THE TALKING WORD, THE SILENT VOICE:
VOICE AND GENDER IN THE THEATER OF
EARLY MODERN SPAIN

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Abstract

The Talking Word, The Silent Voice begins with the peculiar simultaneity of the introduction of the printing press to the Iberian Peninsula and the emergence of the Spanish comedia as a popular form in the seventeenth century; my project thus reads symptomatically the intervention of theater as a technological displacement of orality, understood as the previously dominant vector for literary circulation. Subsequent centuries witness a transition from pre-mechanical technologies of reproduction to the word printed inside of the increasingly popular book. In the new space of theater—understood as both the physical site required for the organization of a public performance and as the conceptual redoubt that must be annexed from reality in order for theater to exist—the human voice is no longer a spontaneous participant in the oral transmission of the literary, written or not, and becomes a highly prescribed element in a delimited space. In other words, the voice becomes scripted and rehearsed. And yet, the performative nature of the drama, and the repetition it entail, results in an excess that is not fully confined by the script. In this way, in the realm of drama, the human voice lives on simultaneously as that which is outside the written word (the voice as pure sound) and as that which is contained within it (the voice as meaning). I therefore pay close attention to the ways in which the return of the repressed or muffled voice makes possible new dramatic resources and brings innovation to the early modern
stage. Be it at the initial juncture of its development with its lesser-known forefathers such as Diego Sánchez de Badajoz or during its later manifestations in the Madrilenian corrales and court performances, which I engage through the works of Lope de Vega and Calderón de la Barca.
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Quien no duerme, escucha; que oirán una voz de mozo de mulas, que de tal manera que canta, encanta.

—Miguel de Cervantes

…the progression from the voice to meaning is the progression from a mere—albeit necessary—mediator to the true Word: there is only a small step from linguistics to theology.

—Mladen Dolar

*El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de La Mancha* has long been considered a book about books, a book about reading, a book constantly taunting its readers with its awareness of its own status as a text. The fact that it was supposedly found as a partial manuscript, Don Quijote's madness that stems from his addictive reading of and over identification with chivalric novels, Cardenio's "librillo de memoria," and the surprising twist in Part Two where Don Quijote comes face to face with the reality of his own fictionality are all
proof of how this early novel is struggling to define itself and to work out its own anxieties over the novelty implied by the new literary order it inaugurates.

And yet, for all its emphasis on textuality and its obsession with its own textual and material reality, *Don Quijote* is also a book about story telling and orality, a book mourning the loss of the voice it has helped silence. This is, of course, a self-evident observation: Don Quijote and the characters he encounters spend their time telling each other stories. Indeed, as Margit Frenk has observed, the verb *leer*, which permeates the novel, is not opposed to the idea of orality and storytelling but is in fact often used to describe the activity of reading out loud and in the company of others.¹ But beyond the use of the human voice as the material support for the dissemination of textuality, the novel seems painfully aware of another voice, one it has excluded in order to come into existence, that is, the voice not as a carrier of linguistic meaning, but the voice as pure sound, the voice as the material marker of a human being’s uniqueness.

In this early modern novel can thus be read the struggle between the order of inscription and writing and that of orality and storytelling, or what Elias L. Rivers describes as the tension between “the charms and limitations of oral culture,” represented by Sancho Panza, and “an abstract literary culture” propelled by Don Quijote’s out of control humanist tendencies (140). Or, as Joan Ramón Resina explains,

¹ The notable exception to this observation is, to be sure, Don Quijote himself. It is, for
“El contraste entre oralidad y escritura atraviesa la obra de Cervantes y define a sus personajes. Don Quijote es un ávido lector, y su locura procede de una insuficiente adaptación a las condiciones impuestas por una cultura progresivamente escrituraria” (288). Don Quijote, according to Resina, transgresses the autonomy of the text—an autonomy that comes into being when orality is transformed into inscription and becomes an increasingly decontextualized experience that exists further and further from the reader’s immediate surrounding reality—and in this way “se sitúa dentro de la oralidad con la actitud propia del lector” (288).

The material support behind the written or printed word is constantly made evident not only with the multiple metaliterary moments included in the novel, but, in fact, with the reader’s every turn of the page. Yet how do we begin to approach the material support necessary for the orality that traverses Don Quijote? Any attempt to apprehend the materiality of the oral/aural process in the novel leads us back to the printed word. Orality is only described, even if the description is a constant and fundamental part of Cervantes’ novel. Voice, the material support necessary for the storyteller and orality, appears to be the impossible-to-represent other that forever escapes our attempts at establishing its presence, its limits and its role within the borders of the literary. It is only when language fails, when the language of Don Quijote fails—and here language is both a specific language, that is Spanish or “cristiano” as I analyze below, as well as the textuality of the novel itself, language as a concept that
underpins all possibility of narration—that we come into contact, if not with the
material voice that supports orality, then with its effects on the literary object. It is to
this failure that I turn my attention, a failure expressed as silence but never as an
absence or a lack of meaning.

Zoraida’s Silence

One of the most well-known and often studied passages in *Don Quijote* is the tale
of Ruy Pérez de Viedma, a Spanish captain returning to his homeland after years of
captivity in North Africa. When he arrives at Juan Palomeque’s inn—or his castle, if we
choose to accept Don Quijote’s fantasy—he is accompanied by a beautiful and
mysterious woman, later identified as his moorish bride, Zoraida. Luis Andrés Murillo
divides the plot of “The Captive’s Tale” into three parts. In the first, Ruy Pérez
recollects before his fellow travelers at the inn his family ancestry in the city of León
and the events, after his father divide his lands among his sons, that lead him to a life of
arms. The second part of his story summarizes his trajectory as a soldier and his
eventual promotion to the rank of captain, as well as his captivity at the hands of the
Turks. The final section deals with his escape from captivity, orchestrated by Zoraida,
and their subsequent love story (115-116). I am interested not in the story told by Ruy
Pérez, but in the conditions that make the narration possible, that is, the moment of his
arrival at the inn and the fact of his escape from captivity. In both cases, at the center of both events, is his bride Zoraida.²

When the strange pair arrives at the inn, Don Quijote and the other guests (Sancho, Dorotea, Luscinda, Fernando, Cardenio, as well as the Priest and the Barber) have gathered for the night. Silence surrounds their arrival, putting an end to a conversation between Fernando and Don Quijote: “Muchas palabras de comedimiento y muchos ofrecimientos pasaron entre don Quijote y don Ferando; pero a todo puso silencio un pasajero que en aquella sazón entró en la venta, el cual en su traje mostraba ser cristiano recién venido de tierra de moros [...]” Zoraida is then described as entering the inn behind him, “encima de un jumento” and “a la morisca vestida” with her face and head covered by a veil and her body by a cape (461). This silence is broken when Ruy Pérez asks for a room and is told there are no vacant rooms at the inn. But this silence is immediately replaced by another when Dorotea offers to share the women’s sleeping space with Zoraida and apologizes for the substandard accommodations at the inn. Zoraida responds with silence, and instead of speaking “puestas entrambas manos cruzadas sobre el pecho, inclinada la cabeza, dobló el cuerpo en señal de que lo agradecía” (462). The gesture is clear but the meaning of her silence is not lost upon the group either. This silence is not an absence of meaning, and the guests at the inn are quick to interpret and fill its gap with signification: ”Por su silencio imaginaron que, sin
duda alguna, debía ser mora, y que no sabía hablar cristiano” (462). Although she has already been described as dressed in the manner of the moors, the true proof of her status as a non-Christian is her silence or the absence of Spanish or “cristiano,” as it is described in the previous quote.

But in fact her silence means much more. Zoraida cannot speak “cristiano,” that is, she has not yet acquired the linguistic ability to communicate in Spanish, but also refuses to speak the language of her Muslim past. She is thus rendered voiceless, her silence a sign simultaneously of what she considers the accident of her Muslim birth and her true identity as a Christian, albeit a new or transitional identity. Her silence is simultaneously the materialization of her refusal to speak the language of the non-Christian, an attempt to hide her linguistic present, and an embrace of Christianity and the uncovering of an absence of language. Zoraida’s silence is thus an ambiguous marker for both presence and absence, for both the Christianity she desires and the Muslim tradition she is trying to shed.³ Zoraida’s silence makes her foreignness evident

³ Although I argue that Zoraida’s silence makes her religious identity difficult to pinpoint, a long scholarly tradition has read this character through the lens of a Marian characterization. Her arrival at the inn on a donkey and the lack of rooms at the inn are read by authors such as Michael Gerli and Alban Forcione as doublings of the story of the Virgin Mary’s arrival in Bethlehem. A contrast between Zoraida’s Marian characterization and what is perceived by some critics as her disregard for Christian behavior and Spanish attire has been explored by the work of Francisco Márquez Villanueva and Helena Percas de Ponseti. More recently, Christina Lee has argued “that Zoraida is representative of the heroines of the well-known legends and apparitions and findings of miracle-working Marian statues residing in special sanctuaries” (109).
when she fails to answer questions put forth by the women at the inn but it is also the only statement of Christian faith available to her.

A few lines later, the dichotomy between language and/or voice and clothing or appearance is made evident when the women staying at the inn ask Ruy Pérez

“Decidme, señor—dijo Dorotea—: ¿esta señora es cristiana o mora? Porque el traje y el silencio nos hace pensar que es lo que no querríamos que fuese.

—Mora es en el traje y en el cuerpo [said the Captive]; pero en el alma es muy grande cristiana, porque tiene grandísimos deseos de serlo.” (462-463)

In this way, Ruy Pérez tells not only his own tale, but also the story of Zoraida. For the rest of “The Captive’s Tale,” except for an intriguing outburst that I will analyze below, he must speak for his bride. As we learn during “The Captive’s Tale,” although Zoraida and the Captive do not have a common language and have been forced to communicate through a series of translators, he is now her only means of representation.

A few important points can be taken from this story. To begin with, in this tale the voice is endowed with a certain degree of authenticity, an authenticity that goes beyond language and cultural heritage. Zoraida’s dress might be that of a “mora” but her soul is Christian, and her silence functions as proof of her true Christian soul. Yet

Unlike previous scholars, Lee takes into account “the fact that in everyday life and in religious practices in Early Modern Spain there were many different understandings and perceptions of the Virgin Mary and her role, often quite distinct and separate from each other” (107).
there is a telling dissymmetry in the dichotomy between appearance and essence, or between Zoraida's moorish appearance and her "muy grande alma cristiana." Whereas Ruy Pérez can dress his Christian soul in moorish dress, Zoraida's soul cannot be signified as Christian and appears only as silence. Zoraida, indeed, demands the Captive's language—his Christian system of signs—to be understood fully as Christian essence and not mere Muslim surface. Her visual appearance cannot do justice to her state of transition between two cultures and religions, but her voice, her silence, and her rejection of language explain it.

Zoraida inhabits a complex position in “The Captive’s Tale.” She is radically alien to the community formed by the intersection of religious and linguistic identity while paradoxically being a constitutive part of it. This religious and linguistic community—and the religious will be marked, in this context, as linguistic with the use of “cristiano” as the term that denotes Spanish and not, or at least not only, an organized theological practice—cannot not offer her inclusion, and her lack of language skills and religious identity forces outside the circle of storytellers gathered at the inn. But she is also not completely other and her desire for Catholicism and her rejection of Islam and her refusal to speak her native language places her at the limit of this religious and linguistic identity. In this way, Zoraida is the external limit that allows the group to think of itself as a group. She is the apparently non-threating other against which the community is able to define its limits and create a cohesive identity.
Religiously, and culturally, Zoraida is no longer Muslim and not yet a Christian; she has turned her back on her linguistic and religious identity as an Arabic speaker and as Muslim but cannot yet speak Spanish, or “cristiano.” However, beyond a religious and linguistic identity, Zoraida’s role within the very narrative structure of the novel also follows this inside-outside configuration. Zoraida is an essential participant, indeed an essential trigger in “The Captive’s Tale” while she is nevertheless barred from the function of narrator. She orchestrates the events that lead to the captive’s escape, in this way offering an ending or conclusion to his tale and allowing for the fulfillment of necessary narrative conventions, but also, and possibly more importantly, by freeing Ruy Pérez she creates the possibility of narration. Dead men tell no tales, but, Zoraida knows well, neither do those in captivity.

And yet after the narrative possibilities she sets in motion, she is welcomed into the group at the inn, admired for her beauty, her pious demeanor and her desire for Christianity, but does not become a participant in the community of narrators, and never tells a tale—neither her own nor another’s. In the narrative process that is “The Captive’s Tale,” Zoraida participates only with a statement of existence; when she hears her fellow travellers refer to her as Zoraida, she tried to correct them but is able only to offer her proper, her Christian, name: “¡No, no Zoraida: María, María!” (464). This statement, what should be a univocal statement of identity expressed by the proper name, will nonetheless continue to follow the ambiguous structural position that she
has held throughout “The Captive’s Tale,” with its present-absent nature. By rejecting the name Zoraida she must indeed also answer to its call; she must in fact allow herself to be interpellated by her Muslim past in order to reject it. In this way, María never fully comes into being and is always obfuscated by negativity: María is only ever Not-Zoraida.4

**Don Quijote’s Invisible Song**

If Zoraida’s silence introduces “The Captive’s Tale,” there is another silence that loosely bookends this passage of Cervantes’s novel. Almost immediately after the

4 E. C. Graf reads Zoraida’s statement of her Christian proper name and her rejection of her Muslim one in a different register. In a chapter dedicated to a reading of Don Quijote through Edward Said’s orientalism and Louis Althusser’s interpellation, Graf posits that “key aspects of the novel anticipate many of today’s fashionable academic deconstructions of the ideological discourses that support political power.” Furthermore, Graf explains, “far from reproducing an uncritical endorsement of the rise of imperialistic, ethnocentric, and religiously conformist institutions known as the early modern nation-state, he [Cervantes] writes about it in dissenting and disorienting ways” (22). Thus, according to Graf, Don Quijote has been interpellated by “the expansionist ideology of Spanish chavinism.” By reading chivalric romance as history, Don Quijote’s view of reality is distorted and, Graf argues, the corpus of chivalric novels functions “like ideological apparatuses, subtly seducing their reader into ingesting their values” (24-25). Significantly, after establishing this complex relationship between Althusser, Said, and Cervantes, Graf reads Zoraida’s outcry — “¡No, no Zoraida: María, María!” — in a radically different register. According to Graf, Zoraida’s words prove the iconographical relationship between her arrival at the inn and the Virgin Mary’s arrival in Bethlehem. Although Zoraida’s insists on her Christian name and attempts to turn her back on the Muslim one, she nevertheless responds to the name Zoraida in a way that almost parodies Althusser’s definition of interpellation. Put otherwise, Zoraida insists on María but nevertheless answers to the call of Zoraida.
conclusion of the story narrated by Ruy Pérez, we encounter another significant episode, one that begins in Chapter 42 but that flows over from this chapter into the next, seemingly uncontainable by the chapter structure that defines the novel. The previous four chapters have narrated “The Captive’s Story” I analyze above. The opening paragraph of Chapter 42 is peppered with verbs related to the orality that traverses this section of the novel: oir (to hear), callar (to silence), escuchar (to listen), contar (to narrate/to tell) (514). The storytelling—as well as the arrival of new travelers: a judge and his daughter Clara, who turn out to be Ruy Pérez’s brother and niece—continues throughout the chapter until finally all characters retire for the night and silence falls upon the inn. Moments before dawn Dorotea and Clara de Viedma are awakened by “una voz tan entonada y tan buena, que les obligó a que todos le presten atento oído[...]” (521). The voice, aside from being beautiful, has an elusive quality, for its audience find it difficult to pinpoint its location: “Unas veces parecía que cantaba en el patio; otra, que en la caballeriza[.]” The chapter then ends with a colon that, like an open mouth, takes a breath to issue forth the song. The song, although indirectly described in Chapter 42, does not appear until the next chapter, which begins, after the chapter number and summary, with a transcript of the lyrics sung by the mysterious voice

—Marinero soy de amor

y en su piélago profundo
navego sin esperanza
de llegar a puerto alguno.

(521)
The lyrics continue for another sixteen lines. But the question remains: what is this song? What does it sound like? And more importantly, where is this song? The colon has misleadingly taken the reader to the next chapter and to the song’s lyrics. But I argue, instead, that the voice that makes this song possible is in fact represented by the blank space between Chapter 42 and Chapter 43. The voice, as a blank space, materializes as a translation from aural/oral into the visual and appears only as a visual silence between two chapters, its only marker the colon that provides an opening instead of closure. The liminal position between chapters occupied by the enchanting voice is signaled from the beginning of the paragraph it introduces when the voice is described as reaching the sleeping women “faltando poco por venir el alba” (521). Just as Clara and Dorotea have a difficult time locating the geographical origins of the singing voice, its link to the moment of dawn gives it also a temporal indeterminacy. Diegetically, the voice exists temporally in the non-definable moment between night and day; structurally, or extradiegetically, the singing voice exists in the space between the plot and the characters, thus bringing together the liminality of daybreak and the liminality of the singing voice within Don Quijote. The characters of Cervantes’s novel
can hear the voice, but this voice is inaudible to the reader even if its narrative effects create tangible repercussions throughout the novel.

This key paragraph is in fact mirroring an earlier moment in the chapter that functions as the closure to “The Captive’s Tale.” A few lines before the first mention of the singing voice, Ruy Pérez and his brother are finally reunited:

Acudió el captián a abrazar a su hermano, y él le puso ambas manos en los pechos, por mirarle algo más apartado: mas, cuando le acabó de conocer, le abrazó tan estrechamente, derramando tantas lágrimas de contento, que los más de los que presentes estaban le hubieron de acompañar. Las palabras que entrambos hermanos se dijeron, los sentimientos que mostraron, apenas creo que pueden pensarse, cuanto más escribirse (520).

The words exchanged between both men resist representation, at least representation by means of the written word, and are barely captured by language. Cervantes thus offers the reader two moments, almost back-to-back, where language appears to fail the needs of the narrative. The impossibility of representing a specific aural expression—one, the reencounter between the two long-lost brothers, emotionally charged to such a degree that language fails to capture it, and the other of such aesthetic beauty and uniqueness that is supersedes its lyrics and melody and calls attention to its pure and impossible materiality—disrupts the narrative of the Quijote. In the first case, this
irruption of the limits of literary representation is marked by the momentary inclusion
of the first person⁵ ("...los sentimientos que mostraron, apenas creo [yo] pueden
pensarse...”); in the case of Clara and her singing lover, the voice is first pushed into the
margins of the chapter, the margins of the novel and the margins of the literary; into the
blank and silent space that surrounds the novel, the blank space that organizes the
chapter structure of the *Quijote* through pure negativity.

Immediately following this moment of negative representation, the voice again
invades and disrupts the narrative. In Chapter 43, Clara recognizes the voice and
attempts to share the story of her frustrated love for the son of a rich Aragonese
gentleman. Following the structure that has guided the entire novel and especially the
passage at the inn, the mysterious singing voice triggers her desire to share her
narrative with Dorotea, but in this case, the curiosity and desire for narrative fiction
among the novel’s characters is displaced and overshadowed by the desire and
enjoyment of the silent voice, heard only by the characters and "invisible" to the reader.
Clara begins her story, but Dorotea asks her to wait until the song has finished: "Pero no
me digáis nada por ahora; que no quiero perder, por acudir a vuestro sobresalto, el
gusto que recibo de oír al que canta; que me parece que con nuevos versos y nuevo tono

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⁵ *Don Quijote* is, of course, a first person narrative, that of Cide Hamete Benengeli, and
yet the long passages in which the first person narrator is obscured lends the novel the
appearance of an omniscient narrative. For this reason, the moments the first person
pronoun or verb form irrupts into the text become notable and meaningful.
torna a su canto" (522-523). The voice that a few paragraphs above instigated the creation of a new chapter now disrupts the narrative flow. The singing voice brings forth a new chapter and the beginning of Clara’s story but the song seduces its audience—and audience that is not the reader, for the reader this voice is silent and the lyrics can only mark its passage—and the novels, the narrative, literature, momentarily stops and offers the singing voice its space.

There is a further moment of undecidability in this passage. The singing voice, as I have explained above, is difficult to place both geographically and temporally. It is also impossible to gender the voice until many paragraphs into Chapter 43. The novel attempts to describe the beauty of the voice but fails to establish its gender, and it is not until we reach Clara’s reaction to hearing her absent lover’s voice, that it is clear that we are listening to a male voice. Before Clara’s intervention, the reader is not aware of the gender of this singing voice: “Nadie podía imaginar quién era la persona que tan bien cantaba, y era una voz sola, sin que la acompañase instrumento alguno” (521). Thus, in the first moments of Clara’s story, what could arguably be considered one of our main categories for the classification and description of the human voice—that is, categorizing a voice as either female or male—is unavailable. When, later, after the lyrics in the next chapter and after the two women have commented on the voice they are listening to, and the reader is finally made aware of the fact that the voice is, indeed, masculine, an interesting reversal has taken place. The voice as aesthetic object and,
furthermore, an object of desire has traditionally been considered to be female. As Adrianna Cavarero argues, “[... ] in the (notoriously dichotomous) symbolic patriarchal order, man is conceived as mind and woman as body. The division of logos into a purely feminine phone and a purely masculine semantikon, finally, accomplishes and confirms the system” (107). Cervantes retains the binary structure of the voice as vehicle for semantic meaning—the multiple narrators at the inn and the multiple stories they share stand in for this function—and the opposite and contrasting voice that does not share information and is instead the vehicle for aesthetic pleasure, for example the voice and its function as song. Nevertheless he then inverts the traditional hierarchy by giving Clara the narrating voice of reason and placing her male lover in the position of unattainable object of desire. The young man disguised as a footman is not only the passive and distant object, all the more desired because it cannot be found, he also embodies the voice at its most aesthetic and pleasurable. In this way, the story of the captive and his exotic bride is inverted, and Zoraida’s silence has been replaced by the silent song of the footman. Zoraida’s beauty and charm are mirrored in the beauty and appeal of the singing voice, both forms of beauty enchant and capture the attention of its audience. In both cases, the written word—here representing the semantic message transmitted by the human voice—serves as a necessary prosthesis that allows the reader of the novel to discover the meaning of what otherwise appears only as emptiness, silence or absence.
The first, Zoraida’s silence, is the silence caused by the new, understood as the process of coming into being and our inability, however temporary, to find the appropriate words or discourse to describe and come to terms with what we have before us, a silence of that which is not yet ours and is in the process of being incorporated into our vocabulary and linguistic consciousness. Like Zoraida, not yet Christian and no longer “mora,” the new leaves us speechless, wordless and outside of language. The second silence is that which is so radically other that all we can do is caption the silence it produces in us. Here I am silent, is all that can be said of this silence, here is the limit of what can be said. The first silence is the inability of our current language to account for the new, the second is the structural failure of language as semantic meaning to account for what is radically outside of it, the external border that uncovers its failure and which, in spite of its failure, is the border that gives it form and allows it to come into being. Unlike Zoraida’s silent presence within the community of narrators created at the inn, and unlike the meaningful absence of her voice, the silence at the end of Chapter 42 does not belong to one of Cervantes’s characters, indeed, the lyrics and the description of the footman’s song and voice are part of the text of the Quijote. The silence is the silence of the novel itself, its incapacity to represent the human voice it has been flirting with in previous chapters. This silence is the novel marking its limits and thus establishing itself as a genre.\(^6\)

\(^6\) There is another, more famous, silence in Cervantes’s novel. I am referring to, of
Language and excess

It would seem, based on Zoraida and the footman, that what Cervantes offers is the slipperiest of definitions of voice: uncontained by language and the written word, escaping its use as a clear sign of identity, and refusing even binary gender divisions. Voice, by this definition refuses a relationship with meaning and dissolves the basic unit of sign and signifier.

The critique of voice as transparent presence, as the marker of logos or as the basic unit of language is, as is well known, one of the foundational moves of Derrida’s philosophical endeavor. The phonocentric voice has become, since the popularization of course, the abrupt silence of the story at the end of Chapter VIII when, seconds before Don Quijote’s and the Basque’s swords are about to cross, the novel suddenly fades away. The narrator explains, in the next paragraph, that the original text ends here: Pero está el daño de todo esto que en este punto y término deja pendiente el autor desta historia esta batalla, disculpándose que no halló más escrito destas hazañas de don Quijote de las que deja referidas. Bien es verdad que el segundo autor desta obra no quiso creer que tan curiosa historia estuviese entregada a las leyes del olvido, ni que hubiesen sido tan poco curiosos los ingenios de la Mancha que no tuviesen en sus archivos o en sus escritorios algunos papeles que deste famoso caballero tratasen; y así, con esta imaginación, no se desesperó de hallar el fin desta apacible historia, el cual, siéndole el cielo favorable, le halló del modo que se contará en la segunda parte.

In this fragment, the narrator bemoans the lack of continuity for the story of Don Quijote, a lack all the more unbearable given the climatic scene that precedes the break. I argue that Cervantes posits a complicated definition of voice and points to the limited ability of the written word to represent it. Faced with voice, the written word can only bear witness to the event of voice even when it is unable to capture or reproduce it. Inscription, unlike voice or sound, can travel due to its permanence. And yet, at the end of Chapter VIII it would seem that the written word fails even in this task and falls prey to circumstance and contingency. The written word is not immune to loss and absence.
his work, one of the major parameters that guide scholarly research into the role of
voice as phone in the structure of language.

“The voice,” wrote Derrida in 1967, “is heard (understood)—that is undoubtedly
what is called conscience—closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier:
pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow
from outside itself, in the world or in ‘reality,’ any accessory signifier, any substance of
expression foreign to its own spontaneity” (20). Voice is thought to allow the speaker
and the listener immediate access to unadulterated presence. Voice offers the illusion of
escape from the never-ending play of signs, that is, writing as a negatively defined
system based on difference. It is therefore in writing that Derrida finds the excess of
language—Rousseau’s famous “dangerous supplement” that puts a wrench in the
illusion of the living voice and which complicates the connection between voice and
logos.

But there is another voice, another part of the story, and with it comes a different
narrative: the role of voice in Jacques Lacan’s definition of subjectivity or the object
voice. In this different narrative the voice is not the mythical origin of meaning, that
which lies at the onset of language and therefore in closer proximity to logos, but is
instead the result or the surplus of the process, or illusion, of meaning production.
Lacan’s voice is not the Derridian voice—although one can also say that it is not not the
Derridian voice—but a voice that is conceived as a meaningless object. It is the voice
devoid of all meaning, effectively separated from and resistant to meaning of any kind. The Lacanian voice, as Slavoj Zizek suggests, is the scream that gets stuck in one’s throat, the bone that cannot be spit out (1991, 50). This voice is the result of subtracting the retroactive process of quilting needed for the production of meaning from the signifier. In other words, if for Lacan meaning is always created retroactively, through the retroactive fixing of a string of signifiers which lead not to meaning as such, but to the illusion of meaning that covers up the void or effaced signifier (or subject), then the voice is the difference between the signifier and the process of meaning production (2006, 53-56).

Mladen Dolar has combined both approaches to voice—Derridian and Lacanian—by taking Lacan’s definition of voice as surplus and reinserting it into the Derridean structure of language. In this way he is able to approach voice through Derrida’s famous conception of pharmakon as the undecidable element, simultaneously benign and malignant, and impossible to pin down at either end of the pole. In Dolar’s reading of the voice, Derrida’s analysis of writing as pharmakon, remedy and poison, is also applicable to voice, as long as it is the voice of Lacanian surplus. Therefore, voice, especially the singing voice, lies precisely at the heart of this tension between the beneficial and the malignant; a tension that, just like the writing defined as supplement, is the necessary and excluded element that supports Western metaphysics.
Among the many examples Dolar puts forth to illustrate this claim is Plato’s negative assessment of the flute as the “most many-stringed of instruments” that makes the utterance of words impossible. The flute cannot accompany the meaning-producing voice, but instead substitutes it, and should therefore be left to the female, to the woman, while voice as meaning, that is, conversation should be the pastime of men. Similarly, in Book X of Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, Augustine describes what he calls “sinning by the ear.” Sacred music lifts the human soul towards the sublime, brings man closer to God, and yet it is also the element that can lead man away from the divine and closer to pure aesthetic enjoyment and unchecked pleasure. Temptation can therefore enter through the ear, in the form of the very hymns that contain the words that bring man towards redemption⁷ (Dolar, 42-52). In both cases, at stake is the need to stabilize the undecidability of the singing voice, to find the limit between redemption and temptation.

This undecidability is a fundamental aspect of the use and the narrative consequences of Cervantes’s depiction of the human voice in “The Captive’s Tale.” The orality that Cervantes thematizes throughout *Don Quijote* goes beyond being a topic and becomes a major structural devise if we switch genre from prose, or more precisely the

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⁷ Dolar carries out a playful reading of the history of philosophy in a section entitled “A Brief History of Metaphysics” contained in this 2006 book. Another interesting survey of the same nature is Michel Poizat, *La voix du diable*. 
novel, to theater or dramatic literature. Parallel to the rise of the novel in the Iberian peninsula is, of course, the rediscovery of drama and the rise of a national Spanish theater during the sixteen and seventeenth centuries. It is in theater that the human voice becomes not just the absent signified behind the silent and inscribed dialogue as is the case with the novel, but is instead the central medium through which the text will reach its audience. Or as Paul Zumthor has written following Barthes:

“A polyphony of information” (to use Roland Barthes’s words), theater appears to be a writing of the body in a complex but always preponderant way. It integrates voice as a carrier of language to a graphism traced by the presence of a human being in the evanescence of what makes theater what it is. It thereby constitutes the absolute model of all oral poetry. (41)

According to Zumthor, orality and theater are always “necessarily fragmentary.”

Beyond the linguistic content of the oral text, a content that is shared with and can be replicated by the written text, orality brings with it a corporeal content embodied by gesture: “In its primary function, before the influence of writing, voice does not describe, it acts” (40). It is the tension between an always performed orality and the linguistic content of the oral text, or to use Zumthor’s terms, the tension between the

8 For a historical overview of the creation of a national theater in Spain see Melvina Mckendrick, Theater in Spain: 1490-1700. Ronald Surtz, The Birth of a Theater. Dramatic Convention in Spanish Theater from Juan del Encina to Lope de Vega, also provides a detailed analysis of the evolution of the necessary dramatic conventions that helped create a secular and national theater in early modern Spain.
“abstraction of language and the spatiality of the body,” that makes theater an always incomplete semantic process. In the same way in which Zoraida and the footman’s song occupy an ambiguous position that refuses a fixed interpretation, the necessary use of voice in theater not only transmits information to an audience but is also an essential structuring element.

And yet in spite of the fragmentary and incomplete nature that voice imparts to the performance of orality or theater, the identification of voice and body appears to be uncontested. When faced with the body upon a stage—apparently immune to the critique of voice as presence, which I have described above—the voice and the speaking subject seem to collapse into one monolithic category. Or as Kaja Silverman describes a similar process within the context of twentieth-century cinema: “When the voice is identified in this way with presence, it is given the imaginary power to place not only sounds but meaning in the here and now. In other words, it is understood as closing the gap between signifier and signified” (43).

But the issue of voice and its relationship to the speaking subject, to the body that produces it, has been with us for a long time. The complexities of reconciling the materiality of voice produced within the body and that is fully effective only once it leaves the body preoccupied early modern scholars. Gina Bloom has traced this contradiction in the use of voice and its thematization upon the early modern English stage. She reads early modern ambiguity regarding the locus of voice—either the throat,
that is within the speaking body, or the ear, which transforms voice into something external to the body—as an attempt to reconcile the work of anatomists and natural philosophers with the Aristotelian definition of vocal sound:

For Aristotle [in *De Anima*], then, vocal sound is, in its physical essence, a striking of air that sets in motion further movements of air. Breath is so central to Aristotle’s definition of voice that he cites it as material cause for the lack of voice in fish: “It is clear also why fish are voiceless; they have no windpipe. And they have no windpipe because they do not breathe or take in air” (73).

The notion of voice as “movements of air” brings with it a series of physical obstacles that could disrupt or hinder the transmission of sound, or, more specifically for my purposes, speech. Conditions such as physical distance, temporal delay, and environmental disruption are all contingencies that affect the successful transmission of the human voice. But, as Bloom explains, according to Aristotle and his early modern readers and translators, these potential obstacles are also the necessary conditions for the effective movement of sound from speaker to listener since suitable distance and an appropriate delay ensure a fruitful aural communication. The contingencies that leave sound vulnerable to failure are the very contingencies that make sound possible.

It is this instability associated with the human voice that plays out upon the early modern stage and, more importantly, helps structure and organize the dramatic space
of the stage. The creation of an independent, autonomous diegetic space delimited by the physical space of the stage has been approached and studied in terms of the visual, often at the expense of considering the aural experience that constitutes theater. Perspective, for example, has long been considered the convention that allowed the stage to become an alternative space to the reality of the audience:

Astonishingly, at the time, that scenery should “appear to be” what it represented. The code of perspective had not yet been assimilated into norms of entertainment. The elite audience was not sure they could not walk into the new fictional space. In adapting old tricks of painting to the stage, Peruzzi caused the “narrow” space of the stage not even merely to resemble it, but to fool the mind, appearing “to be” what it was not. In candlelit rooms where false depth flourished, the court stage now came closer than mere painting to the lie; the courtier learned to call for smoke and mirrors to bamboozle him. (92)

Hollis Huston, in the quote above, describes the autonomous stage in terms of painting and perspective, and of the deceit of making two dimensions appear as three. This “new fictional space” requires a tricking of the eye and, interestingly enough, he includes a description of the semidarkness of “candlelit rooms” that, he implies, is one of the elements that contribute to this “false depth.” The trick of perspective is effective, but the lack of strong lights helps the artificial escape close scrutiny. But this creation of a
“new fictional space” is not the sole consequence of visual and plastic innovations. The voice, precisely due to its unstable and fragile nature and the complex relationship it holds to both the body that produces it and the meaning it helps disseminate, has an important part in the creation of the autonomous dramatic space described by Huston. The human voice, both when it is thematized as part of a dramatic plot or when it is engaged as an important component for the staging of a play, serves as a critical creator of space, one that also helps “to fool the mind, appearing ‘to be’ what [and where] it is not.”

The purpose of voice upon the early modern stage, a voice considered a finicky traveler and one not always faithful to the body considered as its point of origin, is one similar to the “new fictional space” created by visual perspective as described by Huston. With this in mind, I turn my attention to the seventeenth-century auto sacramental by Pedro Calderón de la Barca El gran teatro del mundo and its use of voice in the organization of dramatic space.

**El gran teatro del mundo**

Sometime between 1633 and 1635, an actor appears on stage wearing a star-studded tunic and a hat bearing three rods—at the time, a common marker of divinity. He plays Autor. Moments later, Mundo walks on stage, summoned by Autor, the beginning of a conversation centered on the popular trope of the world as stage. The
world is mine, says Autor, and I will choose its actors. I am the stage, says Mundo, and
upon me man will act out his role. Man, the actor on the world stage, comes out in
different roles: beauty and discretion; the rich man and the pauper; the king and the
peasant; the unborn child. This auto sacramental, Calderón de la Barca’s El gran teatro del
mundo, constitutes a fascinatingly circular parable in which the world is represented by
a stage that is represented by the world that is represented by a stage… In this
ingenious allegory—brilliantly disguised as another allegory—Calderón simultaneously
comments on the nature of the theological interpretation of the world and the nature of
theatrical theory: the theatrical stage creates a world ruled by its own norms and
demands and the world is a stage, with each mortal soul merely carrying out a role as
part of a drama that will be represented only once and for which no rehearsal takes
place. Theology and metatheater. In this auto, each actor—Rey, Discreción and
Hermosura, Rico and Pobre, Labrador and Niño—enters the stage through a door
marked with a cradle and is called to leave through a door marked with a coffin,
completing the circle of life upon the stage.

The figure of death, neither named nor materialized in this play, is rather
designated as Voz in the list of characters. Throughout the El gran teatro the audience
will hear its voice without being able to see the body that produces it. It is Voz, then,
who calls, in song, to each character when his time upon the stage is done. That is, if
God is represented by the Autor; the stage by the world; and humanity by different
actors representing the diversity of man, then Voice, it seems, represents death.

However, the presence of this voice, of Voz, disrupts the otherwise symmetrical structure of the play and the allegory of the cycle of Christian life. Voz—the voice of death—signals to each character the moment in which he or she must cross the door marked with a coffin, and yet birth, or the crossing of the door marked with a cradle is not similarly personified. It is a crossing, a movement carried out by the actors-humans, and not an entity in itself.

The names of all the characters reveal their nature and their role in the hierarchy of the stage; all of the characters have a physical presence on the stage, and thus constitute a visual signifier for the audience; and, finally, there is dialogue and linguistic exchange between all the characters, even if it serves only to reveal the structures of power that bind them together and the impossibility of apprehension or communication with divinity. However, Voz introduces a new level of figurative language into Calderón’s drama. The voice stands for death, but as a proper name—Voz—it is not anchored to any referent and does not follow the allegorical relationship that structures the Autor-God or Mundo-stage couplings. That is, Autor stands in for God as the maker and creator that brings the stage into being, and Mundo stands in for the stage directed by God along with its human inhabitants or actors, thus setting the allegory of the world as stage. Likewise, Voz and its disembodied voice do not follow the logic of allegorical representation that structures the synecdochal nature of the names given to
each character upon the world stage. The different human characters that will appear on stage stand in as a solitary example of an entire class of society: nobility, peasants, the rich and the poor. And yet, Voz resists both these allegorical rationalities. It has no allegorical duality making it impossible to decide if it is part of the cosmos of Autor or of Mundo. Is Voz a player in man’s worldly theater or in God’s divine drama? Death is not a character like any other, in the same way that a disembodied voice is not the same thing as physical presence. It would seem that death cannot be personified, cannot materialize before the eyes of the spectator. It could thus be said that death-voice does not participate in the economy of allegory that characterizes this play and the auto genre as a whole. The death-voice figure is never embodied; no actor on stage represents it, although the sound of the voice entails a referent in the netherworld of the space beyond the stage. And yet, it can speak, or to be more precise, in this case it can sing, as if seducing the characters away from life and stage. Voz seems to exist in a non-space between the diegetic stage, the extradiegetic behind the scenes, and the textual materialization of the play. Finally, the voice never engages in the conversation carried on by the universe of characters and, rather, engages with individual human characters, one at a time, and only at the moment of their death. Is this voice a form of diegetic and theological stage directions? Why does it only speak in song? Moreover, why does it never become an actor, and exist only as words on a page or sound on the stage, never partaking of the visual? This voice, it seems to me, is at the border between the two
aspects of the theater, which are, on the one hand, the ephemeral performance that takes place on a stage, and, on the other, the theater as text that circulates across time and space. This figure, I will argue, embodies the excess of theater, of language, and of (Christian) allegory.

*El gran teatro del mundo* performs the common allegory of world as stage, but to add to its metatheatricality, it also contains a play within a play. Autor and Mundo appear on stage and discuss the play that they are about to construct. The actors enter the stage and are given their parts; afterwards the theater of earthly life begins and will end before the larger play is over. The actors, or the different earthly manifestations of the human race, follow the orders and directions issued by Autor and relayed to them by Mundo. During the play within the *auto*, Autor becomes a spectator and no longer intervenes. Towards the end of the play contained within the play, Voz irrupts, announcing through song the end of each actor’s time on stage and, momentarily, takes over the role of Mundo as stage director. If Autor does not appear in the play contained in the *auto*, and Voz appears only in this section of the play, how can we describe the relationship between the two? One answer can be found in an exchange that occurs between Pobre and Rico at the moment of their interpellation into, or by, death:

Rico: ¿Desta voz que nos llamó
tú no te estremeces?

Pobre: Sí
Rico: ¿No procurarás huir?

Pobre: No;

que el estremecerse es
una natural pasión
del ánimo, a quien como hombre
temiera Dios, con ser Dios.

Mas si el huir será en vano,

porque si della no huyó

a su sagrado el poder,

la hermosura a su blasón

¿dónde podrá la pobreza?

Antes mil gracias le doy

pues con esto acabará

con mi vida mi dolor.

(ll. 1208-1222, p. 78)

Pobre, through analogy, links God and Voz by comparing the fear of God to the fear that invades the characters upon hearing the sound of the voice. Simultaneously, the stage arrangement has established another link, the one between Voz and death. The stage door used by the actors to exit the play is marked with a coffin, and thus
establishes an iconographic relationship between death and Voz who guards this exit.\(^9\)
The usual equivalences of the allegory of the world as stage are inverted by placing
author and world on the same allegorical plane, and in this way Autor coexists with its
allegorical other, God, through its contact with Mundo. Therefore the mysterious voice
can be read as the aural trace of God, the process of death and, furthermore, the
introduction of Autor—as a character playing a part—in his own play. The conventional
equivalences that construct the world-as-stage allegory are inverted by placing the
author and world in the same allegorical plane. Thus, the allegorical relationships in
Calderón’s auto—God is to earth (Mundo) as author (Autor) is to stage—have suffered a
chiastic shift that makes the different levels of the allegory enter into contact. As a result
of the chiastic inversion of the relationship between the two main characters of the play,
Autor and Mundo, it become difficult to separate the traits that correspond to each
allegorical level, that is, the attributes of Author from those of a divine creator. If we
divest these pairs, God/author and world/stage, of their specific material manifestation,
we could also add to the equation the signified-signifier pair. Therefore, if the author, as
surface reading, is the signifier for God/signified, but stage is the signified that

\(^9\) The 1976 Catedra edition of the auto edited by Eugenio Frutos Cortés includes stage
directions. The stage of the comedia acted out within the auto is described as follows:
“Con música se abren a un tiempo dos globos: en el uno estará un trono de gloria, y en
él el AUTOR sentado; en el otro ha de haber representación con dos puertas: en la una
pintada una cuna y en la otra un ataúd” (59).
corresponds to Mundo as signifier, the crossing of signifiers and signifieds allows for a constant shifting of the elements of the allegory. It is impossible to fix the directionality of their movement or to discern surface from depth. Said otherwise, the disembodied voice leads us outside the diegetic stage and points to the theatricality of the *auto* itself. It leads to the realization that the author we have read as God is in fact an author. And in this case potentially the literal god of the *auto*: the author Calderón de la Barca.

My intention is not to carry out a reading of *El gran teatro del mundo* through Calderón as historical figure, but to identify Voz/voice as the free-floating signifier that binds the allegory together. Voice is the knot that allows the allegory to remain an allegory and that offers the illusion of depth to a collapsed allegory where various figures from different planes coincide.¹⁰

¹⁰ There is a fascinating moment of foreboding in this play where Calderón presents a bare-bones exposition of the Lacanian paradox of subjectivity. When Autor calls out to his human actors, at this point undifferentiated souls he dwells for a moment on the impossibility of calling upon the subject that is yet to come into being:

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Mortales que aún no vivís
y ya os llamo yo mortales,
pues en mi presencia iguales
antes de ser asistís
aunque mis voces no oís,
venid a aquestos vergeles.
(ll.279-284, p.49)
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Theater and excess

Breaking the fourth wall of theater has been a frequent endeavor in contemporary drama. Questioning the limits of the diegetic space of drama—both conceptually at the level of text and physically in relation to space in the theater as architecture—has served as a way to think about theatrical practices and the ideological conventions that constitute, and are constituted by, these practices.

This breaking down of limits or blurring of borders is, to be sure, not unique to the contemporary world; multiple examples of the overflowing of the borders of theatricality could be found throughout the history of many different dramatic traditions. Indeed, the strict division between stage and spectator was somewhat new to the theater of Spanish Golden Age and in many senses alien to the proto-dramatic forms of the Middle Ages. It is safe to say that up until the theater of Lope de Vega it would have been difficult to establish a clear distinction between audience and stage, at least not one easily recognizable to contemporary viewers.

In the case of dramatic liturgy, one of the main ancestors of early modern theater in Spain, the audience/worshipers were not a silent and passive entity but were instead expected to participate and represent roles. Mobile carts and floats were frequently used as stages that could be taken into a variety of spaces according to the needs of the audience and the ceremony (Surtz, 67-85). This is especially true of the auto sacramental, a genre that materializes the close relationship between church and spectacle, and
which demanded an active audience since its main goal was to familiarize Christians with the concept of transubstantiation. The audience of these plays was expected to assimilate theological dogma while being entertained by the extravagant costumes and set-designs, something especially true of the Calderonian *auto* (Parker, 51-54).

One of the most evident symptoms of this blurring of lines or moments of meta-drama in early modernity is the trope of world-as-stage or the concept of *theatrum mundi*. However, there are also moments in which the space off-stage irrupts into the diegetic, when “reality” is contaminated by theater and not, as would be the case above, reality with the dramatic. Here a closer inspection of the uses of the *theatrum mundi* concept betrays its double directionality. When the lines between reality and dramatic fiction are crossed, the question arises: is the diegetic trying to break out or is reality trying to break in?

William Egginton underlines the distinction between an example such as *El gran teatro del mundo* where the world is a stage because it obeys the designs of God-as-author and humans are the actors following a divine script that they cannot access, and a case such as William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, where the world-turned-stage is related to the inconsistency of human identity and the fact that all we can ever do is “play” ourselves according to our changing circumstances. This second example views man as “merely players” who “in [their] time play many parts” (Egginton, 74-76). Two different notions of space spring from the two approaches to the world as stage. In the
case of Calderón’s *auto*, space is conceived in close approximation to the structure of theater proper since there is a stage and outside of it lies reality whether divine or historical. In Shakespeare, on the other hand, the space of the theater is all there is and there is neither an outside nor a beyond with respect to the very theatricality of life itself.

As I note above, Voz is the figure that convenes the allegory owing to its excess of meaning, to its capacity to attach itself to the many signifiers contained in the play. Paradoxically, this excess of meaning is the result of its lack of content, which then inserts the rest of the drama into a logic of meaning. I will argue that a similar movement is present during the process of creating dramatic space in *El gran teatro del mundo*.

Calderón’s *auto*, then, is both an example of both the *theatrum mundi* allegory and of metatheatricality: its allegorical content is based on the popular trope, but is also a case of a play within a play. Therefore at one level, the literal plane, we have the space of the divine world authored by God and, at the level of allegory, the space of the theater and its author. In his introduction to Calderón’s play, Eugenio Frutos Cortés divides the play into five parts—appearance of Autor; introduction of human actors; the play within a play; end of the play within a play and the closing of the world-stage; and finally the moment of the Eucharist—and bases his division on stage exits and entrances and the actions represented on stage. However, using the structural organization of the
play in terms of diegetic levels, we could also divide the play into three parts that would represent different dramatic spaces. The *auto sacramental* would thus consist of three moments: the preparation for the play that will be staged; the performance of the play; and the judgment of each actor’s performance once the play is over. Parts I and III are characterized by metatheatricality, while part II is the play contained by the *auto*.\textsuperscript{11}

At the center of this structure lies Voz, the bodiless character that will question the interior-exterior dichotomy and therefore make it difficult to navigate the various spaces of the play with any degree of certainty.

The singing voice of the play staged within *El teatro del mundo*, as I have noted above, is heard but has no visual presence on stage. This lack of material reality makes the location of the voice impossible to grasp. In contrast to this disembodiment, the intricacy of the set decoration supports the different diegetic levels we see on stage by means of an extravagant spatial organization that visually supports and establishes the borders between these spaces. At this point in the play the set design consists of two open globes: Autor is seated in one, from which he watches the second globe, Mundo,

\textsuperscript{11} In the first section of the play Mundo and Autor discuss and divide Creation into three parts that would mimic the three-act structure of the comedia: natural law, written law, and divine law (II.99-205). The three-act structure of the comedia is reflected and repeated by the narrative offered by Mundo of his creation but also by the *auto* written by Calderón. Interestingly, the *auto*, that is *El teatro del mundo*, has three parts and the comedia played within it has only one. At a formal level the situation can be described as an *auto* within a *comedia* that is only in name an *auto*.  

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which has also opened and revealed a stage within it. The human actors play the roles assigned to them upon this stage. The interaction of voice and set decorations that takes place on the open globe brings together the two levels of the allegory and joins them in one figure. The open globe, once only standing in for the world, has become a stage, a visual supplement that allows the audience to establish a clear division between the different spaces on stage. We still hear the voice of Mundo but we see the globe transformed into a stage. The plot and characters of the *auto* offer the traditional allegory of the world as stage, although, as I have noted above, in Calderón’s hands the allegory goes through a chiastic inversion that allows its different levels to interact. As the globe opens up to reveal two stages, the allegory transforms from a narrative mechanism to a material reality. And, in terms of stage construction, world and stage have become one, and the two levels of the world-stage allegory are contained in one physical representation.

Voz, on the other hand, resists a stable position in both the allegorical structure of *El gran teatro del mundo* and the spatial organization needed for the staging of the *auto*. The multiplicity of possible meanings, both visual and discursive, that the mysterious voice has accumulated during the play does not allow its meaning or position to be stabilized or allocated to a proper allegorical level. Discursively, Voz points to God; iconographically, the door marked by a coffin unites it to death. In relationship to the spatiality of the stage, Voz’s lack of materiality makes its location
difficult to establish, and, as such, puts into question the elaborately constructed boundaries, visually and discursively, of the multiple dramatic spaces on stage. Voz is the excess that does not allow for unequivocal meaning; Voz obfuscates and exposes the construction of spatial limits.

The bodiless voice, the character designated Voz, can be said to issue from the globe as world, the globe as stage, or the space of the divine represented by the second globe upon which Autor is seated. It could, in fact, come from neither or even from all three. Following dramatic conventions—the pact between spectator and spectacle—a sound heard with no visible cause on stage is accepted as coming from outside the scene but within the diegetic space of the play. But if we take a step back from the play on stage, yet another space appears: the space of the audience that, although outside the diegetic universe, functions as the spatial limit that brings it into existence.12 What we see then is the space of the drama of human life (the play within the play); the theatrum mundi created by Calderón in the form of an auto sacramental; and the unique reality of

12 Voz, the bodiless singing character, appears to function in this auto sacramental in a way similar to Zoraida/María in “The Captive’s Tale.” Their location at the border of a given space or a community’s limit gives both characters the paradoxical role of being radically other to their environment and simultaneously the very condition that make possible the necessary space for a dramatic stage, in the case of Voz, or a communal identity, in the case of Zoraida/Maria. In both cases, the absence of a space of their own excludes them from the stage or the community, and yet their presence at its limit is exactly what allows these spaces to become contained units. Zoraida/María and Voz are the limit that allows the community to become a closed off and independent entity and come into being.
the theater, needed to establish the limits of diegetic by defining itself against it. What can be concluded about the location of the voice if we include the possibility of this third space?

The unstable nature of Voz makes it possible to attribute its location to any of these three spaces: an invisible character in the drama of life; a divine voice that comes from within the diegetic but off the stage; or an unexplained voice from backstage? Where do we find Voz? A first step could be to look closely at the question of where. By asking where, we highlight the fact that all three spatial possibilities have in common their function as containers. One play is contained by the other, which in turn is contained by the stage; mimicking this structure from within the play, we see the stage contained in the world. And yet, the use of containment—the multiple spaces that contain other spaces, such as the stage inside the globe—is in fact a dramatic translation of the substitution needed for allegory. That is, if in the world stage allegory the stage functions as a substitute for the world and the author takes the place of the divine, Calderón’s translation of this structure into dramatic language and practice results in a stage that functions as a series of containers. The world does not replace the stage, as it would in a narrative allegory, but instead contains it.

Yet, a translation in reverse or a return to substitution can attest that if Voz cannot be located, it is because we asking the wrong question. The fact that the mysterious voice has no material reality allows it to resist the spatial translation. The
necessary question is what does Voz substitute or, in any case, what substitutes it? The earth does not contain the stage and God does not contain the author, instead one substitutes the other, stands in its place and displaces it. The reason we cannot find a place for Voz is because it cannot be translated into spatial logic; its emptiness, its lack of meaning and materiality, offers nothing for translation and is therefore infinitely substitutable. Voz is the only element of the play that resists spatialization, just as it resists meaning, for the reason that it is the element that is eternally in the midst of a process of substitution. The physical set up of the stage, the differentiated space created by the empty globes are the result of the spatial translation that has erased its own past and covered up its footsteps. Symptomatically, the language of the play is plagued with spatial allusions and references to entrances and exits, making the idea of containment pervasive throughout the play. Mundo’s first words in the play ask:

Quién me llama,

que desde el duro centro

de aqueste globo que me esconde dentro

alas viste veloces?

¿Quién me saca de mi, quién me da voces?

(ll. 27-30, p. 40)

He describes that he has set up a stage:

para que […]
In *El gran teatro del mundo*, the chiastic inversion of the levels of allegory makes the transfer between different spaces unavoidable. If the stage is not contained in the world but instead substitutes it, and if, indeed, the correspondence between the allegorical pairs God/author and world/stage has been inverted, then the substitution not only creates movement from one space to the other, it also makes possible endless movement within each space. In other words, if the stage can be substituted for the world, but both elements can be considered either divine creations or the literary work of the author, we are faced with an endless transformation of stage into world into stage into world.

Reality begins to leak into the allegorical stage, since if we cannot decide if the world stands in for a stage or vice versa, then the world surrounding the stage may just be another stage. The chiastic inversion of the world-stage and God-author allegory, which has now been enhanced visually with the stage inside the world embodied by the hollow globes, uncovers a play within a play within another play called reality. If Autor, as he sits and watches his creation, can be either literary agent or divine manifestation, is the audience watching a stage or a world? The figure of Autor-as-Calderón could be substituted by the audience present at each staging of *El gran teatro del mundo*. We would then have not a structure of reality contrasted to fiction or
diegisis, but a subdivision of space of the same nature—stage or world—that duplicates itself and erects inner borders to create an illusion of exteriority. With this in mind, Egginton’s differentiation of metatheatricality and intradiegetic spaces collapses into one and the same space. Meta-drama is read from the outside in, that is, from the point of view of the audience or reality, but if we take our cue from the chiastic inversion of the allegory, we may attempt to read it from the inside out. If the world is a stage and we read the allegory from the inside of the play, the world of reality that contains the stage of the theater is in fact also a stage.

This of course is the point of the *auto*. Its goal is to make the reader understand the world as the earthly theater that is bound to end (a theater in which things are not what they seem). But it is relevant to note that the spatial undecidability created by Voz does not bring a homogenization of the different spatial manifestations of the stage; it does not bring down the interior walls that it constantly displaces thereby creating a logic of exteriority. In fact, the resistance to spatialization performed by Voz is precisely what creates the possibility of dramatic space in *El gran teatro del mundo*. The infinite substitutions that take place void these spaces of content, making them subsist only in opposition to each other. It is because they are substitutable that difference is established and can then be translated and transformed into dramatic space.
Chapter 1
Rebecca’s Ear: Acoustic space in Diego Sánchez de Badajoz’s Farsa de Ysaac

I begin with an image that peculiarly illustrates the difficulty of dealing with the human voice’s ephemeral character, with the impossibility of dealing directly with the material support that makes speech possible (Fig. 1). In this image, reproduced in Karl Young’s Drama of the Medieval Church and originally found in Herrad of Landsberg’s Hortus deliciarum, the viewer sees Jacob approaching his father’s deathbed, wearing animal skins to simulate his brother Esau’s hirsute body. Here Isaac raises his hand, ready to issue his final blessing to the wrong son. However, the illustration deviates from the Bible in at least one significant respect. Indeed, one thing has been added to the scene of the painting that is not narrated in the biblical text: the illustration depicts Rebecca’s

13 The Hortus deliciarum is a medieval manuscript complied under the direction of Abbess Herrad for the Hohenbourg convent of Agustinian canonesses in the latter half of the twelfth century. Krüger and Runge describe the manuscript as “an encyclopedic handbook [...] [t]hematically arranged according to the history of salvation, with integrated material on natural history and dogma, this ‘garden of earthly delights’ contains over a thousand extracts from widely different Latin texts, and a wealth of narrative and allegorical miniatures” (1). The manuscript was destroyed in a fire during the bombing of Strasbourg in 1870.
presence at the moment of the usurped blessing, whereas Genesis 27 makes no mention of her having attended this event. Yet in this image, she is not only present but appears to be an active participant in the scene. Her hands are touching her son Jacob’s limp body. Mother and son are cast as master and puppet. The words she has uttered until this moment grant her voice a material reality that changes the outcome of this biblical story. Her ephemeral voice has created an alternative space, one that exists in contrast to the space of her husband’s intended blessing. Her voice, in this way, becomes an object in the world with material repercussions and can be captured only as presence in this visual representation.

For how else can Rebecca’s voice be represented in a visual medium such as this illustration but through the depiction of her physical presence? And how else to read her presence but as a narrative excess or an exegetic addition deemed necessary by medieval and early modern interpretation? Rebecca’s presence in the image and her voice in the Bible story both function as an excess—narrative in one case and linguistic in the other—that transforms the story and brings with it alterations in the gender hierarchy and the very genre of the tale. Rebecca’s voice—in this case represented by her body, a body visible to the reader but invisible to her husband Isaac—resides in the tension between the material and the ephemeral; between the human voice as mere sound and the human voice as the producer of linguistic meaning; between the realm of the object and the purely abstract.
In the pages that follow, I analyze Rebecca’s voice and its role in the sixteenth-century *Farsa de Ysaac* by Diego Sánchez de Badajoz, a short Eucharistis play that stages the events of Genesis 27. Rebecca’s voice, as it is deployed by Sánchez de Badajoz in this *farsa*, along with her silent presence within the performance, transforms a simple retelling of a Biblical passage into a metatheatrical exploration of the nature and limits of dramatic space within the still nascent early modern Spanish theater, an exploration that has at its motor a female character and a figure that I read as representing the directorial impulse inherent to theater. Rebecca thus both figures the very function of the director, at once underlining the artifice behind every singular performance and also the work’s material conditions of production, that is, its prior existence in text, planning, and rehearsal. In other words, in this play Rebecca stands for the off-stage and extra-dramatic process necessary for the production of illusionistic theater. I will suggest here that Sánchez de Badajoz remains a symptomatically understudied figure for what has been forgotten in this shift to modern theatricality. My modest hope is to both reinterpret his figure and his work and also to underline a significant fissure in the dominant historical account of the development of modern dramatic practices, including sixteenth and seventeenth-century theater.

In the conclusion to this chapter I will return to the Genesis 27 passage as conceptualized and depicted in the early modern visual arts. The contrast of visual and dramatic representations of the story of Isaac’s blessing has a twofold intention: to
begin with, it allows me to explore the presence of Rebecca and the different approaches
to the difficulty of representing her voice and its consequences in two separate media
and during different historical moments. But more importantly, the bringing together of
voice and image highlights the material and concrete nature of Rebecca’s voice that
attends the conception of “voice” upon which this study centers. Interpreted now
through its peculiar non-representation in the image, voice betrays its status as object.
Current scholarship on early modernity and the materiality of language concentrates on
writing and printing, largely ignoring the material consequences of the human voice.
But as Gina Bloom has stated, “in the early modern period words were imagined to be
things, rather than just refer to things”(2). And “[w]hile early modern writers
recognized the voice as ephemeral and often invisible, they represent vocal matter as
taking on a variety of shapes (breath, seed, and so on) that are alienable to the speaking
subject”(3).

_Farsa de Ysaac_

_Farsa de Ysaac_ is a deceptively simple and straightforward staging of the story of
Jacob’s appropriation of his eldest brother Esau’s blessing. Sánchez de Badajoz’s
treatment of the story is faithful to the Genesis 27 source text, keeping close to both the
structure and the wording of the Latin translation of Scripture. The stage directions are
uncharacteristically detailed for the time, and in conjunction with the main body of the
play—the characters’ dialogue—the work captures most of Genesis 27. Sánchez de Badajoz is able to follow the Biblical text closely by transforming key elements of Scripture into action through stage directions; what remains becomes the dialogue spoken by the different characters. The only element that appears out of place in relation to the play’s source text—one of Sánchez de Badajoz’s few narrative additions—is the traditional figure of the shepherd, which had become a dramatic staple by the time of this farsa and which serves as a mediator between the diegetic world upon the stage and the reality of the spectators watching the performance. To be sure, this mediation brings with it an exegetic and didactic element—typical of early modern religious drama in general, and Corpus Christi celebrations in particular—that presents and reiterates religious teachings, as well as the proper interpretation of these lessons, to a often illiterate public.

14 E.C. Wertheimer makes a distinction between the use of the shepherd in the work of Juan del Encina and in the farsas of Sánchez de Badajoz: “[...] he [Sánchez de Badajoz] too would have a rustic character come forth to introduce the plot of his farsas, but his shepherds would also have an important role in the ensuing action, as well as being charged with the presentation of the moral lesson. At the same time, Sánchez’s shepherds served as figures of comic relief, mocked for their stupidity, gullibility, sensuality, foolish concerns, and their language. Sánchez’s went farther then either Encina or Fernández in his merciless satire of the gente menuda, allowing the shepherds who represented them to expose their degraded character and values through their coarse expressions, always couched in the sayagués dialect. Throughout the pre-Lope theater, this linguistic device was used to ridicule the villanos” (91). While I agree with Wertheimer’s assessment of the role of the shepherd in regard to some of Sánchez de Badajoz’s farsas, for example Farsa del Santíssimo Sacramento and Farsa theologal, I would not include the Shepherd in Farsa de Ysaac in this description.
The misleading simplicity of this short play has resulted in a body of scholarship composed largely of readings that concern its status as a retelling of the Biblical source. Such studies have tended to concentrate on the interpretation of Isaac’s blessing and its exegetic tradition, and generally ignore the necessary transformations the story goes through in its passage from the pages of scriptural text to the dramatic stage of the sixteenth century. For example, Pérez Priego places this play in the category of “farsas figurativas,”15 which he defines as “la puesta en escena de una fabula histórica que procede de la Biblia y que es interpretada con vistas a la doctrina espiritual que se pretende enseñar” (37). He frames this specific farsa within the context of the exegetic tradition that reads Esau as a figure of the Jews, on the one hand, and Jacob as a figure of the Gentiles, on the other; the difficult relationship between the two brothers, as would be expected, is argued to represent the historically contentious relationship between the two groups.16 Américo Castro, for his part, reads Sánchez de Badajoz’s use

15 Pérez Priego divides Sánchez de Badajoz’s farsas into “dialogales,” “alegóricas” and “de figuración.” He explains the three categories as follows: “Estos procedimientos argumentales que ensaya pueden reducirse a tres categorías diferentes, igualmente eficaces y logradas. Por un lado, cuando siente más urgente la superposición de lo didáctico a lo celebrativo, Diego Sánchez prescinde de la invención argumental y busca una exposición directa de los asuntos teológicos y morales a través del simple diálogo de unos pocos personajes en escena. Por otro, quizá en momentos de creatividad más reflexiva, buscará argumentos en cuyo desarrollo escénico se haga más plástica la exposición y comunicación de los asuntos; tal sucederá con las farsas alegóricas y con las de prefiguración bíblica” (29).
16 Pérez Priego dates this exegetic tradition to Hugues de Saint-Victor (Allegoriae in Vetus Testamentum, in Patr. Lat., CLXXV, col. 649) and offers the following quote: "Isaac igitur
of the Genesis 27 passage as a comment on the "conflicto intercastizo" between Old and New Christians, a point of contention central to Iberian politics during Sánchez de Badajoz’s lifetime and beyond (81-85). However, even when scholars pay attention to the more strictly formal and dramatic aspects of Sánchez de Badajoz’s work, it is usually to point to what is considered its somewhat anachronistic nature or his theater’s status as a throwback to medieval dramatic practices. As Ann E. Wiltrout has written, "Diego Sánchez’s plays, outdated in their own time, are of the type composed by Lucas Fernández, who remained isolated from the new Italian currents, and by Juan del Encina prior to his sojourn in Rome" (18). In this sense, critics as diverse as Pérez Priego, Castro and Wiltrout, all center their attention on the didactic and theological consequences of Genesis 27 and often underestimate the dramatic innovations necessary for the staging of the passage.

Early Spanish theater, understood as the work being produced by playwrights such as Gil Vicente, Juan del Encina, Bartolomé de Torres Naharro, and Sánchez de Badajoz, in the period between Antonio Nebrija and the rise of commercial theater, was

Deus; Rebecca, gratia; Esau, Judaicus populus; Jacob, gentilis (...). Ovidit Esau Jacob: odio habent populum Christianum ex gentibus collectum Judaei, videntes eum dominari sibi." Although Saint-Victor’s work dates back to the twelfth century, this interpretive tradition goes back to Augustine of Hippo’s The City of God in the fourth century: “We have seen that Isaac’s two sons, Esau and Jacob, presented a symbol of the two people, Jews and Christians [...]” (707). In Scenes from the Drama of European Literature, Erich Auerbach mentions Isaac and his two sons as one of the influential examples of figura—an example of figura futurorum, to be precise—that would guide the medieval figurative tradition (65).
characterized by a porous and participatory relationship between audience and stage. The autonomous stage, that is, a space strictly delimited from the audience and from reality that became a given with later theater was only still forming. Theater in Spain before Lope de Vega, as Surtz describes it, had “more in common with the dramatic rituals of ancient Greece and the Middle Ages than the illusionistic theater of Renaissance Italy and the nineteenth century” (9). In the early theater of the Iberian peninsula, unlike the work of Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Terence that were serving as models for Italian humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the lines between spectator and stage were constantly redrawn and renegotiated not only from play to play but also within the different moments of each piece. Common dramatic elements such as the widespread use of an introito usually presented by a shepherd and its use to connect audience and stage; a character’s apparent self-awareness of his or her status as dramatic character; and the constant use of direct address from character to audience, together resulted in a co-mingling of the time and space of the audience and that of the stage, and created a relationship that would be better described as a continuum instead of a fixed border. As Melveena McKendrick has pointed out, it will not be until the second half of the sixteenth century with the influence of Italian theater companies in Spain and the work of Juan de la Cueva that theater as we understand it today will emerge out of the combined elements of the “popular tradition rooted in ceremony and rite and Church instruction” and of the
“classicizing, literary traditions of drama as a self-contained art form” (40).17

**Dramatic Time and Space**

Manuel Sito Alba describes the beginnings of Early Modern theater in Spain by contrasting the definition of the word theater set forth by Nebrija at the end of the fifteenth century—“teatro do hazian juegos”18—and the use of the same word by Calderón de la Barca more than a century and half later in his famous El gran teatro del mundo (158-162). Calderón’s use of the word betrays the many changes that occurred in the genre between these two dates. From Nebrija’s definition, where theater is a physical place, a quasi-architectural concept, with Calderón we arrive at a conception of theater, now transformed into a current and living practice

Autor: [...]  

Yo a cada uno  
el papel le daré que le convenga,  
y porque en fiesta igual su parte tenga

17 Melveena McKendrick credits Juan de la Cueva with taking a “lead in breaking with past and recent practice [...] in presenting plays as self-contained representations of reality, employing neither the comic introito or prologue spoken before the action by one of the characters, nor the argument designed to help the audience follow the plot” (55). While I agree with this statement, I also find moments of dramatic self-containment and autonomy in the work of earlier playwrights.  
18 Nebrija’s definition of the word “teatro” is quoted by Joan Corominas in his Diccionario crítico etimológico de la lengua castellana.
el hermoso aparato
de apariencias, de trajes de ornato,
hoy prevenido quiero
que, alegre, liberal y lisonjero,
fabriques apariencias
que de dudas se pasen a evidencias.
Seremos, yo el Autor, en un instante,
tú el teatro, y el hombre el recitante.

(ll.56-66, p.41-42)

From the opening scene of Calderón’s famous El gran teatro del mundo we witness the development of a notion of theater that encompasses not only the location of dramatic representation, that is a stage or even more generally the building or structure housing a stage, but the function of the author (Autor); the script and actors (“Yo a cada uno el papel le daré que le convenga…”); and the process of dramatic illusion (“fabriques apariencias/que de dudas se pasen a evidencias”). In other words, Calderón’s use of the word theater, although it has not left behind the notion of location included in Nebrija’s definition, has taken on the notions of a genre, a practice, and, furthermore, an infrastructure, that characterize modern theatricality.19

19 The use of the word theater as a physical location is very much still in use today. The Diccionario de la Real Academia offers as the first usage of the word theater: “Edificio o
It would seem, therefore, that, from Nebrija to Calderón, there is a shift from defining theater as the area around a spectacle, as the place from which we view it and the place that contains it, to theater as the space of the spectacle itself, that is, the space that is created, and the rules that govern the movement of human bodies through that very delimited space we would now call a stage. In other words, from the fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth, when attempting to define theater, attention has shifted from the structure that houses the stage to the practices not only taking place upon the stage but also, simultaneously, creating it. If we accept the leap from Nebrija to Calderón proposed by Sito Alba as the shift from location to dramatic genre and from architecture to practice, what is it that we leap over? What do we set to the side in the name of this narrative?

Sánchez de Badajoz resides between two traditions. On the one hand, his work is produced after the forgetting of theater such as it was performed and defined in Ancient Greece and Rome and yet, on the other, his work does not completely coincide with the Early Modern revival or reinvention of the form. His work is thus neither the mysterious and archaic relic that Nebrija pointed to with his fifteenth-century definition of theater as the area around a spectacle, nor the place from which we view it and the place that contains it. Sitio destinado a la representación de obras dramáticas o a otros espectáculos públicos propios de la escena.” In English, the OED’s first entry for the word is: “A place constructed in the open air, for viewing dramatic plays or other spectacles.” The use of theater as a literary genre or as the spectacle or the actions upon the stage is the third entry of the third usage and its first recorded example is dated 1668 with Dryden’s Of Dramatick Poesie, An Essay.
nor does it fully display the autonomous stage that will become a permanent fixture of early modern theater over the next century. In the theater of Sánchez de Badajoz we find the frequent use of typical medieval dramatic expressions coexisting with innovative moments of autonomy and indeed, modern or protomodern theatricality. In this context, specifically *Farsa de Ysaac*, the use of direct address as well as apparently inconsistent use of geographical and seemingly illogical temporal changes are transformed by Rebecca’s presence within the story of Genesis from seemingly crude medieval remnants into explorations into new forms of dramatic representation.

**The Play Postponed/Shepherd**

The *introito* that opens *Farsa de Ysaac* includes the customary comic intervention of an illiterate shepherd. In this case, he begins by deviating from the very formula that defined his role within the play by forgetting the proper greeting:

¡Hala, hala, gente honrada!

¿queréis saber a qué vengo?

Digo’s que vengo a no nada…

¡Y olvidé la revellada!

¡Qué poca memoria tengo!

(ll. 1-5, p. 171)
The initial framing device, the Shepherd’s salutation and interpellation of the audience, is mentioned—if only as a forgotten step of the formula—but not performed. The Shepherd then playfully ponders the grammatical consequences of double negatives; hints at the difficulty and importance of “entendimiento” by asking the audience if they think they understand his speech and by mentioning the significance of the topic of the farsa; and finally introduces the topic of Isaac and his blessing. *Farsa de Ysaac* then continues, after this traditional, if somewhat flawed, interpellation of the audience, with a brief summary of the story of Isaac’s blessing, that is, the argument or plot that will guide the play, followed by a short description of the correct interpretation of the Biblical passage:

Veis el patriarca Ysac

y Rabeca, su mujer,

veis a Jacob y a Esaú:

que hijos mellizos son

nacidos al tú más tú;

que este, Jacob, que Yrrael hu,

hurtó aquel la bendición.

Dentro del vientre riñeron

con enbidias muy ardiles

y quantos dellos vinieron
que nunca bien se quisieron
son judíos y gentiles:
hizieron los malhazejos
entre sí tanta carniças
que an agora, en fe parejos,
entre llos nuevos y viejos
no faltan llas ojariças.

(ll. 24-40, p. 172)

The Shepherd’s description of the spectator’s action, that of the verb to watch, see or look, and its corresponding direct object, the scene of Isaac and his clan, is firmly rooted in the grammatical present of the verb “veis,” and yet also points an arrow to the past and the Biblical events to be represented. Likewise, the “veis” offered by the Shepherd directs the spectator’s attention away from herself, to another time, and more importantly, to another space. In this way, the Shepherd introduces the possibility of alternative temporal and spatial realities different from the one initially shared by the audience. We experience a temporal unfolding that separates the time and space of the audience and the time and space of the actions we are about to witness on the stage. The introduction of this initial “veis” brings with it an implicit over there or an elsewhere from here. It is in this breach, between the past tense of the Bible and the present tense of the current retelling of the story of Isaac and his clan, as well as the transhistorical
interpretation offered at the end of the summary, that the Shepherd’s exegetic tour takes place and his role as mediator between stage and audience is highlighted. This juxtaposition of different temporalities, between the time of the viewer (subject in the present/‘‘veis’’) and the time of Biblical passage (direct object in the past/‘‘hurtó’’), transcodes the temporal into the spatial and, and as I will explore in greater detail, opens up a place for the performance of Genesis 27 to come into being, one that will exist in distinction from its source narrative. It is this space, independent from the present of the audience and the past of the Biblical history that is to become the greatest innovation Sánchez de Badajoz will contribute to the creation of modern Spanish theater.

The audience, the subject of the verb ‘‘veis’’ as used by the Shepherd in line 24, stands in the here and now, while the direct object, that which is to be seen—in other words, ‘‘el patriarca Ysaac y Rabecca su muger,’’ described in the past—stands elsewhere from the here and now of the audience. The different verbal tenses create two temporal locations, the present of the audience and the past of Isaac and Rebecca represented by the present first person ‘‘veis’’ and the third person preterit ‘‘hurtó.’’ The audience is looking now, here and in the present, but it is the past that they see. This verbal and temporal panorama is, of course, an example of medieval theatricality present during and simultaneous to the spatial reorganization that takes place with the juxtaposition of different dramatic times upon the stage. And while the ‘‘veis,’’ in the
present, points to a moment in the past, it may also refer to the custom of having all actors on stage wait for the characters to come to life following the shepherd’s introduction. And yet, although Jacob’s transgression is described with the preterit, the identity of the two brothers is described with the present: “mellizos son nacidos” and “son judíos y gentiles.” Jacob and Esau, both as Old Testament characters and as their medieval figural fulfillment, Jews and Gentiles, are described with the present of the verb to be and thus partake of the grammatical tense used by the shepherd’s initial “veis.” The actions we are about to witness, actions that are summarized by the above-mentioned “hurtó” as well as by the verb quartet created by the third person plural in “riñeron/vinieron/ quisieron/hizieron,” take place in the past, even though the subject of the four verbs has been described in the present. Jacob and Esau, as well as Isaac and Rebecca, are also here, in the present, standing before us. The shepherd’s summary of the story of Isaac and his use of different verb tenses creates a juxtaposition of temporalities upon the stage: the present of the audience watching and waiting for the play to begin and identified by the questioning “veis;” the past as the repository of

20 The verbs “riñeron,” “vinieron” and “quisieron,” appear at the end of lines 31, 33 and 34 and therefore fulfill the rhyme pattern necessary for a quintilla, that is, a stanza composed of five octosyllabic verses and, in this case, an ABAAB rhyme. “Hizeron” is the first word of the next quintilla and is thus not necessary for the completion of the previous quintilla’s rhyme scheme. Nevertheless, the proximity of the four words and their identical endings due to their shared subjects (Jacob and Esau and their figural decedents, Jews and Christians), create a cluster of meaning that encapsulates the actions that will be represented upon the stage in the play to come.
biblical events narrated as history marked by the preterit; and finally the eternal present of the verb “son” and the characters, or the actors, if I may purposefully abuse this metaphor, that populate this sacred past as well as contemporary political and religious interpretations of Jacob and Esau. But this traditional juxtaposition or coexistence is, in case of Farsa de Ysaac, dissected and consequently displays and unfolds the temporal characteristics of the medieval stage. The audience travels from its awareness of their present (“veis”) to the Biblical past of a stolen blessing (“hurtó”). The supposed historical reality of the event of Isaac’s life is immediately transformed and grammatically linked by the repetition of a string of verbs in the preterit third person plural (“riñeron,” “quisieron,” “vinieron”) and then transformed once again, through a return of the present tense (“son judios y gentiles”), into the brothers’ figural fulfillment and the story of their descendants who have perpetuated the sibling rivalry into the present in the form of religious interpretation and early modern Iberian politics. Thus, we confront the eternal present of religious time and its becoming present both as its religious interpretation in the here and now of world history and a dramatic representation with the much more narrow here and now brought forth by the Shepherd’s “veis.”

The return to the present is marked by the “agora” in line 38 and the return of the present ushered in by the Shepherd’s original description of the act of looking. The mention of contemporary political conflict between Old and New Christians (“en fe
parejos,/ entre llos nuevos y viejos/ no faltan llas ojariças”) brings the audience back to the present, grounding them, it would seem, in their original here and now. However, instead of returning to the initial moment of the “veis” and the religious celebration at the beginning of the shepherd’s introduction, the audience returns to the political reality of the contemporary strife between Old and New Christians, in spite of being in “fe parejos.” Stated another way, representation has gone from religious celebration to religious teaching and has finally arrived at political reality. The initial separation between audience and biblical characters that was implied by the distancing “veis,” the distance between those who look and that which is to be looked at, has not been closed but instead widened, and the exegetic journey started by the Shepherd has not yet taken the audience back to its initial present nor has the promised play begun.

Parallel to the above temporal transformations, the journey guided by the Shepherd also includes also a spatial component, or a spatialization of the temporal transformation marked by the variations in verb tenses. The audience, initially in the here of the experience of a sixteenth century church celebration, is asked to look upon a scene taking place in the Canaan of antiquity, a scene that is then transformed into the non-space—and atemporality—of the figural. The concrete space of Isaac’s two sons that the audience has been asked to envision loses its concrete and material substance and is converted into a literary and religious rhetorical device, into the transhistorical relationship between Jews and Christians. And although it could be argued that the
space of Jacob and Esau as rhetorical figures can be defined, in this passage, as spatial
only in a loosely abstract fashion, Sánchez de Badajoz nevertheless grounds this shift
from history to rhetoric through the materiality of Rebecca’s body. The rhetorical hinge
that articulates the shift from the sixth quintilla, which introduces the two brothers as
the offspring of Isaac and Rebecca (“veis a Jacob y a Esaú/sus hijos mellizos son”), and
the seventh, which introduces the two brothers as figures for Jew and Christians (“y
quantos dellos vinieron/que nunca bien se quisieron/son judíos y gentiles:”), is
Rebecca’s female body, in fact, her very womb: “Dentro del vientre riñeron/con enbidias
muy ardiles” (ll. 31-32, p. 172). Rebecca’s womb is, thus, the first place of battle between
the two brothers and the origin of the eternal contention between Jews and Christians,
and, in this way, it provides the abstract interpretive shift from history to eternity, or
from the literal to a figural reading, a material and corporeal foundation. Rebecca’s
womb is the origin of this figure, but it also adds the spatial element that would
otherwise be purely metaphoric. Therefore, in Sánchez de Badajoz’s retelling of Genesis
27 it is the body of Rebecca, specifically (and possibly metonymically) her womb, which
operates as a bridge between the material and historical reading of the biblical passage
and its transhistorical, figural, and abstract interpretation. 21

21 The relationship between Rebecca and her womb, as developed by Sánchez de
Badajoz in his Farsa de Ysaac, appears to resist rhetorical categories. Is the connection
between the two a metonymic relationship? Or is it based on synecdoche? Does the
womb represent Rebecca or does Rebecca stand in for her womb? Or, more radically,
Finally, once again, the “agora” which would yet again appear to secure a return to the reality of an audience watching a religious spectacle, to take the spectators back to their initial space, instead converts the material stage upon which the representation of Isaac’s blessing will take place into the allegorical stage of history upon which contemporary Christians, New and Old, still battle with the consequences of an ancient sibling rivalry.

After time—past and present, as well as the possibility of a timeless eternity—has been catalogued and explained by the Shepherd, as well as transcoded into spatial language, line 41 brings a momentary reprieve from the proliferation of temporalities and spatial representations: “Ora, en fin, yo aquí me asiento” (ll. 41, p. 173). For an instant the audience is once again brought back to moment of the opening “veis,” with the “ora” and “aquí” that mark the present of the Shepherd’s words. Nevertheless, the opening “veis” in the second person plural and thus addressing the audience is here replaced by the first person singular (yo aquí me asiento). The Shepherd, it would seem, has returned to the initial moment of his introito where he will now sit and rest, but the audience is to continue on its journey. The present tense is used once again in the next line, the “veis” is here transformed into “escuchá” and its direct object has become the mystery of the Holy Sacrament and a presage of Isaac’s only sense not fooled by does this relationship, between Rebecca and what could be argued is the biological essence of the female body, completely resist figural description or interpretation?
Rebecca during the moment of the blessing.

The future, in the form of a repetition of the opening “veis” with a shift in verb tense, follows in line 45 and gives a new form to the time and space of the stage:

veréis una gran figura;
veréis aquel viejo honrado
que cinco sentidos tien
ser en llos quatro bulrado:
gran misterio figurado
de la hostia, nuestro bien.

(ll. 45-50, p. 173)

This new transformation of the verb “ver,” the “veréis” that begins the previous quote, appears as a temporal progression forward from the first use of the verb “ver” in the present tense during the Shepherd’s first mention of Isaac in line 24. Both verbs open phrases that have the same direct object, that is, they both refer to the same character, Isaac: “[V]eréis una gran figura” can be read as itself as chronological repetition of the previous “[v]eis el patriarca Ysac.” The question that presents itself when we hear the two phrases is then: what is the difference between the two Isaacs? Between present Isaac and future Isaac? What is the spectator looking at in the present and what is it that the spectator has yet to see? The contrast between two almost identical lines, separated only by the shift in time from the present to the future, allows for a simultaneous
reinforcement of the Biblical passage and thus fulfills the didactic and theological aim embedded in early religious theater. However this shift also functions as a deferral or postponement of the passage. The Biblical story has been glossed over and explained, but the play, the Shepherd reminds us, has not yet begun. If the first Isaac, the direct object of the first “veis,” can be read as the different versions of the Biblical character—as historical, figural, mythical character and as the center of both a religious and political figural interpretation—the audience must wait, explains the Shepherd with the “veréis,” for the Isaac-to-come.

The use of multiple temporalities—the coexistence of different historical moments in a timeless present—in early modern dramatic expressions is a frequent device used to develop didactic and theological points, as can be seen with the Shepherd’s introduction and summary. As Surtz explains in the context of early modern drama in Spain: “The participants in the Mass and the spectators of these early plays [late fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries] are made to transcend their particular moment in historical time and asked to contemplate time and space from the timeless present of God’s point of view” (45). The Shepherd’s presentation and dissection of this timeless present or “God’s point of view,” at first blush, continues with this tradition. But the postponement of the actions of the Genesis passage creates a distinction between the narrative quality of the Bible story and the yet to be seen dramatic demands of its performance. The introduction to the *Farsa de Ysaac* satisfies the doctrinal
requirements of religious theater but also prepares the audience for the possibility of an autonomous dramatic space. In this play we see a translation of doctrinal needs into theatrical needs: God’s point of view will be transformed into the omniscient point of view of the would-be director. Rebecca, who in the Shepherd’s introito served as the materialization of the abstract link between the literal and the figural readings of her twin sons’ rivalry, will now operate as the link between different spheres that will create the dramatic space necessary for the performance of Isaac’s blessing, a blessing she is unable to offer her son Jacob with her own voice. The irony of the repeated use of the verb “ver” in reference to a blind man will become evident from here on, and Isaac and Jacob’s voices will become the sites of dramatic innovations through Rebecca’s omniscient and at times invisible authority.

The First Play/Isaac

Line 60 of the Farsa allows the audience to finally hear Isaac’s voice and hear the patriarch tell his own story: “La vista tengo perdida/de mi vejez ya muy larga […]” (ll. 61-65, p. 173-174). Although this is our first encounter with Isaac’s voice, the Shepherd has already told us the story of Isaac and has briefly introduced the theme of the senses and their limits. Isaac’s first words echo the Shepherd’s use of the verb “veis”/”veréis” in the introito, now nominalized into the noun “vista.” The play—after the Shepherd’s introduction and summary and understood as the representation of actions upon a
stage by actors playing characters—could be said to start at this point. The sound of the voice of Isaac appears to fulfill the promise of the future tense in the “veréis una gran figura” of line 45. The story then unfolds quickly, for the audience has been informed of the backstory of Isaac’s two sons. Immediately, five lines down, Isaac calls for his eldest son:

Ven tú mi hijo mayor,
primogénito heredero,
Esaú, gran cazador.
Vee a caça, mi señor,
y ven presto que te espero,
y desque ovieres hallado,
traime alguna refección
que coma y esté esforçado
porque antes de ser finado
te dé mi bendición.

(ll. 66-75, p.174)

Isaac asks his son to bring him food so that he may regain his strength and bless him. In so doing, Isaac describes his son as “mi hijo mayor” (his eldest), “Esaú, gran cazador” (great hunter) and “mi señor” (my lord). The rhyme scheme, ABBAACDDCC, unites the three words used to describe Esau, with the ending -or, and leads up to the use of
the epithet “gran caçador” in line 68. I’ll return to this rhyme scheme in a moment. For now, it suffices that Esau agrees to go hunting and, with God’s direction, return speedily with food for his father.

Immediately after this exchange between Isaac and Esau, in an almost parallel scene, we find Rebecca with her younger son Jacob. The contrast with the previous scene between her husband Isaac and her eldest son Esau betrays a parallel structure that highlights significant contrasts and substitutions. To begin with, the scene opens with what appears to be the feminine sphere of the hearth and domesticity, as Rebecca says:

[...] 
vee presto a nuestro ganado 
y traéme un par de cabritos; 
serás tú el adelantado, 
que le haré un guisado conforme a sus apetitos. 
De tu mano comerá 
pensado que es Esaú, 
que no te conoscerá; 
su alma te bendirá 
y el bendito serás tú.

68
Rebecca’s words and their rhyme scheme stand out in contrast to the words used by Isaac in the previous quote. Here, “ganado” is joined in rhyme with “adelantado” and “guisado.” In the second half of the quotation, the rhyme scheme pairs “comerá” (will eat), with “conoscerá” (will recognize), and “bendirá” (will bless). The union by rhyme of the food related terms “ganado” and “guisado,” mediated by “adelantado,” is opposed to the world of hunting—and the -or ending words “mayor,” “caçador,” and “señor”—that echo from the conversation between Esau and his father in the previous scene. Livestock has replaced hunting and “un par de cabritos” (87) replaces the contingency of “desque ovieres hallado” with the certainty of domestic livestock (71). Isaac asks for food so that he may regain his strength and perform the blessing; Rebecca promises to cook a meal according to his “apetitos,” shifting the use of food from necessity to pleasure (90).

Furthermore, the third person singular of the future tense of “comerá,” “conoscerá,” and “bendirá” (he will eat, he will not recognize/know, and he will bless) encapsulates Rebecca’s plan for tricking Isaac into giving to Jacob the blessing that rightfully belongs to Esau. These words can be read as a rudimentary set of stage directions necessary for the performance of the blessing according to her plan. Yet this fragment also echoes the Shepherd’s use of the future tense at the end of his summary and introduction in lines 45 and 46. Only now the subject of the future tense verbs shifts
from the audience to Isaac, underlining the passive role Isaac will play in Rebecca’s performance of the blessing, and more importantly, once again postponing the moment of proper dramatic representation. Rebecca here uses the same future tense verbal structure to describe both the performance she will direct before Isaac, as well as his reaction. In this way, Rebecca momentarily takes on the role played at the opening of the farsa by the shepherd. As a result, the spatial and temporal differentiation marked by the introduction of Isaac’s voice following the Shepherd’s introduction, is broken up again by another postponement. The “veréis” is replaced by Rebecca’s new use of the future tense, that is the “comerá,” “conocerá,” and “bendirá,” opening up yet another space for the play-to-come. The future play we, the audience, are waiting to see is again pushed into the future, only this time, instead of theological pretexts and exegetic foundations, we are offered a tour of the dramatic details needed for the performance of the blessing according to Rebecca’s requirements. The play will not begin until the proper exegetic preparation of the audience has been carried out, and is instead postponed further until the necessary dramatic preparation needed for the yet-to-be spectacle directed by Rebecca. What had been the play proper has now turned into another introduction and the prelude to the play to be staged by Rebecca in an attempt to redirect Isaac’s blessing to whom she knows to be its rightful recipient.

Also pertinent here is that Rebecca, in response to Jacob’s fear of being found out by his father, accepts authorship and responsibility for the actions that will be taken: 
“obedesce a mi razón, / y si te echar maldición / ella venga sobre mí” (ll. 108-110, p. 175). The word “bendición,” from line 174, is echoed by its antonym: “maldición.” The two words, the former related to Isaac and his surroundings and the latter related to Rebecca and her space of domesticity, are connected not only by rhyme but together also form the two poles of a dichotomy. The medieval panorama of eternal time has given way to the dichotomy of nature and hunting inhabited by Isaac and the domestic world of livestock governed by Rebecca. The future tense of “comerá,” “conocerá” and “bendirá” hints to future transformations of these two divergent and, at least for the time being, complementary spaces.

The irony of the Shepherd’s use of “veis” and “veréis,” the exclusion of Isaac implied by the use of the very sense he lacks, deepens as Rebecca prepares to direct a performance tailored to a blind man and his available senses. Similarly, the dramatic organization now follows the logic of the human voice and the sense of hearing. Rebecca’s overhearing of Isaac’s voice and the spatial consequences that come with it guide the plans for the blessing and will further reorganize the dramatic space of the stage. Rebecca’s ability to overhear Isaac’s conversation with Esau highlights the mutual dependence of the two spaces. And even if they exist on opposite sides of a mutually excluding dichotomy, the conceptual limits of the one allow for the organization and demarcation of the other. Within this exclusive and yet dependent spatial structure, Rebecca takes advantage of the human voice’s capacity to travel
beyond the body, and together with Isaac’s blindness, uses it to infiltrate a space from which she has been barred. Additionally, Rebecca constantly moves between two interpretations of “voice.” Isaac’s voice is necessary as material expression, as sound and not only linguistic expression, while her own voice is divorced from its material reality, a mere metaphor used to establish agency or authority. The patriarch’s blessing is not simply a series of words that can be repeated; his blessing is possible only in his voice and as an unrepeatable and singular event. Isaac and Rebecca, as bodies, are limited each to their own space, that is, Rebecca and Isaac are never in the same scene together, but their voices travel freely throughout the stage. Isaac’s voice, after it leaves his body, disseminates into space and reaches Rebecca’s ears, no longer under the control of its original bearer. Rebecca, through her son Jacob, is able to establish authorship and authority within her husband’s world, and, as we will see a few lines later in Farsa de Ysaac, hijacks both her son’s body and the materiality of her husband’s voice.

The Second Play/Rebecca

The arrangements for usurped blessing continue with Rebecca’s hurried preparation of the cabritos fetched by Jacob. At the more properly metatheatrical level, she fashions the Esau “costume” that Jacob will don, saying:

Vístete, hijo, mi amor,
esta ropa de Esaú,
porque tu padre y señor
lo conosce en el olor
y pensará que eres tú;
y quierote empellejar
este cuello y cada mano
porque se pueda engañar
tu padre, si te atentar,
y piense que eres tu hermano.

(ll. 181-190, p. 179)

Here Esau’s clothes and animal fur are used to replicate a hairy body and simulate his smell for his father. A few lines later Rebecca gathers the props her youngest son will use: the meal, the plate and its other accessories. One of the few things Sanchez de Badajoz improvises in his adaptation is the inclusion of “manteles” among the objects taken to Isaac by his son Jacob as ordered by Rebecca. She and Jacob catalogue the ways in which each of Isaac’s senses, smell and touch, will be fooled.

Finally, the play we’ve been promised is ready to be performed, the play that has been postponed by the Shepherd and then Rebecca can begin. The moment of the blessing arrives and Rebecca gives her son a last direction: “Toma este manjar muy fino/que él come de buena miente/y aquel pichel de vino […] y pan cozido reziente” (ll.196-
Rebecca disappears and Isaac and Jacob, in full costume, come face to face. The *Farsa* reaches its conceptual center and its midpoint with this scene. One by one, Isaac’s senses fall prey to Rebecca’s staging and, although she will no longer return to the stage in what is left of the *Farsa*, her handiwork is done.

Jacob: ¡Ha, mi padre y mi señor!

Ysaac: Bien oigo. ¿Quién eres tú?

Jacob: Toma, come por mi amor:

yo soy tu hijo mayor,

primogénito, Esaú.

He cumplido tu mandado,

de mi caça te guisé.

(205-213, l. 180)

The play ends in reverse order of how it began, closing off the frames and spaces opened up by Rebecca’s private representation for an audience of one. Isaac eats his meal and blesses the wrong son. Esau returns and the mistake is discovered. The Shepherd appears on stage and explains that a new era of peace among Christians New and Old is coming and all rejoice in the miracle of Christ that cannot fool the faithful:

Ya no falta bendición

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22 *Farsa de Ysaac* consists of 380 lines, and the encounter between and Jacob begins in line 205.
a nosotros y a vosotros,
pues después de su pasión
mora Dios entre nosotros;
ya los unos y los otros
festejemos por mil modos,
pues que Dios combida a todos.

(ll. 374-380, p. 187)

But what has changed between the first half of the play and the closing second half? There is, of course, Rebecca’s absence from the anticipated scene of the blessing. After playing an important role in the first half of the Farsa, once her play is staged and Jacob’s performance begins, she disappears from the stage and does not return. We will have to account for this absence and also the consequences it brings.

Stranded Voices

Adriana Cavarero reads Isaac’s blessing as a story that “refutes the deaf strategy of logocentrism” (23). As an illustration of the complexities of the Hebrew word qol—a word that can mean voice but also the acoustic effect of non-linguistic phenomena such as wind, storms and thunder—the story of Isaac “makes evident not only the uniqueness of the voice, but also its crucial asymmetry with respect of the order of speech” (23). According to Cavarero, at the moment of the blessing, after Isaac’s sense
of smell and touch has been fooled by Rebecca’s design, this asymmetry is made evident with Jacob’s untruth: “I am Esau.” Isaac responds to this lie: “The voice [qol] is the voice of Jacob, but the arm is the arm of Esau.”

Although Rebecca’s plan is successful, Jacob’s voice is the only element impossible to disguise, the only element that resists the dramatic illusion Rebecca has created for her husband. With the story of Isaac’s blessing the difference between voice and speech is brought to the fore, by pitting the uniqueness of voice against the uniqueness of the proper name. In Jacob’s statement “I am Esau,” voice and speech work against each other, with voice unequivocally identifying Jacob even when the proper name, through speech and language, and the disguised body, are those of Esau. This phrase, when spoken by Jacob requires the reinforcement of the sense of smell and touch, but when issued from the mouth of Esau, upon his return and after the blessing has been given to Jacob, the utterance is a self-evident truth that needs no proof or supplement. The voice cannot be disguised.

And yet in spite of the impossibility of disguising the voice, in both the Genesis 27 story and in Sánchez de Badajoz’s version, Isaac is quick to set aside his doubts and suspicions and accept what his sense of smell and touch offer as truth. The voice of

\[ \text{\textsuperscript{23}} \]

Cavarero does not offer a source for her quotes from Genesis 27. The 1941 edition of the Douay Bible translates the two instances when Isaac asks Jacob who he is as “I am Esau thy firstborn: I have done as thou didst command me” and “Are thou my son Esau. He answered: I am” (Gen 27:19 and Gen 27:24).
Jacob cannot be disguised as Esau’s, but the plan works in spite of this aural remainder.

Mladen Dolar pushes Cavarero’s distinction between voice and meaning, and defines voice as precisely that which “does not contribute to making sense” (15). Dolar reads the apparent detachment between voice and meaning through a teleological and theological lens as it is exemplified by Saint Augustine. In sermon 288, Augustine contrasts John the Baptist as voice to Christ interpreted as logos, the word, and presents this difference as a process of progression. According to Dolar, the materiality of the voice is lost in its progression towards logos and Word, and is then replaced by the materiality of the flesh, the body of Christ: “The material element which has to be obliterated spectacularly reappears as the manifestation of the Word, in the guise of the flesh of identity itself” (endnote 6, 191). The story of Isaac’s blessing follows a similar logic. In the process of convincing Isaac to pay attention not to Jacob’s voice but to his words, Rebecca draws attention away from the material support that makes the utterance “I am Esau” possible. The “body” of Esau, in this case a spectacular tactile and olfactory replica created by Rebecca, then takes the place of the original vocal materiality.

Due to Isaac’s blindness, Jacob’s voice, when heard by his father, is an example of the acousmatic voice, a voice that is heard but whose origin cannot be seen, a voice that declines refuge in the human body. The term acousmatic was first used by Pierre
Schaeffer, who takes the word from *akousmatikoi*, or Acousmatics, the name given to Pythagoras’s disciples who are said to have listened to his teachings from behind a curtain. Film scholar Michel Chion retools the term to describe the complexities of ascribing the screen as the location of the voices an audience hears during a film, with the off-screen voice as the extreme example of the term. “When the acousmatic presence is a voice,” writes Chion, “and especially when this voice has not yet been visualized—that is, when we cannot yet connect it to a face—we get a special being, a kind of talking and acting shadow to which we attach the name *acousmêtre*” (1999, 21). But the disarticulation of voice and body or sound and location is not specific to cinema. Or, as Dolar explains, sound constantly eludes an origin and the sense of sight must be called in to ground the ear’s confusion; “ultimately,” he continues, “there is no such thing as disacousmatization [the attempt to return the voice to its corporeal origin]” (70). The source of the voice can never be seen; it stems from an undisclosed and structurally concealed interior, and cannot match what is visible. Isaac can hear Jacob’s voice but it is a voice “whose source one cannot see, a voice whose origins cannot be identified, a

24 Chion offers the following definition from an unspecified “old dictionary” as the basis for Schaeffer’s definition: “a sound that is heard without its cause or source being seen” (18).

25 For Dolar the story of Pythagoras and his followers points to theatrical element at the origins of philosophy: “It appears that at its origin philosophy depends on a theatrical *coup de force*: there is the simple minimal device which defines the theater, the curtain which serves as a screen, but a curtain not to be raised, not for many years—philosophy appears as the art behind the curtain” (61).
voice one cannot place” (Dolar, 60). Isaac’s blindness makes every voice he hears acousmatic and unhinges the acoustic from the visual, allowing Rebecca’s plan to succeed.26 With Chion’s reading of voice, and opposed to Cavarero’s interpretation of the mistaken blessing, Isaac does the only thing possible with an acousmatic voice, that is, he identifies a source, in this case the body of Jacob disguised as Esau that stands before him.27

The disarticulation between body and voice generated by Isaac’s blindness and his need to rely on other senses has a further and important ramification for the staging of the blessing. I have already noted the contrast between Rebecca’s prominent role in the first half of the play and her conspicuous absence after Isaac performs his blessing. I read this absence as a reversal of the progression from the materiality of the word to that of the body as described by Dolar through Saint Augustine. That is, Rebecca’s body

26 Bruce Johnson sees a similar situation in Hamlet, where he reads certain moments of disassociation between sight and sound as epistemological categories reflecting the Elizabethan concern over the shift from a predominantly aural and oral culture to one increasingly dominated by technologies of printing: “For the Elizabethan audience the question of what we know, and how we know it, was a matter of urgency. The question is explored in terms of a shifting and unstable relationship between the evidence of the eye and the ear” (259).
27 In fact, in Le Son au cinéma, Chion compares the spectator’s interpretation of voice upon the screen to that of the blind in real geographical space: “En effet, si le son provenant de cette «source» fixe du haut-parleur est attribué à un personnage évoluant dans l’écran, et si l’on voit ce personnage aller à droite, on va entendre alors le son passer à droite; si le personnage sort du champ, on entend le son à côté de l’écran. Ce phénomène, qui asservit la localization attribuée par le spectateur au son à la vision de sa source réelle ou supposée (ou, pour les aveugles, à la situation de celle-ci dans l’espace géométral), est vérifié tous les jours des millions des fois” (1985, 29).
become an abstraction, the invisible and absent figure that nevertheless functions as an organizing principle for the stage. Although her body suffers a process of dematerialization and abstraction, her voice traverses an opposite course and instead gains a material presence. Prior to the metatheatrical moment of the blessing, Rebecca has been not been able to talk to her husband, as Jacob and Esau do, nor has she been able to offer the blessing in her own voice. But after this crucial scene her voice has acquired a materiality by proxy, in other words, she has hijacked the materiality of her husband’s voice and her youngest son’s body. Her abstract directorial voice completes what Joseph Roach calls “re-fleshing,” a process he places at the center of theatrical performance in which “the living effigy, the actor, functions as a fetishized substitute for the corpse” (27). Her body undergoes what could be called, following Roach, a re-fleshing, during which her voice secures the material weight needed to ensure the blessing of her youngest son. Consequently, Sánchez de Badajoz brings together in the *Farsa de Ysaac*, the ambiguous and complicated function of theatrical authority, embodied in the figure of Rebecca, and the complexities of the voice and its materiality. Or as Lawrence Switzky explains in his reading of Edmond Rostand’s *Cyrano de Bergerac*: “[it] imagine[s] the visibility and invisibility of theatrical authority in terms of vocal ventriloquism, largely because the voice is a form of semi-corporeality that mimics the uncertain presence of the director”28 (219).

28 Although Rostand’s play is from the nineteenth century, I believe that representation
The multiple definitions of voice used by Rebecca, be it as abstract theatrical authority alongside its concrete even if usurped materiality, are underscored a few lines before the moment of the blessing. The playwright renders Isaac’s doubt and his attempt to overcome the discrepancy between Jacob’s voice and his claims to Esau’s identity with the frase: “Las manos de Esaú son […] pero la boz y su son es de Jacob” (ll. 221-224, p. 180). In this passage Isaac dismantles the elements that make up the voice of Jacob, separating sound from voice, while maintaining a certain unity between the two, as can be seen with the peculiar use of the singular verb to be, “es,” to denote that “boz” and “son” belong to Jacob. What is Jacob’s voice, then, when separated from sound? The 1739 Diccionario de Autoridades published by the Real Academia Española has as its first entry for “voz:” “El sonido formado en la garganta, y proferido por la boca del animal.” The first entry for “son” is “Ruido concertado, que percibimos con el oído, especialmente el que se hace con arte, ó música.” A comparison of the two terms, as defined above, mirrors the doubling of the signifier used by Isaac to refer to Jacob voice, “boz” and “son,” and brings up once again the dichotomy between nature and civilization—between nature and artifice—created by the spatial organization of the stage that I have already discussed. The anatomically based definition of “voz,” one of the relationship between theatrical authority and voice through the use of ventriloquizing figures is much older. Not only is it present in Farsa de Ysac, but it is also the main conceit of Calderón de la Barca’s seventeenth-century La desdicha de la voz.  

29 The Diccionario de Autoridades offers eighteen entries for the word voz, proving the rich semantic field the word enjoys in Spanish.
that locates the point of origin and production in the throat and mouth of a body, as well as its ascription to animals, places “voz” outside of language, outside of human communication and civilization. “Son,” for its own part, is defined as separate from human physicality; its production remains unexplained and the body, specifically the ear, is mentioned as necessary only for its reception. Furthermore, its relationship to music and art remove it from the site of animality and nature, placing it instead on the side of civilization and artifice.30

But the intricacies of the concept of voice, as well as Isaac’s bizarre division of “boz” and “son” in reference to Jacob, go beyond supporting this dichotomy created in the play. The second entry in the Diccionario de Autoridades for “son” is as follows: “Por extensión significa la noticia, fama, y divulgación de alguna cosa.” At the center of this definition is the idea of dissemination, of the power of sound to travel beyond its origin

30 The binary structure at play here between the definition of “voz” and “son” reproduces Aristotle’s contrast between speech and mere voice, except that in the case of Farsa de Ysaac the difference between the two points to the shift from biology to aesthetics, and in the case of Aristotle the difference alludes to the progression from individual interest and survival and the creation of an ethical community: “Now, that man is more of a political animal than bees or any other gregarious animal is evident. Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal who has the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature attains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore likewise the just and the unjust. And it is the characteristic alone of man that he alone has any sense of good and evil, of just and unjust, and the like, and the association of living beings who have this sense make a family and a state” (13).
and outside of the control of its subject or place of production. This, of course, brings us back to Chion and Dolar’s idea of acousmatic voices, or the difficulties inherent in fully housing the human voice in the human body. Although its origin lies in the body, as explained by the first entry of the definition for “son,” once it is articulated and brought into being, the voice travels beyond its originating body and beyond its jurisdiction. Finally, a second entry for “voz” describes it as “[p]or extensión se llama al sonido, que forman algunas cosas inanimadas heridas del viento, ù hiriendo en él.” This definition, together with the second definition for “son,” condenses Rebecca’s strategy for controlling the blessing and creating a space for her own authority. Along with the dissemination or “divulgación” central to the second entry for “son,” the possibility of making that which lacks its own motor or agency to produce sound is at the center of what could be called Rebecca’s dramatic practice. By using her son Jacob as a puppet, and ventriloquizing the necessary dialogue through him, she is able to bend and transform the blessing intended for Esau into a blessing for her favorite son.

The moment of the blessing as a play-within-a-play should be regarded as a significant moment of the birth of theatrical modernity. At its center lies Rebecca’s savvy exploitation of Isaac’s blindness and the exclusion of the sense of sight from the scene she organizes. Unlike most accounts of the rise of illusionistic theater in the Renaissance, where the development of linear perspectival visuality and its introduction to the art of theater and stagecraft are the catalyst for a new stage, at the
center of Rebecca’s stage is the sense of hearing, along with its difficult and contradictory characteristics, and not the sense that makes perspective possible: the sense of sight.

From Voice to Image

In the same way that early religious theater helped propagate Scripture and its proper interpretation, the visual arts were also enlisted for this religious and didactic enterprise. As Pope Gregory the Great wrote in response to the iconoclasm of Bishop Serenus of Marseilles at the beginning of the seventh century: “What writing (scriptura) does for the literate, a picture does for the illiterate looking at it, because the ignorant see in it what they ought to do” (quoted in Duggan, 227). Six centuries later John of Genoa repeated this argument when he argued the threefold purpose of religious images:

Know that there were three reasons for the institution of images in churches. First, for the instruction of simple people, for they are instructed by them as if by books. Second, so that mystery of the incarnation and the examples of the Saints may be more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.

(quoted in Baxandall, 41)
But beyond their similarities as an edifying and educational tool during the middle ages and the early modern period, I am interested in contrasting theater and visual arts, and specifically the representation of Genesis 27 in these two media, not only to juxtapose two different forms of materiality, one aural and the other visual, and their impact on the telling of the story of Isaac, but in an attempt to read the story of the blessing as one inherently useful for the study of drama and theatricality.

In connection with the particular instance of Sánchez de Badajoz’s reimagining of Genesis 27 in Farsa de Ysaac, the comparison between drama and image is also an attempt to illuminate the changes and reorganization suffered by the dramatic space of the farsa through Rebecca’s intervention, as well as the reasons behind her absence after Isaac has blessed Jacob. Through these images, then, I analyze the ways in which painters and illustrators have imagined and represented the spatial organization of the scene of Isaac’s famous misplaced blessing.

The first image, an anonymous woodcut collected in the Illustrated Bartsch, dates from the late fifteenth century (Fig. 2). The figures are rendered with thick contours, which along with the parallel lines used for shading and a non-perspectival composition, are characteristics associated more with earlier woodcuts rather than fifteenth-century examples of this genre. The woodcut shows all four characters of the Genesis 27 passage, with Esau in the top left corner, cut here with his bow and arrow in the middle of hunting for his father’s meal, and we see what might be a rabbit hiding
under a wooded area.³¹ Towards the center, we see Rebecca walking away from the scene of her husband’s blessing, holding an empty platter but looking back to Jacob and Isaac. At the right of the scene sits Isaac, holding Jacob’s fur-covered hands, searching for proof of his identity. As in the case of the image from Herrad of Landsberg’s *Hortus Deliciarum* that opens this chapter, Rebecca’s is present during the blessing, indeed here made prominent with her placement at the center of the image, a position that brings together the two halves of the woodcut and acts as a axis between the left side inhabited by Esau and the right inhabited by Jacob and Isaac. In the same way as the mention of her womb in line 31 of *Farsa de Ysaac*, her position in the woodcut puts her at the center or origin of the battle between Jacob and Esau. Her body faces away from the blessing and she carries an empty platter, indicating Isaac has finished the meal she has prepared, but her face is turned back to Jacob, as if surveying his performance, a last

³¹ Marc Michael Epstein has studied the representation of Genesis 27 in *haggadot* in Spain, Germany and France and has found that starting in the fifteenth century most examples show Esau hunting a hare: “The hare-hunt first appears in Ashkenaz in the fifteenth century, and is present in only a handful of manuscript *haggadot*. Yet the motif gains popularity with the advent of printing, and is found in at least three of the most popular early printed *haggadot*, as well as the later *haggadot* that emulated their design”(17-19). The popularity of both the hunting motif, as well as the hare, is striking according to Epstein, because “hunting by Jews was unequivocally condemned throughout ancient and medieval rabbinical literature, which viewed it as a distinctly non-Jewish activity, one of the classic excesses of the gentiles”(19). He concludes: “Rabbinic literature makes it clear that Esau’s quarry is Jacob and Israel, and so his hunt serves as a typography for the oppression of Israel by the nations of the world. Accordingly, when hunting appears in medieval Jewish literature and in art, it is often used allegorically, most commonly as a figure for the persecution of Israel” (19).
glance to confirm that all is going according to plan.

The architectural details, the windows behind Isaac’s throne and the towers overhead, function as iconographical markers of a contained space, or the interior of a building or structure. Iconographically, we are to read the space of Isaac as interior and Esau’s as exterior, with Rebecca functioning here as the link between the two spaces, and, because of this, making it difficult in this woodcut to establish with certainty whether she is inside or out. In this representation, Rebecca is the limit or border between two areas, making possible their identification and definition, but she is nevertheless neither fully a part of either space, nor is she completely other to them. But unlike the initial moments of Sánchez de Badajoz’s Farsa de Ysaac, the dichotomy between Isaac/Esau and Rebecca/Jacob has been transformed. First, the opposition is now between Isaac/Jacob and Esau, with Rebecca holding together the binary opposition, while not completely belonging to it. Second, the very nature of the dichotomy has also been altered, and where there was once an opposition between hunting and livestock, between nature and domesticity, between nature and artifice, now the major opposition is the contrast between the interior and the exterior. Translating this to dramatic terms, specifically in the case of Farsa de Ysaac, once the blessing begins Esau is cast off the stage, leaving Jacob and Isaac now part of the same sphere. Rebecca, who created the opposition between the two spaces, is now part of neither.
In the sixteenth century painting by Girolamo da Treviso we find the same moment as the one depicted in the previous woodcut, but with what might appear to be significant compositional changes (Fig. 3).\textsuperscript{32} Compositionally, Treviso’s painting is a mirror image of the anonymous woodcut I analyzed above, with Isaac and Jacob towards the left of the image and Esau in the outer right of the canvas, barely seen in the background through an open door with his bow and arrow. Rebecca once again holds a central position. To the left of Isaac the spectator can see the meal prepared by Rebecca, along with the plate and the tablecloth mentioned in Sanchez de Badajoz’s \textit{Farsa}. He is shown holding Jacob’s right hand; once again attempting to prove to himself that it is Esau who has brought his meal. The four figures are clustered together closely, allowing the viewer to capture all at once, but we are also aware of the distance between Esau and the rest of the clan. The introduction of linear perspective, in Treviso’s \textit{Isaac Blessing Jacob}, makes Rebecca’s role as the articulation between the two worlds, represented here by Esau and Isaac, difficult to sustain. That is, although the placement of the different Biblical characters is similar in the previous woodcut and this image, the use of linear perspective to represent space forces Rebecca into the interior space and the ambiguity of her location is no longer preserved.

The final image, Jusepe de Ribera’s 1637 \textit{Isaac and Rebecca}, has many of the formal

\textsuperscript{32} The exact date for Girolamo da Treviso’s \textit{Isaac Blessing Jacob} is unknown, but the painter was born in 1497 and died in 1544, placing its composition in the first half of the sixteenth century and making him a contemporary of Diego Sánchez de Badajoz.
elements already present in Treviso’s representation of the blessing (Fig. 4). Its composition is much more linear, with the discarded meal, and the accessories needed for its consumption, on the far right, followed by Isaac, lying in bed and holding the hand of his youngest son. Great emphasis has been placed on displaying the goatskins Rebecca has used to disguise her son, and the process of identification through the sense of touch is beautifully represented in this painting. Isaac’s closed eyes, and his hands gently placed upon his son’s arms—one holding up his arms while the other appears to be in the process of moving up and down the length of Jacob’s hand—transmit to the viewer the sensorial process Isaac uses to (mis)identify his son.

Although Jacob’s disguised arm invades the left half of the canvas, his body is pictured in the left side of the painting, with his mother behind him, a hand upon his back. Rebecca is placed at the center of the left half, and Esau can be seen through an open window, his hand lifted and resting on what looks like a bow and the fruit of his hunt. Once again, the unity of the four figures is broken up by the introduction of perspective. All the figures line up on the same plane that cuts through the bottom half of the painting, all seem to be united by touch: Isaac with his hands upon Jacob, Rebecca touches Jacob’s back, and, because of the position of his hands, an illusion of contact is created between Esau and his mother.

Intriguingly, in Ribera’s picture of the blessing, Rebecca is looking straight at the viewer, and Esau seems to be looking at the scene of the blessing, that is, at the painting
the viewer is likewise contemplating. Rebecca’s direct gaze upon the spectator—here contrasted to Isaac’s blindness, and therefore underscoring his condition—interpellates the viewer, seemingly bringing us in, just as the Shepherd welcomes us to *Farsa de Ysaac* with his introduction. But beyond this interpellation, her direct gaze highlights another kind of blindness, that is, the blindness of the figures on the canvas to their viewers.

Isaac’s blindness has here spread to Jacob, who seems unaware, unlike his mother, that there is a viewer standing before him, in other words, that he is performing not only for his father and following his mother’s directions and, but also for an audience.

Esau’s gaze also appears prominent in Ribera’s painting, positioned in the far left of the painting. Seen only through a window, dressed in dull brown compared to the brilliance of the colors used for the rest of his family, he is also looking upon the scene of the blessing. Esau looks attentively at the performance before the blessing, as if he were privy to the outcome but was powerless to intervene. The combination of Esau and Rebecca’s gazes thus creates a sensorial chain that replicates the one rendered by Treviso in *Isaac Blessing Jacob*. Rebecca, Jacob, Isaac and, if we collapse the painting’s perspective, Esau are united by the sense of touch; Esau looking upon the scene of brother’s appropriation of what should have been his blessing, while Rebecca meets the spectator’s gaze with her own, repeats the relationship, only now replacing touch for vision as the site of contact. Rebecca and Isaac both place their hands upon their son; we the audience, and Esau, both turn our vision to the same object: the scene of the
blessing. Rebecca, Esau and the hypothetical spectator of the oil painting are now connected by sight. At the center of both chains are Rebecca and Jacob, Rebecca at the center of the one that traverses the surface of the image to include the audience, and Jacob at the center of the battle over the proper recipient of Isaac’s blessing rendered on Ribera’s canvas. But, in fact, at the center of the canvas itself is Jacob’s arm covered in goatskins, putting the disguise, or the artifice that is to trick Isaac, in a conspicuous position. And is the beautifully rendered goatskin-covered arm not the work of Rebecca? Is she not, consequently, at the center of both chains, with Jacob’s arm as a mere extension of her own? Here Rebecca has not only usurped the voice of her husband, but she has turned her son’s body—arm and voice—into mere prosthesis, into a tool for her own use.

Given these visual representations and the dramatic organization of Farsa de Ysaac, what is Rebecca’s role? Genesis 27 makes no mention of her presence during the blessing, and Sánchez de Badajoz gives Rebecca her last words and her last appearance upon the stage in lines 196-200, after which she gives Jacob the food he is to serve his father. I read her appearance in the visual representation of the scene of the blessing as an attempt through painting to represent the complicated materiality of sound and the human voice. Rebecca’s hijacked materiality, the dramatic ruse she must create to take over her husband’s voice, the only medium possible for the blessing she intends for her son Jacob, and the artificial and manipulated materiality of her son’s body, a body
disguised as another, can only be made evident, that is, visible upon the surface of the canvas or the page, through presence. And what is possible in theater through multiple framings and postponements, and through the interaction of visibility and invisibility upon the stage is made evident, is represented visually through the introduction of her material body at the scene of Isaac’s blessing. Her presence within the frame of these images points to the limits of painting and visual representation, of the impossibility faced by painting when confronted by the ambiguity of sound and voice. That is, faced with Rebecca’s place painting responds by turning her authorial voice, a voice that can haunt any space and take over the material reality of others, and her spatial ambiguity, one that resists the inside/outside dichotomy as clearly articulated in the fifteenth-century woodcut, into a figurative appearance of her body at the scene of the blessing. This excess of presence is transformed into interiority when rendered visually and in this process her spatial ambiguity is obliterated. What is presence in painting is represented dramatically upon the stage through omnipresence.

Now the original meal Isaac asked for has gone from sustenance to flavor and desire, when prepared by Rebecca, and finally, at the moment of the blessing, in the middle of the central drama, it has turned into the props that represent a meal. And Isaac, who started off as the potential audience to be duped by Rebecca’s dramatic artifice, is not just another actor in her blessing. Indeed, it is finally Rebecca who bestows the blessing, by proxy and using her husband’s voice, upon her youngest son.
Rebecca recognizes that the blessing can only be given using the voice of the patriarch. It is the voice in its unique individuality that is needed and not just as a message conveyed or words communicated to another; Rebecca therefore hijacks Isaac’s voice and turns it into a prop like the plate or the bow, used by her twin sons.

Furthermore, as we see in the three images, Esau has been relegated to the exterior, and Isaac and Jacob are now enclosed within four walls. In the Farsa, they become the pure interiority of the dramatic stage and the original dichotomy between nature and civilization or between nature and artifice, represented by the Isaac/Esau and Rebecca/Jacob pairings, has shifted onto Isaac/Jacob upon the stage and Esau is left outside the newly created dramatic space. Rebecca, in Sánchez de Badajoz’s play, overcomes this dichotomy, neither inside nor outside. Like her womb, the origin of the battle between the two brothers, an origin that is neither a part of nor foreign to the conflict, she is now the origin of the newly formed dramatic stage but is no longer a visible part of it.

At first glance, at the end of Farsa de Ysaac, we are back in the medieval world of the timeless and fluid stage—“the timeless present of God’s point of view”—where the Old Testament coincides and merges with the truths of the Eucharist and the political contingencies of sixteenth-century Spain. But if we look closely, the structure of the narrative has been altered with Rebecca’s staging and her hierarchical organization of the dramatic layers that constitute the Farsa de Ysaac. If the play begins with the glossing
of Scripture, a panorama of eternal time and the promise of a future play starring Isaac, by the end we encounter Isaac turned into spectacle and his blessing transformed into entertainment, and what began as religious ritual and Scripture is now theater.
Chapter 2  
Rehearsed Pain: The Cross, the Voice and the Sovereign Stage in Lope de Vega’s  
*Fuente Ovejuna*

In 1899 Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo included a recently rediscovered play in his *Estudio sobre el teatro de Lope de Vega*. He described this play as “un drama épico en toda la fuerza del término[,]” where “lo que presenciamos es la venganza de todo un pueblo; no hay protagonista individual; no hay más héroe que el demos” (33, p.176-177). The forgotten play was, of course, the now incredibly famous *Fuente Ovejuna*, and Menéndez y Pelayo’s decision to include it among other at the time more recognized plays by Lope helped establish its important place in the Spanish literary canon. “*Fuente Ovejuna* is obviously a modern discovery,” writes Paul E. Larson, “relatively unknown before 1890” (273). Larson dates the origins of new critical interest in *Fuente Ovejuna* rediscovery to the aftermath of the French Revolution when it was translated into French and published in 1829. A few decades later, in 1845, it was translated into German and used as an example of “issues related to national character and political unity [...] as part of their [Romantic Germans scholars] study of Spain as a test case for proving that national unity could be defined by analyzing a nation’s theatrical
production” (268). But despite it momentary resurgence in France and Germany, it was thanks to Menéndez y Pelayo’s interest that Fuente Ovejuna became a text of critical interest for Hispanists, as well as a fundamental part of Golden Age theater repertoire.  

Throughout its critical trajectory within the field of Hispanism, the interpretive traditions surrounding Fuente Ovejuna have, as Larson points out, either aligned themselves with or rebelled against the French and German political motives underpinning its rediscovery and translation, as well as Menéndez y Pelayo’s later reading of the uprising, “la venganza de todo un pueblo,” as an “hecho revolucionario” (33, p. 175). That is, studies on Lope’s play have either read it as a highly political play that threatens the status quo or, instead, as a conservative, albeit vicious, attempt to maintain sovereign order and power. For example, in 1902, a few years after the publication of Menéndez y Pelayo’s book, Francisco Navarro y Ledesma wrote: “Fuente Ovejuna, uno de los mejores dramas de Lope, en que el protagonista es todo un pueblo que hace justicia a su arrebatado y tirano forzador” (321). As an example of the opposite camp, Joaquín Casalduero states in his 1943 essay on Fuente Ovejuna:

33 According to Larson, Fuente Ovejuna was first published in 1619 in a collection entitled Dozena Parte. Much later, “Hartsenbusch finally reprinted Fuente Ovejuna in 1857, including it in volume 41 of the Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, entitled Comedias escogidas de Fray Lope Félix de Vega Carpio” (269).

34 Casalduer’s essay first appeared in 1943 in the Revista de Filología Hispánica but I am quoting from Ruth Whittredge’s 1959 translation published in The Tulane Drama Review.
The conflict between this nineteenth century sensibility and Lope’s play is so great that a man of Menéndez y Pelayo’s literary erudition can find no other way to bridge the gap than to drag the playwright off to a political Arcadia, the playwright and his contemporaries: “the happy state of political unconsciousness in which the poet and his public lived.” (84)

For the rest of the century, literary critics have been forced to address these two interpretive poles—revolutionary readings versus conservative interpretations—anytime they mention Lope’s famous play. But leaving aside the difficulties of tracing the diverse meanings the concept “political” or even “revolutionary” has for each author or scholar, as well as the interesting missed connections created by the overlapping and conflicting definitions of these two key concepts, I turn my attention to Menéndez y Pelayo’s original description of *Fuente Ovejuna* as a “revolutionary” play.

Although it is true that Menéndez y Pelayo uses the word “revolutionary” to describe Lope’s play, he does so within the context of two contrasting parameters that serve to describe the forces in tension upon Lope’s stage:

El genio, otras veces tan dulce y apacible del poeta, se ha identificado maravillosamente con las pasiones rudas, selváticas y feroces de aquellas muchedumbres; y ha resultado un drama lleno de bárbara y sublime poesía, sin énfasis, ni retórica, ni artificios escénicos; un drama que es la realidad misma brutal y palpitante, pero magnificada y engrandecida por
el genio histórico del poeta, a quien bastaría esta obra, sin otras muchas, para ser contado entre los más grandes del mundo. En Fuente Ovejuna, el alma popular que hablaba por boca de Lope, se desató sin freno y sin peligro, gracias a la feliz inconsciencia política en que vivían el poeta y sus espectadores. Hoy, el estreno de un drama así promovería una cuestión de orden público, que acaso terminase a tiros en las calles. (33, pp. 176-177)

As can be seen in the previous quote, according to Menéndez y Pelayo there is a contrast between the usual “dulce” and “apacible” genius of the playwright and the “pasiones rudas, selváticas y feroces” represented by the mob created by the people of Fuente Ovejuna and this mob appears to stand in for or at least be linked to “la realidad misma brutal y palpitante,” and for which Lope serves as a mouthpiece in this particular play. It is interesting to note how Menéndez y Pelayo applauds Lope’s famous play for avoiding “artificios escénicos” and for allowing the voice of the people, “el alma popular,” to speak through him. If we agree with Menéndez y Pelayo’s interpretation, in this play Lope de Vega appears to bypass artifice and mimesis and is able to offer his audience a direct experience of the above-mentioned “alma popular” and “realidad misma.” The opposition between these two forces, the gentle genius of the poet and the rough passions of the people, has been read, as I stated above, as the political forces depicted in Fuente Ovejuna, that is, as the clash between, on the one hand, the Comendador Mayor and, on the other, the naive inhabitants of the town of
Fuente Ovejuna. I argue instead that this play has too often been conceptualized as a dramatized chronicle, that is, as a dramatic rewriting of the 1572 Crónica de las tres órdenes y caballerías de Santiago, Calatrava y Alcántara by Francisco de Rades y Andrada that inspired Lope’s Fuente Ovejuna, and for this reason critics have privileged political and historical—in other words narrative—interpretations of the opposition between the simple people of Fuente Ovejuna and the powerful members of the Order of Calatrava. \(^{35}\) Instead, I read Fuente Ovejuna as Lope’s dramatization of the clash between reality and dramatic representation, and the difficult but necessary negotiation between the two during the creation of theater.

In the previous chapter I approached Sánchez de Badajoz’s Farsa de Ysaac as an example of the shift from early religious drama and I interpret it as an initial attempt at illusionistic theater, as well as the first steps towards defining and separating, conceptually and physically, the space of the audience and that of the stage. \(^{36}\) By the time of Lope (1564-1635), theater had integrated and naturalized the illusionistic

\(^{35}\) In “The Historical Elements of Lope de Vega’s Fuente Ovejuna” (1934), Claude Aníbal studies the historical aspect of Lope’s play, but he concentrates on the discrepancies between Lope’s historical sources and the play Fuente Ovejuna and is less interested in explaining these inconsistencies in the context of the generic shift from history or narrative to drama: “He [Lope] frequently depicts historical events, but interpretation, and even commentary, is either omitted entirely or is always of the most incidental sort, limited to the requirements of natural dialogue” (659).

\(^{36}\) Of course religious theater, such as the auto sacramental and other religious dramatic practices, was still very much alive, and continued to flourish as an extremely popular genre alongside its secular and commercial counterpart.
conception of theater and the separation between stage and audience was not only complete but had indeed become a constitutive part of the basic structure of early modern theater. And yet, in Fuente Ovejuna we find the dramatic stage once again grappling to redefine and reestablish its relationship to its surrounding other. That is, in Fuente Ovejuna reality and its relationship to the stage is dramatized as the social unrest that continuously threatens to invade the established social order. In other words, the “unscripted” movement of the disorganized masses that threaten the well-structured hierarchical order of the Orden of Calatrava, as well as the sovereignty of the crown as represented by the appearance of the Catholic Monarchs within this play. The antagonism between either the political order and political uprising or, if translating from politics and history to theatrical production, between dramatic order and the irruption of the unexpected or that which exceeds the script, reaches its point of greatest violence, both dramatic and physical, in the final act of the play with the brutal torture scene and the fruitless attempt to extract a confession.

The hostility between order and uprising, between stage and reality, is further mirrored in the difficult relationship between writing and voice that traverses Fuente

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37 Along with the conceptual spatial categories needed for the performance of illusionistic theater, the second half of the fifteenth and the early sixteenth centuries also witnesses the development of an increasingly professional physical and economic infrastructure that houses and supported commercial theater in Spain’s major urban centers. José María Diez Borque offers an excellent overview of this process in Sociedad y teatro en la España de Lope de Vega.
Ovejuna. We find this topic explicitly, of course, at the beginning of Act II and the often-quoted conversation between Leonelo and Barrildo, where the two men discuss the merits and pitfalls of the still emerging print culture, that is, the popularization of the printing press or, in the words of Leonelo: “esta invención de Cutemberga, un famoso tudesco de Maguncia” (ll.914-915, p. 51). According to the discussion between Leonelo and Barrildo, although printing books saves ideas from the oblivion and destruction of time, it also allows ignorant folk to disseminate ignorant ideas, and is an affront to the authority that supported knowledge in preprint culture. But beyond the extensive use of this scene as an example of the early distrust of print culture, little has been written on the contrasting uses of writing and orality in Fuente Ovejuna. Catherine Swietlicki, an notable exception to this lacuna, writes: “Little noted, however, have been those aspects of the play that have to do with speech and writing, in general, and with the dynamic relationship between orality and texuality, in particular” (33). Swietlicki reads the above-mentioned scene between Leonelo and Barrildo as a complaint over the “loss of community and the isolation of the individual, two conditions that resulted from a more textually conditioned personal identity and from a more highly literate society” (40). The first scene of Act II of Fuente Ovejuna thus functions as moment of longing for a return to a chirographic past, that is, to a past based on manuscript culture in contrast to the increasingly technological textuality that characterized the sixteenth century. According to Swietlicki, the yuxtaposition of contrasting ideological positions regarding
print culture evident in this scene — with Barrildo in favor of the new technology and Leonelo against it—make evident that “Fuente Ovejuna is still a traditional microsociety functioning through verbal interactions and retaining the intimacy and sense of communal values intrinsic to an oral-aural world” (40).

But a further complication of the problem of voice and its relationship to inscription is found in the torture scenes in the final act of Fuente Ovejuna. After the uprising of the townspeople and the murder of the Comendador Mayor—the sinister Fernán Gómez de Guzmán who has terrorized the people of Fuente Ovejuna with relentless economic, sexual and physical violence—King Fernando sends a judge to investigate the crime and punish the guilty. The judge arrives in Fuente Ovejuna with his men and the legal process begins, a process that includes the procurement of a confession through torture. It is at this moment in Lope’s play that the violent clash between inscription and voice, between the written word and orality, reaches its climax. For it is also with this act of torture, a legal and bureaucratic procedure sanctioned by the crown and the judicial system, that the struggle between voice and its other, inscription, overlaps with the struggle between reality and drama. For what is confession in this play but an attempt to put into writing, to textualize, the collective admission of guilt contained in the screams of pain and the chorus-like cries of “Fuente Ovejuna lo hizo”? (l. 2210, p. 106) Moreover, the failed attempts at inscription within the play’s narrative parallel the extradiegetic attempts to incorporate pain as the
ultimate example of that which escapes representation and resists being subsumed by the dramatic stage. In this play, Lope uses pain, which emerges in the final scenes as a voice that resists inscription and escapes permanence, as an unattainable horizon of reality.

The Comendador’s Anxiety

From the moment the play begins the issue of order and proper place and its relationship to both dramatic and social hierarchy is made evident. *Fuente Ovejuna* opens in Calatrava la Nueva, where we encounter a scene saturated with anxiety and self-doubt: “¿Sabe el Maestre que estoy en la villa?” This question, stated by Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, the Comendador Mayor, that is, the second in command of the Orden of Calatrava, underscores the concern for and an anxiety over the proper name, recognizability and the fitting reception of individual and collective identity. In other words, the audience’s first encounter with the world of *Fuente Ovejuna* is one where the characters that populate Lope’s stage are worried about their place within a specific hierarchical structure as well as the stability of the structure itself. Our first contact with the Comendador makes clear his anxiety and his suppressed, even if palpable, anger over his delayed audience with the Maestre, his superior despite his young age. The audience hears, in the first lines of the play, a stunted and uneasy exchange between the Comendador and his two servants, Flores and Ortuño. As he wait for the Maestre—
Rodrigo Téllez Girón, the young man at the head of the order—the Comendador voices his concern that his superior will not offer the respect he believes he warrants. The Maestre heads the Order’s chain of command but the Comendador is his senior, a discrepancy that causes an overlapping of age and title, that is, a hierarchical confusion that results in the Comendador’s anxiety now transmitted to, as well as exacerbated by, his two servants. Described in other terms, the play opens, at least implicitly, with the very concept of authority and order and its relationship to the proper name, in this case the Comendador’s proper name vis-à-vis his young superior Rodrigo Téllez Girón, as well as the authority offered by his relationship to the proper name, Orden de Calatrava. Proper names and titles seem, in this scene, to fail at naming and transmitting what they should, or at least, what they traditionally have done; nominal representation, the Comendador fears, is not operating as it should. The social unrest that will later befall the town of Fuente Ovejuna as well as the difficulties in keeping the borders of the stage and the real in place, as I contend occurs in the final act, are foreshadowed and summarized in the play’s opening lines, limited here to the breakdown, or at least the fear of a possible breakdown, in the rules of hierarchy and individual identity.

Furthermore, this anxiety or unrest is wonderfully mirrored in the rhetorical structure and versification used by Lope in this initial scene. In the first nine lines of the play all the lines spoken by the Comedador are enjambed, contributing to the growing
anxiety the character feels over his perceived anonymity before the Maestre. His first words consist of one and a half lines; his next intervention consists of two complete lines (4-5); and his third intervention goes up to three full lines. The many enjambments, along with the escalating length of his sentences, expose the Comendador’s despair, as the audience is made aware of the increasing discomfort of this first scene and the Comendador’s amplified hysteria. It is worth analyzing the opening lines of the play in greater detail. The Comendador opens the play by asking his servants if the young Maestre has been informed of his presence in Calatrava. Flores answers in the affirmative:

Comendador: ¿Sabe el Maestre que estoy en la villa?

Flores: Ya lo sabe.

Ortuño: Está con la edad, más grave.

Comend: ¿Y sabe también que soy

Fernán Gómez de Guzmán?

Flores: Es muchacho, no te asombre.

Comend: Cuando no sepa mi nombre,

38 The Maestre’s name is not spoken in this scene and in fact will not appear until 69-70. In these lines the three elements present in the first nine lines and repeated and condensed into three lines:
Maestre: Decid, que ya lo estoy, ya.
Comend: Gran Maestre, don Rodrigo Téllez Girón [.]
¿no le sobra el que me dan

de Comendador mayor?

(ll. 1-9, p. 9)

The first stanza of the play, a redondilla, consists of four lines with an ABBA rime pattern and hence the word “estoy” at the end of the first lines is rimed with “soy” in the fourth. The juxtaposition of both verbs serves to establish, immediately and unequivocally, the where and the who of the Comendador. A location and an identity. He is (“estoy”) in Calatrava and he is (“soy”) Fernán Gómez de Guzmán. “Estoy” and “soy”—or ser and estar—two Spanish verbs contained by the English verb “to be” are present in the opening lines, illustrating their simplest and most basic use: location and identity. The momentarily unqualified use of “estoy” in the first line is emphasized by its location at the end of an enjambment, a position that isolates the verb from its prepositional phrase, “en la villa.” In this way, the implicit first person pronoun “yo” and the verb “estoy,” left floating at the end of the first line (“Sabe el Maestre que estoy”), function here—momentarily, before the reader reaches the next line—as a statement of pure existence. The first line of the play is thus a statement of pure existence issued by a man who has begun to doubt his importance and his position in a hierarchical order. Consequently, the question “Does he know I am here” can be

39 In a recent staging at the Globe Theater in London of Simon Armitage’s *The Last Days of Troy*, a dramatization of the end of the Trojan War based on both Homer and Virgil,
restated more straightforwardly as “Does he know that I am.” The anxiety of the Comendador’s discourse is only intensified in the second half of the stanza where the verb “soy” produces an enjambment into the fifth line and closes the first stanza. The implicit first person pronoun of the fifth line is graphically severed from the proper name when the linking verb (“soy”) remains in the first stanza while the proper name is pushed into the next. The Comendador’s proper name is visually and conceptually severed from a second statement of existence, from the verb “soy,” only here, instead of the possibility of self-identification through geographical location, what is at stake is his name: Fernán Goméz de Guzmán. In both cases, the first line and the verb “estoy” and the fourth line and the verb “soy,” Lope offers a subtle and powerful example of the

during a tense encounter between Paris and Hector and moments before the final defeat of the Trojan forces, Paris tries to convince his brother when faced with imminent defeat they should escape their besieged city. Hector refuses and responds: “We are Trojans of Troy or we are nowhere at all.” The symmetry between the two phrases that make up this sentence, both comments on the essence at the center of what it means to be Trojan, is broken up by the “nowhere” in the second half of Hector’s line. “We are Trojans of Troy” demands a comment on being, and instead the correspondence in the second half ignores the word “Trojans” and concentrates on “Troy.” We expect being, but we find instead location. If they leave, if the Trojans escape their city, they will be nowhere, even if they survive. Paris and Hector may continue to be if they leave Troy, but they will be nowhere. The grammatical error that substitutes “Trojan” for “Troy” and “nothing” for “nowhere,” reflects the absolute wrongness of Paris’s proposition, the complete collapse of the ethics of being Trojan as rendered in Paris’s plan. In fact this is so wrong, that even grammar collapses when trying to transmit this information. Escaping the Greeks might allow Paris to survive as Paris, but away from Troy Paris-as-Trojan would not be. In Spanish, to be sure, the grammatical and rhetorical complexity of Hector’s words do not survive. “Somos troyanos de Troja o nos somos en ningún lugar” or “Somos troyanos de Troya o no estamos en ningún lugar.” Theater, it would seem, is an excellent medium for the analysis of what it mean to be as both ser and estar.
lack of order and controlled representation that will be at the center of *Fuente Oveja*.

Even versification structures are affected in this scene with the stanza unable to contain a basic unit of meaning within its borders. The separation between the verb and its prepositional phrase, in lines one and four, mirror the distance between the figure of the Comendador, the proper name Fernán Goméz de Guzmán and the man who has, until this point, answered to both this title and this given name. This character’s existence is not in danger, as can be seen with the importance given to the verbs *ser* and *estar* in this stanza, but there is a lack of trustworthy and stable representation for his existence. He is there, physically and biologically present, but not much more can be counted on.

The second stanza continues the structure of lines one and four ending with “estoy” and “soy”—again, enjambments created by verbs cut off from their prepositional phrases by the laws of versification—and explicitly introduces the proper name implied by the “soy” of the final and enjambed line of the first stanza. This second stanza ends with another enjambment that creates a rhyme between “Guzmán” and “dan” (to give). In this case the enjambment pushes the direct object of the verb “dan” into the third stanza, paralleling the structure of the first stanza. In this way, if the first stanza introduces existence by creating a grammatical repository that allows location to come into being (“to be” in the sense of “estar”) and the second stanza produces a proper name and identity (“to be” in the sense of “ser”) that can now be qualified, the enjambment at the end of the eighth line brings with it the idea of title and hierarchical
position. If the Maestre is not aware of the arrival of Goméz de Guzmán (his location), if he has not heard of his name and his reputation (his proper name), the tradition of the order of Calatrava and the title of Comendador (his location in a hierarchical order, or the location of his proper name within a hierarchical order) should be more than enough to ensure the young man’s knowledge of and respect for the man who performs such a charge. Goméz de Guzmán’s invocation of this title and of his place within the order of Calatrava brings together the verbs “ser” y “estar” used in the first stanza, that is, location and identity, to create a hierarchical identity: a position, or location, within an order with a proper name, in this case, the Order of Calatrava.

The first verb at the end of a line spoken by the Comendador, the first line of the play, in fact, is “estoy” (estar, first person singular, present) and the second is “soy” (ser, first person singular, present). The third verb breaks with the first person subject and into the plural with “dan” (dar, third person plural, present). His presence and his name are personal and, possibly, private characteristics. They relate to the individual. His title, Comendador, is his inclusion in a community, the order of Calatrava and his rank within its structure and, also, the order’s place in the community at large (the town of Calatrava, Castile, Spain, Christendom, etc.). What concerns the Comendador is the ability or failure of his presence, his name, and his very reputation, to precede him, to travel where his physical body cannot and to do justice to his position and rank. This failure of representation, of course, sets up his alternate reputation among the
townspeople of Fuente Ovejuna as a negation of the values put forth in the opening scene.

When the young Maestre finally arrives, the Comendador’s fears are somewhat appeased. His first words are an apology for keeping Gómez de Guzmán waiting

Perdonad, por vida mía,
Fernán Gómez de Guzmán,
que agora nuevas me dan
que en la villa estáis

(ll. 41-44, p.11)

The stanza contains many of the same elements used by Lope in the opening lines: the name Fernán Goméz de Guzmán, the verbs “dan” and “estar,” the word “villa,” etc. The apology is followed by the Comendador’s complete name, which echoes the same scheme as the previous quote by rhyming “Guzmán” and “dan,” only here Lope inverts the rhyme order and it is the interior lines of the redondilla that unite the two words. He has only now been informed of the Comendador’s presence, a contradiction of what Ortuño stated before, and he is well acquainted with his proper name.

Line 44, the fourth line of the Maestre’s first dialogue, is truncated with its final syllables spoken by the Comendador. This catalectic line, interrupted and completed by the Comendador’s “tenía,” continues with the hurried and desperate tone of the initial lines and the older man’s paranoia:
Comend.: Tenía
muy justa queja de vos;
que el amor y la crianza
me daban más confianza,
por ser, cual somos los dos,
vos Maestre en Calatrava,
y yo Comendador
y muy vuestro servidor.

(ll.44-51, p. 11)

After succinctly explaining his initial disappointment with his superior’s welcome, the Comendador takes on what would appear to be a reconciliatory tone as he brings up their common membership to the Order of Calatrava and their respective hierarchical positions. But although semantically the imagined insult has been settled, the desperate and paranoid tone continues, and the verse organization tells a different story with a continued use of truncated lines and constant interruptions:

Maestre: [...] 
Quiero volver a dar
los brazos.

Comend.: 
Debéime honrar,
que he puesto por vos la vida
entre diferencias tantas,
hasta suplir vuestra edad
el Pontífice.

Maestre: Es verdad.

Y por las señales santas
que a los dos cruza el pecho,
que os lo pago en estimaros
y como a mi padre honraos.

Comend.: De vos estoy satisfecho.

(ll. 54-64, p. 11)

It is only with the Comendador’s words in line 64 that the use of catalectic lines ends,
finally signaling an end to his paranoid relationship with his superior. The truncated
lines reflected the interrupted and hurried tone of the conversation between the two
men, with line 64, “De vos estoy satisfecho,” as the first correspondence between
sentence and verse closing the matter. A momentary truce is created, with his superior’s
agreement to honor him like a father. With order reestablished, the two men can now
return to the issue of war.

The tone of the conversation then changes and the Comendador begins a long
and ceremonious speech directed at Téllez Girón. Aside from being the first long
uninterrupted passage in the play—72 lines compared to the 68 lines that lead up to this passage—there is a change in versification and rhyme, a shift from the four-line redondillas to the romance form based on octosyllabic couplets.\textsuperscript{40} Menéndez Pidal designated this form “romances noticiosos” and dates it back to the thirteenth century, when they were used as part of an oral tradition for the recounting of news and events (307). And it is in this manner that the Comendador will use the form with the Maestre.

He begins with a lavish retelling of his superior’s family’s past, including the unorthodox fashion in which he came to be Maestre.\textsuperscript{41} The first lines include the elements of location, proper name and rank that had upset the Comendador in the opening lines of the play:

\begin{quote}
Gran Maestre, don Rodrigo
Téllez Girón, que a tan alto
lugar os trajo el valor
de aquel vuestro padre claro[...]]
\end{quote}

(ll. 69-72, p. 12)

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{40} Antonio Quilis describes the romance form as “una serie ilimitada de octosílabos, en los que solamente los pares tienen rima asonante o parcial” (150).
\textsuperscript{41} Donald McGrady explains, in footnote 72 of his edition of \textit{Fuente Ovejuna}, that Rodrigo Téllez Girón became Maestre of the Order of Calatrava when his father stepped down from the post and passed it on to him. This went against the Order’s custom of electing a new Maestre and special approval was sought from Pope Pius II.
\end{flushright}
In this first sentence of the Maestre’s speech, an incredible 35 lines long, he covers not only the history of Téllez Girón’s arrival at his current position and the men who helped him along the way, but also a summary of Iberian history and politics and the current monarchs’—Isabel and Fernando—rise to power. It would seem that order has been restored and the correct hierarchical arrangement accepted by the Comendador, but in fact this passage is held up by a clever and ironic use of the literary conventions of legacy and lineage, of fame and honor.

In the previous quote the mentions of the greatness of the Maestre’s father (“...el valor/de aquel vuestro padre claro [...]”) stand in contrast with the audience’s knowledge of the historical Pedro Girón and the dramatic irony only continues with the mention of Isabel I and Fernando II, and the Maestre’s support of Juana la Beltraneja. But beyond the questionable character of Pedro Girón, what initially could be read as praise for the Maestre’s family legacy, that is, the “tan alto/lugar” the young man has reached with his family tree is also given an ironic twist. The use of verb structure “os trajo” used to describe his current position intensifies the nepotism that has allowed his success. The Comendador is thus able to highlight the passivity of the young man’s role in history by transforming him into the grammatical object, instead of the subject, of the

42 Juana la Beltraneja (1462-1530) was Enrique IV illegitimate daughter and after the death of her father in 1474 she, along a faction of Spanish nobility, tried to assume the throne. Juana la Beltraneja was briefly in power from 1475 to 1479 but ultimately Isable la Católica, Enrique IV’s half-sister, became queen of Castille.
verb “to bring.” He thus creates a literary representation of the Maestre as unfit for the tradition that has been handed down to him.

Towards the end of this passage the portrait of the Maestre is set with an interesting chiasmic reversal that puts into question not only Téllez Girón’s family legacy but the notions of legacy itself. In the second and third sentences of the Comendador’s speech (ll. 105-116), he advises the young man to gather his people and take over Ciudad Real as part of a plan to overthrow the Catholic Monarchs. In the next full sentence he closes his advice with a mention of what people are saying about the young Maestre:

Será bien que deís asombro

Rodrigo, aunque niño, a cuantos
dicen que es grande esa cruz

para vuestros hombros flacos.

(ll. 116-120, p. 14)

With these four lines, the Comendador is able to put into the mouth of others, and in this way say openly, what he has been insinuating up to this moment. The cross mentioned in line 119 is of course the red cross of the Order of Calatrava and is used here to signify the responsibilities that come the position of Maestre. But I would argue that it also signifies the tradition of the Order, that is, the legacy now institutional instead of only familial that rests upon the young man’s shoulders. In this way, the
Comendador presents an image of Téllez Girón’s shoulders bending under the weight of the Order’s great history. A few lines down, and at the end of the next full sentence, still part of the Gómez de Guzmán’s speech, we find a similar image. Commenting again on the young man’s family legacy, he mentions other figures from the past and their great achievements:

los Marqueses de Villena,

y otros tantos capitanes, tantos,

que las alas de la Fama

apenas pueden llevarlos.

(ll. 125-128, p. 14-15)

On the surface, once again the Comendador praises the Maestre’s family, one with achievements so great that even Fame struggles to carry them upon her wings. But the proximity to the image of the young man’s weak shoulders, as well as the similar position both figures hold at the end of a sentence infects the second image with the characteristics of the first. That is, while the shoulders of the first image are weak and in the second image it is instead the load that is too heavy, both the shoulders and the wings are unable, or almost unable, to convey that which has been entrusted to them.

The two images together present a distrust of the communication of legacy and the past, and ultimately of self. If the Comendador opens Fuente Ovejua with the fear that words—his proper name, his rank as Comendador, the name Order of Calatrava—will
fail to represent him correctly, his speech exemplifies the reason behind this fear by showing how surface meaning can be twisted and conventions perverted into meaning something other than their original intent. The opening scene in Calatrava la Nueva suggests a world where representation is failing, a failure that is both political, as can be seen with the favoritism that allowed Téllez Girón to take over his father’s charge, as well as linguistic or aesthetic, as is the case of language that is thought to be unable to convey meaning in a trustworthy fashion.

“¿Quién lo dirá como yo, siendo mis ojos testigos?”

The opening act of Fuente Ovejuna presents a dramatic universe flooded with fear over the crumbling of order and hierarchy, as well as a lack of trust in language and its capacity to properly represent and communicate meaning. And yet, after the initial scene between the Comendador and his men and once he is giving advice to the young Maestre, the rhetorical aspect of his speech becomes highly controlled and full of elaborate flourishes, even if a reading between the lines betrays the older man’s paranoia. It would seem that it is only these well-worn conventions that are keeping the precious order that remains.

This tension between a highly controlled language and its seeming failure at communicating clearly, presumable its most important task, appears again in the next scene. An unspecified period of time later Flores appears on stage, now in Fuente
Ovejuna upon his return from the battle in Ciudad Real between the Maestre’s men and Isabel and Fernando’s army. He tells a group of townspeople that “[la] guerra se acaba ya, puesto que nos ha costado/ alguna sangre y amigos” (ll. 451-454, p.30). Frondoso, one of townspeople, asks him to tell the story of what has happened. As in the first scene between Téllez Girón and Gómez de Guzmán the shift in dramatic tone brings with it a verse change, Flores returns to the octosyllabic romance to describe the violent battle that has taken place.43 He begins to narrate the accomplishments of both the Maestre and the Comendador, as well as the bloody triumph of the Order’s soldiers. The narrative passage is lavish and describes the “gallardo Maestre” with “dos mil lucidos infantes/de sus vasallos valientes/ y trescientos de a caballo” (460-463). The young man is dressed in:

 [...] una casaca verde,

 bordada de cifras de oro,

 que sólo los brazaletes

 por las mangas descubrían,

 que seis alamares prenden.

(ll. 470-474, p. 30-31)

43 Before Flores’ arrival, a group of townspeople was gathered discussing different topics, including the evil Comendador. Their conversation is carried out in redondillas.
Flores’ description emphasizes the ceremonial aspects of the war; in this case the colorful attire and the extravagant materials. The Comendador is similarly described as wearing over his “turca jacerina,” a “peto y espaldar luciente,/ que de oro y perlas guarnece” (489-492). He wears orange headgear topped by white feathers, as well as a red and white strap for his spear.

Both men’s description paints a dynamic scene full of bright colors, intense textures and exquisite materials. The battle is thus described almost in purely ceremonial terms with war transformed into a purely aesthetic experience for the people of Fuente Ovejua and the audience. The properly military elements that make up the men’s apparel are only glimpsed momentarily through the avalanche of color and texture described by Flores. For example, in the case of the Maestre, we imagine his beautiful “casaca” covered “cifras de oro” with only a glimpse of metal where the sleeves meet the “brazalete” (470-474). The spectacle of war with its exciting paraphernalia momentarily breaks down and shows its true purpose. In the same way that Flores’ visual description, in spite of attempting to present only the heroic and triumphant aspect of the battle, must touch upon its military and violent side, the battle narrative must also do the same. After the catalogue of colors and textures that make up the Comendador’s attire, Flores describes the Order’s entrance into Ciudad Real as follows:

Entróla, bien resistida,
y el Maestre a los rebeldes
y a los que entonces trataron
su honor injustamente
mandó cortar las cabezas,
y a los de la baja plebe,
con mordazas en la boca,
azotar públicamente.

(ll. 505-512, p. 32)

The beauty of the first descriptions underscores the horror of the Maestre’s cruelty on
the battlefield and the images of the battered bodies of his enemies. The bright colors
that a few lines before had described fabric, metal and feathers now bleed into the stark
description of beheadings and extreme corporal punishment. The vividness of the reds
and greens of the Comendador and the Maestre’s military attire now allows the
listener—the people of Fuente Ovejuna and the audience of Fuente Ovejuna—to imagine
the bruises of those of the “baja plebe” and the red blood of the beheaded spilling onto
the battlefields.

The invasion of Fuente Ovejuna

According to Mitchell Greenberg, the world of Fuente Ovejuna is divided into a
series of opposing concepts—exterior/interior, masculine/feminine, political/sexual—
and each side of this binary opposition is represented by the Order of Calatrava or the town of Fuente Ovejuna. At the center of the dramatic space created by this opposition is the Comendador:

The two faces of community, the external ("politics") and the internal (the sexual) are combined in the person of Fernán Gómez. He is the only character who joins the exterior to the interior, the outside world of Castilian history to the inside world of the village, bringing the one into the other. (41)

What is being dramatized upon the stage of *Fuente Ovejuna* is consequently the passage from a divided and fractured set of feudal kingdoms to “the new order of emerging absolutist monarchy” (39). The Comendador must then be sacrificed and his death at the hands of the people of Fuente Ovejuna is “the ritual sacrifice of the Bad Father, the expulsion of the ‘other within’” (59).

Although I do not disagree with Greenberg’s reading, I observe another drama taking place upon Lope’s stage and another set of oppositions at stake. I am therefore interested in two passages I analyze above, the opening scene of the play and the battle scene described by Flores, for a number of reasons. To begin with, they are examples of the way in which Lope dramatizes the anxieties and limits of theater. What is at stake in the two scenes is the issue of representation and jurisdiction. Is representation possible when language can be twisted and perverted with such ease? In the second passage the
answer to the previous question would seem to be in the negative. Is there a reason behind the convention of battles and deaths taking place offstage, besides the practical response to the difficulty of staging a battle? The battle between the Crown’s army and the Order of Calatrava takes place in the future—the Comendador advises his superior that such a battle would be won with ease in the opening scene—or, as Flores narrates it, in the past, the audience does not witness this scene.

In both scenes there is something that invades the text or the play in spite of what would appear to be the failure of language. In the first case, the use of dramatic irony allows history to enter the scene making it impossible for the audience to accept the Comendador’s advice. The audience’s reality, be it seventeenth century Spanish citizens or a contemporary global audience, breaks through the rhetoric used by the Comendador forcing the scene into a dialogue with the future. But while the first scene sets up the problem of representation, it is the battle scene that truly complicates the problem. To begin with, the horror of war irrupts into the scene in spite of the extravagant and aesthetically pleasing description and, as I mentioned above, its beauty in fact highlights the cruelty and bloodshed of the battle. But beyond this invasion of reality into a highly stylized passage, the depiction of those who end up on the losing side of the battle, the passage also questions the separation between the different spaces that Greenberg describes as opposing and binary. The Comendador’s penetration of the city during the battle (“Entróla, bien resistida”) foreshadows the rape of Laurencia that
will lead to the uprising of Fuente Ovejuna. The use of similar literary tropes to describe both military violence between competing armies and sexual violence against the female body function here to undermine the separation between the interior and the exterior spaces established by Greenberg and most literary critics when reading *Fuente Ovejuna*. Interiority and femininity, two characteristics Greenberg uses to describe the dramatic universe of Fuente Ovejua, are now also part of the world of war and noble men and the original dichotomy is compromised. In *Fuente Ovejuna*, the economic and sexual violence carried out by Gómez de Guzmán is not disconnected from the epic historical events of the nobility, nor are the actions of what would appear to be distant battles divorced from the reality of the people of Fuente Ovejuna.

Furthermore, the image of penetration or the piercing of a guarded space also describes the invasion of the real—in the form of history in the case of the Comendador’s advice for the Maestre, and in the form of the horrors of war in Flores’ description—into the diegetic world of Lope’s stage. In both scenes mentioned above, the audience is momentarily made aware of the discursive texture used to represent reality or that which exists off-stage and the distance between the stage recreation and

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44 The problem of finding the unity or relationship between the so-called two plots of Lope’s play—the peasant uprising and the act of treason headed by the Comendador and the Maestre—has dominated scholarship on this play since Joaquín Casalduero and Leo Spitzer. See Joaquín Casalduero, “‘Fuente Ovejuna’: Form and Meaning” and Leo Spitzer, “A Central Theme and Its Structural Equivalent in Lope’s *Fuenteovejuna*.”
the “original” event. The image of the penetrated city in Flores’ description is especially fruitful when interpreted in this way. Beyond the image of penetrating a well-guarded space, as is the dramatic space of the stage, the disruptive stanza continues with the horrific idea of silence. The nobles are beheaded and the lower classes are gagged and publically whipped. This violent penetration, be it military, sexual or metatheatrical, and its consequences must be silenced. It is this notion that will be turned upside down in Act III with Laurencia’s rejection of silence and passivity.

The Wedding

Before concluding with the uprising and torture of the final act of the play I turn my attention to the wedding scene at the end of Act II. The scene begins with music, as the whole town gathers to celebrate the union of Laurencia and Frondoso but the scene quickly turns tragic when the Comendador arrives along with Flores and Ortuño. Immediately before his entrance the musicians’ lyrics allude to him while avoid his proper name:

“¿Para qué te ascondes, niña gallarda?”

45 I am aware of the difficulties in defining concepts such as “original” in this context. I am not positing the idea of original as a greater proximity to the historical reality of the events of Fuente Ovejuna. The original event in this context is anything that exists outside the stage and the diegetic world created by Lope—the Rades Chronica or even the audience’s notions of history would enter into this category.
Que mis linces deseos
paredes pasan.

(lll. 1568-1571, p. 78)

The image of penetrating closed spaces, initially brought up in Act I with the line
“Entróla, bien resistida” (l. 505, p. 32), returns now with greater force in the musicians’
lyrics. The Comendador’s “deseos,” in this case sexual, are able to penetrate the walls of
any home, just like his desire for power penetrated the walls of Ciudad Real. At this
point, the rhetorical irruptions of the real that pierced the dramatic fabric in the scenes
mentioned above are replaced here with the literal interruption of the Comendador’s
dramatic entrance. What has up to this point in the Lope’s play been descriptive has
become performative, in both the sense that it is played out before the audience and in
the way it is used by Austin when he coined the term “performative utterance” (6).46

46 In describing performative utterances Austin often disregarded the possibility of their
inclusion in literary works: “Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the
circumstances in which the words are uttered should be, in some way, or ways,
appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other
persons should also perform certain other actions, whether ‘physical’ or ‘mental’ actions
or even acts of uttering further words. […] Surely the words must be spoken ‘seriously’
and so as to be taken ‘seriously’? This is, though vague, true enough in general – it is an
important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must
not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem” (6-8). Barbara Johnson has contested
this notion arguing that: “The nonseriousness of a performative utterance ‘said by an
actor on the stage’ results, then, not from his fictional status but from his duality, from
the spectator’s consciousness that although the character in the play is swearing to
avenge his dead father’s ghost, the actor’s own performative commitments lie
elsewhere. But the performative utterance itself is here just as ‘serious’ within the
The lines “mis linces deseos/paredes pasan” and the subsequent appearance of the Comendador on stage act out the rhetorical and narrative irruptions that have inundated Fuente Ovejuna while also performing the action they describe.

The Comendador arrests Frondoso and orders his men to take Laurencia “y haced que guarden/su persona diez solados” (ll. 1641-1642, p. 81). The scene ends with the men of Fuente Ovejuna falling silent, in spite of a momentary attempt by Barrildo to break their silence. Of course, this brings forth the image of the gagged and whipped prisoners mentioned by Flores in lines 510-512. It is in the next act that the gag will be removed.

**Fuente Ovejuna**

As Marsha Kinder has described:

this play demonstrates how the meaning of several acts in a chain of escalating violence—war, rape, corporal punishment, murder, torture, and execution—is fluidly transformed by how that violent behavior is represented verbally and in what political context. (145)

context of its surrounding fiction as it would be in the context of the fiction we call real life” (60).
In the final act of the play the escalating violence propagated by the Comendador is taken over by the people of Fuente Ovejuna and, as the quote above explains, there is a shift in the way this violence is presented, as well as its dramatic function in Lope’s play.

Laurencia returns to the stage in Act III, her hair in disarray—“desmelenada” the conventional Golden Age marker for rape—and demands that the men in her community avenge her attack. Mercedes Camino reads this moment as a sign that Fuente Ovejuna is in such disarray that correct gender roles are no longer in play:

Although collective protagonists, the villagers, the play suggests, should have different roles according to their gender. The emphasis on this split climaxes in the famous entreaty of Laurencia, “desmelenada”, when she urges the town’s men to honour the duties of their gender and to defend their women. (388)

Laurencia takes on the responsibilities the men of Fuente Ovejuna have been too cowardly to fulfill, and therefore become an active participant in seeking the justice that she is due. But this scene also presents a reversal of dramatic role with Laurencia taking on a structural function similar to the one performed by the Comendador during his opening speech to the Maestre. Symptomatically, her intervention—an irruption or interruption into the “sala de concejo” where the men have gathered—is marked by a shift, once again, to the octosyllabic romance meter used by the Comendador and Flores
in the scenes already quoted from Act I. She uses an array of rhetorical embellishments and conventions to describe the men: they are “ovejas,” “liebres cobardes” and “gallinas.” She interpellates them as failed Iberian citizens by describing them as “bárbaros sos, no españoles.” She accepts the convention of woman as property by demanding that her father be responsible for her revenge since “Aún no era yo de Fondoso/ para que digas que tome, / como marido, venganza.” Laurencia ends her speech by joining Frondoso’s injustice to her own (1725-1789).

Her speech is successful and the men take up arms, and as they leave Laurencia calls the town’s women into action. The group of men that has already gathered and left in search of the Comendador, prepare by looking for “espadas, lanzones, ballestas, chuzos y palos” with which to arm themselves (1811-1813). In contrast the women organize themselves into an army by naming Pascuala as their “alférez” and by inserting themselves into a literary tradition of military valor by invoking the achievements of the Cid and Rosamontes. Laurencia’s speech serves to unite the people of Fuente Ovejuna and allows them to seek justice for the atrocities committed by the Comendador, but at a properly dramatic level it also functions to fully unite the two worlds of *Fuente Ovejuna*. The masculine world of the military is not longer exclusively masculine nor is it only the domain of the nobility that exists beyond the limits of Fuente Ovejuna. The stage is united into a single space, with the Catholic Monarchs,—mentioned by the townspeople as they leave in search of justice—the people of Fuente
Ovejuna and the Comendador violently coexisting. At this moment, history read as the passage from a feudal past to a modern monarchy, but also as the Arcadian timelessness of the event of the real surrounding and enveloping the village and the townspeople, all become one. In Fuente Ovejuna, explains Greenberg:

“History,” that is, the event of the “real” world surrounding and enveloping the village, appears to operate on another stage. Its presence makes itself felt in the utopian space of the villagers only by and through the presence of the Comendador. In a very real sense for the villagers of Fuenteovejuna, Fernán Gómez is their only link to the greater stage of the world: he is their history. (33)

But after the wedding and after her speech, when Laurencia takes on the structural place of the Comendador, history fully irrupts onto the stage and the division between the “real” world and Fuente Ovejuna comes down, leaving only one stage.

It is on this united stage that Gómez de Guzmán’s murder takes place. After the men and women, separately, have gone in search of revenge, the scene’s perspective changes and the Comendador and his men, along with Frondoso, appear on stage. As they are about to hang Frondoso by the hands, a loud noise interrupts them and it is now the home of the Comendador that is penetrated by the (male) villagers. The crowd’s desire for violence escalates with the arrival of the women. The crowd, taking the Comendador with them, exits the stage and the audience now only hears the attack.
Rehearsed Pain: The Cross and the Pen

Laurencia creates a single space for the drama of *Fuente Ovejuna*, a unity that is solidified with the murder of the Comendador. But if history—embodied by the Comendador, according to Greenberg—in this play performs the role of the real and suggests the world beyond the stage, what happens to this space after the Comendador’s death? At the level of plot of narrative, he is of course replaced by the Catholic Kings, a substitution that can be read as dramatizing the historical passage from one political system to another. Allegorically such passages have been read, to offer two examples, as the passage from one political order to another or the shift from feudalism to a “unifying nascent absolutist monarchy” (Greenberg, 53) or the shift from an “orally grounded mindset” to a “technologized textuality” (Swietlicki, 34). But dramatically this answer is more complicated.

The Comendador’s death creates a void in the play by expelling from the stage the personification of exteriority, that is the Comendador as the embodiment of history. With this expulsion, the stage is left without a contrasting other against which to define itself. Said another way, after the Comedador’s death the stage has no outside to mark its limits. It is in this context that I read the torture scene at the end of *Fuente Ovejuna*.

Erin Graff-Zivin recently described current discussion around the topic of torture as restricted to three fields: legal, pragmatic and moral. The questions commonly asked are: Is it legal? Does it work? Is it right? She continues:
What has often remained left out of the conversation—which revolves around the ostensibly competing demands of national security and universal human rights—is the seemingly less immediate but vital question of what torture does? (xi)

With this in mind, what does torture do, dramatically, in the play *Fuente Ovejuna*?

Reflecting the political and social disorder created by the Comendador’s actions and the subsequent uprising and murder, the play is left in disorder after the brutal murder. The scenes of torture, according to my reading, are an attempt to ground the play and reestablish a contrasting other that will allow for the creation of new limits against which it may define itself as drama. At the end of *Fuente Ovejuna* drama and history are no longer in opposition and this binary structure is replaced by the contrast between language and non-language, between meaning and non-meaning. The new duality projects the notion of the real onto the voice in pain, transforming this meaningless voice into the other of the language that makes up the play. Pain is an especially effective trope for this purpose for, as Elaine Scarry explains, “there is no language for pain, [...] it (more than any other phenomenon) resists verbal objectification” (12) In the case of *Fuente Ovejuna* pain not only resists verbal objectification but also representation. Both the death of the Comendador and the torture of the villagers take place in real time, unlike the initial battle scene narrated by Flores, but off-stage and thus beyond the audience’s vision.
The voice of pain, at the end of the play, substitutes the opposition between history as the real and the diegetic world created on the stage. But it also questions the contrast between orality and writing that traverses the play. If pain “not only resists and language but actively destroys it” (Scarry, 4), then both writing and orality are equally affected by it. Both systems of meaning—speech and writing—are transformed into its other. The two system of inscription that appear in the play—the emblem as represented by the cross of Calatrava and the writing represented by torture—are both unable to capture this raw voice of pain. The image of the cross, specifically the red cross that serves as the emblem for the Order of Calatrava, is a constant throughout *Fuente Ovejuna*. The cross not only represents the Order of Calatrava but is also closely linked to the Comendador. At the end of the play, both the emblematic cross and writing have failed to capture the voice of the people of Fuente Ovejuna.

The cross and writing are united in this failure at the end of the play. When the judge appears before the King, he explains:

Haciendo averiguación
del cometido delito,
una hoja no se ha escrito
que sea en comprobación,
porque conformes a una,
con un valeroso pecho,
en pidiendo quién lo ha hecho,
responden: “Fuente Ovejuna.”

(ll.2365, p. 113)

The judge explains that a confession could not be put in writing, no pages have been written. The confession under torture has not been turned into written language and has escaped the order of inscription. Furthermore, the judge uses the “valeroso pecho” to describe the bravery of the villagers, an image that brings up the red cross worn by the Order of Calatrava. The first mentions of the cross in Act I all mention its location upon the chest of the members of the order: “la cruz de Calatrava/le cubrió el pecho” (34-35), “Y por la señales santas/ que a los dos cruzan el pecho” (60-61), “Maestre de la

47The importance of writing and its relationship to the exercise of power is illustrated by J.H. Elliott with the following colonial example: “The challenge of empire produced a bureaucratic response, in the form of government by paper, on a scale previously unknown in European history. We have hardly begun to grasp the sheer quantity of paper used for the government of the Spanish Monarchy and empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, when a viceroy or any major official left office, a formal investigation known as a residencia or visita, was conducted into his tenure of office, with sworn statements being taken from those in a position to speak. In 1590 one such visita was begun on the retirement of the Count of Villar as viceroy of Peru. By 1603 the judge conducting this visita has used 49,555 sheets of paper and was not yet finished. The ex-viceroy himself was long dead. What a different world this was from the world of seventy or eight years before, when the Emperor of Charles V had allegedly asked for pen and ink and none was to be found in the palace! Although royal administration was not as casual in the early years of Charles V as this story would suggest, the avalanche of paper in the last sixteenth century (not to mention the plethora of pens and the torrents of ink) suggests that, between the early years of Charles and the later years of Philip, there had intervened a revolution in the operation of government” (15).
cruz roja/ que tenéis en el pecho” (133-134). The “valeroso pecho” of the villagers now points to the absence of the red cross of Calatrava and the Comendador’s death and the new political power, the Catholic Monarchs, have been unable to turn their raw voice into writing. The voice of Fuente Ovejuna has taken over the role of the history and writing as the material conditions of the play itself.
We constantly inhabit the universe of voices, we are continuously bombarded by voices, we have to make our daily way through the jungle of voices, and we have to use all kinds of machetes and compasses so as to not get lost.

—Mladen Dolar

The visual persists until it disappears; the sonorous appears and fades away into its permanence.

—Jean-Luc Nancy

In *El médico de su honra* Calderón de la Barca develops the story of a suspicious husband who murders his wife to cleanse an imagined infidelity, a plot-line Calderón used for two other plays: *A secreto agravio, venganza secreta* and *El pintor de su deshonra*. The three works feature nearly identical plots, instrumental in nature and rather secondary to their true object, that is, their reflection on the concept of *honra*. Each of the works seems to mine the spectral qualities of this most-obsessively revisited Early Modern
desideratum—honra—in search of some always-elusive ground, a site in which to stabilize its immateriality and its very semantic instability. In the case of El médico de su honra, the conceptual indeterminacy of honra is seemingly “fixed” in the work’s exploration of theatre’s own residual vocality and in turn bears witness to an emergent and irrepressible anxiety regarding theatrical reproducibility, memory, writing, and performance.

Though the play’s narrative is widely known, its deployment of retrospective sequences, teichoscopia, and other such complicated theatrical techniques suggest that a brief outline of its plot would be worthwhile. Its details are as follows: Don Gutierre lives outside of Seville with his wife Doña Mencía, who at some point in her past was the love interest of King Pedro’s brother, the Infante Enrique. After an accident while traveling to Seville with his brother, Enrique must be taken unconscious to the nearest house: the home of Gutierre and Mencía. When he awakens, he recognizes Mencía and learns of her marriage to Gutierre. He decides to win back his former love. Almost simultaneously, Doña Leonor, who is in turn Gutierre’s former love-interest, has appeared before the King to demand a dowry so that she may enter a convent, an attempt to reenter society—even if only by willingly renouncing it—through vows that will wed her to Christ. Gutierre denies all wrongdoing and argues that he was forced to leave her in an attempt to protect his honor after he saw a man jumping off of her balcony. Although there is no proof of the act, the King imprisons him while inquiries
are made. Enrique, taking advantage of Gutierre’s imprisonment, begins to aggressively “court” Mencía, while repeatedly she tries to control his attacks against her honor. Gutierre becomes suspicious and, following a series of confusions and misunderstandings, decides to kill Mencía. In an attempt to cleanse not only his honor but also the suspicion of infidelity, he hires a barber-surgeon, Ludovico, to bleed his wife to death, thus masking the murder as a botched medical treatment. At the end—following Mencía’s murder—all is revealed, and King Pedro forces Gutierre to marry Doña Leonor as both punishment for his actions and as the restitution his former lover demands. Honra, then, figures both centrally in the title and as the narrative center of the play’s entangled argument: but what is the nature of honra in this play? What is it about honra that causes all its characters to go to great lengths to protect and guard it? Why does it drive Gutierre to commit a ghastly murder?

In the pages that follow I will explore the uses of honra in El médico de su honra in order to reveal its fundamental emptiness as a signifier. Honra, that is to say, is a signifier essentially lacking any positive content, and rather names a process of circulation which can best be understood as a figure for the anxieties that arise from the instability that the oral represents vis-à-vis the written, as well as so-called “reality.” If in Calderón’s play the spoken word is seen as a danger to honor, then the healing of honra must be carried out through a written inscription. The play, indeed, develops the tension between writing and the spoken word, a tension, again, made manifest through
the concept of *honra*. In this play honor resides in the gap between the word *produced* and the word *received* by another.

As I developed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, Dolar begins his exploration into the nature or “essence” of the human voice by defining it as “what does not contribute to making sense.” “It is,” he continues, “the material element recalcitrant to meaning, and if we speak in order to say something, then the voice is precisely that which cannot be said” (15). The human voice is present for all speech acts and yet it constantly escapes any attempt at being captured, and therefore, seems to take on an extralinguistic or even non-linguistic quality. The voice is the material support that makes meaning possible, intimately linked to meaning production; its vocality points indexically to this process. Yet the voice also appears to exist in a space beyond meaning. With this account, Dolar posits an opposition “where voice appears as materiality opposed to the ideality of meaning, and the meaning is the goal” (15).

From this starting point, Dolar attempts to isolate voice in order to locate its materiality. He begins by stripping voice of everything that forces it into the role of custodian of meaning. Analyzing elements considered internal to speech but which at first glance exist outside meaning, such as accent, intonation and timber, Dolar ultimately discards such elements by pointing to their participation in meaning production: accents point to region or class in a particular speaker; intonation can turn the intended meaning of a sentence on its head; timbre, which he describes as “the fingerprint
quality of the voice,” is one of the conditions of possibility for linguistic success, the accident that makes the norm feasible (22). He continues his process of distillation by concentrating on “presignifying voices” or “voices outside of speech,” that is, physiological manifestations such as coughing and hiccups. And yet, there is a possible “semantics of coughing,” where an apparently involuntary physiological function is domesticized and forced into meaning. One coughs before beginning to speak, when making time while thinking over a response, or to announce one’s presence. Even the accidental byproducts of the voice can be codified into signification.

Dolar then turns to the case of singing. Here the relationship between meaning and voice is inverted; vocal sound becomes the central focus at the expense of meaning. The traditional distrust of music within the Western philosophical tradition is forcefully underlined by the historical hierarchy of word and melody in sacred music.48 If the voice at center stage—as in the case in singing—appears to be the “locus of true expression, the place where what cannot be said can nevertheless be conveyed,” it is however a “structural illusion, the core of the fantasy that the singing voice might cure the wound inflicted by culture, restore the loss that we suffered by the assumption of the symbolic order” (31). What we ignore by accepting this structural illusion, Dolar

48 Dolar considers the birth of opera to be the culmination of the “dramatic tension between the word and the voice […] and [the moment when] their impossible and problematic relationship presented its driving force. The entire history of the opera, from Monteverdi to Strauss (Capriccio), can be written through the spyglass of this dilemma. For a complete development of this topic see Zizek and Dolar.
continues, is the fact that our fascination with the human voice is the result of this wound perpetrated by culture. Its powers exist in precisely the gap opened by this wound and made evident by the voice in music.

Logics of honra

The concept of honra is the subject of numerous studies since it is a fundamental and recurrent element of Spanish seventeenth-century theater. Honor is the dramatic motor of countless plays of the period; it is the element that triggers action and structures plot. Yet, despite its prominence and frequent appearances in the comedia, disagreement among scholars on the definition and historical details of honra, as well as its functions onstage, has characterized most scholarly work on early modern dramatic representations of honra.

In 1956 Gustavo Correa described honra as that which gave voice to the collective feeling of seventeenth-century Spanish society, and which, simultaneously, helped create a national identity. Correa distinguishes between two logics of honra, to which he applies a spatial metaphor: “vertical honra,” the immanent honor that comes with birth, and “horizontal honra,” the embodiment of “valores fundamentales de la cultura española” or the social standing of an individual in a given society (101). Thus, according to Correa, vertical honra aims to differentiate and establish social and economic hierarchies in seventeenth-century Spain, while horizontal honra, which is the
possession of any self-respecting person, regardless of social class, functions as an equalizing device that creates social cohesion. *Honra* was so prevalent in Golden Age theater, he argues, because all spectators would have been able to identify and relate to the complexities of sustaining *honra* since “la *honra* abarca todo el conjunto de la sociedad española de la época” (106).

Almost ten years later, C.A. Jones took this line of interpretation to task by marking a strict division between *honra* as an historical reality on the one hand, and *honra* as an artistic convention on the other. According to Jones it is not to history that critics should turn for insight into a playwright’s uses of *honra*, but rather the critic should concentrate on how the concept developed on stage. Of interest in comedia studies should be the transformations of its historical object, in this case *honra*. Thus the literary critic would find it more fruitful to “look at honor in relation to the artistic use to which it is put in the plays, rather than as historical or social phenomenon” (34). Jones thus proposes *honra* as a shorthand that indexes “the demands made on the individual by the conventions of the society of which he is a member” (35) and maps out its uses in Calderón’s work as the element that allows a character to exceed both stereotypes and particularities in order to represent external social pressures felt by the common Early Modern subject. And yet, as the more recent critic Melveena McKendrick has stated—and as it is perhaps quite clear from Jones’s slippages between society, history, and theater—it is difficult to isolate the artistic uses and transformations of
honra if we do not have a historical or extratheatrical honra against which to compare its theatrical deployment. Thus both forms of honra, historical and dramatic, must be taken into account for the study of the Spanish comedia, without reducing the relationship between both forms of honor—extradiegetic and diegetic—to a direct correspondence.

Although it is naive to read what happens on the Early Modern Spanish stage as a realistic depiction of the society that created it, dramatic fiction can nevertheless shed light on the community from which it emerges and the study of historical forces can do the same for the stage to which they give rise. Therefore, McKendrick reads the anxiety over honra, so widespread in the comedia, as a “mimetic transference” of the increasing anxiety during the seventeenth-century over creed and race, or limpieza de sangre. An “intuitive translation of obsessional energy from one area of experience to another, a process of mimetic transference” brings to the stage the age’s obsession with limpieza de sangre transformed and reconfigured by the dramatic convention of masculine and sexual honra (322). Both limpieza and honra oscillate between the two extremes of purity and contamination. Both limpieza and honra imply a lack of agency on the part of the subject who cannot seem to protect his or her own purity and defend him or herself from contamination. According to McKendrick, honra makes for infinitely more entertaining theater than the bureaucracy of limpieza de sangre, and therefore race appears transformed and aestheticized as sex.
Although the definition and approaches of these three critics imply markedly distinct conceptions of the literary object and propose radically different consequences for the study of theater and history, they hold one element in common: all three critics view the dramatic representation of *honra* as a stable and unchanging notion or device. That is, *honra* is understood as a signifier that remains constant from play to play, and its various dispositions according to the numerous authors who treat it are considered at most to be nuances. Correa sees a seamless and direct interaction between reality and fiction; Jones calls for greater patrolling of the border that separates the two; while McKendrick, finally, seeks a more rigorous and complex reading of the interaction between both spaces. In all three cases there is a clear exteriority granted to reality set against the parallel, enclosed, and well-defined space of the literary and the universes it creates. Such a division results in a homogenous notion of *honra*, where the stake in every case is simply a matter of deciphering the literary signifier’s most direct referent in the real world. In Correa’s case it is a mimetic relationship with a concept also called *honra* that circulated in Early Modern Spain. Jones and McKendrick, on the other hand, believe that literary depictions of *honra* have a more complex relationship to reality, but that nevertheless, literary *honra* does point to a social or political manifestation in historical Spain—limpieza de sangre in the case of McKendrick and local social demands in the case of Jones. Yet while it would be difficult to disagree with the existence of a relationship between politics and aesthetics, or to deny the relation
between art and the world in which it appears, there is much to be gained by listening to what literature tells us about literature, what it tells us about itself and its own anxieties. As such, I suggest that Calderón’s deployment of *honra* points not only to a social category “out there,” but indeed also functions as the index of a novel conception of literary language.

**Dangerous Circulation**

*El médico de su honra* begins with Infante Enrique falling from a horse while traveling to Seville with his brother, King Pedro, a character based on the historical Pedro I of Castille and also known as *Pedro el Cruel* or *Pedro el Justiciero*, and members of his court. The King orders that the unconscious Enrique be taken to a nearby villa for help, and callously hurries off, continuing his journey. Before riding away on his horse, he offers the following words

Llegad a esa quinta bella,
que está del camino al paso,
Don Arias, a ver si acaso,
recogido un poco en ella,
cobra salud el Infante.
Todos os quedad aquí,
y dadme un caballo a mí,
que he de pasar adelante;
que aunque este horror y mancilla
mi remora pudo ser,
no me quiero detener
hasta llegar a Sevilla.
Allá llegará la nueva
del suceso.

Vase
(ll. 13–26, p. 26)

The progression of the three redondillas that make up the King’s speech not only reveals his state of mind, but is also particularly notable for its economic encapsulation of the work as a whole. The first line ends with the inversion of the feminine adjective “bella,” used here to modify “quinta.” The placement of the word at the end of the line not only grants it an important position in the hierarchy of meaning within the first redondilla, but also permits its association, through the necessary rhyme scheme that characterizes this verse form, with the word “ella” in line 16. In this way, prefigured by the “bella/ella” pair, is the meeting, a few lines down, between King Pedro’s brother, Enrique, and his former love interest and now a married woman, Doña Mencía. The original association “bella/ella,” is expanded and the “bella quinta”—her home but also the site of her confinement—now prefigures Mencía’s appearance upon the stage in the
next scene. The literal confinement and containment of Mencía’s body within the private space of the family home that will be at the center of this comedia, are transformed here, in this redondilla, into a rhetorical and linguistic containment of the woman’s proper name, that is, the proper name Mencía, within the “bella/ella” pair.\(^4\)

The first four lines of the King’s speech present a unit that both suggests and contains the female body that will be the site of struggle during the three jornadas that make up the play, while simultaneously obscuring and concealing her proper name.

After giving his entourage, in the second redondilla, the order to stay behind and look after Enrique’s recovery, King Pedro asks for a horse and explains he will continue on alone to Seville.\(^5\) He explains that although this “horror y mancilla” could have stopped him, he will, in spite of the accident, continue his journey. The use of the word

\(^4\) In fact, it could be said that the linguistic components of the rhyme cluster follow the same logic: the word “ella” itself is contained within the word “bella.” Beyond the feminine – a ending of the word, the first person female pronoun points, and of course deictically postpones, to the absent female body of the play’s protagonist.

\(^5\) This is, in fact, the tone and pace of the first scene. The four-verse stanza that opens the play takes up seven lines and its full utterance takes three different characters:

Don Enrique: ¡Jesús mil veces!
Don Arias: ¡El cielo
te valga!
Rey: ¿Qué fue?
Don Arias: Cayó
   el caballo, y arrojó
   desde él al Infante al suelo.
(ll. 1-4, p. 75)

The fractured use of verse reproduces, rhetorically, Enrique’s fall. The redondillas culminate in two full lines signifying the Infante’s landing after the fall and can be said to function as a poetic thud.
“mancilla” to describe his brother’s accident is perhaps unexpected; according to the 
Diccionario de la Real Academia the word signifies a wound or lesion but also means
damage to ones reputation or fame resulting in dishonor.

The King’s speech ends with a truncated redondilla and a truncated line, pulling
the listener (the spectator, the reader) into the King’s hurried pace with his final words
tapering off in the air as he rides on to Seville. Additionally, the truncated end to his
words along with the change in focus through verbal usage, that is the shift from
second person singular when he gives orders to others (“llegad a esa quinta bella”) to
the first person when he describes what he is to do (“que he de pasar adelante”) and
finally, in the truncated ending, the third person singular used to describe how news of
the event will reach Seville leaves us wondering who is taking whom to the city. Are
“las nuevas del suceso” the content that will reach the city, a passenger, along will the
King that it to arrive to Seville on horseback? Or are these “nuevas” an independent
vehicle that moves independently of King and horse? With these compact lines, three
and half redondillas or 14 lines, the great playwright sets up the premise of his play,
introducing from the beginning the stakes and anxieties that will circulate and populate
the rest of El médico de su honra. At one level the containment set up with King Pedro’s
first speech is broken immediately, when Don Arias and Don Diego invade Mencía’s
house seeking help for the injured Infante Enrique. But, at another level, and, I will
argue, more importantly for the topic at hand, the rhetorical containment established
here is tested repeatedly throughout the play’s first act, rupturing only in the final lines of the first act.

Skipping ahead momentarily to that point in the play, when King Pedro is using his “segundo oído” to hear Gutierre’s defense against Doña Leonor’s accusations. Doña Leonor has already stated her complaint before the King—that is, her case against Gutierre and his broken marriage promise and the irreparable damage caused to her honor—and is now hiding out of Gutierre’s view while the King hears his version of the story. He states distrust, jealousy, and a preemptive defense of his honor as reasons for not fulfilling his promise to marry Doña Leonor and adds:

y así, libre deste amor,

en Sevilla me casé

con Doña Mencia de Acuña,

dama principal, con quien

vivo, fuera de Sevilla

una casa de placer.

(ll. 851-856, pp. 114-115)

He still mentions the physical containment or “imprisonment,” but the rhetorical containment is now gone. She, in the form of the proper name, is free to circulate. Line 858 offers the first mention of Mencia’s name, even while she has been the subject of many conversations and speeches, including her own, and has been on stage for a
considerable amount of time during the first act. It is at this moment that the rhetorical walls that were built around her proper name by the King’s speech in the opening scene finally fall to ruins.

Yet even here her name comes up in a peripheral manner in contrast to the lead she plays in *El médico de su honra*. Furthermore, it is during the case mounted against Doña Leonor’s honor that Mencía’s name is spoken, even if the case is a strange echo of her own past with the Infante and a prefiguration of the tragic event to come in course of the next two acts.\(^5\) Thus it is not the literal intrusion into her home earlier in the act that puts Mencía in danger, nor is it the jealousies and suspicions that arise from her past. It is, in fact, the trivial mention of Mencía’s proper name, that is, the introduction of the name “Doña Mencía de Acuña” into the play, that signals the breaking of a rhetorical captivity and linguistic containment. Thus begins her dangerous circulation.

**Traveling Tales**

But I will return first to this earlier sequence that initially draws Mencía onto the stage. While the King’s men carry Enrique to the villa, the play’s focus turns to the lady of the house. Doña Mencía has just witnessed the scene and is in the process of recounting the events, which the audience too has just witnessed, to her maid Jacinta. Moments later, Jacinta informs her mistress that the men are approaching the villa. The

\(^5\) In fact, the last lines of the play are completely a summary of the murder of Mencia.
presence of a witness transforms the unique and unrepeateable event into words in order to share the event with another. Enrique’s fall from a horse is transformed by Mencía into discourse that she can then circulate and pass on to Jacinta. Indeed, Calderón emphasizes the difference between the happening and the telling, which, because given the theatrical resources of the play, are exposed as two discrete instances of narrative. In the first, the fall is disguised as an event—it is presented as the excited exchange of dialogue among the group riding with the King. In the second instance, Mencía’s story, the fall is told through a rhetorically elaborate passage. It is this process of narration that, however spectrally, refers to the signifier *honra* prior to its first mention as a word on the stage. If *honra* will be performed in this play as the fear of others speaking about one’s life or, said in another way, having one’s life transformed into narrative and circulated, then this first scene can be read as the ground zero of *honra*. In other words, in *El médico de su honra* any narrativized event that circulates is a danger to someone’s *honra*, regardless of its narrative content. The transformation of events into words, and the threat posed by the possibility of their circulation, is the true source of anxiety in this play, not the content of the discourse exchanged as such.

This initial event and its narration are an instance of a constant retelling of stories that characterizes Act I of the play. In this first part of the play we learn of Mencía and Enrique’s backstory as well as that of Gutierre and Leonor. These stories will circulate and suffer transformations according not only to who is narrating but also according to
who is listening. The first echo of this initial retelling is seen with Mencía and Enrique’s first encounter. After Enrique wakes up in her house and they recognize each other, he begins to complain of her cold-heartedness and her marriage to Don Gutierre. Here he retells the story of the fall from his own point of view, employing a highly stylized discourse. His near death experience, he tells Don Arias, is nothing but a foreshadowing of his death upon hearing of Mencía’s marriage. Mencía immediately responds, in an attempt to protect her honor, with her own version of the events

[…]; y yo agora,

por si acaso llevó el viento

cabal alguna razón,

sin que en partidos acentos

la troncase, responder

a tantos agravios quiero,

porque donde fueron quejas

vayan con el mismo aliento

desengaños.

(ll.281-298, pp. 88-89)

It is interesting to note the use of three words ending in the letter -o and containing the -ie combination: “viento,” “quiero” and “aliento.” These keywords sum up the basic components of honra as I have defined it thus far, since breath/”aliento” emits the
spoken word, the wind/"viento" puts it into circulation and want/"quiero," which can be read as desire, brings the two together. The sexual dimension of honra, as desire, which McKendrick emphasizes in her work, gives substance to what is otherwise simply movement or circulation. In this case we can read “quiero” or want—her desire to clear her name in case the wind has taken Enrique’s words elsewhere—as the component that brings circulation into being. Her desire only multiplies the “aliento”—she produces more words—that can be taken away by the wind.

Georgina Dopico-Black reads El médico de su honra as the site of a tension between linguistic strategies of containment and what she calls “adulterous dissemination” (118). According to her reading, the female body, in this case Mencía’s, is put through process after process of containment, all of which ultimately fail. For Dopico-Black, the work posits an analogy between the idea of the contained female body, locked away at home, and the closed mouth or the contained word, both of which attempt to stop “adulterous dissemination.” And yet, it could be said that the play is in fact about open mouths and the words they produce, since what moves Act I are multiplying and repeated, although transformed, versions of Mencía’s and Gutierre’s stories. Mencía fears that the wind disseminated Enrique’s words, that is, his side of the story, but instead of trying to contain his narrative—to silence his words—she sets forth her own words, adding them to Enrique’s. By the end of Act I, Mencía will have told her story three times, Gutierre twice, while Leonor will also do so twice. If we add to this Don Aria’s intervention—he
turns out to be the mysterious man seen by Gutierre jumping from Leonor’s balcony—we in fact have four versions of Mencía and Enrique’s narrative and five versions of Leonor and Gutierre’s.

Throughout Act I all of the communication is accomplished through the spoken word. Only later do alternative forms of communication appear. In the second act, the spoken word circulates at a greater pace and becomes the center of a constant struggle for control over meaning. Toward the end of the act the uncertainty caused by the spoken word gives way to the written word or inscription, in the form of, first, a note written by Mencía and misread by Gutierre, and, later, more violently, to her gory murder. This note is also the pinnacle of Mencía’s attempts to narrate and control the narration of her honra, as well as that of Gutierre’s continuous misreadings of her narration.

The Cure

Act II is bookended by two encounters between Mencía and her husband, both of which become sites for the struggle over how an event gains meaning through its narrative formalization. In the first encounter, Enrique has secretly, with the help of Jacinta, entered Mencía’s house while Gutierre is in prison.52 While Mencía tries to get

52 Jacinta is an interesting character, since, as a slave, she fulfills the role of undermining her mistress’s honra by allowing Enrique to bribe her. In this case, in exchange for her
him to leave, Gutierre arrives, having been let out for the night by the prison guard. “En salud,” Mencía says, “me he de curar” (1243), using for the first time in the play the medical metaphor that will become its leitmotif. Mencía thus begins to stage a scene in which Enrique takes the role of thief, no longer an intruding lover: she hides Enrique, comes out to greet her husband, and moments later yells “thief.” When Gutierre and Coquín run in to catch the intruder, she knocks over a lamp, leaving the scene in darkness, and only their voices are heard. After a brief struggle, Jacinta returns to the room with a new lamp. It becomes evident that Coquín and Gutierre have only caught each other, for the scene that Mencía stages takes place in complete darkness. Only the voices of the characters allow their counterpart characters to perceive the action on the stage. They have only the sound of the human voice, or its absence, to guide themselves in the creation of a narrative that will allow them to understand what has happened or what Mencía wants them to think has happened. The human voice, though, does not function as a tool of recognition in this case and thus a separation between body and voice occurs.

help getting into Gutierre and Mencía’s home, Enrique promises her her freedom. In this way Jacinta performs the double function of, on the one hand, circulating information through her compromised position both as part of the household and other to it, and on the other, circulating as commodity. She circulates information through gossip and her contact with the world outside the family home but is also the object of commercial circulation. The darkness is of course only diegetic, as during a performance the stage would have been lighted or in daylight and the actors would only acted as if in total darkness.
Jean-Luc Nancy has written of the exclusion of listening and sound in Western philosophy by playing on the double meaning of the word “entendre” in French. The word means “to understand,” but also means “to hear.” The philosopher, he writes, is the one who understands and hears but cannot listen (1). He calls for philosophical knowledge that would not only concern itself with what presents itself to view but also notions such as accent, tone, timbre, resonance, and sound. In *El médico de su honra*, Mencía takes advantage of this omission in knowledge and understanding by allowing darkness to cover up the men’s identities. Momentarily dispossessed of vision, Gutierre and Coquín are unable to recognize each other after Enrique has left the scene. Word and voice act only as content, and the details and nuances of sound are not registered, making it impossible to use the human voice as a marker of identity. The signifying sound of the human voice cannot enter meaning and thus the field of knowledge of the play’s characters.

Yet immediately after Mencía establishes her counter-narrative in order to protect her honor and, in fact, her life, another element is introduced that undermines her attempt to control the scene. After the lights return, Gutierre approaches her. She sees a dagger hidden beneath his cloak, a dagger her husband has found and which was left behind by Enrique during his escape. Mencía misreads the presence of the dagger

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54 That this inability to recognize the voice of the other in darkness is also a longstanding convention of the comedia demands further investigation into the spectral vocality of the genre as a whole.
and believes Gutierre has found her out and wants to kill her; it is her fear that makes Gutierre suspicious. The dagger thus reintroduces the visual into a scene that leading up to this point has been dominated by the acoustic and the very absence of the visual. In this way, the dagger can be read as a substitution for the writing tool that inscribes words on paper, and seems to foreshadow the inscription that Ludovico’s blade, following Gutierre’s command, will carve upon Mencia’s body, an episode to which I will soon turn.

Dopico-Black reads the note I mention above as the first and only instance of authorial intent on Mencia’s part. I would venture that in fact Mencia’s fictional invocation of a thief marks a significant attempt at controlling meaning through a sophisticated and dramatic authorial move. Nevertheless, the means of this move lie in the acoustic, and not in the written word. This process of meaning production is akin to theatrical production. The unity of voice—her enunciation of the word “thief” at a calculated moment—and movement in space (she knocks over a lamp as a trigger for further action and the possibility of creating a narrative) reproduce the basic structure of theatrical performance as such. It could almost be said that Mencia is in fact “directing” the scene in which she is participating through her actions and words.

The closing scene of Act II, Mencia and Gutierre’s second encounter, also takes place in darkness. Mencia is sleeping in the garden and her husband arrives unexpectedly in an attempt to calm his suspicions. He enters through the garden,
jumping over the wall, breaking into his own home, in a manner similar to Enrique’s entry at the beginning of the act. He arrives to the garden in total darkness, for Mencía’s candle had been put out by the wind. He calls to his wife and is initially reassured by Mencía’s apparent recognition. A confused conversation ensues in which Mencía believes she is talking to Enrique, yet Gutierre misreads her words as being addressed to him. Finally, Mencía utters the word “alteza” and the mistake is revealed. Once again the voice as sound does not enter the perception of its user, Gutierre, and listener, Mencía. She can hear the words her husband says, she can understand their meaning, but is unable to listen to them as sound. She understands the meaning of his words but fails to listen to the sound of his voice and is unable to identify him as her husband.

In an inversion of the opening scene of this act, Gutierre then announces his presence explaining that he entered the house through the garden door, a dissimulation of what in effect has truly happened. In the same way that Mencía directed the previous scene, Gutierre controls this encounter by letting his wife know that he knows, although mistakenly, about her affair with Enrique, while simultaneously avoiding the verbalization of the event. This verbalization would result in a multiplication of linguistic circulation, which would further endanger his “honra.” Instead he makes veiled threats that Mencía does not fully understand semantically. Even when she does not understand the content or referent behind it, the violence of the threat is evident to Mencía:
Don Gutierre: No me espanto, bien mío;
que el aire que mató la luz, tan frío
corre, que es un aliento
respirado del céfiro violento,
y que no sólo advierte
muerte a las luces, a las vidas muerte
y pudieras dormida
a sus soplos también perder la vida.

Doña Mencía: Entenderte pretendo,
y aunque más lo procuro, no te entiendo.


The word “aliento” and words with a similar -o ending—“espanto,” “aliento” and “violento”—return in this passage now transferred to a darker semantic field. If the word “aliento” related to circulation and desire in Mencía’s words to Enrique in Act I, the word “aliento” now points to the results of this circulation: fear and violence.

Act II ends with Gutierre’s articulation of his desire to kill Mencía, an idea that will be developed and put into practice in Act III. Gutierre arrives at this decision during his final staged encounter with her. It is here that inscription through the written word enters the play and announces Mencía’s death at Ludovico’s blade. Again, Gutierre arrives home, after receiving a pardon from the King. He has just confronted
the King about the Infante’s dagger (found in his home) and is now more convinced than ever that his wife is guilty of adultery. The Infante has been forced to flee Seville after accidentally wounding his brother with the very dagger Gutierre presented before the King as proof of his wife’s adultery.

Moments before his arrival, Mencía receives news that the Infante has fled. Worried that people will think he has left on her account, she decides to write him a note asking him not to leave. She is interrupted in the middle of writing the text by Gutierre’s arrival, when he finds the following fragment: “Vuestra alteza, señor/ no se ausente…” (2462-2464). Gutierre reads this as a love note and decides that his wife must die. This final decision is communicated by the written word, when Gutierre finishes Mencía’s note in his own hand, with his own voice:

“El amor te adora, el honor te aborrece; y así el uno te mata, y el otro te avisa: dos horas tienes de vida; cristiana eres, salva el alma, que la vida es imposible.”

(ll. 2496-2498, p. 193)

Gutierre’s suspicions culminate in Mencía’s death, but before the execution of the sentence, the note, with Gutierre’s intervention, performs a symbolic inscription on the text she has authored in a fashion that foreshadows the literal mark Ludovico will inscribe on her body. As it invades her text, Gutierre’s inscription means the death of Mencía as a character on stage. After the death scene she will no longer appear on stage
until her final unveiling after the murder, and her final appearance can be said to be more that of a prop than that of a character: still, but also silent. Gutierre writes upon her note, ending it, and Ludovico, as Gutierre’s unwilling scribe, inscribes a wound on Mencía’s body that will end her life.

The inscription metaphor indeed continues when Ludovico guides the King to Mencía’s now-dead body. Following the bloody handprints Ludovico left behind when Gutierre led him out of his house, the King asks Don Diego, another member of the court present during Enrique’s accident at the beginning of Act I: “¿No ves sangrienta una mano/impresa en la puerta?” Ludovico, the unwilling scribe, has left behind a text printed in blood and inscribed upon a door so as to later identify Gutierre’s house.

By way of concluding I would like to return to the question of Enrique’s dagger. Dopico-Black reads the dagger dropped by Enrique at the beginning of Act II as a phallic symbol that plants suspicion in Gutierre’s mind. She establishes an analogy between the dagger found in Mencía’s bedroom and the penis thought to have penetrated Mencía’s body. Dopico-Black follows the dagger through its literal and figurative movements—though its movement as a prop within the play and its shifts in meaning. Enrique leaves the dagger behind during his escape; Gutierre then finds it and reads it as the invading phallus that compromises his wife’s purity and his honor. Mencía sees it underneath her husband’s cloak and reads it, rightly, as a symbol of her husband’s revenge should he find out that Enrique was in his home. Later, the dagger is
used when Gutierre appeals to the King for justice, where he describes it as a tongue of steel:

\[
\text{esta brillante} \\
\text{lengua de acero elegante,} \\
\text{suya [Enrique’s] fue.}
\]

(II.2105-2107, p.175)

King Pedro in turn confronts his brother and describes the dagger as a hieroglyph that unveils his guilt. Finally, when the King gives back the dagger to his brother and is accidentally injured by it, the dagger becomes, in Dopico-Black’s reading, “no longer merely a sign of adultery or dishonor but also of future regicide” (153).

The dagger at this point returns to its original form and is once again a weapon. Pointing to the transformative qualities of the dagger as instrument of inscription, the dagger becomes a dagger just in time for Mencía’s murder and moments after it has been called a hieroglyph. In this way, the power of the writing instrument and the power of the blade as instrument of inscription are united in one object. At this moment the sharp edge of the dagger is ready to kill Mencía both as body and as agent of linguistic circulation. The literal knife bleeds the life out of her body and the metaphorical knife turns her into a still and quiet figure that is unable to set forth any

\[\text{55 Pedro I de Castilla (1350-1369) was stabbed to death by his step-brother Enrique II de Castilla.}\]
more words into circulation and is locked into silence. Yet, the pen/dagger inscribes death upon Mencía’s body but does not kill the spoken word as such. The play concludes with a return to a time before Enrique’s fall, to the moment before Gutierre married Mencía and before he left Leonor, only this time he is unable to abandon her. His suspicions remain, which in the logic of the play is just as damning as proof, and Leonor’s honra and therefore Gutierre’s, both conceived as circulating narrative, have only increased their movement during the play.
In *Performance Theory* Richard Schechner explores the ambiguity inherent to the terminology used to speak about theater. One example of this ambiguity is the apparently simple word “script,” a term currently used in modern theater to refer to the text or written document that antecedes a performance and remains intact from one enactment to another. Schechner, however, rejects this straightforward definition and denies the textual basis that the word’s etimology implies and instead defines the script as “[t]he persistent shape [...] which was kept from one event to another” (68). This concept of script, as can be seen from the grammatical tense of the previous quote, is no longer the one modern theater audiences and scholars reach for when thinking about dramatic practices. Schechner dates this small but momentous transformation of meaning back to the early modern Europe:

> From the Renaissance until very recently, concomitant with the rapid extension of literacy, the ancient relationship between doing and script was inverted. In the great tradition of the west the active sense of script was forgotten, almost entirely displaced by drama; and the doings of a particular production became the way to present a drama in a new way. The active sense of script was preserved in
popular entertainment persisting from Greco-Roman times (and probably before) to our own epoch. But in the great tradition the script no longer functioned as code for transmitting action across time; instead the doings of each dramatic “production” became a way of re-presenting and interpreting the words-of-the-drama. Maintaining the words intact grew in importance; how they were said, and what gestures accompanied them, was a matter of individual choice, and of less importance. (Schechner, 69)

By removing the onus of safeguarding the survival of the script from generation to generation from collective memory and instead enlisting the technologies of writing to assure its endurance certain elements were, of course, lost. These elements, according to Schechner, belong to what is purely performative and escapes the technologies of inscription. Our contemporary definition of script and the texts it produces may communicate words to be said, but not the way in which these were to be said.\(^{56}\)

\(^{56}\) Schechner here appears to echo certain messianic tendencies of fallen language, only in his case the fall is due to a technological development instead of a religious event. His description of script prior to the development of writing come very close to paraphrasing Walter Benjamin’s texts on language. For example, the following passage from the famous essay “The Task of the Translator,” where Benjamin explains: “Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information—hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of a bad translation. But do we not generally regard as the essential substance of a literary work what it contains in addition to information—as even a poor translator will admit—the unfathomable, the mysterious, the ‘poetic,’ something the translator can only reproduce if he is also a poet? This, actually, is the cause of another characteristic of inferior
This is in part a technological failure of written language, of our alphabetic and phonetic writing system. We could possibly image a system of signs that would be the product of an amalgamation between literary text and musical score, one where the human voice would be ruled by pianos and fortes or largos and prestos and not only by symbols associated to meaning-producing sounds. But even if history had produced such a writing system—one that accounted for gesture, intonation, and body and facial expression, or that which according to Schechner was lost with technological dissemination—the individual material voice would always escape such a system. The script in either of Schechner’s meanings, just like language, can never contain every nuance of the event of performance. The ambiguity Schechner attributes to the meaning of script is also the ambiguity of language itself.

This ambiguity has been greatly debated among literary scholars when faced with dramatic texts, and the text/performance dichotomy still guides scholarship on theater of all periods. In the field of early modern Iberian theater, Bruce Burningham has argued in favor of a performance-based and actor-centered approach that does not take the written text as its final horizon, but instead concentrates on the “intangible traces” (3) left behind after the final dramatic product has dissipated. Instead of a closed off and finished product, Burningham conceives of dramatic practices as “the moment-to-moment system of open communication that necessarily exists between live performers and their spectators” (5).

 translation, which consequently we may define as the inaccurate transmission of an inessential content” (16).
And what greater example of an “intangible trace” than the human voice upon the stage? And what clearer example of the ambiguity described by Schechner? The human voice, unlike gesture or body movement, is never isolated from meaning and yet can never be fully explained by it; it is always at the intersection between form and meaning. Voice, for this reason, is a fruitful hinge between Schechner’s two meanings of script or Burningham’s dichotomy between text and performance. The sound of human language is closely linked to the performative aspect of the dramatic act, that is, it implies the presence of bodies upon a stage and inserted in the flow of time, but it also takes us back to the textual or the tangible aspect of the theater, or the script. The voice refers back to the words traced or inscribed by the playwright on the two-dimensional page. In this way, the human voice exists somewhere at the junction between the tangible and the intangible, between the performance process and the textual product that makes up theater. In the pages that constitute this project I hope I have taken sufficient advantage of this ambiguity.

57 Richard Schechner considers the eye to be privileged organ when it comes to the experience of theatricality, and the ear only to a certain degree and in most cases only an afterthought: “Traditionally in western theater, the eyes and to some degree the ear are where theatricality is experienced. By etymology and by practice a theater is a ‘place of/for seeing’” (333).
Illustrations

Fig. 1 Isaac and Jacob.

Fig. 2 Jacob Receiving Isaac’s Blessing. Anonymous. 1485. The Illustrated Bartsch. Vol. 85, German Book Illustration before 1500: Anonymous Artists, 1484-1486. 1 May 2014. In ARTstor.
Fig. 3 *Isaac Blessing Jacob*. Girolamo da Treviso. n.d. (sixteenth century). Musée des Beaux Arts, Rouen.

Fig. 4 *Isaac and Jacob*. Jusepe de Ribera. 1637. Museo del Prado, Madrid.
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