ENLIGHTENMENT VALUES AND THE FEMALE PSYCHE ON THE NEOCLASSIC STAGE: THE TRAGIC HEROINE AS PRE-ROMANTIC SUBJECT

TRACIE AMEND

Although many Spanish Neoclassical tragedies take place in historical settings (from the founding of Rome to the horror of sixteenth-century Castilian civil war), the moral compass and social themes within are explicitly of the Enlightenment. Specifically, Neoclassical dramatists often underscore the importance of legal justice, respect for the monarchy, and social stability in their historical tragedies. These themes are emphasized in two seminal tragedies of the 1770s—José Cadalso’s Don Sancho García (1771) and Nicolás Fernández de Moratín’s Guzmán el Bueno (1777). In both works, the tragedians use Castilian heroes and the drama of the Reconquest to explore Enlightenment values in a specifically Spanish context.

Along with the emphasis of Enlightenment themes, each dramatist develops a unique precursor to the later Romantic style of those tragedies written and produced in the early nineteenth century: namely, the use of the tragic heroine as a font of desire and fractured subjectivity. In both works, the female characters are unable to achieve what their male counterparts accomplish—that is, their desire prohibits them from adhering to their civic duties. More specifically, the women are unable and unwilling to deny their internal selves—they choose destructive desire over an enlightened restoration of order. In this way, the tragic heroines in Don Sancho García and Guzmán el Bueno act as templates for the Romantic male subject of the early nineteenth century.

The theme of uncontrollable desire and its threat to political stability is one that appears frequently in tragedies. However, the tragic hero’s (or heroine’s) ability to deal with illicit or destructive desire may differ according to the formulas of the period in question. In other words, the typical Neoclassical tragic hero resolves his illicit desire in a much different way than his Romantic counterpart. For example, the Castilian king Alfonso VIII in Raquel (first staged in 1778) overcomes his internal passions in a much different manner than the quintessentially Romantic noble Don.

1 It is important to note that Don Sancho García originally debuted under one of Cadalso’s pseudonyms, Juan del Valle (Casamayor Vizcaíno 582).
Álvaro in *Don Álvaro o la fuerza del sino* (1835). In both tragedies, the hero must contend with illicit desire (in the case of Alfonso, it is his lust and blinding passion for the Jewess temptress Raquel; in the case of Álvaro, it is his lust for the chaste Leonor). In addition, both heroes must choose between giving in to their passions and upholding their social duties (for Alfonso, he risks losing control of his kingdom, for Álvaro, it is the loss of his status as virtuous soldier). The hero’s ultimate choice becomes the important point of departure between the “Neoclassical” ending and the “Romantic” ending. In the case of *Raquel*, the king’s subjects are able to break the spell of desire and restore Castilian order; for Álvaro, the only resolution is suicide—specifically, throwing himself off the stormy cliffs. It is clear that while both tragic heroes face similar obstacles, the Neoclassical tragedian ensures that the order of the monarchy is restored. Conversely, the Romantic tragedian revels in the individual’s angst and the ultimate collapse of his social world. Using *Raquel* and *Don Álvaro* as exemplars of the typical Neoclassical and Romantic tragedy, respectively, it is possible to flesh out further the different techniques used to explore the tragic hero’s subjectivity and his relationship to the social world.

Unlike the exceedingly tragic and melodramatic endings of future Romantic tragedians, the Neoclassical tragedians tended to resolve the tragic crisis through a restoration of order—that is, enlightened justice triumphs over treachery or any internal weakness in the tragic hero. Often, historical heroes act as models of enlightened virtues—particularly their adherence to reason and order (Albiac, “Razón” 221). María Dolores Albiac characterizes this enlightened justice as an innate quality of the monarch—that is, the enlightened ruler, by virtue of his nobility, holds the essence of “un ser bueno” (“Cetros” 344). Even when the tragic hero seems helplessly carried away by power lust or uncontrollable desire, he ultimately comes to the realization that he must resume his position as an enlightened monarch. As Jesús Pérez Magallón explains, the tragic hero will eventually sacrifice his private desire for the good of the public (86). In other words, virtue and duty triumph over “natural inclinations” (Sánchez-Blanco 408).

Until the hero comes to this point of resolution, his vassals (at least, the virtuous ones) will obey him even in the face of tyranny. Along with the

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2 Some critics describe the objects of desire (that is, Raquel and Leonor) as parallel subjects to the male tragic heroes. Kirkpatrick and Bueno Pérez repeatedly describe Leonor’s importance to the tragedy not just as an object of desire, but also as a feminine reflection (albeit a less developed version) of Don Álvaro’s miserable internal self. In the case of *Raquel*, Donald Shaw even goes so far as to suggest that Raquel could constitute the actual tragic hero due to the complexity of her character and her effect on the moral conundrums within the tragedy (“García” 250, 254).
ultimate assertion that the legitimate ruler will maintain order, the Neoclassical tragedians also emphasize one particular virtue as the key to enlightenment—loyalty of the subjects to the monarchy. Even if the monarch eschews enlightened logic and virtue, it is still the responsibility of his subjects to obey him. As Albiac explains, “Era preciso que el monarca fuese ejemplar, pero aun en el caso de que no lo fuera, el deber inexcusable del vasallo era callar y obedecer” (“Cetros” 349). This tendency is what she describes as an oxymoronic despotic enlightenment—that is, that the despot’s power is protected as law despite any injustices or misjudgments he may commit (341). In this sense, the monarch either changes his tyrannical course by the play’s end, or in some cases, the enlightened ruler retains his honor and nobility even in the face of extreme suffering or temptation. In either case, the Neoclassical tragedians assert that justice and the restored order of a stable monarchy are requisite endings.

As the seminal Neoclassical tragedy in Spain, García de Huerta’s *Raquel* exemplifies this conflict between desire and political duty. The central tragic conflict is Alonso’s all-consuming desire for Raquel, his Jewish captive and lover. The king’s inability to follow the honorable path against his enemies lies within his own personal desire. Alfonso is so obsessed with Raquel that she is able to blind him completely from his duties, and even more importantly, his identity as a true Castilian leader. In addition, Alfonso’s feverish desire victimizes the wellbeing of his subjects—from his vassals to the plebeian (Andioc Teatro 263). However, this tragic tension is only in play as long as Alfonso’s passion blinds him to his civic duty—for most of the tragedy, Alfonso exists in a “sleep” free from reason (Shaw, “García” 252). Despite Raquel’s power over the king, his subjects eventually break the spell by murdering Raquel and her counselor Rubén. The result is that the king comes to his senses and resumes his place as trusted monarch; concurrently, those nobles who obeyed him during his period of desire are rewarded with their lives and restored power. In the words of Shaw, “rational awareness” wins the day (255). This ultimate triumph of the state over desire gives Raquel its “enlightened” conclusion.

Conversely, the Romantic tragedies of the early nineteenth century revolve around the tragic hero’s fractured subjectivity, his failure to reestablish order, and the rejection of “rational awareness.” As Susan

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3 René Andioc characterizes *Raquel* as the quintessential Neoclassical tragedy both in his book *Teatro y sociedad en la Madrid del siglo XVIII* as well as his article “La Raquel de Huerta y la censura.” In the latter, Andioc details how García de la Huerta’s choices (and those imposed upon him by censure) led to a distinctly Neoclassical take on the themes and characters of the final drama. For his part, Aguilar Piñal describes how through a multitude of successful performances, *Raquel* achieves a nationalized significance which becomes the foundation of Neoclassical theater (134-5).
Kirkpatrick, Michael Iarocci, and Carlos Seco Serrano describe at length in their analysis of Romantic subject, the typical Romantic hero is unable to resolve the tension between his social persona and his internal desire. All three critics cite Mariano José de Larra’s life, literature and suicide as the exemplar of Romantic angst because he (and his protagonists / alter egos) cannot bear the harshness of external reality. Rather, the Romantic subject is consumed by an internal, emotional sense of self (Kirkpatrick 9). This dependence on the individual and his internal angst is ultimately that which differentiates Neoclassical sentiment and emotion from Romantic expression. Specifically, the key trait of Romanticism is the emotional, private exploration of the individual’s subjectivity (Butler 30).

This model is also a template for the psychological development of the Romantic subject in early nineteenth-century theater. As Kirkpatrick explains, the typical Romantic tragic hero suffers a constant tension between his internal subjectivity and the social order of the outside world (17). The Romantic subject remains fractured because he is unable to resolve this tension. Unlike Alfonso in Raquel, the desire of the Romantic subject trumps all sense of social duty or external order. As a result, the Romantic protagonist gives himself over to his destructive desire, a surrender that leads inevitably to suicide, death, or dishonor. In this sense, the hero’s primary impediment is his inability to adhere to civic duty or social responsibility.

This pattern is modeled perfectly in Don Álvaro, as the title character never conquers the agony of fractured subjectivity. Throughout the tragedy, the infamous Romantic hero wrestles with his internal desire for Leonor and the social responsibilities that forbid his affiliation with her. As Kirkpatrick explains, Don Álvaro is “dogged by a fate that prevents the coordination of his desires and memories [...] into a coherent whole, a self

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4 The concept of the individual struggling to perceive the outside world originates partially from Lacan’s description of the formation of the Subject in his work “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience.” The idea of imago, or looking at one’s image in the mirror, is the point at which the self distinguishes himself from the outside world, or in Lacan’s words “the organism and its reality —or, as they say, between the Innenwelt and Umwelt” (192). Kirkpatrick, then, applies this basic concept of the formation of the Subject to the adult struggle between internal self and his or her reality within the context of Romantic literature. Kirkpatrick cites Hegel’s notion of the Self as the basis for psychological conflict in the Romantic protagonist. Specifically, the Romantic Self externalizes desire and projects his internal passion onto the objects of the outside world. This externalization incites a sense of individual identity that centers on the individual’s desire (Kirkpatrick 14).

5 The downfall of the tragic hero through fractured subjectivity is a pattern that appears in several Romantic tragedies of the 1830s, including El trovador and Macías.
that might determine its existence in the world” (115). This lack of coordination between his internal self and the outside world torments the famed Romantic hero until his only option is suicide. It is the inability to adhere to social norms (and the intensely private expression of his internal angst and desire) that characterizes the Romantic subject’s angst.

The period between Raquel and Don Álvaro is one of mixed influences in the Spanish tragedy—that is, Neoclassical and Romantic themes and techniques overlap. It is for this reason that Russell Sebold, John Cook, and Donald Shaw describe several dramatists and poets of this period as either “pre-Romantic” or “transitional” figures. In fact, Sebold sees Cadalso as the epitome of the pre-Romantic author in his study El primer romántico “europeo” de España. Specifically, Sebold describes Cadalso’s exploration of the sensual connection between the poetic subject and nature as a clear precursor to Romantic style. In the case of Don Sancho García and Guzmán el Bueno, many of the themes explored are those which Albiac and Pérez Magallón describe as explicitly enlightened. Moreover, both tragedies were written and performed well before transitional dramas such as La conjuración de Venecia (performed in 1834). However, Cadalso’s and Moratín’s exploration of the internal, female self is often closer to the portrait of Don Álvaro’s angst than that of Alfonso. It is this remarkable display of the pre-Romantic tragic heroine that sets these dramas apart from others of the 1770s and 80s.

In both Sancho and Guzmán, the instrument of destructive desire and dissension is the anguished queen. The use of Castilian noble women (as opposed to a Moorish or Jewish temptress) provides a new complexity to these tragedies. On the one hand, the tragedians’ characterization of the queens as weak and unable to comply with civic order places them nicely within the constructs of Neoclassical tragedy—that is, the female characters are either manipulative seductresses or inferior versions of the enlightened male hero (Pérez Magallón 229-30). In this sense, the queens’ internal conflicts and emotional weakness make them effective foils to male monarchs’ strength and virtue. However, this “female” emotional anguish is born of understandable desires and instincts, and their struggle with their internal emotions garners empathy from the audience. As carriers of the royal line and mothers to the heir, the tragic heroines in Sancho and Guzmán

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6 In his analysis of the trajectory of Spanish Romanticism, Shaw describes Alberto Lista and José Joaquín de Mora as transitional authors who bridged the gap between Neoclassicism and Romanticism (3). In the realm of theater, Shaw cites Martínez de la Rosa and Ángel de Saavedra’s dramas as examples “early Romanticism,” although he is quick to distinguish Saavedra’s early exiled works in the 1820s from the overly Romantic techniques inherent in Don Álvaro (10-11). John Cook also cites Martínez de la Rosa’s dramas as early forays into Romanticism.
are ultimately sympathetic subjects. Both Cadalso and Moratín take advantage of this conflict in order to increase the dramatic tension in their tragedies. As Sánchez-Blanco explains in his analysis of Guzmán el Bueno (in its many iterations), the female characters are “portadoras de la vivencia trágica” (412). In this sense, the female characters become something more than seductresses or villains — their struggles characterize the central conflicts of the play.

Despite the title of Cadalso’s tragedy, the tragic action in Don Sancho García revolves around Sancho’s mother, Ava, and the Moorish king Almanzor. Both protagonists are driven by their respective desires: Almanzor desires territory and power, while Ava struggles with her uncontrollable passion for the villainous Almanzor. In order to place himself on the throne, Almanzor uses María’s desire for him as a blackmailing tool — either she kills her son (the rightful Castilian heir Sancho), or she will lose his love. The majority of the play consists of the discussion of María’s moral dilemma, as well as that of the servants Alek and Elvira, who become unwitting accomplices in the plot to kill Sancho. After a series of agonizing monologues, Ava decides to kill Sancho in order to protect her relationship with Almanzor. Upon attempting to poison him, however, María accidentally drinks her own poison, and Sancho escapes alive. The Castilian soldiers execute Almanzor, and Sancho pardons his mother as she lies dying from the poison. Thus, the rightful and just monarch is restored to his position, and both the royal line and the kingdom are protected.

In some ways, Cadalso’s treatment of noble order and justice continues the Neoclassical pattern of reconciliation and reconstruction. The vassals (in this case, Gonzalo) protect the interests of the state and attempt to thwart the infiltration of the Other. The monarch, blinded by desire, is destroyed before she can do damage to the Castilian line. Ultimately, Cadalso ensures that Sancho is on the throne and that justice prevails. In his characterization of the male characters, there is little ambiguity. Almanzor’s monologues mark him as a villain with no conscious — Almanzor is positioned as the absolute antithesis of “el buen rey” (Albiac, “Razón” 237). Jesús Pérez Magallón even goes so far as to characterize Almanzor as the epitome of tyranny and cowardliness (134). Conversely, the young prince Sancho is portrayed as the only legitimate heir. No one, in fact, challenges the prince’s virtue and his legal right to be on the throne. In addition, Cadalso’s characterization of the servants emphasizes the twin necessary virtues of enlightened rule: loyalty to your master at all times, and the protection of legal justice. In this sense, the virtuous male Castilians act as theatrical versions of the “hombre del bien,” that is, the model of Enlightened morality and behavior (Sebold Cadalso 203). Both Gothic servants, Gonzalo and Elvira, remind the spectator of the moral and legal obligations of their masters, as well as their duty to protect Sancho (Albiac 350). Gonzalo, in particular, acts as the moral compass for Sancho and for
the play as a whole. Along with advising the young prince, Gonzalo also offers himself as an alternate victim of Almanzor and Ava:

¡Mi Soberano! (jay Dios!) Mi brazo armado
lo apartará del fiero precipicio:
será mi vida justo sacrificio
que le libere; yo, yo mismo quiero
ser víctima del moro fiero. (Acto IV, Escena I)

This black and white characterization of the male characters underscores the overall message of the tragedy—the Castilian line must triumph over the Other.

In order to give the evil plot more texture, Cadalso creates a complex character in the person of the servant Alek, Almanzor’s anguished minister. When the Moor reveals his plot to kill Sancho, Alek immediately points out the moral and legal violations inherent in his plan, calling the manipulation of Ava’s desire “crimen más tirano / que si tú lo mataras con tu mano” (Act II, Escena I). A few verses later, Alek again calls his master a tyrant: “Pero supón que el cielo tolerase / delito tan atroz, y te dejase / en el trono usurpado castellano / ¿te gustara ser rey, siendo tirano?” (Acto II, Escena I). Despite his sense of justice, Alek eventually recognizes his duty to obey and serve his king at all costs. Alek displays his internal conflict in a long monologue, but eventually yields to his sense of duty and loyalty:

Con rostro humilde adoraré su ceño;
y si de Rey pasando a ser tirano,
me mata, besaré su regia mano.
Estas del buen vasallo son las leyes,
por más faltas que se hallen en los Reyes. (Acto III, Escena II)

In his use of logic and the legal sense of legitimacy, Alek acts as the Enlightened voice amidst Moorish tyranny. In this way, Alek is a parallel character to Gonzalo. Both characters display the virtue and stoicism of the perfect subject, but Alek’s complexity as a key character in the tragedy allows for a broader view of the Other. Specifically, the minister struggles with his subjectivity in much the same way that Ava does throughout the

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7 In his overall description of Neoclassical tragedies, Pérez Magallón indicates that the characterization of Alek in Don Sancho García marks an important transition in the portrayal of Moors in Neoclassical theater. Although the Christians and Moors cannot exist together peaceably in the historical setting of the Reconquest, Cadalso implies that Moorish characters may act as parallel tragic heroes with dignity and virtue (125, 136-7). María DoloresAlbiac is even stronger in her assertion that Cadalso’s depiction of Alek demonstrates a rejection of prejudice towards Arabs in eighteenth-century Spain (“Cetro” 351).
tragedy. Like Ava, Alek suffers from an internal conflict; in this case, it is a question of loyalty to his king versus his disgust for Almanzor's murder plot. Unlike Ava, however, Alek's conflict is quickly resolved in that he immediately chooses loyalty to his king and Córdoba over his internal misgivings. Even more significant is that Alek's emotional turmoil is rooted in a respect for justice and noble legitimacy, virtues he eventually sacrifices in order to perform as the "buen vasallo." In Sebold's words, Alek masters the perfect balance between "patriotismo y alejamiento" (Cadalso 208). Whereas Ava succumbs to the longings of her internal psyche, Alek triumphs over his emotions to fulfill his duties as minister.

The play's conclusion also purports a highly enlightened message; namely, Castilian virtue will triumph over Moorish deceit. Not only is Sancho the rightful heir; he is also portrayed as a potential martyr and Christian prophet. Cadalso even uses Christ-like imagery in his description of Sancho, particularly when the threat of his execution draws nearer. In Act IV, Elvira begs God to protect Sancho from cruel fate, proclaiming "Cuando miro a Don Sancho, y considero / llegar al sacrificio este cordero...pregunto: ¿por qué el mortal sujeto / es del ciego destino triste objeto?" (Escena IV). As a lamb sent off to slaughter, Cadalso paints Sancho as a saint or deity encompassed in the body of the Castilian prince. Once Ava's attempt to poison Sancho fails, the characterization of the prince becomes a description of his virtue and by extension, his ability to rule as a just monarch. The final exclamation of Sancho’s virtue is evident in his ultimate pardon of his mother:

Tu hijo soy, tu hijo te venera.
Cuando te miro, solamente veo
tu carácter, y no tu crimen feo;
y si a vengarme fuera inexorable,
sin remediar tu error, fuera culpable.
Tu culpa y mi venganza será justo
que pague el moro aleve. (Acto V, Escena IV)

With this decision to pardon his mother, Sancho proves his abilities as a good ruler and as a Castilian prince. Since his mother is of the Gothic line, as Don Gonzalo points out, the proper spilling of blood is to come from the treacherous Other, who will in turn cleanse the honor of the Gothic line with his blood. The fact that Ava ultimately dies as a pardoned soul suggests that justice has been done in both a religious and legal sense. When Sancho's men kill Almanzor, the Castilian rule is no longer threatened, and the proper order is restored.

Even with this Enlightened conclusion, Don Sancho García contains some themes and techniques that are precursors to Romanticism. In fact, Cadalso's attention to the private emotion of the poetic voice is similar to the expression of Ava's anguish in numerous monologues throughout the
play. The careful development of Ava’s character suggests that there is more complexity hidden beneath the surface. While most of the male characters are drawn with broad strokes, Ava’s internal crisis allows for a more complex expression of internal angst. Through the use of monologues, Cadalso keeps focus on Ava’s state of being and her fateful decision, thereby ensuring that the dramatic tension depends upon her actions as tragic heroine. Even before Almanzor asks her to kill Sancho, Ava recognizes the conflict that her illicit desire presents, telling him:

Lo sabes; mis vasallos se opusieron
luego que mi cariño conocieron
en tu persona puesto. Ellos osados,
y contra tu nación preocupados,
de nuestro amor hablaban con injurias;
corté sus vuelos y calmé sus furias.
Yo sola, sin auxilio, ni consejos,
rompí la nube que tronaba lejos.
Calló Castilla ya. Ya no se opone
al yugo extraño que mi amor te pone:
¿qué habrá que yo no alcance y te conceda? (Acto I, Escena I)

In this early monologue, Ava recognizes the power of Castilla as a nation, the force of the political sphere that compels her to perform her duties as queen. In the first moments of the play, Ava believes that her internal desires and the duties of her public persona can coexist peaceably. This potential balance is immediately destroyed, however, when Almanzor gives her the letter which details his murderous plot. In this moment, Ava characterizes the letter as the transmitter of evil, a “funesto papel” which brings back the “densa nube” that had only moments ago dissipated. As soon as she holds the “infected” letter, she proclaims dramatically: “bebamos de una vez todo el veneno” (Acto I, Escena I). In this sense, the letter becomes a physical manifestation of Ava’s internal crisis. From the very first scene of the play, Ava has become injected with poisonous desire that will destabilize her role in the social order.

The poetic description of her anguish and the flame of desire in the early scenes of the play could easily be mistaken for the famous Romantic

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8 Despite Sebold’s repeated assertion that Cadalso effectively explores Romantic technique in his poetry (and in some cases, prose), he does not extend similar praise to Cadalso’s dramatic efforts. In fact, Sebold describes Don Sancho García as an overall failure due to the following factors: the lack of profit, the poor use of Aristotelian laws and structure, and the flat and unsympathetic portrayal of Ava—specifically, her lack of maternal warmth (Cadalso 57-9). Although Sancho was a failure financially, I disagree with the contention that Ava’s characterization lacks depth.
tragedies of the 1830s. In many ways, Ava’s monologues comply with the definition of the Romantic subject as the “ser sensible en diálogo con un universo material” (Sebold, Trayectoria 106). In monologue after monologue, Cadalso further develops the schism between what is virtuous (the mother protecting the son) with what is lustful and selfish (indulging in her desire for Almanzor). Albiac characterizes this tension as the conflict of “dos deberes” —that is, maternal duty versus duty to the state (“Razón” 224-5). In her discussions with Elvira, Ava describes her fear of retribution and her guilt. Not only does she recognize the horror of her actions as a mother, but also her violation of the Castilian lineage and honor. In a chilling monologue early in the play, Ava argues that it is better to execute herself rather than destroy the honor of the Castilian line and its virtuous heir:

...De su amor (el de Almanzor), ¿qué logrará sino sustos?
junto al tálamo mismo y vería
la deplorable imagen de García
y su inocente pecho, atravesado
por mi bárbaro brazo ensangrentado,
fuera vista más triste y horrorosa
que del infierno la morada umbrosa,
la imagen de su padre, que glorioso
de esta infame mujer fue noble esposo,
me parece que veo, y que me dice:
¿de un esposo tan fiel, viuda infelices,
no basta profanar mi augusto lecho
con un dueño Africano? ¿Satisfecho
no estaba tu delirio? ¿Aún no basta?
¿A España privas de mi egregia casta
de nobles sucesores destinados
a ser por todo el orbe respetados?
De amor, Elvira, abrázame la llama
antes que yo consienta que la fama
publique tanto horror… (Acto I, Escena III)

This portion of the monologue is significant in that it gives voice to Ava’s recognition of external reality. Specifically, Ava is able to list the consequences of murder from the perspective of the state —along with murdering an innocent victim, she will have destroyed noble Castilian honor and contaminated the blood line by sleeping with the African enemy. With the imagery of this monologue, Cadalso plays with Romantic themes

9 According to María Angulo Egea, the use of a melodramatic monologue to display feminine virtue and chastity is a common technique in Neoclassical theater throughout the eighteenth century. Specifically, the monologue becomes a tool for displaying an idealized notion of female virtue (482). Cadalso’s use of monologues is unique, however, in that they portray both the light and dark side of Ava’s psychological state.
even as his message remains largely Neoclassical. The characterization of desire as “delirio” hints at the overwhelming power of the individual's private angst. Albiac characterizes Ava’s passion as “la sensualidad pervertida” —perverted in the sense that even her conscious and maternal duty cannot persuade her to renounce Almanzor (“Razón” 242). Even though Ava condemns herself for her uncontrollable desire, it is obvious that she will not be able to overcome it. By stating the state’s case, Ava has opened up herself to the agony of fractured subjectivity.

As Almanzor continues to manipulate Ava, the flame of illicit desire consumes the queen. Throughout the tragedy, she expresses her angst as a tug-of-war between desire and motherhood. Even though she tries to reject Almanzor to protect her son and the state, she inevitably succumbs to the “…dulzura de su nombre…en tierno halago se convierte mi ira.” (Acto I, Escena VI). At the end of Act I, she describes perfectly the nature of her fractured subjectivity: “dudo entre el hijo y el amante mío; / cualquiera de los dos que yo despidan, / una mitad fallece de mi vida” (Escena VI). The missing half of her person speaks to the Romantic idea of a divided self: Sancho speaks to both her motherly instincts and her awareness of her duty to prepare him as future king; conversely, Almanzor incites her womanly desire and private yearnings. Near the end of Act II, Ava reiterates her dilemma by first arguing “mi hijo me priva de un amante,” then giving in to her maternal tenderness: “¿qué interior impulse me arrebata? / sí, ya siento de madre la ternura; ya me habla al pecho la naturaleza” (Escena IV). Nonetheless, her internal passion as a woman trumps her motherly compassion as she proclaims: “y no marche Almanzor; muera García” (Escena IV). Like Don Álvaro, Ava will wallow in her fractured subjectivity as she moves ever closer to her personal destruction.

Only at the moment of her death does Ava fully recognize the consequences of her ruptured subjectivity. In a last-ditch effort to comply with her duty and restore the line, she offers herself up as a cleansing sacrifice: “Ayuda, ¡o cielo! la guerra saña / de Sancho y sus gloriosos descendientes / contra África felices y valientes….Yo quisiera lavar mi culpa infame / con sangre de mis venas…” (Acto V, Escena IV). In this moment of civic clarity, Ava is able to earn back respect and forgiveness for her uncontrollable desire. René Andioc describes this moment of defiance as Ava’s transformation into a “protagonista positiva” who buttresses the Reconquest with her dying breath (Teatro 392).

Nonetheless, her dying declarations cannot save her from the consequences of illicit desire. Upon realizing that she will die of poison, Ava suffers the knowledge of her own condemnation: “Un negro horror, rencor y cruda muerte / me quitan el hablarte, y aun el verte” (Acto V, Escena IV). By condemning Ava in her last moments, Cadalso seems to suggest that she will be subject to a higher justice despite her son’s Christ-like pardon. It is this tragic fate that allows Cadalso to explore the internal self in a way that foreshadows the tragic heroes of the Romantic period.
As queen, Ava’s primary political role is to protect the Castilian line, yet she eventually relinquishes that duty in order to assuage her desire. In this sense, Ava’s subjectivity is parallel to that of Don Álvaro and other tragic heroes of Romantic drama. In the case of Don Álvaro, the tragic hero spurns the honor of his social position (the political realm), and indulges in his illicit desire for Leonor. In both cases, the characters agonize over their social duties, but eventually let desire win. The key difference between Don Álvaro and Sancho, however, is the conclusion—in Sancho, the family remains intact, thereby maintaining the proper balance of power and stabilizing the Castilian line.

Like Don Sancho García, Guzmán el Bueno’s primary conflict revolves around the possible murder / sacrifice of a Castilian prince. Unlike Cadalso’s tragedy, however, Moratín keeps the tragic action fixed upon the title character. In the midst of the late Reconquest, the Castilian king declares that he will sacrifice anything to gain back territory from the Moors and maintain the honor of his lineage. His word is put to the test when his son, Pedro, is captured in battle. Upon discovering that they have the prince as collateral, the Moorish generals threaten to execute Pedro unless Guzmán surrenders Tarifa. Concurrently, Guzmán kidnaps Aben Emir’s daughter Fatima for his own leverage. While both Guzmán and Pedro argue for the necessity of sacrifice, the two principle female characters—María, the queen, and Blanca, Pedro’s wife—state the emotional case for saving Pedro and giving up Tarifa to the Aben Emir. The heart of the tragedy, then, becomes the moral and emotional debate over whether Guzmán should save the city or his own son. The stakes are raised when Blanca, distraught, offers herself up as a substitution for her husband. Nonetheless, the Emir is not persuaded and threatens to execute both Pedro and his wife. Ultimately, Guzmán decides to sacrifice his own son for the larger good, thereby retaining Tarifa and the honor of his bloodline.

As in the majority of Neoclassical tragedies, order is restored and the virtuous Castilian line triumphs. In the case of Guzmán, the enlightened path is that which the men embody—sacrifice and honor for the sake of the state. Although Guzmán agonizes briefly over his paternal love for his son, his sense of self is tied tightly to his public persona and role as Castilian monarch. At the end of Act I, Guzmán lets himself feel the horror of his sacrifice, saying “siento / en mi pecho el más bárbaro tormento” and “qué funeral horror en mi semblante llevo por ser leal!” (Escena XV). Although Guzmán does experience internal angst, he also frames his sacrifice as a given—that is, that the push to “ser leal” will automatically subsume his paternal instinct: “Pero es fuerza fingir. ¡Honores vanos, / que obligan a olvidar el ser humanos” (Escena XV). Even in this early stage of the tragedy, Moratín quickly establishes the good monarch as one who sacrifices everything internal for the good of the state.

As the play progresses, Guzmán’s emotions become more about the women’s pain rather than his own; concurrently, his own motives are...
centered entirely on military victory or his honor. During the climactic last moments before Pedro’s execution, María attempts to persuade Guzmán one last time. Upon hearing María’s maternal torment, Guzmán proclaims:

“¡Qué agonía! / ¿No me basta el pesar, Doña María, / que el corazón me oprime, que en tu llanto / me das más fiero y bárbaro quebranto?” and later “Siento tus males, los de Pedro y Blanca” (Acto III, Escena XIII). Rather than feel tormented himself, Guzmán only experiences pain through the emotions of the others. It is only his enlightened sense of order and duty that compels Guzmán to sacrifice his son. The climax of the last act becomes the following exchange:

María: ¿No te ablandan / de una llorosa madre los suspiros? / Padre…
Guzmán: Llámame alcaide.
María: ¡Ay, que es tu amado hijo don Pedro!
Guzmán: No es sino un soldado.
María: Un soldado hijo tuyo.
Guzmán: Los son todos. (Acto III, Escena XIII)

The fact that Guzmán rejects his position as father in order to embrace his civic duty further cements his portrayal as an enlightened monarch. As Pérez Magallón explains in his analysis of the play, the adherence to military necessity transcends all other emotions or tensions, and the male characters are praised for maintaining this position (Pérez Magallón 117). In this sense, Guzmán embraces his duties as enlightened alcalde, thereby securing his moniker as “El Bueno.”

Moratín offers a similarly staid characterization of Pedro as carrier of the line. For Pedro, any internal angst or passion for Blanca is immediately overwhelmed by his sense of duty and honor. In fact, the honor of the Castilian line is the subject of virtually all of his monologues. For both father and son, their internal emotions do not exist where honor and lineage are threatened. Pedro even describes himself as martyr and servant of the state. In this sense, the men’s extreme dedication to civic duty is so complete that they exemplifies a sort of stoicism divorced of the emotions of the common man (Sánchez-Blanco 408-9). Upon seeing his son after his capture, Guzmán tries to steal Pedro’s resolve against fear, dishonor, and the emotional pleadings of his wife and mother:

Guzmán: Extremos de flaqueza femeniles
   capaces de infundir la cobardía
   en el pecho más fuerte. Yo quería,
   don Pedro, examinar adónde llega
   tu valor, si los llantos de tu madre
   te enternecieron y, si Blanca ruega,
   si débil cederás, que a tal instancia
easi recelo yo de tu constancia… (Acto II, Escena IV)
Pedro is quick to assert that unlike his mother’s “extremos de flaqueza femeniles,” his passion is that of a virile hero — the foil to feminine weakness, proclaiming “Soy hijo de Guzmán y soy de España” (Escena IV). Later in the dialogue with his father, Pedro further asserts the strength of his masculine honor:

Pedro: El vano amor tiene hecho su manida
sólo en ociosas almas: no entre guerras
vive, ni entre el honor. Siempre que reine
pasión más fuerte y varonil y heroica,
el noble de ésta el ímpetu contiene. (Acto II, Escena IV)

Once again, Moratín sets up the characters as dualities — in this case, masculine versus feminine, and public persona versus private anguish. By maintaining their civic persona, both men serve the state properly and achieve the status of honorable martyrdom.

Although Moratín highlights the virtuous and sacrificial nature of the male characters, the tragic engine of the play depends upon the agony of the internal self and private emotion. In other words, the moments of greatest tragic tension are created by María and Blanca’s emotional torment. Whereas Guzmán and Pedro’s are obsessed with their public persona, the female characters are the opposite — their internal passion overwhelms all rational observance of duty and honor. While this emotional reaction is portrayed ultimately as weak and damaging to the state, Moratín also paints the female characters with a large dose of sympathy. Sánchez-Blanco even suggests that the Neoclassical audience would be tempted to take the women’s side over that of the stoic, male warriors (412).

María and Blanco are driven by their emotions and instincts as mother and lover — Moratín characterizes them as visceral and powerfully irrational. Even before it is announced that Pedro has been captured, María experiences a “sueño espantoso” in which African lions devour Pedro (Acto I, Escena II). Along with foreshadowing the torment of the decision to come, María’s early monologues establish the intensely internal nature of the female characters’ passion. Upon describing her premonition, María proclaims “…aun me parece / que el corazón latiendo me la anuncia. / Mi labio apenas trémulo pronuncia / el nombre de mi hijo, recelando / quizás algún grave mal” (Acto I, Escena II). In this way, Moratín immediately sets up the female characters as the emotional center of the tragedy and as subjects connected deeply to their bodies. This characterization projects the female characters as deliciously “of the flesh” both literally and psychologically. At the height of her desperation, María laments: “¡Ay, hijo mío, / que en un suplicio a verte morir llego entre fieros verdugos sin delito!, / ¿quién creyera que así te malograras y penas tan inmensas me causaras?” (Acto III, Escena XIII). Unlike the male concern for lineage and a sense of historical honor, María views Pedro’s death through the lens
of a visceral blood connection, or the history of a mother-son relationship. In this way, Moratín emphasizes the queen’s sense of corporal / internal connection as opposed to the more abstract, “masculine” ideals of honor and virtue.

Although not as visceral in her imagery, Blanca also languishes in her own passion and jealousy. When she attempts to convince Pedro to escape the Moorish prison, she interprets his refusal as a sign of his lust for Fátima, the Emir’s daughter: “Jamás me amaste, ¡o ingrato!; es imposible, / no lo creo, juraste falsamente” (Acto II, Escena VI). Later, she directly attacks Pedro’s honor and lineage: “es vanidad y altísima arrogancia, / de tu altivo linaje, que pretende / levantarse a los cielos con hazañas” (Escena VI). This moment of accusation is significant in that Blanca presents the emotional, “feminine” perspective of the internal self. Not only is she consumed by jealousy, she is also demeaning the Castilian male honor. In this sense, what is virtuous to the men becomes a sign of arrogance and a fleeting gain of territory for the women. This characterization of familial honor indicates that Blanca, like María, eschews public duty in order to indulge her private angst.

In order to express the tension between the sexes (and the anguish of the women), Moratin uses the motif of hot and cold imagery. Specifically, the warmth of the women’s visceral passion is juxtaposed with the cold stoicism of the men. Both María and Blanca experience and embody the heat of passion, and both become “frozen” when confronted with their husbands’ cold adherence to social order. When María first senses that her son might die, she exclaims “Toda soy hielo!” (Acto I, Escena VIII). Later, upon accusing her husband of infidelity and Castilian arrogance, Blanca exclaims “Ni eres Guzmán: las sirtes abrasadas / de Libia entre dragones te abortaron y con ponzoña y hiel te alimentaron” (Acto II, VI). While this venom functions well as an elaborate insult, it also puts forth the idea of Pedro’s body and mind as something apart from the warmth of the womb. Rather than be nurtured by the women’s warm breasts, the men are sustained by ice. In this way, Moratin’s imagery further illustrates the duality of internal, “female” passion with cold, “male” stoicism.

Eventually, María and Blanca must either die or renounce their feminine desire to save Pedro at all costs. Although both women threaten sacrificial suicide, they ultimately choose the latter route and accept defeat. This transformation is evidenced by María’s climactic surrender to her husband’s argument at the end of Act III:

¡Válgame Dios! ¡de qué profundo sueño
me despierta tu voz! Me animo en vano,
me aliento noble y madre desfallezco.
En pasión maternal nada es extraño,
señor, me la enseño la naturaleza.
Más yo no marchar intento la nobleza:
Soy Coronel, tu esposa, aunque soy madre.  
Conozco, ¡ay Dios!, que tan prudente padre,
lo miró todo y aunque calla, siente
la desgracia del hijo y la imprudente
sinrazón de la madre; mi disculpa
será el perdón que mi audacia pido.
Yo aumenté tu pesar. Con esta angustia
probarnos quiere el cielo, lo conozco:
humilde adoro la voluntad suya.
Venciste mi pasión, venciste, esposo…
si mi tormento y mi dolor conducen
to ensalzar la grandeza castellana,
muera mi hijo a manos más crueles. (Escena XIII)

In this moment, María has not only given up on her son’s life, but also the essence of her internal desire to protect her son. Pérez Magallón describes how Castilian patriotism triumphs over maternal instinct:

Por fin, la esposa vuelve al redil, acata la autoridad del marido, regresa al odio visceral en contra el moro y recupera su dignidad de rica hembra castellana. La vida del hijo no tiene ahora ningún valor frente al código social de una clase que debe garantizar por encima de todo su propia perduración. (236)

This adherence to the “código social” and the Castilian line ensures that the dictates of the social realm trump the torment of the internal self.

In this way, Moratín contrasts sharply the two perspectives that drive the tragic conflict. María characterizes her own maternal fervor as natural but also imprudent, audacious, and “sinrazón”—all the hallmarks of a passionate internal self. In contrast, the public persona is prudent and a virile competitor driven by honor and the “grandeza castellana.” As soon as María proclaims herself to be her husband’s coronel, she gives up her position as mother. By the play’s end, she has divorced herself from the passion of the internal self in order to mimic her husband’s public persona.¹⁰

In both *Don Sancho García* and *Guzmán el Bueno*, the female characters attempt to thwart the balance of power—Ava *almost* kills her son in order to assuage her desire for the Almanzor, and María *almost* refuses to sacrifice

¹⁰ The idea of the tragic heroine embodying “half a subject”—that is, the internal half—is a theme explored by Romantic tragedians in the early nineteenth century. Both Susan Kirkpatrick and María Lourdes Bueno Pérez flesh out the concept of halved subjects in their respective studies on Romantic subjectivity.
her own son, even when the future of Castilian power and honor are at stake. Both José Cadalso and Nicolás Fernández de Moratín juxtapose the strength and honor of the male line (the Gothic kings and princes) with the dangerous weakness of the royal women. While the men exemplify the notion that the state’s wellbeing must prevail at all costs, the women represent the primary impediment to that achievement. Ultimately, the tragedies’ “happy endings” rely upon the triumph of male Castilian virtue over womanly weakness.

In some ways, Cadalso and Moratín extol the male dedication to civic duty and condemn the female expression of internal passion and emotion. While this position is indicated multiple times in both plays, there is also a strong necessity for the expression of the internal self. The emotional torment of the female characters drives the plot forward and is the heart of dramatic tension in both works. Moreover, the psychological development of the tragic heroine creates a sense of empathy that speaks to the spectator’s own visceral emotions. Although the characters suffer from fractured or halved subjectivities, the spectator can identify with both the power of internal passion and the need to adhere to civic responsibility. Through the display of “feminine” passion, the dramatists speak to the human condition and give an emotional dimension to their tragedies. It is this exploration of the individual and her internal emotion that will become the hallmark of the Spanish Romantic tragedy in the nineteenth century.

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