

# Visitors from beyond the Grave

## Ghosts in World Literature

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# “PHANTOM LADIES” AND “GHOST GALLANTS”: THE MOTIF OF SUPERNATURAL LOVERS IN THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE THEATRE

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**ABSTRACT:** Spanish Golden Age plays about a supernatural lover are usually considered regular situation comedies, but also make up a subgroup among them. In this particular type of comedy, the *galán* (gallant) or the *dama* (lady) assumes the disguise of a ghost or another magical creature in order to overcome an obstacle that hinders their love relationship. Moreover, the gender of the disguised character is the key to analysing the two ways in which the motif of the supernatural lover displays itself in Golden Age plays. On the basis of a comparison between two plays by Calderón featuring this motif from the two approaches, female and male disguised characters —*La dama duende* (*The phantom lady*) and *El galán fantasma* (*The ghost gallant*)— and using examples from other plays in which it is also used, this chapter tries to analyse and explain these two ways in which the motif of the supernatural lover displays itself in the 17th century Spanish Theatre.

**KEYWORDS:** Comedy, lie, supernatural, gender differentiation, Calderón de la Barca.

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the main features of a group of Spanish *comedias* written in the 17th century revolving around the motif of the “supernatural lover”. In these plays the love relationship between the *galán* and the *dama* is shaped by a special characteristic: the supernatural disguise that one of them adopts. We will describe the principal traits of this scheme focusing on the differences aroused from the gender of the character that disguises himself or herself in each case, taking the comparison of two famous plays by Calderón de la Barca based on this motif as a starting point —*La dama duende* (1629) with a female leading character, and *El galán fantasma* (1637) with a male one—. This analysis will be completed with examples taken from other plays where this theme works as a main driver, such as *El diablo está en Cantillana* (1662) by Luis Vélez de Guevara and others where the motif acts as a subsidiary element in a more complex plot, as in Tirso de Molina’s *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In the text, dates in brackets refer to the year when the first edition of each play was published. All the plays discussed are listed here with estimated composition dates: *La viuda valenciana* (1599-1600), *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1615), *La fantasma de Valencia* (1625), *El diablo está en Cantillana* (around 1626), *La dama duende* (1629), *El galán fantasma* (1629-1637), *El imposible vencido* (1637), *Bellaco sois, Gómez* (1641-1643) and *El encanto sin encanto* (1650-1652). All texts are quoted from the editions included in the bibliography.

It is a well-known fact that in the *Comedia Nueva* love is usually depicted in terms of conflict until a catharsis takes place at the very end of the play in the form of marriage<sup>2</sup>. A similar problem arises in our plays, but in these cases the characters opt to disguise themselves as supernatural creatures, with the resulting trick. The ploy can carry out various aims, the main ones being: the desire to start a courtship and the need to protect a consolidated couple from the love requirements of a character from a higher social class. The consequences in the development of the plot and in the general tone of the play are different for each of these two distinct situations. At this point it should be noted that the plays we are considering here are often read and studied with others, like *Amar por señas* or *La celosa de sí misma*, both by Tirso de Molina. In this vein, De Armas has suggested all these works can be grouped together under the motif of the “invisible lover”. In all of them, he points out, a young foreigner is invited to love a lady who cannot be seen, as she is covered, wears a mask, or always receives the *galán* in a dark room<sup>3</sup>. This classification of undeniable interest only explains plays in which women disguise themselves and is nevertheless too general, in light of the overly too frequent presence of components such as masks, the covered lady (*la tapada*), or spaces like dark rooms and secret passageways in the comical theatre of the Golden Age. All of them serve the purpose of creating identity misunderstandings, confusion and the *quid pro quo* distinctive feature of comedy —appearing not only in the Spanish Golden Age plays, but also in the ones by Shakespeare, Molière, Plautus or Menander—. Therefore, this study will focus on the plays where the habitual string of misunderstandings is linked to a supernatural lie, given that it has important consequences in the way the plot and its humorous mechanisms are devised. This deception is concocted through different textual and spectacular elements, anchored in certain cultural conceptions<sup>4</sup>. In fact, cultural aspects —especially those concerning beliefs in ghosts, goblins and other magical creatures— play an important role in these plays and contribute to create a double comical perspective. On the one hand, reactions towards the supernatural are remarkably efficient dramatically speaking, not to mention the contrast between sceptical characters and gullible ones (*graciosos*, most of the times). This is underlined by the contrast between the knowledge of the spectator —already aware of the false nature of the supernatural element— and the limited perspective of the characters. A further trait of these plays is the romance between a lady or a gallant and a mysterious creature which —save from being defined as male or female— cannot be identified as a human or a ghost. In order to further study the cultural constructs beneath the supernatural lover motif, it may be relevant to make some brief observations on the precedents of the ghost gallant and the phantom lady.

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<sup>2</sup> Di Pinto 2004: 131-132.

<sup>3</sup> De Armas 1986: 341-342.

<sup>4</sup> Cazés Gryj 2013: 71.

Regarding the female variation of the theme, the figure of the lady masquerading as a supernatural being is not easy to trace in Spanish literature, despite the well-known prejudice of the diabolic linked to females. This idea was common in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and was widely spread throughout the Spanish Middle Ages<sup>5</sup>. However, in the medieval texts devilish beings that impersonate women are abundant, while real women who try to masquerade as supernatural creatures are rather unusual. Another view on the topic is provided by De Armas —let us recall his selection of plays on “invisible women”— where he suggests that the origin of the motif goes back to the story of Cupid and Psyche included in Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass*. According to De Armas, these women reverse the roles of the classical myth: they remain hidden under the guise of the supernatural mask, leaving men to burn with love and curiosity. Right after, De Armas draws the transmission of the motif until the 17th century theatre, via the Italian *novella* and the Spanish *El soldado Píndaro* (1626) by Céspedes y Meneses<sup>6</sup>. Even if the echoes of these works are significant, points of convergence between texts are scarce, and the similarities analysed by De Armas seem “undeniable, but minimal regarding extension and global structure of the plot”<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, it is more cautious to keep a sceptical stance on the precedents of these dramatical “phantom ladies”. Conversely, tracing back the origins of the ghost gallant turns out less difficult, as the “ghost in love” is a recurring topic in Spanish literary history. Closely linked to folklore, it is always a male figure who dresses up as a spirit to hide his love away from the prying eyes of any onlookers<sup>8</sup>. Furthermore, the belief in ghosts —which was common in the 17th century— usually has a comical stage effect in these plays where the false spirit is a character in disguise that frightens others and brings laughter to the audience<sup>9</sup>. All in all, these ghostly figures in love were not unfamiliar to the *corrales de comedias* of the 17th century and their audience: spectators knew the true identity of these figures beforehand and could even guess a love relationship being hidden —which increased the comical effect.

#### VARIATIONS IN THE MOTIF: PHANTOM LADIES [FEMALE LEADING ROLE] AND COMICAL TONE

The first aspect to draw attention to when comparing *La dama duende* to *El galán fantasma* is the comical tone of the first, as it belongs to the prolific “cloak-and-sword” theatrical production of Calderón. These plays are a continuation of the ones written by Lope and Tirso, always centred around love and jealousy,

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<sup>5</sup> Escartín Gual 2008: 67.

<sup>6</sup> De Armas 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Antonucci 2006: XXXVIII.

<sup>8</sup> Pedrosa 2006: 733-734.

<sup>9</sup> Laplana Gil 1993: 95.

although increasingly stylized, complex and ingenious<sup>10</sup>. Here, women usually play the leading role, as does our model of phantom lady. The main character of *La dama duende* is Ángela, a young widow, curious and restless, who longs to escape her brothers’ constant surveillance. Her desire for freedom drives her to adopt a supernatural disguise, which offers her a good chance to establish contact with the opposite sex —as it also happens to the ghost gallants. Nevertheless, the obstacles that Ángela and the other disguised female protagonists must overcome are mild and usually restricted to the private and the domestic. The supernatural disguise allows Ángela to flirt with Manuel, the gallant, without endangering her honour or confronting her brothers’ authority. Significantly, turning into a phantom lady will also enable her to take the lead in the courtship. Far from being a novelty in the “cloak-and-sword” comedies, as Wardropper pointed out, in these plays women are able to take the initiative in the courtship, contrary to what is usually established —a fundamental lack of mutual understanding between real men and women which comedy loves to exploit<sup>11</sup>. In the plays considered, the disguise clearly enables women to take part in the game of seduction, as we see in *El encanto sin encanto* (1672) by Calderón<sup>12</sup>. The lady in this comedy, Serafina, locks Enrique up in a fortress with the help of her servants under the pretext of protecting him. While concealing her identity from the gallant, Serafina sings, dances and even declares her love for him, always disguised as a sort of ghostly apparition Enrique is forbidden to touch. Once again, the supernatural lie allows the lady to adopt an identity that effectively protects her honour.

The supernatural disguise may also play a small or secondary role in other plays, such as *La viuda valenciana* (1620) by Lope de Vega, *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* (1635) by Tirso de Molina or *Bellaco sois, Gómez* (1643), attributed to Tirso. In the first one, another young widow, Leonarda, is willing to indulge her desire for Camilo, a gallant she has spotted in the street, without marrying him or jeopardising her good name. In order to achieve her goal without the young man discovering her identity, Leonarda asks her servants for help: they blindfold Camilo and take him to Leonarda’s place, where they sleep together. According to Ferrer Valls in her edition of the play, Camilo’s ignorance of his lover’s identity is the core plot-premise<sup>13</sup>. This only proves *La viuda valenciana*’s close relationship with regular comedies on mistaken identities, but one of the sub-themes in the play sets up a clear dialogue with the phantom lady motif. Thus, when Camilo is on the brink of discovering Leonarda’s identity, she confuses him, making the young man believe he has been sleeping with an old lady. Camilo, scared, resumes

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<sup>10</sup> Wilson 1974: 171.

<sup>11</sup> Wardropper 1978: 222.

<sup>12</sup> Valbuena Briones 1973: 635 had already pointed out the links between *La dama duende*, *El galán fantasma* and *El encanto sin encanto*, plays he regarded as a trilogy on “mysterious lovers”.

<sup>13</sup> Ferrer Valls 2001: 35.

one of his frights since the affair began: his mysterious lover must be a demon, a witch or a “*lindo encantamiento*”. Even if Leonarda has never disguised herself, her behaviour induces his lover to believe a magical creature has been involved in their romance, which may relate the play to *La dama duende*<sup>14</sup>.

In *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, Juana chases Martín, who has fled after taking advantage of her under a promise of marriage. According to a carefully designed plan, Juana assumes the new identity Martín has adopted in Madrid while —after spreading the news she has died— she pretends to be a ghost in front of him. A similar trick can be found in *Bellaco sois, Gómez*: after announcing her own false death to Gregorio, Ana pursues him under various male and female disguises, one of them supernatural. She impersonates her own lost soul and threatens to continue haunting the gallant. Both Martín from *Don Gil* and Gregorio from *Bellaco sois, Gómez* end up surrendering to the insistence of such clever ladies and accept to marry them. In the two plays, thus, the supernatural disguise is one among many devices used by women to achieve their goals —no need to say the fear awakened provides them with a major advantage over men.

In the four above-mentioned plays, supernatural disguise is mainly used by women to solve two regular female dramatic problems: the urge to seduce a man or the need to win back a lover who has left them. The main obstacle here is usually the lady’s own honour, not an external real threat, for when this appears it is always under the form of a close relative (Angela’s brothers, Leonarda’s aunt...). Hence, women use the supernatural disguise to face inner difficulties —even if they may have external consequences— linked to an honour code they have made their own. Such ruses are the way women temporarily avoid this strict code, keeping even their love interests from finding out the transgression. An acute female awareness of the laws of their society is thus revealed, as stated by Wardropper in his renowned article<sup>15</sup>. In fact, these phantom ladies display an outstanding ability to cloak themselves with an aura of mystery, taking men aback and achieving a more powerful position than them. They do not hesitate to make use of secret spaces and passages, costumes, favourable conditions, carefully outlined plans and the help of servants. However, as said before, these female spheres of influence are often restricted to a domestic setting. This setting, the female leading role and the nature of the conflict developed contribute to lending an intentionally cheerful and comical tone to this group of plays. This is significantly less marked in plays revolving around a male main character, that is, a ghost gallant.

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<sup>14</sup> Critics such as De Armas 1993: 65 have analysed the ties between the two works, once again on the basis of the Cupid and Psyche myth, for «both Leonarda and Ángela turn into invisible Cupids, ensuring their faces are not shown».

<sup>15</sup> Wardropper 1978: 226.

VARIATIONS IN THE MOTIF: GHOST GALLANTS [MALE LEADING ROLE]  
AND SERIOUS TONE

The first remarkable aspect of *El galán fantasma* is its setting: the action takes place in the ducal court of a foreign kingdom —a much higher social sphere than the one depicted in *La dama duende* and other related plays. The second striking element is the desperate situation that compels the main character, Astolfo, to make use of the supernatural disguise: the Duke of Saxony wants to eliminate him in order to abuse his fiancée, Julia. As a consequence, it is not possible for Astolfo to enjoy his trick the way Ángela and other phantom ladies do. In fact, he only takes advantage of a situation in which other characters misinterpret his presence as a ghostly appearance —for everyone thinks he was killed by the Duke in a duel. Bearing these elements in mind and considering their implications in the verse, Parker claims *El galán fantasma* “is not a funny play and it can only be considered a comedy regarding its type of plot” and that “even if the situation is comical, the humorous aspects are not developed”<sup>16</sup>. In this line, the brutality displayed by the Duke towards the couple (he nearly kills Astolfo and tries to rape Julia) connects *El galán fantasma* with a number of baroque plays where the dominant/dominated dichotomy plays an important role. Their plots always revolve around an outrage committed by a character coming from the high nobility, who abuses his power induced by sexual attraction towards a woman of a lower social level<sup>17</sup>.

On the contrary, the above-mentioned play is far away from those tragic pieces such as *Fuente Ovejuna* or *El alcalde de Zalamea*, common models of plays centred in the abuse at the hands of the powerful character. Indeed, the very use of the supernatural disguise to circumvent the abuse of the tyrant provides some comic relief as well as a parodic tone to *El galán fantasma*. Therefore, Arellano’s suggestion to include the play among Calderón’s *comedias palatinas*<sup>18</sup> on account of its exotic palace setting and the presence of a noble character seems quite convincing. Iglesias Iglesias also argues in favour of considering the play a subtype of *comedia palatina* —those constructed around the lust of a powerful nobleman. Difficulties with the classification of the play arise from the seriousness of the conflict —insistently highlighted by Calderón— in contrast with its comical components. This mixture of tragic plot and comical treatment is one of the distinctive features of *El galán fantasma*, even if comical elements are limited to certain sequences and characters (like the *gracioso*) in the play. This comical-serious model, as defined by Vitse<sup>19</sup>, was more frequent in Calderón’s time —and

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<sup>16</sup> Parker 1991: 191-195.

<sup>17</sup> Diallo 2013: 67-68.

<sup>18</sup> Arellano 2012: 503-504.

<sup>19</sup> Vitse 1983: 526.

meant to endure. It is more in line with the definition of *comedia seria* suggested by Arellano<sup>20</sup>, which would be the best framework to understand a play as *El galán fantasma*. On this basis, we can draw the first conclusions around the character of the ghost gallant: he is a young man in love facing a typical conflict of duties, due to the fact that a nobleman belonging to a higher social position —and therefore worthy of respect— lusts after his fiancée. The gallant will be forced to resort to the supernatural disguise against his own will in order to avert the danger. The result is a comical-serious play set in a high-class environment that remains comical —even if it involves many serious and tragic elements. This scheme is not only to be found in Calderón's play. In fact, Vélez de Guevara's *El diablo está en Cantillana* (1622) shares the same plot and a similar approach<sup>21</sup>: Lope Sotelo is a loyal vassal to his lord, King Don Pedro of Castile, until asked by him not only to give up his lady, but also to help him seduce her. Incapable of persuading the monarch to abandon this whim, a desperate Lope will disguise himself as a ghost to avoid the royal command and keep his lady. Once again we witness the conflict between a vassal and a lord who abuses his power —this time, in a medieval and rural context. However, a more comical perspective can be entertained: Vélez takes more advantage of the traditional sources of the “ghost in love” scheme, and the funny reactions of the peasants of Cantillana towards the ghost contribute to stress the hilarious aspects of the plot. Rodríguez Baltanás has pointed out the importance of the ghostly ruse in the play, as it structures its plot —and its serious passages—, while serving as an effective trigger for comedy<sup>22</sup>. Thus, both the play by Calderón and the one by Vélez develop —and neutralize— a tragic conflict through humour<sup>23</sup>. Overall, men are always disguised against their will, forced by a critical situation they cannot face by any other means. The disguise allows them to fight back against powerful opponents indirectly and stop them from abusing their power. Moreover, in these plays the supernatural trick is not restricted to the domestic setting, rather taking place outdoors (the streets of Cantillana, Julia's garden...) enabling more characters to get involved in the appearances of the supposed ghost.

At this stage, after pointing out the differences between plays based on female and male supernatural lies, we are going to focus on the main elements involved in this type of trick which are common for both types of plays —and

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<sup>20</sup> Arellano 2012: 138.

<sup>21</sup> Links between both plays have been well analysed by Iglesias Iglesias 2013, in her thesis on *El galán fantasma*, concluding both draw from tradition (the mentioned “ghost in love” scheme). Nevertheless, there are elements Calderón seems to borrow from Vélez.

<sup>22</sup> Rodríguez Baltanás 1992: 87.

<sup>23</sup> The motif of the ghost gallant can also be found in *novellas* written in the same period: *La fantasma de Valencia*, included in *Tardes entretenidas* (1625) by Alonso de Castillo Solórzano and *El imposible vencido* from the *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (1637) by María de Zayas y Sotomayor. We will not devote more attention to them for they are novels and not theatre plays, but they are the proof that the motif considered here was not restricted to the dramatic genre.



proof of both of them being variations of the same literary motif—, this is, elements regarding the set design, the romantic relationship, the presence of other characters who may be accomplices or victims of the supernatural lie and the way in which the trick is discovered at the end.

### **1. Set design (mechanisms making the ghost possible)**

In many of these plays, a stage device contributes to the creation of the supernatural lie: a secret passage that connects two faraway spaces. This enables the alleged supernatural being to move from one place to another, to the amazement of characters ignorant to the existence of the passageway. The knowledge of its existence earns the supernatural lover a privileged position: without it, the existence of the supernatural is the most straightforward account for those mysterious movements. This device can take various forms: the cupboard that connects Ángela’s and Manuel’s rooms in *La dama duende*, the mine that joins Julia’s garden with the house of a friend of Astolfo’s in *El galán fantasma* or the secret passage used by Serafina to reach the fortress where she keeps Enrique in *El encanto sin encanto*. In *La viuda valenciana* there is not any secret passage, but the path to Leonarda’s house reminds one of it, as it is a walk Camilo goes over at night and blindfolded: the young man does not know how to reach her lover’s house and feels as defenceless before her as the above mentioned characters ignorant to the existence of the secret passage.

But what about the plays where the passage-device is missing? The supernatural trick is played without it in *El diablo está en Cantillana*, *Bellaco sois*, *Gómez* and *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*. In these cases, the costume takes the role of the passage. Lope uses the traditional ghost costume—a white sheet and chains—, while Ana simply covers her head with a cloak while her words reveal her as a ghost, in the manner of a verbal disguise. Juana’s trick is similar, since it is the false identity taken from his lover, plus the untrue news she spreads, the basis to make her supernatural nature believable.

### **2. The deceiver / deceived lover and the romantic relationship**

The relationship between the supernatural lover and its love interest is always tinged with mystery, as the later ignores the true nature of the supernatural being. If the gallant is the disguised one, the uncertainty is usually short-lived: the lady is deceived for a little while, since the trick is aimed at someone external to the couple, this is, the powerful nobleman. Ladies react to these ghosts with terror and tend to believe in their supernatural condition. In *El galán fantasma*, Julia panics the first time she sees Astolfo in her garden, having assumed Astolfo had died from the wounds previously caused by the Duke in their duel. However, in case the lady was in the dark about the whereabouts of her lover but did not presume he was dead, the first apparition of the ghost gallant is less disturbing.

In *El diablo está en Cantillana*, the first encounter with the ghost gallant takes place when the lady is in her bed, talking to Lope in her sleep. When he wakes her up all of a sudden, the lady simply believes she is still in a dream (691-695)<sup>24</sup>.

Women who assume supernatural disguises face far more complex situations: it is not only their relatives they want to deceive, but also the men they are trying to seduce, awakening their interest while keeping their identity a secret. These phantom ladies are wittier than their male counterparts when plotting their tricks and enjoy stretching on the supernatural lie as much as possible. This applies even when other characters are on the verge of discovering them: Ángela, for example, upholds she is not a woman but a phantom even when she has been caught red-handed by Manuel (2104-2110)<sup>25</sup>. This daring female behaviour enabled by the supernatural disguise has a deep impact on the development of the romance, encouraging the gallants to win those women over. In the first instance, gallants praise and flatter the phantom ladies—even if they are unsure of their true nature. However, as soon as men try to approach them, ladies invoke supernatural elements as a pretext, claiming the loss of “a greater gift” by their lovers if they move forward, according to Ángela. This resistance, triggered by women’s desire to keep both their honour and the supernatural deception, puts male characters in a difficult position, since their courage and desire comes into conflict with the lady’s will. For example, in *El encanto sin encanto*, Enrique is tempted to defy Serafina’s order:

SERAF.                    Deteneos,  
                               porque en el instante mismo,  
                               que me toquéis, no hallaréis  
                               nada de cuanto habéis visto.

ENRIQ.                  Primero que de cobarde,  
                               he de morir de atrevido.  
                               Si es fantástico o real,  
                               ¡viven los Cielos divinos!,  
                               he de ver, por más que diga  
                               vuestra voz... (III, pp. 428-429) <sup>26</sup>

This behaviour may also be related to rationalistic attitudes: men usually look more reluctant than women to accept the supernatural nature of phantoms and always strive to find a logical explanation for them. The best exponent is probably Manuel in *La dama duende*, who—aided by logic—is able to overcome even the sudden apparition of Ángela inside his own room. In other cases, men

<sup>24</sup> According to the edition by Muñoz Cortés 1976.

<sup>25</sup> According to the edition by Antonucci 1999.

<sup>26</sup> According to the edition published by Neumeister 2010.

reckon they are in front of a hard-to-explain incident, but refuse any supernatural explanation (e.g., Enrique in *El encanto sin encanto*). However, there are exceptions to this rule and some men are completely fooled, as Martín in *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*. It is always the lady who puts an end to the trick, but she always delays the revelation of her true identity until the very end of the play, making it match with the happy ending (this is, marriage).

### 3. Other characters involved in the trick: opponents, relatives and servants

In plays revolving around a ghost gallant, the figure of the powerful nobleman competing for the lady is essential, as it is him who forces the gallant's disguise. This antagonist is also the main victim of the deception, but acts as bravely as expected from a nobleman in front of the alleged supernatural being. King Don Pedro from Velez's play remains sceptical about the existence of the ghost and he approaches it asking for its identity and drawing his sword at their first encounter. In *El galán fantasma* the Duke acts in a similar way, even when expected to fear Astolfo's ghost since he allegedly killed him. In contrast, phantom ladies do not trick any high-status character nor pretend to be a supernatural being in front of no one other than their lovers and the servants of them<sup>27</sup>. Women who must account for their actions (Ángela lives with her brothers; Leonarda is visited by her uncle) resort to the above-mentioned scenic elements to avoid the vigilance of their relatives, while they reserve the supernatural disguise to contact men. In other plays this difficulty does not play an important role, for they are independent female characters, like Serafina —whose family is not mentioned in the play—, or because they have left home to chase their lovers, like Ana and Juana.

Servants, for their constant presence near ladies and gallants, always get involved in the supernatural trick: they can be accomplices of the supposed ghost or witnesses of its appearances. Both Isabel, Ángela's servant in *La dama duende*, and Rodrigo, Lope Sotelo's servant in *El diablo está en Cantillana*, fit in the figure of the accomplice-servant, without whom the trick would have been impossible. In the first case, Isabel is the first to discover the secret passage in the cupboard that links the rooms and shares it with her mistress. Afterwards, she accompanies Ángela whenever the lady enters Manuel's room and even acts as a second phantom, tormenting Manuel's servant, Cosme, parallel to her mistress. In *El diablo está en Cantillana*, Rodrigo is responsible for suggesting the ghostly costume, and he complements his master's supernatural lie making it more believable by joining the scared peasants of Santillana and pretending

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<sup>27</sup> *Don Gil de las calzas verdes* is an interesting exception, since Juana has two servants who display opposed roles: Quintana fits in the accomplice-servant figure, while Caramanchel is one of the main victims of the supernatural trick, even if Juana does not intend to deceive him.

his exorcisms will expel the ghost from the town. In the second case, victim-servants are usually the first characters to get the mysterious happenings wrong, blaming a supernatural creature for them. For example, in *La dama duende*, Cosme states the earliest claim that there is a phantom in the house. Besides, the typical characterisation of servants in theatre allows them to act cowardly and in a ridiculous manner. One of the most widely used devices—while a powerful comical element—to point out the lack of bravery of the servants is the comparison between their reactions and the ones displayed by their masters. This also serves as a bridge between the ideal and the real, the hero and the audience<sup>28</sup>. These contrasts are very common in the works we are considering here: in *La dama duende*, for instance, interactions between Manuel and his servant, Cosme, are exploited for comical purposes every time they face a “supernatural” element:

DON MAN.	¡Válgame el cielo! ¿Qué haré? Nunca me he visto cobarde sino sola aquesta vez.
COSME	Yo sí, muchas. (II, vv. 2068-2070).

#### 4. The end of the trick

Let us focus on the end of the supernatural lie, scenes where the gallant or the lady reveals his or her true identity thus leading to the happy outcome. These always take place after a climax event, in which the ruse is discovered by someone else or the liar is forced to admit it. In the masculine variants the identity of the gallant is unveiled by the powerful nobleman himself, who always forgives the gallant for his lie. In *El galán fantasma*, Astolfo does not admit his trick, but the Duke comes to the conclusion that he must be alive, anyway. In *El diablo está en Cantillana*, in contrast, Lope—still in disguise— fights the king back and, once defeated, he has no choice but to beg him for mercy and reveal his true identity (807-822). On the other hand, phantom ladies keep their identity secret until the end of the play and there are many possible ways in which the truth can be revealed. Some ladies find themselves trapped in a situation where they simply cannot uphold the lie any longer. This is the case of Ángela when she gets locked in the same room as Manuel (III, 3072-3079). The ending of *La viuda valenciana* outlines another possibility, since Leonarda never gets to admit the truth: it is her lover who brings a light to one of their dates arguing that the trick «cannot be endured more» (III, 2870)<sup>29</sup>. There are especially quick-witted ladies too, whose deceptions develop just as planned

<sup>28</sup> Arango 1980: 379.

<sup>29</sup> According to the edition by Ferrer Valls 2001.

from beginning to end. Serafina, in *El encanto sin encanto*, puts an end to her game with Enrique because other characters find out where she had been keeping him, but they cannot prove she was protecting the gallant nor her reputation had been damaged. Tirso’s female characters go further: in *Bellaco sois*, Gómez Ana could have lengthened the string of false identities indefinitely, nevertheless decides to stop it after showing up as a lost soul for the last time. In *Don Gil de las calzas verdes*, Juana confesses the truth to Martín after punishing him severely and being on the brink of sending him to jail. After the unveiling of the mystery, forgiveness and wedding proposals come immediately afterwards. In an analysis of the suspense of *La dama duende* Beecher claims the happy ending proceeds from an agonistical confrontation and this can be generalised to every play based on a supernatural lie<sup>30</sup>. In those plays where the disguised character is a male and, therefore, the victim of the trick is a nobleman, he goes through a sudden repentance and a change in his intentions. The example of the Duke from *El galán fantasma* is illustrative: when the lie is discovered, instead of the expected reaction of anger, Astolfo is forgiven and allowed to marry Julia. In the comedies with a female lead, as soon as they ask forgiveness to their lovers —who play the same power position towards women than the noblemen towards the gallants—, the family of the lady or other witnesses enter the scene, asking the lady’s good name to be repaired through marriage. The gallants, even if recently aware of the women’s true identity, acknowledge the cleverness of their lovers and happily accept the wedding, just like Gregorio does, who immediately falls for Ana’s beauty and states:

Cuando no traigáis más dote  
que las sutilezas raras  
de ese ingenio, que eternicen  
plumas, buriles y estatuas,  
merecen que yo os adore.  
Dadme esa mano.<sup>31</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

In the previous pages it has been pointed out that in the same way Calderón wrote *El galán fantasma* using a parallel motif to the one used in *La dama duende*, the plays revolving around a supernatural lie can be grouped into two categories, depending on the gender of the character playing the trick. Each has its own traits, but they can be understood as two variations on the same motif, that is, the character of the supernatural lover, as they share various common

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<sup>30</sup> Beecher 2000: 12.

<sup>31</sup> According to the digital edition by Williamsen 2000; lines not numbered.

features, arising from the comical use of the supernatural world on stage. It may therefore be useful to study these plays as a separate —not isolated— group, aside from the plays based on the mysterious lover (thus, the traditional game of misunderstood identities). This proposal is based on the grounds that the mere identity misunderstanding can be found in nearly every Golden Age comedy, while comedies on supernatural lovers entail a number of special inherent traits.

The comedies with a male supernatural lover tend to maintain the same structure, partly inherited from the folklore. As we have previously stated, the ghostly disguise is the gallant's last resort to avoid the unfair abuse of the powerful and protect the lady. Moreover, not only do they feel uncomfortable playing this role, but they are never the authors of the trick. In the case of Lope Sotelo in *El diablo está en Cantillana*, it is his servant who suggests it; this same role is assumed by Astolfo's friend Carlos, since the entrance to the mine that leads to Julia's garden is located in his house. The resulting plays show a more serious tone than their lady-led counterparts, as long as in all of them the potentially tragic conflict becomes blurred through a comical subterfuge, aka the supernatural disguise. This device permits the fight between vassal and lord to be conducted through comical attitudes and closed with a happy ending, that is, the end of the requirements of the powerful over the lady and his recognition of the young couple's legitimacy. It appears more difficult to draw general conclusions regarding the plays where women resort to the supernatural disguise, but all of them share a similar comical tone, sensual and festive at the time. Ladies seem more comfortable playing the role of the supernatural lover, enjoy the trick, acting boldly when protected by it, and extend it as much as possible. They are, thus, to be considered prime examples of those feminine figures characterized by their audacity, determination and ingenuity, responsible for many Golden Age comical plots. This has led many critics to reflect on the sympathy of the playwrights for women and even to consider the feminism of the Golden Age comedy, especially from the 1978 homonymous essay by Wardropper.

Regarding the causes and meanings of these differences between male and female, we should remember that even if the supernatural lie is a clever and audacious trick —of undeniable utility for the lady or gallant that uses it—, it is nevertheless a deceitful strategy. It is therefore unworthy of a man, but much more acceptable as a feminine strategy. Probably, the gallants' decorum —since they are always young noblemen— required them to despise a trick that involves hiding their own identity to impersonate a ghost, thus delaying to take up arms. Without a doubt, the audience would have condemned Astolfo for enjoying his ruse and stretching it as much as possible. However, ladies make fun of their trick, talk about it with their friends and servants and even manage to get their way when the lie is about to be discovered. In conclusion, the lady *gains* freedom when she disguises and stops being a woman —just the same way she gains it when she impersonates a man or even when she covers herself as a *tapada*—; the

gallant loses it, given that it is shameful to reject one’s own manly nature to be another thing. Therefore, only the menacing context and the imminent assault, aimed at himself as much as at his lover, justify the disguise. The male supernatural trick is in close relationship with the circumstances of the moment and entirely owing to them, but it is never representative of the gallant’s nature or habitual attitude. The lady, however, employs the same strategy without so many explanations being necessary, for in comedies female characters are expected to use any trick to marry the men they like.

Under such circumstances, the supernatural ruse seems to be substantially feminine, one among the many inventions by women in comedies —which amused the audience by means of the contrast between the fictitious female prominence and their real-life subordination to men. The male supernatural lover appears like a derivative figure that keeps the decorum of the gallant in abeyance: an ambiguous comical-paradoxical effect is thus suggested, as long as it endangers the model of noble manhood, tingeing it with femininity. On the other hand, it entails an ethic and circumstantial legitimization, which makes clear the gallant does not use the trick willingly, but pressured by an abuse of power. Nevertheless, plays on phantom ladies and ghost gallants share the same humorous devices. In both of them, laughter is prompted by trouble being overcome through the supernatural lie —and it should be hilarious to see servants, ladies and gallants trembling with fear at alleged ghosts. After all, in the plays we are considering here, as much as in any comedy, the key is the triumph of love and the happy-ending —proof that there is no difficulty that cleverness cannot overcome. The supernatural trick is always at the service of love and it is, thus, always forgiven, as Ángela argues when Manuel discovers her lie:

Por haberte querido  
fingida sombra de mi casa he sido;  
por haberte estimado  
sepulcro vivo fui de mi cuidado;  
porque no te quisiera  
quien el respeto a tu valor perdiera,  
porque no te estimara  
quien su traición dijera cara a cara (2989-2996)