

DRESSING A SALAD, CLOTHING WITH VIRTUE; OR, IS
ONE LANGUAGE MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN ANOTHER?

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It has long been recognized that Jesuit school dramas are linguistic hybrids. The earliest plays were primarily in Latin, even forming an important component of the school boys' instruction in that classical language. Originally conceived at least partially as exercises in grammar and rhetoric, as well as opportunities for moral instruction, these dramatic works evolved from declamatory practice and even the scholastic ritual of the formal *quaestio*¹. Jesús Menéndez Peláez describes the classical origins of university theater and, by extension, Jesuit school drama:

El teatro universitario se escribía en latín, al nacer como una imitación del teatro clásico, particularmente de Plauto y de Terencio. El teatro jesuítico nace también con esta misma preocupación. [...] Las propias normas que emanaban de los rectores de la Compañía aconsejaban y, en ocasiones, exigían la utilización del latín en la mayor parte de los ejercicios prácticos que complementaban las enseñanzas teóricas de la Retórica y [...] del aprendizaje en el ejercicio de la lengua latina. [...] Pero sucedía que representando las comedias en latín, y en un latín culto y erudito, la mayor parte de los espectadores se quedaban en ayunas. De

¹ Alonso Asenjo, 1995, vol. 1, p. 13, affirms: «[e]l teatro de colegio de los jesuitas en España empieza con espectáculos parateatrales (declamaciones, disputaciones, dialogi...)».

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ahí que esta orientación latina inicial evolucionará por imperativos y exigencias del propio público².

As the genre evolved, the spectacular dramatic elements of performance received more emphasis, with the wealthier colleges employing some dazzling special effects. The plays gradually came to be performed more in the vernacular, with varying proportions of Spanish and Latin to be found during a fairly extensive period of transition. At this liminal stage, sometimes the plays themselves contained their own translations of selected passages, as for example when a character might give a speech in Latin, immediately followed by an interpreter (often called, rather unimaginatively, *Interpres*) who would offer more or less the same speech—occasionally with a gloss added for rhetorical flourish—in Spanish for audience members who might be unversed in Latin. Eventually the proportions of these linguistic choices shifted, to the point that most lines were delivered only one time in the vernacular. Menéndez Peláez describes this gradual shift in theatrical practice:

hibridismo lingüístico es una de las características que tipifican al teatro jesuítico. El paso de unas obras escritas totalmente en latín [...] a obras castellanas fue paulatino; en un primer momento, se comenzó por utilizar un prólogo en romance que se anteponía a cada acto y que resumía el argumento de lo que iba a representarse; en otras ocasiones, había dos prólogos, uno en latín en boca del «*interpres primus*», y otro en castellano que lo recitaba un «*interpres secundus*». De esta manera, el espectador recibía esta información previa, la suficiente para que pudiera seguir el desarrollo de la acción dramática en lengua latina. En una segunda etapa, el castellano ya se utilizará en los diálogos³.

But until this second phase started, confusion reigned; or at very least, a healthy dose of chaos seems to have been the norm. For several decades during this period of linguistic and artistic transition, there seems to have been little rhyme nor reason as to which language was being spoken in these plays at a given time. Indeed, scholars comment frequently about the unpredictable mix of Spanish and

² Menéndez Peláez, 1995, p. 83.

³ Menéndez Peláez, 1995, p. 84.

Latin they tend to encounter when reading these plays, and speculate as to the root cause of this difficulty:

este teatro por su orientación catequética [...] nace ya abierto a un público urbano de todas las clases y grupos sociales y, por tanto, no necesariamente culto, que sobrepasa al estudiantil. Si este público no tenía por qué saber latín, tampoco el conocimiento de esta lengua por parte de todo el alumnado era uniforme, y en algunos niveles sólo elemental. [...] [S]e va abriendo paso el uso del romance en algunas partes: coros y entreactos, prólogos bilingües, presencia de intérpretes entre los personajes, sumas de actos y algunas escenas en romance⁴.

Indeed, the plays themselves refer to their language as a linguistic «salad»: «y porque según me han dicho hay en la tragedia latín, romance, copla, verso y cuanto mandardes [*sic*] he de hacer una ensalada de todo» (*Comedia Margarita*, p. 281). Another curious word used to refer to this heady linguistic brew is *entrevelada*, a term which rises naturally to the surface in this lengthy exchange:

THOMÉ	[E]stoy aguardando a que me manden llover, esto es, que averigüen si toda la fiesta de hoy ha de ser en latín o en romance, o <i>entrevelada</i> , y si aguardamos el voto de mis compañeros no haremos nada.
DON GÓMEZ	Acabe ya, y diga en romance.
DON DIEGO	No, sino en latín.
DON SEBASTIÁN	Acaba ya; tomemos el medio: vaya en latín y en romance ⁵ .

The debate continues for several more lines, but in the end they decide to leave the play as it is: a mixture of Spanish and Latin. Is there any rhyme or reason to this mix? Several scholars have speculated about a possible rationale. For example, Menéndez Peláez observes that the Jesuit school masters' desire to educate their students must have often conflicted with a desire to proselytize their audience:

Los dramaturgos del teatro jesuítico experimentan una cierta zozobra a la hora de escribir sus obras dramáticas. Como humanistas que son, quie-

⁴ Alonso Asenjo, 1995, vol. 1, p. 29.

⁵ García Soriano, pp. 33-34, footnote 1, emphasis mine.

ren conservar la lengua latina en su teatro, teniendo en cuenta que aquellas representaciones eran los ejercicios prácticos para los alumnos de la clase de Latín y de Retórica; pero, como pedagogos de la doctrina cristiana, se dan cuenta de que sus consejos y avisos morales no podían llegar con la fuerza necesaria a los padres, familiares y amigos de los estudiantes, así como a la gran masa popular que con frecuencia asistía a sus espectáculos teatrales. Esta circunstancia hizo que el romance fuese poco a poco invadiendo el texto del teatro jesuítico⁶.

While this important commentary speaks to audience reception of these works, it does little in terms of establishing a dramatic *raison d'être* for the predominance of one linguistic choice over another. The scholar who comes the closest to doing this is Jesús Menéndez Peláez, although even he must admit that the pattern he notices is often unreliable:

se observa una cierta diglosia en el sentido de que los personajes principales y más nobles utilizarán la lengua latina, mientras los secundarios y plebeyos lo harán en romance; en ocasiones, estos últimos podrán utilizar una lengua latina dentro de una tonalidad burlesca⁷.

While wealthier or more educated characters are as a rule more likely to speak Latin, that is far from being a universal standard to which all Jesuit school dramas adhere.

My own thesis, which I shall attempt to demonstrate in this paper, is that linguistic choice in these plays is tied to notions of virtue. The tie that binds these two concepts is the category of socioeconomic status. The possible implication of this thesis, if accurate, would be that constructions of virtue are not fixed and unchanging, but instead diachronic and linked very specifically to social and cultural norms. In order to test this theory, we shall look at two different school dramas by the same Jesuit playwright, Juan Bonifacio.

We might well ask at this point: why this particular playwright? For starters, he is one of the Jesuit school dramatists we know the most about; few others have been the subjects of full biographies to date⁸. He was well enough educated to produce texts in both lan-

⁶ Menéndez Peláez, 1995, p. 84.

⁷ Menéndez Peláez, 1995, p. 84.

⁸ Olmedo, 1939.

guages, having studied Latin and rhetoric at the University of Alcalá de Henares and law at the University of Salamanca. His dramas have been praised for their literary / *costumbrista* value and popular appeal: «presenta pocos personajes abstractos y alegóricos, prefiriendo tipos reales y concretos, como si de buen realista se tratase»⁹. He lived during an initial phase (1538-1606) of the relevant time period, when Latin still served as the *lingua franca*, at least among humanists. All of these factors make him an ideal test case for our hypothesis.

The two plays in question both appear in the Codex of Villagarcía, but one is heavily Latinate and the other heavily vernacular. These two representative works are the *Tragicomedia Nabalis* and *Triumphus Eucharistiae*. In the *Tragicomedia Nabalis*, Latin predominates: as Cayo González Gutiérrez notes in his edition, «[p]redomina [...] la prosa latina; quizá sea la obra de Bonifacio que más latín tiene»¹⁰. The key figure in this play, Nabal (the central character from the title) is a greedy rich man who refuses to repent. In what must have been a truly spectacular scene, he is shown agonizing in hell after death:

Nunc patior furias, ignem, tormenta, minaces
daemonicos vultus, rabiem saevamque figuram,
horrenda voces; succedunt frigora flammis.

[Ahora sufro las furias, el fuego, los tormentos, los
amenazadores
rostros demoníacos, la rabia y la cruel figura,
voces horrendas; se suceden los fríos a las llamas]¹¹.

The characters portrayed in this drama are from the highest echelons of society, including a king (King David), etc. Even the soldiers in David's army—while not necessarily nobles (in fact, they are so poor and destitute that at one point they are reduced to eating the soles of their shoes)—most of the time still speak Latin, as befits those attending his royal person.

The *Triumphus Eucharistiae*, though primarily written in Spanish, would seem to communicate a similar moral and theological mes-

⁹ González Gutiérrez, 1997, p. 121.

¹⁰ Bonifacio, 2001, p. 347, n. 255.

¹¹ Bonifacio, 2001, p. 397 (Spanish translation in note 350).

sage. Once again, the key figure is a rich, dying man who will not repent. A priest urges him toward a change of heart before it is too late. This spiritual advice only causes him to become further enraged, railing at his servants whom he accuses of hovering around his deathbed greedily. The servants speak Spanish, but so does the rich man, so the net effect is the appearance of having translated the entire scenario from a Latin to a vernacular context. The apparent result is the same message being communicated dramatically on two different levels in two different plays. Or at least, so it seems, until we notice an important difference between the two. If we examine certain textual asides carefully, the primarily Latin drama attributes virtue to the rich and erudite, while the second exalts the righteousness of humble peasants. The final product is an acute sense of class consciousness which should not entirely surprise us in a society obsessed with genealogy and *limpieza de sangre*. Let's see how this works.

First we shall examine passages from the *Tragicomedia Nabalis* to find links between virtue and the Latin tongue. We do not have to look far. In the first scene of the third act we find these lines spoken in Latin by King David himself:

Novercam humani generis esse naturam propter tam multa et varia fortunae tela multi falso putaverunt, nam etsi brutis animantibus arma dedit alia aliis ad injurias propulsandas, longe tamen melius hominem munivit, quem ratione praeditum esse voluit, ut quae fugienda, quaeve expetenda sint cognoscat, et satis esse in virtute positum praesidii ad bene beateque vivendum fateatur. Unde quantalibet procella ingruat, omnia humana infra se posita existimabit sapiens. Sed haec quis vulgo persuadeat? Quae facilius dicuntur quam fiant. Omnis ex plebeiorum animis elabatur assensio, simul ac pericula non procul esse noverint. Et quamquam haec quae dicimus persuasum sint difficilia, nulla tamen multitudo regitur molestius et credit tardius quam quae militibus constat. Quantaemolis est insanorum catervam in officio continere!

[Muchos han juzgado con falsedad que la naturaleza del género humano es una madrastra a causa de las muchas y variadas armas de la fortuna, pues aunque dio a los brutos animados armas distintas a cada uno para rechazar las injurias, mucho más protegió al hombre, el cual quiso que estuviese dotado de razón, para que conozca qué debe evitar y qué debe desear, y confiese que ha sido puesto con suficiente defensa para vivir

bien y felizmente. Por eso, por mucha tormenta que sobrevenga, el sabio juzgará que todo lo humano ha sido puesto debajo de sí. Pero, ¿quién puede persuadir al vulgo de estas cosas? Se dicen con más facilidad que se hacen. Resbala todo asentimiento de los ánimos de los plebeyos, en cuanto conocen que los peligros no están lejos. Y aunque todas estas cosas que decimos son difíciles de persuasión, consta que ninguna multitud, sin embargo, se rige más molestando y confía más tarde que los soldados. ¡Contener en el deber a una muchedumbre de locos es propio de un esfuerzo muy grande!] (Act III, Scene 1, pp. 372-373)¹².

We find further examples of this blatant elitism and cynical class consciousness in the lines, «Timor est qui rusticis hominibus misericordiam probitatemque suadet» («El temor es lo que aconseja a los hombres rústicos la misericordia y la honradez»; Act III, Scene 3, p. 378)¹³. Is there no room for rustic piety in this world view, where virtue would appear to be the exclusive province of the wealthy? This drama does at least leave that door open, if only by a crack, with Abiathur's comment to King David, «no dejará el villano de hacer virtud» (Act III, Scene 2, p. 377). In this context, it is fascinating to note that this line, suddenly, becomes a cue for King David to switch over to Spanish. In a knowing wink to the Latin-educated members of his audience, Bonifacio as playwright has found a way to let them know that they are the truly virtuous, but without completely excluding the peasants or *villanos* from any possible hope for redemption. One can only wonder whether he likewise took particular care in choosing only students from noble families to play the parts of certain «virtuous» characters on stage.

Could such obvious class consciousness, verging upon elitism, only be spoken on the stage in Latin so that the *vulgo* could not understand it? Were the Jesuits this explicitly allied with the wealthy? Were they guilty of propagating a rather snobbish view of virtue?

Well, in this instance, perhaps; but this was not always the case. In *Triumphus Eucharistiae*, by way of contrast, we find almost exactly the opposite «take» on social class. Here the repentant worldly sinner Cosmóparos decries the false virtue so often associated with the aristocracy:

¹² Spanish translation in note 308.

¹³ Spanish translation in note 330. Lines spoken by Comes.

Vi la gran gentilidad,
 el error y ceguedad
 de los nobles;
 vilos ser como unos robles,
 y en el apodo hay verdad.
 El fruto que este árbol da
 es de inmundos animales,
 y así son cosas bestiales
 tras las que el noble se va (Act II, Scene 2, p. 627).

In these lines spoken in Spanish, as we see, social class is still a factor, but it is mobilized differently in the service of other interests. Rich nobles are seen here as blind and full of error, and at one point the speaker seems to imply that they are as dumb as trees. The fruit produced by the tree of nobility is fit only for the vilest of animals, and a nobleman's pursuits are said to be nothing short of «bestial.»

So where is the virtue in this play, if not in the hands—and, more importantly for our purposes here, the mouths—of the nobles? Given the passages we have already examined from the pen of this same playwright, virtue appears here in perhaps the very last place we might expect to find it. In this play, virtue is almost literally personified by a character who arrives to the city from the country and is found, upon examination, to be without guile or deceit. This Leucosirus appears on stage uttering a paean to country life:

Ya, Señor, en las aldeas
 se hallan ricas libreas,
 a fuer de corte y palacio (Act IV, Scene 3, p. 645).

He praises not just country life in general, but his own village in particular:

Casi en todo mi lugar
 no veo hombre jurar,
 y es gran quillotro y descanso
 ver el pueblo todo manso
 y de nadie murmurar (Act IV, Scene 3, p. 645).

This «Holy Rustic» is clearly presented within the text as a foil or counterpoint to the worldly, cosmopolitan (though now repentant)

Cosmóparos. These passages are resonant with echoes and intertextual references to such classical *topoi* as the Horatian *Beatus ille* and its contemporaneous re-instantiations, for example Antonio de Guevara's *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea*¹⁴. Still suspicious of this admittedly utopic vision, other characters question him as to whether all his town's inhabitants could be so good:

ALOYSIUS ¿Buena gente es toda la de aquel pueblo?
LEUCOSIRUS Por su *virtud* (Act IV, Scene 3, pp. 645-646, emphasis mine).

Here the rustic deliberately appropriates the discourse of virtue and manipulates it in order to turn this loaded word to his own ends. The other characters continue to cross-examine him, attempting to pinpoint some area where his country virtue might fail:

PALINODUS ¿Qué devociones tenéis particulares, o qué modo en comulgar?
LEUCOSIRUS Soy un pobre pecador, no sé lo que me hago. Ellos acá en ciudá[d] saben mejor endeusallo [*sic*]. Toma, saben leer. Los sábados en la noche no ceno a honra del Santísimo Sacramento, que he de recibir; ni el domingo almorzamos, por más gorgoritos que haga el estómago; confésome; estoyme de rodillas un rato antes y otro después (Act IV, Scene 3, p. 646).

Such realism, down to the stomach gurgles, may have caused the audience to laugh. Still unconvinced, Metaneus cross-examines him further in what might even be an echo of Inquisitorial trial procedure:

METANEUS ¿Qué pensáis en ese rato?
LEUCOSIRUS Muchas veces no pienso nada, más de estarme holgando de ello y en verdá[d], en verdá[d], que muchas veces no me querría partir de con nuestro señor de puro gozo (Act IV, Scene 3, p. 646).

¹⁴ Guevara, *Menosprecio de corte y alabanza de aldea*.

In the face of this obvious description of the saintly experience of ecstasy, Palinodus can only conclude, «Ésa es muy fina contemplación» (Act IV, Scene 3, p. 646). As he pronounces himself satisfied, we can almost feel the audience nodding their assent as they witness what amounts to a public Jesuit stamp of approval upon this alternative, non-noble path to piety. Latin may be the language of choice for aristocrats to express virtue, but Spanish is the vehicle used to express pious sentiments by their social inferiors.

In conclusion, we have seen how virtue is tied linguistically to social class in these plays. The fact that these two particular plays are by the same author makes this situation all the more puzzling. We can assume that such a stark contrast probably reflects a rather drastic difference in the intended target audience for each drama. While we do not know much about the specific performance context for these two works, we do know that attendance by nobles at Jesuit school drama performances was common:

Entre el público asistente, según nos consta por los distintos testimonios, se encuentran invariablemente los personajes más importantes y célebres de la villa o ciudad; podríamos decir que toda la «gente bien» o de cierta representatividad está presente en estas obras de teatro. Por una parte, encontramos los personajes públicos en razón de su función o cargo. Siempre reciben invitación los que dirigen la vida pública de la ciudad (muchas veces con la intención de arrancarles alguna ayuda o subvención). Por otra parte todos los nobles y los ricos, aunque quizá por distintos motivos, asisten con asiduidad¹⁵.

But aside from engaging in speculative curiosity about whether this playwright might even have been compromised morally by powerful patrons, perhaps it is time to step back and ask a larger question, namely: what can these findings tell us about larger notions of virtue?

As uncomfortable as it may make us to acknowledge this, I believe one answer would have to be that virtue, historically, was imagined in very class-determined ways. It was not an essentialist,

¹⁵ González Gutiérrez, 1997, pp. 236-237.

unchanging construct, but instead was culture-specific. This argument fits into my larger intellectual project of tracing Foucauldian genealogies of vices and virtues. Both are nodes of cultural anxiety that can change over time. While we may not agree with appeals made to class, race or gender in connection with virtue or morality, we cannot ignore the fact that our early modern forebears made these claims. To whitewash this reality would be to rob the Jesuit school dramas of the very historical rootedness, the diachronicity, which make them unique. And these strange cultural documents, these linguistic hybrids, would lose something in that process. It may even be their connection to the surrounding culture wherein lies the secret to their approximation to the status of works of art.

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