THE DUELING DEBATE AS A QUESTION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN LUCIANO FRANCISCO COMELLA’S LA JACOBA (1789)

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The opening scene of Luciano Francisco Comella’s 1789 sentimental comedy La Jacoba may well confuse twenty-first century readers. It is a play by a Spanish author set “en Londres y sus inmediaciones”, but the first scene of Act I opens with the Count of Beutif—a name which sounds French—complaining about the heavy criticism that French writers have leveled at Spain. Furthermore, the protagonist, Milord Tolmin, has just returned to London from Italy (I, 61) after a four-year absence. During the first scene of the comedia four different countries are mentioned, and before the end of the fourth act, New York and Jamaica play key roles (IV, 626-32). On the surface, La Jacoba’s main conflict revolves around the separation of Milord Tolmin and Jacoba. Milord returns from a tour abroad to discover that someone has circulated a false letter from him stating that he has broken his pledge to Jacoba and married another woman in Italy. In response, Jacoba has married the Count of Esteren, who is quickly revealed to be the letter-forger. As Milord grapples with his response to this news, he frequently invokes his identity as an Englishman to punctuate his vows. These invocations, as well as the references to numerous countries, suggest that national identity plays a key dramatic factor in La Jacoba.

And yet, why would English identity be of interest to Spanish audiences? Undoubtedly, the references to England would be understood by a Spanish audience in terms of Spain. Paul J. Guinard states that during the 1780s in Spain, several theatrical works “de tema inglés” appeared in Madrid’s theaters. He is careful to distinguish between English plays and

1 Alva Ebersole, who authored a descriptive study which contains several plot summaries of Comella’s theatrical works—though not one of La Jacoba—notes that Comella composed the vast majority of his comedias between 1789 and 1799 during the reign of Carlos IV (10), a time of rising tension in Spain due primarily to fears about the French Revolution and also to economic difficulties and a war against Great Britain (Herr 262, 396-7).

2 Because my edition of La Jacoba has no page numbers, all references will cite the act and line numbers.
those with an “English theme”, noting that in addition to translations of Shakespeare (285), adaptations and translations of English works — sometimes cited as such and sometimes not — as well as pieces set in London were fairly common. A 1784 representation of Pamela, based on an adaptation of Richardson’s novel, appears to have initiated a trend. Other works which appeared in theaters that same year include Antonio Valladares de Sotomayor’s El carbonero de Londres and El fabricante de paños, as well as an anonymous comedy, La virtud consigue el premio y la maldad el castigo, and new showings of Calderón’s La cisma de Inglaterra (286-7).

La Jacoba, though set in London, stages the struggle over what it means to be a good Spanish citizen in modern eighteenth-century Europe. After learning that he has lost Jacoba, Milord contemplates actions that imply a rejection of London and the learning acquired through his travels in Europe. He considers suicide, exile to Jamaica, and dueling, a practice that Milord’s rational friend, the Count of Beutif, labels as a barbaric and outdated ritual (IV, 157-63). Through the corruption exposed in La Jacoba’s villain, the Count of Esteren, the play poses the question: Who is really civilized and who is really barbaric? Are Milord’s urges toward suicide and dueling, seemingly identified with Spain’s Baroque traditions, so barbaric, compared with the Count’s dishonest dealings in Jamaica? How civilized can London really be if citizens like the Count of Esteren can openly flood the city with ill-gotten contraband from the New World (219-20) and so easily deceive another man’s love interest and seemingly close friend? This article will explore these questions by focusing on the honor conflict and duel between Milord Tolmin and the Count of Esteren.

As the victim of the Count of Esteren’s plot to win Jacoba, Milord Tolmin struggles to decide how to respond to the corrupt villain whose identity is hidden from him, though not from the audience, throughout

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3 In his article “Traducción e historia del teatro: el siglo XVIII español,” Francisco Lafarga states that several of the plays Spaniards translated from French were based on English originals. (n.p.).

4 Fuentes’ study, El triángulo sentimental del Dieciocho: Inglaterra, Francia, España (1999), is one example among several that deal with this literary exchange. One of Fuentes’ key conclusions is that some Spanish authors were directly influenced by English sentimental literature, without the mediation of French adaptations or translations (4).
most of the play. Will he follow the model of enlightened citizenship and relinquish his claim to Jacoba, or will he follow his passions and choose suicide? Will Milord reject life in London altogether and go into exile, sailing off to Jamaica, or will he cling to the ideals of the Baroque past and fight in a duel against the Count? Milord Tolmin’s decision constitutes more than a choice about how to cope with the loss of Jacoba. In his response he must choose whether to align himself with modern, enlightened ideas of citizenship or embrace a Baroque past viewed by many ilustrados as barbaric. The duel between Milord Tolmin and the Count of Esteren in Act IV punctuates this struggle over national identity through the characters’ debate about whether this duel is necessary or avoidable, barbaric or heroic. Milord Tolmin attempts to use reason to dissuade the Count from persisting in his dueling challenge, but he offers these arguments while participating in each step of the combat ceremony, revealing a dissonance between his words and actions.

The duel and both Milord Tolmin’s and Jacoba’s professed preoccupation with *el qué dirán*, in addition to Beutif’s speech in Act I decrying criticism against Spain in Act I, serve as reminders that the notion of honor-as-virtue had not erased the perception that one’s reputation needed to be guarded at all cost. Fernando Díaz-Plaja observes that dueling maintained a more influential role in Spain than in the rest of enlightened Europe, particularly because of the pull of societal opinion, *ox el qué dirán* (233). Indeed, the anti-dueling decrees passed by Felipe V and Fernando VI in 1716 and 1757 respectively, as well as an additional decree passed by Felipe V in 1723 which ordered that all honor disputes be settled by royal tribunals, suggest that the practice of dueling persisted in Spain despite the legal efforts to halt it (Niemeier 69-70). Milord Tolmin’s dilemma over whether to duel with the Count of Esteren is also a struggle over contested definitions of heroism and what it means to be a good citizen of his country. His situation echoes Spain’s own debate about its place in eighteenth-century Europe.

Although Comella set *La Jacoba* in London, the comedia’s opening speech clearly caters to a Spanish audience through its anti-French positioning and references to the *leyenda negra*. According to the stage directions, “El teatro representa un estudio de un sujeto distinguido. Aparece el Conde Beutif leyendo” (n.p.). The Count of Beutif, an enlightened man and friend to the protagonist, Milord Tolmin, is shown reading, an action which reiterates his high social status and points to a good education. His speech appears to react to the contents of the book:

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A esta peste de Escritores
Franceses sufrir no puedo;
¡bueno es que se han empeñado
en sus viajes en querernos
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hacer creer que aún está España
en aquel obscuro tiempo
en que eran los Españoles
tan solamente guerreros! (I, 1-8)

Clearly the Count of Beutif is complaining about the *leyenda negra*, which condemned Spain as a barbaric country. The Count implicitly references the famous comment by Nicolás Masso
n de Morvilliers in the *Encyclopédie méthodique*, “¿Que doit-on à l’Espagne?” Beutif’s admission that science and art had declined during the seventeenth century and have not yet experienced a rebirth point to a struggle to define Spain rather than England. This initial speech extends an invitation to the audience to think about Spain and the *leyenda negra* in the context of Enlightened Europe.

The 1782 question voiced by Nicolás Masson de Morvillers in the *Encyclopédie méthodique* drew little attention in France and most of Europe, but initiated a “crisis de conciencia en la España ilustrada” (Gies 307). Masson’s famous accusation—“¿Qué se debe a España?”—sparked both furious and anxious replies from Spanish authors and inspired a state-sponsored contest for the best defense of Spain (Raillard 35). David Gies and Matthieu Raillard assert that Masson’s article uncovered an anxiety that had been festering for decades. Spanish reactions to Masson exuded “una profunda angustia, un reconocimiento más o menos inconsciente de que la flecha disparada por el enciclopedista francés había tocado un nervio sensible del espíritu hispánico” (Gies 307). This “nervio sensible” reflected a crisis of identity. “¿Qué se debe a España?,” for the *ilustrados* enveloped several questions: “¿Qué es España?,” “¿Quiénes somos nosotros?,” and “¿Somos los hijos del Barroco?” (Gies 310).

Writers such as Forner, Jovellanos and Nicolás Fernández de Moratín, among many, grappled with Spain’s national identity in terms of its connection with a Baroque past in the context of an enlightened Europe. Was Spain’s legacy one that should inspire pride or was it a past against which everyone should rebel? Forner offered a firm defense of Spain in his 1786 *Oración apologética por la España y su mérito literario*. According to Gies, Forner defined Spain as “un ser barroco” and called for a rejection of foreign influence. By contrast, Nicolás Fernández de Moratín had asserted years earlier that Baroque tradition constituted an obstacle for Spain’s passage into modernity.5 Jovellanos, “simultáneamente apasionado y objetivo”, sought “un equilibrio entre el alma hispana y la razón ilustrada”

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5 Nicolás Fernández de Moratín’s “Disertación” preceding his *La Petimetra* attacks Spanish comedias and voices his allegiance to neo-classical, French, theatrical models (n.p.). In other words, Moratín rejected the Baroque influence which persisted in theater and embraced modern, contemporary models.
Jesús Torrecilla remarks that in their attacks traditionalists tended to call neo-classicists “afrancesados” (48), while proponents of neo-classicism labeled traditionalists “ignorantes” and “bárbaros” (65). One of the results of these debates “es una gran variedad de posturas intermedias que contienen determinados elementos de ambos grupos: escritos que, sin aparente conciencia de sus incongruencias, expresan opiniones mezcladas y en gran parte incompatibles” (Torrecilla 51). In Spanish theater, these incongruous elements would appear in works with neo-classical traits, reflecting French influence, that dealt with nationalistic themes (Torrecilla 67).

Milord Tolmin’s conflicted sense of identity as a citizen of his country bears some similarities to the struggles for national and cultural identity seen in Spanish eighteenth-century texts. He expresses contradictory allegiances, at times adhering to the ideals of virtue in his censure of dueling, then aligning himself with the code of chivalry in his knowledge of dueling practices, and all the while swearing that he will leave London altogether and begin a new life in exile. This plurality of opinions in one character points to a conflicted sense of identity. Milord’s foreign travels and his rational arguments against dueling mark him as a participant in enlightened civilization, which Jesús Torrecilla convincingly associates with the hegemonic influence of France in the eighteenth century. However, Milord’s professed desire to defend his reputation and retaliate against the Count of Esteren also portrays him as a proponent of barbaric Baroque ideals associated with the (Spanish) past.

Interestingly, La Jacoba initially drew some praise for its careful treatment of the threats that the Count of Esteren directs at Jacoba, who clearly prefers Milord Tolmin. The Memorial Literario stated:

Aún no se había puesto en nuestro Teatro un asunto tan delicado como la pintura de los efectos de un matrimonio violento manejado con decoro. El contraste del honor de una mujer casada a vista de un amante, que antes debió casarse con ella, y de las sospechas de su marido que sin recelar aún en su honra, conoce su desamor, hacen la buena trama de esta Comedia, los caracteres principales están bien seguidos, la mayor parte de las situaciones diestramente dispuestas y las pasiones fuertes bien pintadas, sin faltar a la virtud ni el decoro . . . (cited in Fernández Cabezón 113)

According to the reviewer, La Jacoba affirms the dangers of the passions and preserves the value of virtue, even though it treads dangerously close to the portrayal of violence through the use of the painting, a portrait of Jacoba that the Count of Esteren initially commissions as a wedding present. It depicts Jacoba “en sus tormentos” (III, 379) and the Count “en acto / de darla una flor, atento” (III, 380-1). However, in his jealousy, the Count orders the painter to alter the portrait and convert it into a visual threat.
The new version, unveiled in Act III, now shows Jacoba covered in blood, and the Count standing over her wielding a dagger (III, between lines 352-3).

The review was not without its criticism, however. Of interest to this study are the comments on the portrayal of dueling, which was judged inverosimile by the Memorial Literario. The reviewer observes that the verses describing the prohibition of dueling, which in Spain were castigated with capital punishment and the confiscation of goods, do not correspond with the play’s setting in London, and English law, which did not sanction duels (Fernández Cabezón 113). This critique provides further confirmation that La Jacoba, though set in London, portrays themes familiar and relevant to Spanish audiences of the late eighteenth century.

**Milord’s Options: Decorum, Suicide or Exile?**

As Milord Tolmin and Jacoba negotiate the conflict created by the deceptive sonnet and false letter in Tolmin’s name and her subsequent marriage to the Count of Esteren, both characters propose multiple solutions. The options of suicide, and later in Act IV, dueling, reflect an adherence to the passions, as well as Spain’s Baroque past. To follow the path of virtue, Milord Tolmin must forget Jacoba altogether, an option he finds intolerable. Another choice proposed by the Count of Beutif — exile to the New World — implies a rejection of European citizenship altogether. Suicide, dueling and exile all portray the gravity of Milord Tolmin and Jacoba’s conflict. Their association with death and exile also appears to reflect the Romanticism that, according to Sebold, had already emerged in Spain and was evident in earlier sentimental comedies such as Jovellanos’ El delincuente honrado and Trigueros’ El precipitado, both authored in 1773 (432). In this particular case, the dialogue of La Jacoba associates these options with the past.

Upon returning from Italy and discovering that Jacoba, believing the lies about his marriage, has wed another, Milord Tolmin initially turns to the option of suicide: “¿para qué / quiero vivir?” (II, 167-8). To punctuate his resolution, Milord Tolmin invokes his identity as an Englishman: “ya lo he resuelto: / soy Inglés, y he de cumplirlo . . . / de hacer que el Támesis sirva / de sepulcro a mi cariño” (II, 185-6, 195-6). Milord’s self-identification as an Englishman suggests that his promise to throw himself into the river Thames will be fulfilled. His references to Caton and Demosthenes and their suicides associate his decision with the heroic.

The stage directions portray Milord “Al tiempo de irse despechado a arrojar al Támesis” (II, between lines 196-7), but his friend the Count of Beutif, enters the scene and immediately halts the suicide attempt. In his arguments against Milord’s desire to take his own life, Beutif invokes definitions of “Englishness” and heroism that revolve around utility and condemn suicide as a brash act that would bring shame to his country:
¿Heroísmo? una bajeza
del ánimo, sí, un delinquio
de la razón, un esfuerzo
que pretende hacer el brio
por no sentirse capaz
de tolerar los martirios
de la vida. Los Ingleses
que en esto te han procedido
son unos lunares feos
de la nación: y proscritos
sus nombres estar debían
para siempre: . . . (II, 207-18)

According to Beutif, rather than a “noble heroísmo” (II, 206), Milord’s suicide would make him an embarrassment to his country, and those who commit such acts should be banished from the country’s memory forever. Interestingly, suicide and dueling were sometimes linked as similar examples of rash, unreasonable behavior. For example, in the October 3, 1786 issue, El Correo de Madrid ó de los Ciegos includes commentary from a philosopher “sobre el duelo, y sobre el suicidio” (30). The author notes that “en los tiempos verdaderamente heroicos no se conocia el furor de los desafios. Este es un frenesí moderno, fundado sobre aquel miserable pundonor, que nadie ha podido explicar, ni definir jamas, que convierte al hombre en un egoista feroz, y le enseña á tomarse el lugar de la razon y de la magestad de las leyes” (30). The Count of Beutif’s arguments against suicide and, later, dueling as poor examples of true heroism echo the reasoning of this unnamed philosopher.

Milord declares his agreement with Beutif: “Tienes razón: mis pasiones / dominaron mi albedrío” (II, 231-2). This statement offers one interpretation of a good Englishman—and thus a good Spaniard: someone who relies on reason rather than being carried away by passion. Beutif emphasizes that:

el que ha nacido
verdadero Inglés obstenta
en lo adverso el rostro mismo
que en lo próspero; invariable
al mal y al bien, no da indicios
ni de pena ni de gozo. (II, 218-23)

Milord’s rash inclinations do not correspond with Beutif’s definition of a civilized member of society who carries himself in the same way regardless of his circumstances and does not succumb to overwhelming emotions.
Nonetheless, Milord continues to struggle in his decision over how to respond to the loss of Jacoba because of an inability to accept the response demanded by reason: forget Jacoba and live a life of virtue in London. Though he begs Beutif for advice, he refuses to accept the first suggestion offered by his enlightened friend: “Que su amor des al olvido” (II, 258). Milord counters that this option “No es dable” (II, 258) and pleads with his friend to offer a gentler alternative, which Beutif does: “Vete a América” (II, 263).

Milord’s decision to leave London for the New World represents more than a convenient method to forget Jacoba. Unlike his first trip abroad to Italy, which formed part of the standard education for a gentleman, Milord’s prospective exile to the Americas constitutes—in the play—a rejection of “civilized” society. In a subsequent scene in the same act, when Beutif presents Milord before the Count of Esteren and Jacoba and they inquire about his decision to go to America, he counters that it is because of his sadness over “El mirar / la poca fe, el trato indigno / de las gentes” (II, 531-3). Milord directs his attack at Jacoba, clearly addressing her as he speaks of “La falsedad, la mudanza, / el perjurio y el olvido” (561-2) which have become “la única recompensa / que logra el amor más fino” (II 563-4). His next statement, however, expands the accusation of untrustworthy behavior and implicates European society in general. Milord explains to the Count of Esteren and Jacoba that he is leaving London “Por huir de los estilos / Europeos” (II, 566-7).

While Milord has previously invoked his status as an Englishman to explain his behavior, his decision to comply with Beutif’s suggestion to go to the New World now appears as a rejection of England and enlightened society. Michael Robert Cave’s dissertation on Comella only briefly addresses the author’s treatment of society in his dramatic works, but he observes that “Ciertas obras que tratan el tema de la sociedad dan la impresión de que Comella concebía la sociedad como un laberinto.

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6 A late-eighteenth-century discourse on “modern” education for young Spanish men states that after completing one year of travel throughout Spain in order to visit its cities and ports (56), a young man should then travel, under the supervision of an escort, to France and Italy and be presented at Court and meet important members of the nobility (“Discurso á los padres de familia sobre la educacion de los hijos” 57). These travels are to last for four years, the same amount of time that Milord Tolmin has spent abroad before the opening of La Jacoba. Interestingly, according to the discourse, the purpose of this time is that “en esta edad con las luces adquiridas podrá extender en sus negocios, y miras particulares, como tambien empezar una cultura prolix del ramo que sea mas de su inclinacion, y hacerse admirar y respetar en alguna linea á beneficio de su Patria” (59). Milord Tolmin’s travels are in keeping with the education of young men in Spain at the time, as are his reflections on what it means to be a good citizen of his “Patria”.

engañador” (111). Milord’s criticism of “los estilos / Europeos”, which he contrasts with “el candor más limpio, / la fineza más constante” of the “indios” among whom he plans to reside echoes Rousseau’s writings about the “noble savage” in *Emile*, who lives free from the trappings of society’s expectations and “lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like” (7).

The rampant deception practiced by all characters—but most blatantly by Esteren—reflects contemporary philosophical ideas on the topic at the time, but it also critically examines them. The Count of Esteren’s connection to both the New World and Europe and the corruption tied to him complicate the question of who is enlightened and who is barbaric. His exploitation of the New World confirms that the Count of Esteren is the deceptive villain in *La Jacoba*. With his confession to the audience at the end of Act I that he won Jacoba “con fingimientos” (I, 642), the Count of Esteren reveals the first hint of his corruption. Throughout the play, characters such as the shallow, *afancesado* Baronet of Licot unveil that the Count’s dishonesty extends to his financial dealings in Jamaica. First, the Count himself indirectly communicates that he won his wealth from the New World when he promises Jacoba in Act II that “los infinitos / tesoros que de Jamaica / espero están a tu arbitrio” (II, 354-6). Since the audience already knows that he has acquired her hand through deception, these treasures already appear tainted with corruption. In addition, this offer of riches rings false, because the Count already suspects Jacoba of infidelity. Before offering her his Jamaican treasures, the Count speculates on whether she still loves Milord (II, 329-31). The gifts which he offers her before they arrive appear more as bribes than as offerings to his beloved.

The inconstancy of humanity described in Milord’s speech acquires more specific features in Act III as the audience learns that the Count himself has climbed to his high place in society via a ladder of crime. Milord’s expressed desires to flee the corruption of European society, then, is rendered problematic, because the Count’s activities in Jamaica, as described by the Baron’s questions about the “Gobernadores / de Indias” call into question whether Milord can escape corruption in the New World. His plan to sail to America is sabotaged on multiple fronts. First, the Count’s connections there reveal that Milord cannot escape the crimes of his unknown rival. Second, Milord persists in postponing his embarkation to visit Jacoba: once in Act II, when Beutif escorts him to the Count’s home (II, 500-4) and then when Jacoba arranges a clandestine meeting in Act III (III, 265-70). Finally, when the Count learns of Milord and Jacoba’s encounter, he challenges his rival to a duel (IV, 51-2). The dueling scene unites the conflicting questions circulating in this play as Milord, the Count of Esteren and the Count of Beutif argue over what it means to be English, heroic, honorable and virtuous.
The Duel: “Inglés Cobarde” o “Inglés Sensato”?

The gothic scene described for the duel in Act IV—“Sitio remoto con vestigios de ruinas, cipreses y árboles” signals the Romanticism which would fully emerge in the nineteenth century, but it also invokes a heroic past. The ruins point to the Middle Ages, when kings presided over judicial duels and used one-on-one contests to settle battles. The inclusion of “cipreses”, symbolic of death, adds a foreboding, sinister air. The duel between Milord Tolmin and the Count of Esteren, however, reveals multiple layers of conflict. Their quarrel over Jacoba and the Count’s anger about the secret meeting between Milord and his wife have brought the two men to the remote location. As the duel proceeds, they spend more time arguing over whether or not dueling is a heroic action for a good Englishman than the reason for their meeting. Their dialogue, as well as the way in which the Count executes the duel’s procedures and Milord acquiesces to the Count’s demands, reveal several inconsistencies. These inconsistencies confirm the Count’s duplicity and create doubts about whether Milord Tolmin can break his ties with the society he has vowed to reject.

When the Count arrives on the scene and orders Milord to take a pistol, the latter uses reason, appealing to the law, to attempt to avoid a fight: ¿Sabéis que estos atentados / están proscritos por ley / divina y humana?” (IV, 58-60). The Count insults him: “Sois un Inglés / cobarde” (IV, 68-9). Milord counters this “Baroque” definition of national heroism with an enlightened version: “Un Inglés sensato / diréis mejor” (IV, 70-1).

In a previous scene at the end of Act II, Milord has already attempted to speak peacefully with the Count. He requests to talk with the Count “De Inglés a Inglés” (554), and then states:

Como noble os aseguro
que su virtud es tan clara
como los rayos del sol.
Sí, os lo juro: respetadla:
y porque veáis si procede
con nobleza mi desgracia,
desde aquí de Londres voy

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7 Billacois states that in France from the sixteenth century one, any weapon — including pistols — was fair game for a duel, though swords remained the most popular option (191). In England, the pistol became the weapon of choice from the 1760s on (Shoemaker 181), so it is not surprising that Milord Tolmin and the Count of Esteren are portrayed using firearms in La Jacoba. Rafael Abella does not state when duelists in Spain began to use pistols, though he does mention that several writers of dueling manuals voiced their preference for pistols, and he then cites some examples of these from the nineteenth century (25-6).
a salir con prisa tanta,
que quizá en la misma prisa
tropezarán mis pisadas. (II, 578-87)

Milord attempts to convince the Count that he has done nothing to harm Jacoba’s virtue, and that he will nobly deal with his loss of her by physically removing himself from London. As an “Inglés sensato” Milord has vocally aligned himself with enlightened Europe, informing the Count that “la razón en estos casos” (IV, 94) censures violence as a means to resolve conflicts.

Milord’s arguments and Beutif’s entrance support a rejection of Baroque values in favor of contemporary philosophical trends which would group dueling in the same category as suicide. Beutif displays bravery and sentimental heroism by physically inserting himself in the line of fire between the Count and Milord, shouting: “Disparaos; / pero de vuestro furor / mi vida va a ser el blanco” (IV, 110-12). Beutif reiterates eighteenth-century objections to dueling and rejects it as a heroic action:

¿ignoráis que están los duelos
por Dios, por el Soberano,
y aun por la naturaleza
proscritos? ¿juzgáis acaso
que el duelo infame es efecto
del valor? vivís errados
si lo juzgáis: de demencia
y de despecho es un acto
solamente. ¿Qué heroismo
ni qué blazon puede daros
el duelo de la pistola,
cuando su destino infausto
no le decide el esfuerzo,
sino tan sólo el acaso? (IV, 117-30)

Beutif associates dueling with insanity rather than heroism. Duels are the result of the most extreme passions. He notes that the use of pistols does not reflect bravery but instead leaves the outcome to chance.

Beutif’s comments on dueling dismiss the ritual and its definition of heroism as relics of a past that should be forgotten:

¿Te llamó cobarde? y bien:
¿porque así te haya llamado,
debes la satisfacción
tomarte tú por la mano?
¿Y es que esos vestigios torpes
del tiempo obscuro, esos actos
que por virtud la barbarie
Niemeier, “The Dueling Debate in Comella’s *La Jacoba* (1789)”

reputa de los pasados
merezcan en nuestros días
de ningún foro sensato
la aprobación? (IV, 153-63)

Beutif’s comments reflect a similar attitude toward duels articulated in D. Martín Ulloa’s history of dueling, written shortly after the 1757 anti-dueling decree (4). Ulloa states that the illegal duel of honor has its origins in the “inculta y bárbara ferocidad” of the Germanic tribes, insisting that the Romans did not permit the practice (42). Both Ulloa and the Count of Beutif dismiss the duel as an out-dated, uncivilized practice.

Milord’s friend pleads with him to reject dueling’s definition of honor in favor of a more modern notion of honor-as-virtue. The Count of Beutif mentions the severe anti-dueling laws in place and asks:

¿En cuál de ellas has hallado
que el hombre que al desafío
se niega, o por un acaso
no puede asistir a él
ha de quedar infamado?
¿Quieres conservar tu honor?
Sé virtuoso. (IV, 166-70,173-4)

Beutif insists that the threat of a ruined reputation should not dictate Milord’s actions, especially in light of his imminent voyage to the New World. He pleads with Milord to flee from “los principios falsos” (IV, 172), echoing the latter’s professed desire in Act II “huir de los estilos / Europeos” (II, 566-7), but Beutif is condemning European ideas from the past, “del tiempo oscuro” (IV, 158), instead of his contemporary society.

Milord and Beutif have appealed to reason and the law to argue against dueling, but while Beutif’s allegiance to enlightened philosophies is clear throughout *La Jacoba*, Milord’s struggle continues. Despite his vocal protests against dueling, Milord’s actions during the scene with the Count of Esteren communicate a greater sense of commitment to his reputation than to virtue. After declaring himself to be an “Inglés sensato” (IV, 70) rather than an “Inglés cobarde” (IV, 68-9), Milord responds to the Count’s threat to make public his refusal to duel (IV, 75-6) with acquiescence:

Venga la pistola, Conde;
pero mirad que esta mano

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8 The prologue to the first volume of the *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia* situates Ulloa’s history “casi al mismo tiempo” as “las sabias providencias del Gobierno contra la bárbara costumbre de los duelos” (4).
la recibe solamente
para defenderme, en caso
de queráis vuestro intento
ejecutar temerario
y no por el desafío. (IV, 77-83)

While the Count’s lack of trustworthiness makes Milord’s excuse of self-defense plausible, his continued participation as the scene unfolds suggests that Milord Tolmin is not fully convinced that virtue makes him heroic. When the Count orders him to remove his vest, Milord protests, “Entre hombres / de honor eso es excusado” (IV, 85-6), but he removes enough clothing to satisfy the Count’s insistence that neither is hiding protection “contra el rigor de las balas” (IV, 79). Stage directions reveal that both the Count and Milord load their pistols (IV, 99) and Milord’s answer to the Count’s warning that he is about to fire —“Ved que me defiendo” (IV, 110)— confirms his full participation.

Milord’s comments and actions also reveal a familiarity with dueling procedures. Besides informing the Count that the duel should be kept quiet—“vuestra honor debe callarlo” (IV, 74), his quick responses during the duel, such as his confirmation that the pistols are not loaded (IV, 96), and the interweaving of his participation with his arguments against dueling suggest that he might be a better duelist than philosopher:

MT: Pero, Conde,
la razón en estos casos . . .
(Se quita el suyo [vestido].)9

CE: Nada escucho. Descargadas
ved si están.

MT: Es excusado.
CE: Aquí munición tenemos
para cargarlas.

MT: En vano
es vuestra empeño.
(Cargan las pistolas) (IV, 93-99)

The last stage direction, which shows both the Count and Milord loading their pistols, reflects a shift in this duel. While previously the Count has initiated each step of the duel, such as the removal of outer garments, now both men proceed in unison: “CE: Ved que disparo. / MT: Ved que me defiendo” (IV, 109-10).

9 “el suyo” refers to Milord’s outer garments, which he is removing in response to the Count’s insistence that neither wear anything to protect themselves from gunfire (88-90).
Milord’s allegiance to dueling and honor-as-reputation is confirmed by his insistence to Beutif that he cannot leave London without physically settling the conflict: “Y así, antes / que consienta en el embarco, / para resarcir mi honor, / qué he de hacer ya he meditado” (IV, 145-8). Beutif advises him to “Sé virtuoso” (174) and simply leave London rather than allow himself to be compelled by an outdated, barbaric mode of behavior. And he does this by appealing to reason and the law (IV, 149-74), just as Milord himself had done during the dueling scene with the Count. Nonetheless, Milord Tolmin remains skeptical:

No es extraño
para mí lo que tú dices;
y aunque le insinué estos cargos
del todo los despreció;
pero si volviese osado
a insultarme puede ser
que no pueda tolerarlo
mi prudencia, y que reprima
su arrebatimiento mi brazo. (IV, 174-82)

Milord hints that he may be incapable of avoiding combat with the Count. His prudence and his arm will not allow him to leave if the Count insults his honor. Milord’s preoccupation with el qué dirán—“¿Qué dirán si yo me embarco / sin satisfacer al Conde?” (IV, 194-5) reflects a preoccupation of Spanish society with reputation that lingered in the eighteenth century, and disgusts his friend. Beutif condemns Milord and swears that he cannot remain friends with someone who holds such unenlightened beliefs: “¿Mi amistad? / No vuelvas a pronunciarlo, / que yo nunca la he tenido / sino con hombres sensatos” (IV, 205-8). Because Milord fears that London will call him an “Inglés cobarde” he refuses to behave as an “Inglés sensato”, suggesting that barbarity may win over enlightenment. However, Milord’s attempt to use reason to dissuade the Count from the duel during their encounter confirms his confusion over what type of Englishman he is. At the same time, Milord’s preoccupation with el qué dirán calls into question his ability to leave society completely behind.

The Count of Esteren’s duplicitous execution of the duel confirms his dishonesty, but it also suggests that corruption infiltrates all parts of English/Spanish society. While Milord Tolmin is aware that the Count “se cree agravado / de mí” (III, 38-9) at the beginning of Act III, the latter never issues an official dueling challenge. The Count’s request that Milord meet him at the remote location does not mention the possibility of combat. Upon arriving at the scene, Milord fearfully speculates:

¿Con qué fin a este lugar
el Conde me habrá citado?
quería hablarme despacio
en este sitio, recelo
que se cree agravado
de mí, y reconvenirme
querrá acaso el agravio. (IV, 29-30, 36-40)

The scene’s setting, and the Milord’s use of dueling terms such as “agraviado” and “agravio” anticipate a private combat for the audience, but from the beginning the Count does not follow the codified procedure for it. Besides not issuing a formal, written challenge or requesting an explanation (Murciano 42), the Count also insists that Milord arrive alone, implying that the duel would proceed without the aid of seconds to ensure that all parties behave honestly (Murciano 42, 83-4). Previous revelations about the Count’s duplicitous epistolary practices to acquire Jacoba have already rendered him untrustworthy. Finally, the Count’s threat to “por todas partes / . . . irlo publicando” (IV, 75-6) if Milord does not duel with him obligates the latter to fight or lose his reputation.

The Count of Esteren’s corrupt financial dealings highlight the problematic aspects of enlightened Europe, but his methods for dueling, by connecting him with Spain’s Baroque past, complicates the question of what is barbaric and what is enlightened. The Count swears that Milord Tolmin has insulted his honor (IV, 65-6), but it is the Count who has first defamed Milord’s reputation by circulating false letters with the latter’s signature and stealing Jacoba (II, 555-6). In addition to challenging Milord Tolmin to a duel, the Count of Esteren has threatened Jacoba with violence by having a portrait of her altered to portray him wielding a dagger over her bloody body (II, 526-30). With this portrait he forces Jacoba to submit to their marriage and Milord Tolmin to leave Europe. The threat of violence against Jacoba also resembles numerous Baroque Spanish honor plays such as Calderón’s El médico de su honra (1637) and El pintor de su deshonra (1650), where female characters are killed by husbands or lovers who suspect or have confirmed infidelity.

The threat of violence, as revealed in the portrait, becomes a visual confirmation of the Count of Esteren’s barbarity. First, he has initiated the central conflict of the play through his manipulation of letters, an act revealed to the audience through dialogue. Next, his duel with Milord Tolmin demonstrates that despite his economic success, he is an unrelenting, unreasonable character. The portrait, which he has commissioned with the riches won in Jamaica, serves as visual evidence that his earnings are blood money. However, while the New World has given the Count the funds to cause the central conflict in La Jacoba, it will also provide the final resolution.
Resolution from the New World: Virtue Rewarded and Deception Punished?

As corruptly as the Count behaves, he eventually repents later in Act IV when the contents of one of the newly arrived ships offer a resolution: his first wife, previously thought to have perished in a shipwreck has survived and traveled back to London on the boat. The Count receives a mysterious summons from the king midway through Act IV which sparks speculation from the Baronet of Licot that the monarch has heard about the duel: “¡El Rey / supo el desafío! Malo . . . De esta vez / va a la Torre por tres años” (IV, 373-4, 381-2). However, during his meeting with the king, the Count learns about the arrival of his wife from the New World. He had believed that his wife had perished in a shipwreck, but in fact two American ships helped save her life. The ship that has made the journey from Jamaica holds not only treasures but also the Count’s wife (IV, 619-32). Instead of a refuge from the corruption of European society the New World delivers a resolution to Milord’s conflict by forcing the Count to relinquish Jacoba’s hand, a fitting option given that this cargo also points ironically to his former dealings in contraband. The proceedings could have been quietly carried out, since the Count’s wife, showing true discretion, “se fue a hablar al Ministro / para evitar muchos daños” (IV, 637-8). With this revelation, though, the Count displays repentance by subsequently confessing his scheme to discredit Milord:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Milord, deteneos, que} \\
\text{hasta que haya declarado} \\
\text{los daños que a vuestro amor} \\
\text{mis desvaríos causaron} \\
\text{no soy digno de ellos. Yo} \\
\text{con un soborno villano} \\
\text{adquirí de vuestro agente,} \\
\text{Williams, una firma en blanco;} \\
\text{con ella mi loco amor} \\
\text{supuso haberos casado;} \\
\text{intercepté vuestras cartas,} \\
\text{fingí un soneto . . . (IV, 653-64)}
\end{align*}
\]

The Count of Esteren’s confession restores him to good standing with Milord, who states: “Los brazos . . . vuelvo a decir que me deis, / y dejad recuerdos vanos” (IV, 664-6) and presumably the audience, which is left with the lesson that no one can achieve happiness through dishonest means:

\footnote{“De esta vez” strongly suggests that the Count’s duel with Milord Tolmin is not his first.}
que el Cielo reprueba siempre
bien con prodigios o acasos
los himeneos que se hacen
con fin siniestro o engaño:
de sinceridad los hombres
armen su pecho . . . (IV, 685-91)

Virtue wins over honor-as-reputation, and all honor conflicts are nullified. The Count’s dueling challenge to Milord Tolmin is ostensibly suspended by the former’s confession of wrongdoing. Jacoba’s restoration to Milord, and Milord’s extension of forgiveness to the Count of Esteren suggest that corruption can be overcome by virtue.

What remains of Milord Tolmin’s conflict with enlightened European society? Presumably, he will stay in London now that he has won Jacoba. As the Count relays his efforts to find Milord and reunite the two lovers, he informs the audience: “hallo a Beutif, que a Milord / llevaba a la nave; hago / que se detengan” (IV, 643-5). The inconstancy and unfaithfulness from which Milord had decided to flee in Act II no longer affects Milord. Consequently, the pressing need to choose which version of heroism to accept—the enlightened, non-violent path of virtue versus the combative, barbaric mode of dueling—has dissolved without the need for Milord to make a final choice.

Although virtue has emerged victorious in the final lines of La Jacoba, its imposed victory is somewhat problematic. “Los estilos Europeos” (II, 566-7) are given a second chance, and the Count of Esteren has repented of his romantic misdeeds, but has all corruption been addressed? Can his confession and Milord Tolmin’s pardon absolve the Count of the anguish he has caused Milord and Jacoba? What about his illegal duel with Milord? Licot teasingly suggests that the king desires to meet with Esteren because of his duel, but apparently the confession also implies that Esteren is pardoned for this crime too. Does the confession-forgiveness mechanism adequately resolve the honor conflict between the Count of Esteren and Milord and remake this villain into a repentant, beneficial member of society? Moreover, no additional mention is made of the Count’s nebulous financial dealings in the New World, despite the fact that his wife’s arrival highlights his contraband dealings there. The final lines of the play address only “los himeneos que se hacen / con fin siniestro o engaño” (IV, 688-9) and not necessarily the Count’s crimes in Jamaica, though these same offenses have been used to characterize him as a villain.

The central conflict in La Jacoba, triggered by the Count of Esteren’s falsification of letters that trick Jacoba into marrying him, and these characters’ efforts to resolve it echoes Spain’s ongoing identity struggle in eighteenth-century Europe. Each potential solution for Milord—whether to conform to decorum and forget Jacoba, escape through suicide, seek
revenge through dueling, or go into exile—corresponds to common themes in ongoing contemporary dialogues about what it means to be Spanish. Discourses on virtue and decorum reflected the influence of the European, and particularly, French, enlightenment, which labeled suicide and dueling as barbaric practices (Kiernan 165-6). Rousseau, for example, had declared that men of honor would see the duel as an abhorrent practice and avoid it at all costs (130). Yet dueling and the defense of honor resonated with a national past of which many Spaniards were proud. This contradiction reflects the fluid exchange of literary translations and adaptations in European countries. Milord's deliberation over the proper response also explores what it means to be a good Englishman, a debate which the Spanish audience would understand in terms of what it means to be a good Spaniard. The discussion about dueling and the necessity of defending one's reputation in the face of *el qué dirán* reflects debates about whether to interpret Spain's past as glorious or barbaric and to what extent Spain should integrate itself into enlightened Europe.

While the denouement and the final lines of *La Jacoba* point to a complete embrace of virtue, and thus full participation in the Age of Reason, several facets of the comedia reflect Raillard's assertion that the debate over Spanish identity generated definitions that “were hardly unified, and further reflected the hybridized, indeterminate nature of Spain” (44). The Count of Esteren's corrupt dealings in Jamaica and his violent threats against Jacoba and Milord Tolmin, as well as his dishonest use of dueling ritual generate two key questions. The first is: How “civilized” is enlightened civilization? This question directly implicates France. However, England, as an influential participant in the Enlightenment, is not immune from this inquiry either. The Count of Esteren's criminal activity in Jamaica, an English colony, highlights the futility of Milord Tolmin's plan to escape ‘modern’ society by fleeing to Jamaica, even though it is the New World which provides the play's resolution, through the arrival of the Count's wife. The second question key question that arises in *La Jacoba* is: Can virtue alone overcome corruption? The denouement hinges on the Count of Esteren's confession and Milord Tolmin's subsequent forgiveness. The confession-forgiveness mechanism, a hallmark of sentimental literature, is based on the potential for humanity to be reformed. However, the Count of Esteren's reform has been forced by the arrival of his wife from Jamaica and does not adequately address his actions against Milord Tolmin and Jacoba.

In *La Jacoba* both the culture of enlightened Europe and Spain's Baroque past are examined and criticized, and while the Count of Esteren's repentance and the final lesson imply a leaning toward the ideals of virtue and decorum, the values associated with Spain's past—particularly honor and chivalry—are not discarded. Rather, the play's representation of the Count of Esteren's corruption, the preoccupation with *el qué dirán* and the
The duel in Act IV, with its debate over honor and patriotism, as well as the contradictory enactment of the ceremony itself, offers the most concrete reflection of what Raillard has termed “the hybridized, indeterminate nature of Spain” (44). Milord Tolmin appeals to reason and the law as justification against dueling, but the stage directions portray him as compliant with the honor code. Milord questions Esteren’s exercise of ceremony, confirming that he is familiar with dueling protocol. His arguments with Beutif over why he must ultimately finish the duel with Esteren reveal a deep bifurcation of values within Milord Tolmin that is not resolved by the play’s conclusion. The restoration of Jacoba and the Count’s apology suspend the honor conflict but they do not nullify the pull that reputation exerts on both Milord Tolmin and Jacoba. Finally, the Count of Esteren as the challenger contributes to the ambiguity in the Inglés sensato/Inglés cobardo debate. Esteren, made rich through commerce, represents a more modern citizen, yet with dueling he is resorting to an outdated rite. His use of the duel confirms that he is behaving barbarically, not because he is resorting to dueling, but because of his distortion of the ritual.

A critical examination of eighteenth-century popular theater in Spain which acknowledges this plurality of ideas and influences can move beyond a dismissal of its contradictions and instead explore some of the reasons behind them. La Jacoba offers a dramatic debate about the definition of true heroism and national identity as it calls into question who is civilized and who is barbaric. Trafficking with goods and with human lives is fittingly countered by a quintessential eighteenth-century motif—shipwrecking—that delivers a clean resolution to the conflict. The duel in La Jacoba is a dramatic amalgam of Baroque notions of honor and the Enlightenment’s examination of the dangers of the passions. An examination of its representation of dueling offers a glimpse of the complex intermingling of multiple definitions of Spanish culture, where neither a lone enlightened model such as that envisioned by Moratín nor an identity based primarily on Spain’s Baroque past, such as that defended by Forner, prevails.

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