking; grotesque feasts and banquets²⁰; giants and bullies; the use of cowbells, castanets, and kites; wooden horses, syringes, and grotesque accessories, these plays also contain many references to the fact that they were performed during Carnival. The beginning of the second act of Diego Velázquez del Puerco's *El rey Perico y la dama tuerta* [*King Perico and the One-Eyed Lady*] contains the following lines:

Salgan los galanes
juntos con sus damas,
que en Carnestolendas
ya todos son mazas.

[Come lovers
together with their ladies,
in Carnival
all are maces²¹.]

These lines refer to the practice during Carnival of tying maces to dogs' tails, which served the purpose of having fun.

PARODY

Burlesque comedies are comprised of jokes, nonsense, and all kinds of absurdities. The parody of a serious model constitutes the basis of these plays. They

18. García Lorenzo, 1977, pp. 145-146. Quotes in Spanish have been translated into English, here and in the rest of the article.

19. Arellano, 1995, pp. 644-645.

20. See Arellano, 2011.

21. Diego Velázquez del Puerco, *El rey Perico y la dama tuerta* [*King Perico and the One-Eyed Lady*], ll. 722-725.

may parody mythological or classical topics (Calderón's *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*] and Lanini Sagredo's *Darlo todo y no dar nada* [*Give it All, and Give Nothing*]), popular subjects of folk ballads (the anonymous *Los siete infantes de Lara* [*The Seven Infants of Lara*] and *Las mocedades del Cid* [*The Youthful Deeds of the Cid*]), or popular traditions (Monteser, Solís, and Silva's *La renegada de Valladolid* [*The Apostate Woman from Valladolid*]). Some burlesque comedies parody serious comedies: the anonymously written plays *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*] and *El desdén con el desdén* [*Disdain with Disdain*], Lanini's *Darlo todo y no dar nada* [*Give it All, and Give Nothing*], and Suárez de Deza's *Los amantes de Teruel* [*The Lovers of Teruel*] are parodies of the plays with the same titles by Lope, Moreto, Calderón, and Pérez de Montalbán. Monteser's *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Gentleman from Olmedo*] could be a parody of Lope's tragicomedy, although it might as well be a parody of the historical tradition.

The degree of fidelity to the model being parodied varies: some of the works (i.e., *El desdén con el desdén* [*Disdain with Disdain*]) are very close to the original, while others refer to the plot of the original play only generally or only to some scenes (*Darlo todo y no dar nada* [*Give it All, and Give Nothing*] is an example). Furthermore, some burlesque comedies parody generic conventions of the serious comedy without referring to a concrete work: for example, Suárez de Deza's *Amor, ingenio y mujer* [*Love, Wit, and Woman*] is a parody of popular motifs of the *comedia de enredo* and Calderón's *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*] takes up motifs of mythological and chivalric comedies.

All the characters of the burlesque comedy, even the most noble ones (emperors, kings, and noblemen) are comic figures, in contrast to conventional comedies, which only have one character of this kind, the *gracioso*. In burlesque comedy, all of the characters adhere to the same codes of ludicrous and absurd humor, including low style, the use of vulgar and colloquial expressions, and grotesque degradation.

Arellano has described how burlesque comedy reduces the number of lines, the variety of strophic forms, the number of characters and scenes, and so forth²². A conventional comedy has approximately 3,000 lines, while a burlesque one has about 1,800 lines.

THE DEGRADED UNIVERSE: SCENIC AND VERBAL DIMENSIONS OF THE COMICAL

Burlesque comedy inverts all the schemes that are valid in the *comedia nueva* in order to present a completely degraded universe. This degradation affects the burlesque comedy's dramatic conventions, the poetic motifs, and the construction of characters. The rupture of decorum is absolute, and serious values are inverted. Love, honor, nobility, the nobleman's bravery and courage, the beauty of the ladies —everything is transformed into ridiculousness. The protagonists of these works are animalized or even converted into things —dummies or grotesque puppets, for example. They are particularly focused on rustic food and excessive drinking and

22. Arellano, 1995, p. 643.

are governed by a very primitive sexuality. There is no doubt that the material world predominates over the spiritual world in these plays.

All the elements of the *descriptio puellae* (description of the lady) are absurdly inverted; we find actresses that have made their faces black with makeup (in *La mayor hazaña de Carlos VI [The Main Deed of Carlos VI]*) or with beards or moustaches (in *La ventura sin buscarla [The Not Searched Happiness]*, *El desdén con el desdén [Disdain with Disdain]*, *Angélica y Medoro [Angelica and Medoro]*, *El Hamete de Toledo [The Hamete from Toledo]*). In *Angélica y Medoro [Angelica and Medoro]*, Medoro offers an absurd description of the beauty of Angelica, who is worth less than a piece of bacon:

MEDORO	De Angélica la plata del cabello y la arrugada calva de la frente, los dos ojos que pueden ser de puente, de su nariz pestífera el resuello, el labio royo, el erizado cuello, las manos de papel de estraza fino, la jarifa cintura de rodezno, la panza de furioso torbellino, los halagos de hermoso viborezno, aquella suavidad de tronco espino, todo lo dejaré por un torrezno ²³ .
	[Angélica's silver hair, her bald and wrinkled forehead, her eyes, like portholes, the pestiferous breath from her nose, her red lips, her wrinkled neck, and her rustic hands, beautiful waist as a millstone, womb of violent storm, her courtesies like that of a poisonous snake, her smoothness like that of a spiky bush... I'll exchange all of that for a piece of bacon.]

Here nothing is left of the motifs of Petrarchan poetry in the Neoplatonic tradition, just as nothing is left of idealized mythological comparisons. In burlesque comedy, amorous dialogue, one of the most frequently parodied literary motifs, often refers to pimping and prostitution.

The mutual insults of lovers is a frequent modality. Arellano describes this kind of dialogue as the «fight of insults, or the invective (*apodos*) tournament»²⁴. Lines 753 to 758 of *La ventura sin buscarla [The Not Searched Happiness]* are a good example:

INFANTA	¡Oh, mi rey!
CARLOS	¡Oh, mi lucero!

23. *Angélica y Medoro [Angelica and Medoro]*, ll. 716-726.

24. Arellano, 1995, p. 652.

INFANTA	¡Oh, mi corito!
CARLOS	¡Oh, gallega!
INFANTA	¡Oh, tinaja de bodega!
CARLOS	¡Oh, caraza de mortero!
INFANTA	¡Oh, bergantón!
CARLOS	¡Oh, picaña!
INFANTA	¡Oh, putonazo!
CARLOS	¡Oh, putona!

[The characters Infanta and Carlos begin their dialogue with positive mentions («my king», «my star»), but immediately their words acquire a colloquial or pejorative tone with the use of invectives and insults («rustic», «villain», «cask», «mortar's face», «scoundrel», «rogue», «great sod», «great whore».]

Other frequently parodied motifs are love letters, portrayals of the beloved, and the exchange of pledges and favors. The burlesque gallants (who are bullies or braggarts rather than noblemen) bet the ladies playing cards or leave them to their rivals. One common scene is the amorous dialogue between a gallant and a lady at the window; in burlesque comedies, this scene always breaks down in a way that parodies the concept of honor, for example when the gallant has to hide because he and the lady are surprised in loving conversation. For example, in *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Gentleman from Olmedo*], the dialogue between don Alonso and doña Elvira is interrupted by the arrival of don Rodrigo. When don Alonso refuses to go into hiding, the lady exclaims: «Pues alguien se ha de esconder, / que mi honor es lo primero»²⁵ [Someone has to hide; it is necessary to protect my honor.] Scenes that describe a lady fainting (in *El desdén con el desdén* [*Disdain with Disdain*], *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*], and *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Gentleman from Olmedo*]), scenes in the dark (we find them in numerous burlesque comedies), and scenes in which a character speaks in a dream are also typical motifs of the burlesque comedy.

Other topical motifs that are parodied are the bolting horse (which is parodied as a bolting donkey in *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*], ll. 40-55); giving presents to the servants; the concession of political posts; and ambassadorship and the relations of war. Courtier ceremonies include ridiculous hand-kissing scenes and grotesque eulogies on the king's long life:

APELES	Vivas, señor, más que un ciervo, y se te cuenten los años como a él ²⁶ .
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25. Francisco Antonio de Monteses, *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Gentleman from Olmedo*], ll. 319-320.

26. *Darlo todo y no dar nada* [*Give it All, and Give Nothing*], ll. 381-383. We have to take into account that the age of bucks is determined by the size of the horns, a symbol of cuckoldry.

[Sir, may your life be as long as that of a deer,
and may you count the years like him.]

In *Los amantes de Teruel* [*The Lovers of Teruel*], the father does not want his daughter to marry her lover and prefers that they engage only in illicit relations:

DON PEDRO Gócela pues, que a fe que es buena moza,
y llévela después a Zaragoza,
que yo estaré contento
con que su amor no pare en casamiento²⁷.

[My daughter is so pretty,
I feel good when her boyfriend enjoys her
and then takes her to Zaragoza.
I'll be happy
if they do not marry.]

Nothing is left of the courteousness and seriousness of the royal court: in these works, we find grotesque kings, authentic «kings of Carnival», as Huerta Calvo has pointed out²⁸. Huerta Calvo also stresses that the role of the king was sometimes interpreted by a jester or a buffoon such as Juan Rana²⁹. Arellano notes that *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*] ends with a grotesque coronation of the «king of madness»³⁰.

There are also many satirical aspects in these plays, including mockeries of poor and hungry noblemen, cuckolded husbands, prostitutes, ridiculous figures, and folkloric characters. Serralta notes that the comical is sometimes created with an incongruent use of religious elements, such Moorish characters with Christian habits (and vice versa), words that invoke burlesque saints, the pairing of curses and vows, and allusions to offensive habits of nuns and monks³¹.

The comedy of this genre is especially verbal³². We find all types of humorous discourses: foolish remarks, *perqués* (repetitions of questions that include the phrase «por qué» [why?]), jokes, tautologies, platitudes, and plays on words, including ambiguous meanings, puns, derivations, and humorous neologisms. It is not possible to translate many of these jokes. For example, in *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*], the King says to his favorite:

REY Vos, Duque, sois mi privado
y aun mi privada también³³.

27. *Los amantes de Teruel* [*The Lovers of Teruel*], ll. 408-411.

28. Huerta Calvo, 1986, 1998 and 2006; see also Mata Induráin, 2006.

29. Huerta Calvo, 2001, p. 174.

30. Arellano, 1995, p. 647.

31. Serralta, 1980b.

32. Concerning verbal modalities of nonsensical humor, the following works are fundamental: Perrián, 1979; Chevalier, 1992, and Arellano, 2003b.

33. *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*], ll. 3-4.

This could be translated as «Duke, you're my favorite and my urinal, as well»; in Spanish, the word *privado* (favorite) sounds like the term *privada*, which means toilet.

The accumulation of verbal forms also works to create one of the effects of burlesque comedy. Examples include the repetition and accumulation of refrains, invective, nicknames, insults, colloquial words (in the sense of Bakhtin's «language of the public place»), literary translations of proverbs, traditional anecdotes, spurious Latin, and burlesque names. Diego Morcilla (Blood Sausage) in *Los amantes de Teruel* [*The Lovers of Teruel*]; Camarón, Sapo, and Inflamado Pejerrey (Shrimp, Toad, and Inflated Kingfish) in *El cerco de Tagarete* [*The Siege of Tagarete*] are examples of the latter rhetorical strategy. In a similar manner, the genre plays with rhymes; tail rhymes, proparoxytonic rhymes, and interior rhymes are common features.

More complex forms of verbal comedy in this genre include «heteroclite inventory» (in *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*], for example), the grotesque banquet (in *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*], *El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*], and *El rey don Alfonso* [*King Alfonso, the Prodigal*]), the will (in *El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*] and *Los Condes de Carrión* [*The Counts of Carrion*]), burlesque auguries and prognostications (in *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*], *Los siete Infantes de Lara* [*The Seven Infants of Lara*], and *Las mocedades del Cid* [*The Youthful Deeds of the Cid*]), the ridiculous challenge (in *Los siete Infantes de Lara* [*The Seven Infants of Lara*], *El cerco de Tagarete* [*The Siege of Tagarete*], and *El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*]), the enumeration of *impossibilia* (in *El rey don Alfonso* [*King Alfonso, the Prodigal*]), and the dialogue of misunderstanding (in *El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*] and *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*]). Two understudied aspects of burlesque comedy are how music is often used in a ludic way and the frequent use of intertextuality (such as references to famous romances, *jácaras*, and popular ballads).

Burlesque comedy also employs scenic comedy³⁴. The ridiculous wardrobe is a striking element of such plays. The princess's dress in *Castigar por defender* [*Punishment instead of Support*] and the costumes of the king and the infant in *La ventura sin buscarla* [*The Not Searched Happiness*] are two examples. Stage directions often include the words «*vestido ridículamente*» [ridiculously dressed]. Ridiculous accessories often appear, such as the cow's leg that Montesinos removes from Durandal as if it was his heart in *El amor más verdadero* [*The Most Truthful Love*], the bladder Vellido Dolfos uses to kill Don Sancho in *El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*], the giant shoe of Filis shown on the stage by Rosicler in *Céfalo y Procris* [*Cephalus and Procris*]³⁵. Burlesque comedies tend toward exaggerated and grotesque gestures (beatings, running, crashes, fusses, indecent dances). In general, the stage instructions are not very explicit, so one has to deduce the character's wardrobe and gestures from his or her own words.

34. See especially Arellano, 2011.

35. Arellano, 1995, pp. 647-648.

Burlesque comedy is marked by a playful atmosphere: the specific vocabulary of the world of games (jackstones, playing cards, etc.) is very present. The carnivalesque environment is completed by inflated bladders, wooden horses, cowbells, kites, *mazas* (the maces tied to the tails of the dogs during Carnival), masques, monsters, bullies, giants, midgets, and savages. There are also women dressed as men or men wearing women's clothes, even pregnant men. Finally, resurrections of deceased people (in *El Comendador de Ocaña* [*The Knight Commander of Ocaña*], *El caballero de Olmedo* [*The Gentleman from Olmedo*], and *El hermano de su hermana* [*The Brother of his Own Sister*], for example) make clear that even death is carnivalized. Everything is possible in the world turned upside-down of the burlesque comedy.

THE INTENTION OF BURLESQUE COMEDY: MOCKERY OR SOCIAL CRITICISM?

Given the fact that the plays represented a ridiculous version of royal life directly in front of the king, the critical potential of the burlesque comedy must be discussed. Serralta regards the genre as mainly comical, as mockery with the aim of provoking laughter within the spectator that does not transcend the humorous dimension³⁶. García Lorenzo, on the other hand, adds to the evident ludic function the role of social satire³⁷. The two positions are not necessarily contradictory. Arellano opts for an intermediate position:

If the ridiculous presentation of the values of baroque society —the mockery of kings, honor, or jokes with religious references imply an attitude against them— this does not seem very important. The staging circumstances are relevant to interpreting burlesque comedy; the Carnival environment gives them the ambiguous critical dimension that is permitted within defined limits and is largely conventional. In my estimation, instead of true social, political or ideological criticism, we see the mockery of literary and theatrical devices³⁸.

It must not be forgotten that these plays were performed in the royal palace, and only during Carnival and on St. John's Day. Their potential to offer a social critique or a critique of authorities is thus very limited.

In short, burlesque comedy unveils the other side of the *comedia nueva* —the carnivalesque and the ridiculous. Even though the corpus does not always represent literature at its highest level, these works have to be taken into account if we want to understand the theatre of the Spanish Golden Age in all its variety.

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36. Serralta, 1980a, p. 106.

37. García Lorenzo, 1982.

38. Arellano, 1995, p. 646.

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