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Agustín Gómez-Arcos's *Diálogos de la herejía* and the Deconstruction of History

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> It is no longer the myths which need to be unmasked (the doxa now takes care of that), it is the sign itself which must be shaken; the problem is not to reveal the (latent) meaning of an utterance, of a trait, of a narrative, but to fissure the very representation of meaning, is not to change or purify the symbols, but to challenge the symbolic itself.
>
> Roland Barthes, "Change the Object Itself"

In 1962, Agustín Gómez-Arcos, a young dramatist, still new to the Madrid theater scene, won his first Premio Nacional Lope de Vega for the historical drama *Diálogos de la herejía*. Yet almost immediately, the prize was swept from his hands in a wave of controversy, annulled in a blatant gesture of censorship that signified the Franco Regime's official response to his unorthodox choice of thematic material, and consequently banned the play from the stages of Spain's state-supported *teatros nacionales*.[2] Set amid the sacrificial flames of the Spanish Inquisition, *Diálogos de la herejía* portrays the turmoil and hysteria that rock a sixteenth-century Extremaduran village when its inhabitants are seduced by a bizarre outbreak of Illuminism (in this case, feigned mysticism), embodied in the characterizations of a lustful religious pilgrim and two devoutly sensuous nuns. In 1964, Gómez-Arcos finally saw a censored version of his play premier to conflicting reviews at Madrid's Teatro Reina Victoria. Also that year, the censored text appeared in *Primer Acto* with a series of articles addressing the play's audacious subject matter and its polemical production / reception.[3] The debate aroused by Gómez-Arcos's heretical dialogues did not represent an isolated episode in his career; rather, the struggle for

freedom of expression is an issue that has unceasingly prevailed as a central theme in both his literature and his life. Indeed, the controversy surrounding *Diálogos de la herejía* was merely a prelude to a series of combative encounters with Francoist censorship that eventually prompted his voluntary exile from Spain in 1966 —first to London, and then to Paris— along with his subsequent linguistic-generic shifts from Spanish to French and from theater to narrative.[4] In 1980, after having acquired in France not only freedom of expression but also several literary accolades for his work as a novelist,[5] Gómez-Arcos returned to the original text of *Diálogos de la herejía* and redrafted a new uncensored version. The analysis that follows is based on my reading of this more recent (as yet, unpublished) text.[6]

For Gómez-Arcos, the stage is an allegorical battleground where abstract concepts —political, religious, erotic, linguistic— engage in combat under the guise of a diverse series of concrete personifications and embodiments. During the post-civil-war years, Spanish theatergoers witnessed a copious outpouring of allegorical drama as many playwrights (i.e., those of the "realist generation," such as Antonio Buero Vallejo) found in this type of theater an outlet as well as a mask for their critiques of the oppressive doctrines of the Franco Regime. Historical drama was one of the many allegorical forms that flourished during this period, garnering a formidable degree of prominence on the Spanish stage. As Martha T. Halsey summarizes:

> During the final years of the Franco era and the critical period of transition from dictatorship to democracy, disaffected Spanish playwrights have turned with increasing frequency to the past to dramatize images of the nation at crucial times that present important parallels with their own time. Their dramas thus reflect Hegelian and Marxist theories according to which history represents an ongoing process that culminates in the spectators' own present. (11)

Among the various factors that motivated the widespread appearance of this genre, José Monleón underscores the singular influence of Bertolt Brecht, whose epic theater had already demonstrated the power of reverting to the past in order to encourage the spectator's critical, distanced contemplation of the present ("Historia y drama

histórico" 5). An additional factor (which Monleón prefers to de-emphasize) was censorship: the historical drama frequently employs the past as a strategic camouflage for an ironic portrayal (and protest) of current socio-political conditions.[7] Monleón includes Gómez-Arcos's *Diálogos de la herejía* as part of the following lengthy roster of exemplary post-war historical dramas: Buero Vallejo's *Un soñador para un pueblo*, *Las meninas*, *El concierto de San Ovidio*, and *El sueño de la razón*; José Martín Recuerda's *Las arrecogías del beaterio de Santa María Egipcíaca*; Claudio de la Torre's *El cerco*; Alfonso Sastre's *Guillermo Tell tiene los ojos tristes*; José María Rodríguez Méndez's *Flor de otoño: una historia del barrio chino*; Antonio Gala's *Noviembre y un poco de yerba*, Ana Diosdado's *Los comuneros*; and Carlos Muñiz's *La tragicomedia del Serenísimo Príncipe Don Carlos* ("Historia y drama histórico" 6).

The allegorical nature of Gómez-Arcos's theater is unquestionably a crucial thread that links his work to that of other "disaffected" Spanish playwrights of his post-war generation. However, throughout his career as both dramatist and novelist —and during the past three decades of living (and writing) in exile, far from the political-historical-geographic-linguistic borders of Spain and what was Spanish fascism— he has, curiously, continued to develop and refine his allegorical strategies. In effect, a glance beyond the horizon of Spanish theater history to a broader map of contemporary literary-artistic practices reveals a striking coincidence between Gómez-Arcos's employment of allegory and postmodernism's so-called "unmistakably allegorical impulse" —a tendency that, in 1980, Craig Owens identified as one of the prominent features of postmodern art (1: 68). Recent discussions of postmodernism point to the works of performance artist Laurie Anderson, photographer Sherrie Levine, painter Robert Rauschenberg, and novelist Thomas Pynchon as among the most exemplary manifestations of this contemporary resurgence of allegory.[8] Allegorical texts are inherently critical, deconstructive, and self-referential, and Owens correspondingly emphasizes the allegorist's role as interpreter: one who appropriates imagery from within a specific cultural context, and lends new meaning to these images by re-contextualizing them and transforming them into "something other (*allos* = other + *agoreuei* = to speak)" (1: 69). The allegorical mode of representation is hence a discourse of *doubles entendres*, positing the existence of a text that is

systematically doubled and supplemented by another. The simultaneous disclosure of dual texts conveys the presence (either implicit or explicit) of a hybrid image. This hybridization of the image is the driving force behind allegory's potential to demystify and decenter meaning, for it endows the allegorical mode with an essential attitude of ambiguity. As Walter Benjamin states in his study of German tragic drama, in allegory "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else" (175). In the theater, as in the plastic arts, allegory draws its strength from the visual impact of this indeterminate double-sided imagery, presenting the spectator with the often irreconcilable task of locating a precise meaning.

In his deconstructive consideration of allegory (which interrogates the Romantic presumption of a hierarchical subordination of allegory to symbol), Paul de Man focuses upon the role of time as one of the key elements in any allegorical configuration. According to de Man, allegory's two constitutive texts remain on separate temporal planes, destined never to collide as the allegorical signifier infinitely defers meaning to its corresponding signified, which is located at an anterior moment in time: "Whereas the symbol postulates the possibility of an identity or identification, allegory designates primarily a distance in relation to its own origin, and, renouncing the nostalgia and the desire to coincide, it establishes its language in the void of this temporal difference" (207). De Man's assertions acquire a special kind of relevance when viewed within the context of historical drama, a theatrical genre that, by definition, plays upon the relationship between time and allegory. Historical dramas characteristically partake of the polysemous nature of allegorical representation by drawing a series of parallels between two (or more) temporal planes. Francisco Ruiz Ramón accordingly emphasizes the historical drama's capacity to express the simultaneous presence of two texts that, although distanced by time, engage in an ongoing dialectical confrontation: "Pasado y presente van reflejándose mutuamente, como dos espejos en movimiento frente a frente, cuyos dinámicos contenidos se descifran utilizando sus códigos recíprocos" (22). In this oscillating dance of reciprocity, there is no semblance of interpretative authority, no primacy of one temporal plane over the other; but rather, the dialogue between past and present establishes a zone of *différance* (as Jacques Derrida would have it), a chiasmus of ambivalence that renders

impossible any semblance of closure with regard to time and meaning.

In *Diálogos de la herejía*, allegory —with its implicit indeterminacy and overtly critical stance— functions as a theatrical strategy in the deconstruction and demystification of authoritative socio-cultural structures, and of the hierarchical (Platonically derived) oppositions and signifying processes that throughout (Spanish) history have empowered and upheld these structures. As the plot unfolds, a temporal dialogue is gradually evoked between sixteenth-century Spain (i.e., during the reign of Philip II) and Spain's post-war state of affairs during the ruthless domination of the Franco Regime. The historical setting of the play represents a time when, in a manner reminiscent of Fascist Spain, an absolute monarchy and the Catholic Church had become intricately intertwined in the formation of a combined political-religious institution, the Inquisition. The primary aim of the Holy Office (*el Santo Oficio*) was the purification of the Spanish state, achieved through the rigorous scrutiny and censorship of thoughts, words, and actions. Hence in *Diálogos de la herejía*, Gómez-Arcos appropriates images from the annals of history that —in light of their ostensible parallels with Spain's recent past— would be widely recognizable to the twentieth-century spectator. Yet, through the use of ambiguity, he defamiliarizes the spectator's perception of these images, subverting their meanings and endowing them with new significance.[9]

The polysemous title of *Diálogos de la herejía* evokes at least four possibilities for interpretation. First, the word *diálogos* represents an historical reference to the time of the Spanish Renaissance, in which *dialogues*, colloquia, and other dialectical arts (pertaining to the tradition of Plato) were common forms of expression. Second, the concept of heretical *dialogues* refers to the supposed acts of heresy that are committed by the protagonists of the play. Third, the title invites a metatextual interpretation with regard to the actual linguistic subversions of religious metaphors that are constructed by the author in composing *dialogues* for his characters. And fourth, in light of the exterior circumstances surrounding the performance and publication of this play, the title can be construed as an extra-textual reference to the heretical discourse, or *dialogues of heresy*, which the censoring authorities of Spanish government accused Gómez-Arcos of perpetuating.

During the sixteenth century, the Iberian peninsula had evolved into a heterogeneous population composed of Jews, Christians, Muslims, Protestants and *erasmistas*, along with an infinite variety of ethnic / racial / religious hybrids and cultural ambiguities (i.e., *mozárabes*, *moriscos*, *conversos*, etc.). Spain lacked a uniform set of religious beliefs and rituals, and cultural differences were not readily distinguishable. Heretics suspected of deviating from the doctrines of Catholic theology were regarded as impure pollutants, dangerous threats to the order of the Spanish state, and prime targets for ritual sacrifice —often witnessed as a public spectacle in which the victim was burned at the stake (fire, being an extremely effective metaphor and method of purification).

Additionally, two other spiritual movements that flourished during the sixteenth-century —mysticism and *alumbrismo* (or, *iluminismo*)— were continually scrutinized for their questionable interpretations of Catholic theology. *Alumbrismo*, as Marcel Bataillon notes, manifested itself as an excessive display of spirituality, an anarchistic variation of mysticism, in which the *iluminado* was somehow predisposed to divine revelations and to communication and unification with the Holy Ghost (167). The so-called *alumbrados dejados* were particularly renowned for their unrestrained public displays of ecstasy, which repeatedly caused alarm among Inquisitional authorities. Their erotic transgressions seemed to intermingle sensuality and mysticism, and quite often, their religious interests evolved into a mere pretext for sexual promiscuity.[10] In allegorical terms, the *alumbrados dejados* embodied an ambiguous mélange of taboo and transgression, a blending of religion and eroticism which coincides with Derrida's interpretation and interrogation of the word *pharmakon*, a term that connotes both "remedy" and "poison":[11] "If the *pharmakon* is `ambivalent,' it is because it constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul / body, good / evil, inside / outside, memory / forgetfulness, speech / writing, etc.)" ("Plato's Pharmacy" 127). For Derrida, the *pharmakon* —along with its related terms *pharmakeus* (sorcerer / magician / poisoner) and *pharmakos* (scapegoat)— is an ambiguous intersection, a locus and play of *différance*, which simultaneously reinforces and subverts the hierarchical oppositions that are designated by the Platonic way of seeing. The

historical circumstances surrounding *iluminismo* and the *alumbrados dejados* thus provided Gómez-Arcos with an apt scenario for the deconstruction of sacred institutions. Eventually and inevitably, the scandalous and widespread fame of these dubious, indeterminate entities inspired a vast parade of tricksters and charlatans, such as those who make their appearance in *Diálogos de la herejía*.[12]

During Part One of the play, the vulnerable inhabitants of a small community desperately crave the arrival of somebody (a remedy) with the capacity to render order from their emotional, physical, and spiritual havoc. The opening stage directions describe the setting as a village nearly depleted of men, most of whom have either gone off to war or have departed for the new Spanish American colonies:

> *Un pueblo en tierras extremeñas, hacia el sur, cerca de la frontera. Finalizando el siglo XVI.*
> *Pueblo vacío de hombres, enrolados en los tercios de Su Majestad, o partidos a la colonización de las Indias de América. Las mujeres se han hecho cargo de los trabajos masculinos, el campo, la viña, el pastoreo, la caza, se visten mitad hombre mitad mujer, se comportan parecidamente. Sin embargo, su resignación sólo es aparente: el ansia del hombre o el deseo de la maternidad las corroe por dentro.* (2)

The men's absence from the village is a circumstance that potentially encourages the obliteration of traditional family structures and institutions as well as the violation of kinship taboos. The absence of the masculine sex from this community has also led to a demolition of conventional signs of gender differentiation, as signified by the women's dress (half male, half female). These women have thus been forced to take on a sort of hybrid, hermaphroditic role within this society, performing both masculine and feminine duties. Despite their apparent ambiguity of gender, on an emotional level (and in a manner reminiscent of many of García Lorca's feminine characters) they find themselves in constant confrontation with a surmounting maternal instinct and the intense urge to express themselves erotically. Yet the Catholic religion and the honor code by which they live inhibit their possibility of satisfying these sexual yearnings. As Mujer 1ª comments: "Mi casa está llena de hombres que no veo, de sombras de hombre, que

me palpan las carnes sin tocarme" (6). Held captive by their sexual desires, and the taboos prohibiting them, they intently await the arrival of news regarding their sons and husbands: whether they are dead or alive, and when they are expected to return.

In an act of desperation, Mujer 3ª, an older woman and the voice of both wisdom and skepticism throughout the play, has requested the inscription of her son's name on a cross in the cemetery (8). She has not received any definitive information regarding his whereabouts, and she is convinced that in declaring him dead, she will be able to restore a semblance of order to her daily life. Her commentaries regarding her son and the troops she has sighted along the nearby Portuguese border accentuate the correspondence between the situation portrayed in this village and the analogous circumstances of the Spanish Civil War, in which many husbands and sons went off to battle and numerous women were left behind:

> Mujer 3ª.- Mis años saben. Casi diez, ya, que marchó mi hijo a guerrear con los indios, a llevar a esos salvajes la palabra del cristiano.... A lo lejos, en la llanura, cuando el sol empieza a levantarse, veo pasar los tercios camino de la frontera. Hombres, caballos y carros. Y lanzas, que relucen al sol como los rayos de una tormenta. Entre los soldados he distinguido a muchachos de no más de catorce años, arrastrándose bajo el peso de las armaduras. (8)

Most of the villagers hold the belief that sacred beings —saints, mystics, and *alumbrados*— possess special visionary powers, wondrously enabling them to conjure up information about the missing men, and perhaps even incite their return. But, as Mujer 2ª declares, their village is not located within close proximity of the royal court, where most of these saintly entities tend to congregate; nor is it situated along any of the common routes of sacred pilgrimage: "estamos aquí, lejos de toda ruta de cristianos" (9). In the isolation of Extremadura, these women not only find themselves out of touch with the masculine sex, they also find themselves beyond the geographic reaches of the spiritual bond of Christianity. Consequently, the power of ritual has begun to lose its rigid hold upon their lives, and their village has become immersed in a chaotic crisis of distinctions, or,

what René Girard calls "a sacrificial crisis": a situation in which the mechanisms of sacrificial rites are absent.[13] A community enveloped in sacrificial crisis is the equivalent of a cultural order plagued by an anarchistic epidemic of ambiguity, which negates all perceivable differences between good and evil, virtue and sin, purity and defilement. Individuals are stripped of their distinguishing features: the boundaries of gender differentiation, the limits designated by kinship systems, and even linguistic structures become confused and blurred. As a result, metaphoric systems of signification begin to deteriorate, societal institutions lose their force and credibility, and socio-cultural order is placed on the verge of collapse through the contagion of reciprocal violence. According to this perspective, only the exclusionary mechanisms of sacrificial ritual can render order from this ambiguous upheaval.[14] The scenario presented in *Diálogos de la herejía* is that of a community cloaked in cultural ambivalence, in which the boundaries of cultural dualisms such as mysticism / eroticism, sanctity / profanity, taboo / transgression, and male / female have become obscured and intermingled. The circumstances of the Spanish Civil War entailed a parallel crisis of distinctions between good and evil, whereby blood relations within a single community were pitted against one another as enemies caught up in a generative cycle of reciprocal violence. During this period, the limits of kinship were figuratively and literally transgressed: families were split in their respective alliances, brothers murdered brothers, fathers murdered sons. In the end, multiple lives were sacrificed in the name of a "sacred" *caudillo* until a Fascist system of order was finally erected.

Once this situation of crisis is established during the opening scenes of the play, the sexually enticing *Peregrino* and his faithful cohort, "Madre" Asunta, make their entrance. They are characterized as two marauding birds of prey, motivated by greed, and masquerading as *alumbraidos*. A third *alumbrada* already resides in the village. She is an enigmatic being known as "Sor María de los Angeles" —a nun who is also rumored to be a witch. Asunta and the *Peregrino* simultaneously personify both the remedy and the poison that the villagers have been anticipating. The following stage directions herald their arrival. It is one of many elaborate textual descriptions that appear throughout the dramatic text, creating a series of powerful visual tableaux. Gradually, these written didascalia forge an ironic narrative

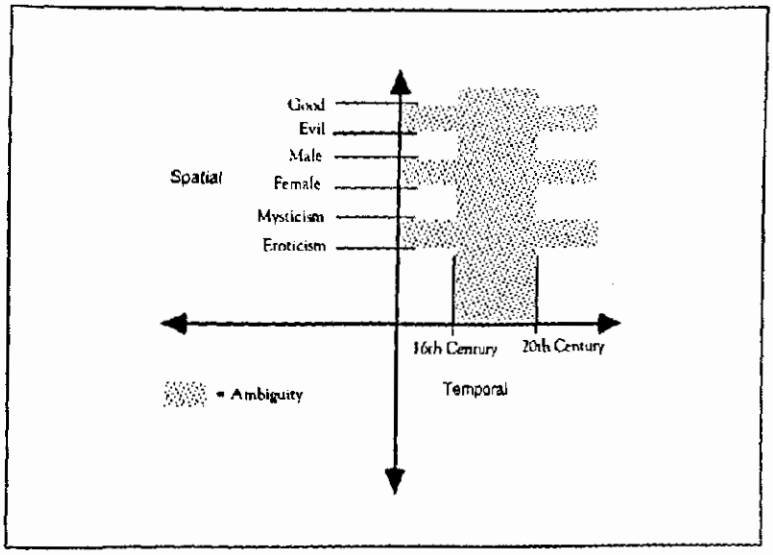
that at once reinforces and subverts the dramatic action and dialogue of the (hypothetical) *mise en scène*:

> *Madre Asunta y el Peregrino, falsa monja y falso tullido, avanzan bajo el sol. Como en todos los personajes marginados de la época (productos típicos de dos polos opuestos: gloria y miseria), el vicio y la virtud confundidos formarán la única máscara de sus rostros, de manera que ellos mismos no sepan cuándo dicen mentira y cuándo sienten verdad. Como llegará el momento en que el instinto de sobrevivir les fallará, si hay que adjudicarles una moral será la de río revuelto; en ese aspecto, su semejanza con ciertos personajes de hoy día deberá hacerse patente.* (13)

Significantly, the most intensely subversive moments of the play, are not largely dependent upon the power of verbal language (the spoken word), but instead, they are intricately tied to the visual implications of the stage directions. (Not surprisingly, these ironic commentaries are conspicuously absent from the censored [staged and published] version of the play.[15]) Gómez-Arcos appropriately characterizes Asunta and the *Peregrino* as visionaries (of apocryphal visions), marginal outsiders, foreigners from beyond the limits of the community, ambiguous entities from the land of transgression who bear a resemblance to "certain" twentieth-century counterparts. Their image is an indeterminate confluence of beneficent and maleficent violence, in which the distinctions between good and evil are not readily apparent. Consequently, when the time arises for the restoration of order, they will make exemplary pharmakoi.[16]

The villagers greet these mysterious strangers with confidence and awe, and are eager to incorporate them into their community. Blinded by their desperation, the women of the village are only able to perceive the benevolent, saintly side of the *alumbrados*' imprecise aura of *doubles entendres*, and they do not even slightly question their dubious authenticity. Moreover, most of the women are extremely eager for the opportunity to meet with the *Peregrino* who, with the help of Asunta, stages daily spectacles of erotico-mystical trances and divine revelations. The sacred properties attributed to the *Peregrino* endow him with the ability to exert both sexual and religious power over the women he receives in his chambers.

While, on the one hand, the villagers who witness these spectacles are able to perceive only one side of this allegorical system of dual meaning, the spectator, on the other hand, is confronted with a double-sided flood of overlapping visual images that traverse the limits of Platonically-grounded divisions and semantic groupings: signs typically embracing sexual connotations intermingle with signs traditionally associated with religion. Eroticism and mysticism oscillate in an unstable ambivalence, and, in accordance with Benjamin's view of the allegorical process, allegory exercises its power to secularize that which is considered sacred, and correspondingly, to elevate profane objects to a sacred plane (175). Thus, in *Diálogos de la herejía*, the *dialogue* between allegory's two constitutive texts is not exclusively temporal; it is also spatial, and the allegorical process can be seen at work along two coordinating axes: vertical (paradigmatic) and horizontal (syntagmatic). Viewed in this manner, Gómez-Arcos's historical drama exemplifies Owens's definition of allegory as a representational mode concerned "with the projection —either spatial or temporal or both— of structure as sequence" (1: 72).[17] As the following diagram illustrates, ambiguity in this play is established across both time and space:



In the preceding descriptions of the villagers and the *alumbrados*, allegory can be perceived as spanning a vertical axis, whereby the dual

images of allegorical double talk —mysticism / eroticism, good / evil, male / female, etc.— are linked spatially and synchronically. At the same time, the horizontal axis is never completely absent from this picture, and at certain key dramatic moments, it is brought into the foreground, emphasizing the presence of a temporal, diachronic relationship between layers of imagery, and establishing an ambiguous gap of *différance* in the historical overlap of the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, in another visual tableau, the *alumbrados* engage in an erotico-mystical bacchanal resembling a psychedelic orgy of the 1960s, in which the Illuminati —Sor María, the *Peregrino*, and Asunta— double as drug addicts. The following stage directions evoke this visual effect of spatio-temporal ambiguity:

> *Oscuro.*
> *En la celda conventual de Sor María de los Ángeles, que recordará a una gran jaula de celosías, tres personajes de aguafuerte que podrían asimilarse a tres pájaros de mal agüero: la monja iluminada, Madre Asunta y el Peregrino alumbrado. La monja parece levitar en un éxtasis sulpiciano, el trance del alumbrado es más carnal, sudores y estremecimientos emparentados a la imagen de un drogadicto de varios siglos más tarde. Naturalmente, toda esta escena tendrá una cierta tonalidad mística, dada por el texto, que se inscribirá en falso contra la sensualidad, la libido y, por qué no, la desesperación profunda de los personajes.*
> *Madre Asunta cuida el trance del Peregrino, le enjuga el sudor de la frente, le retira el cáliz de la boca.* (24)

The ironic tone of this textual description invokes the importance of leaving open to the spectator the possibility of visualizing the presence of two (or more) simultaneous representations. The twentieth century is superimposed upon the past in a sort of theatrical palimpsest (as Owens would have it [1: 69]), so that one text is perceived through the other.

In a later scene, when Asunta attempts to seduce the *Peregrino*, she discovers his scourge, which, as he explains, he regularly keeps on hand as a tool of his trade: "Atributos de mi oficio. Menos espectacular, pero más... morboso que una corona de espinas" (48). Within the semantic domain of mysticism, the *Peregrino*'s scourge functions as an

instrument of religious sacrifice and flagellation, but when an erotic context is transposed upon this visual image, the scourge is converted into a sadomasochistic whip, an instrument of erotic sacrifice.

At the end of Part One, Doña Tristeza de Arcos, an educated, wealthy, and very lonely noblewoman, pays a visit to the *Peregrino* at the monastery. During their private conference, Tristeza, a sixteenth-century rendition of a modern-day feminist (to whom Gómez-Arcos has cunningly bequeathed his own last name), expresses her resentment that the patriarchal rules of conduct mapped out by society prohibit her from taking charge of her own destiny. The embodiment of freedom and anarchy, she is determined to rebel against the established system, and she pleads with the *Peregrino* to help her replenish the empty space within her womb. (She is convinced that conceiving a child with the *alumbrado* will invoke a repetition of the miracle of the Immaculate Conception.) As the *Peregrino* initiates his seduction, Tristeza remarks that she can already sense the sacred fire of the Holy Spirit, entering her body: "-¡Gime, gime como un vendaval, azota mi carne endurecida por la falta de fe, vence mi resistencia, desgárrame...!" (32). The Immaculate Conception is thus transformed into a torrid seduction scene, and Gómez-Arcos seems to imply that Mary of Nazareth, likewise, may have been the victim of similar debauchery. Following this saintly seduction, rumor quickly spreads throughout the village that the *hidalga* is pregnant with the son of God.

In Part Two, the *Peregrino* makes additional lecherous advances toward a young woman named Ursulina. Traumatized, she whips him with his scourge and flees his grasp, hysterically screaming, "-¡Es el diablo! -¡Confesión! -¡Confesión!" (54). Ultimately, a Knight of the Holy Office (*Caballero del Santo Oficio*) is called in to extinguish the chaos; his main concern: to establish whether an incident of heresy has actually occurred, or if all this mayhem merely can be attributed to a phenomenon of "collective feminine hysteria" that has evolved from the women's anguish-ridden situation (61).[18]

Asunta, the Pilgrim, and Tristeza are summoned to an Inquisitional hearing, where they are accused of blasphemy and "tráfico ilícito con el término 'santidad'" (66). The *Peregrino* is accused of pretending to deliver the Divine Word of God (71), and Tristeza proudly announces, "Juntos, este santo y yo hemos sostenido *diálogos* espirituales que la

estrecha mentalidad de las gentes de orden califica de herejías. Una necia palabra..." (76, italics added). In this metaliterary discussion of dialogues and verbal discourse, heresy is defined in terms of discursive violence. In this manner, Gómez-Arcos establishes a clear correspondence between censorship —which is a sacrifice of the text— and the sacrificial flames of the Inquisition. While the *alumbrados* are condemned to be burned alive for their heresies, Tristeza's life is momentarily spared because of her pregnancy. Still, she remains adamant in her defiance of the authoritative Word of the Inquisition, and she believes that if eventually she is placed upon the stake as a sacrificial victim, angels will be sent down from heaven to extinguish the flames. In her words, "La ley del sacrificio... la ley del hombre. Estoy dispuesta a sufrirla" (74).

In the final scene, which takes place in the Inquisitor's chambers at the ecclesiastic palace, the play reaches a dramatic paroxysm through the use of non-verbal imagery and Brechtian alienation. The Inquisitor appears on stage and prays before an eerie life-size crucifix. He is dressed in a monk's habit with a large hood that obscures his face from the spectator. Meanwhile, the pandemonium of a large crowd is heard gathering outside (offstage). Cries from the villagers are heard ("-¡Depravados!", "-¡Herejes!", "-¡Fuego con ellos!" [86]), as they bask in the catharsis of sacrificial ritual. Asunta and the *Peregrino*'s screams-- "¡Reniego! ¡Piedad! ¡Confesión!" (86)-- are heard as the bonfire's flames devour their mortal flesh. After five weeks of confinement to a cloister, Tristeza has been summoned to a meeting with the Inquisitor, who forces her to watch the spectacle through an open window. (The audience can see the flames through this window.) In her final speech, Tristeza expresses her conviction that her "religion" —an anarchistic anti-faith that questions and has the courage to disobey— is the "true" faith, and that one day, it will triumph over the Inquisitor's religion —an oppressive discourse of exclusion and purification, sustained through blind adherence to the mechanisms of sacrifice:

> Tristeza.- (*Deteniéndose.*) Yo creo en la vida. A la vida no se le reza; se la lleva en el seno, se la alimenta de las propias entrañas, se la defiende. El Inquisidor impone una fe estéril, y manda rezar... porque sólo vive para dar la muerte. Me ha acusado de soberbia. Injustamente. Es más fácil para la conciencia calificar al rebelde

> de enemigo que reflexionar sobre su rebeldía; la conciencia es perezosa. La mía no, y le daré una prueba... que le ruego que acepte como prueba de humildad: inspirada por este Hijo mío, que está vivo, rezaré por el alma del Inquisidor, no por la del hereje. (*Sale definitivamente.*) (87)

After her exit, the Inquisitor remains on stage. Then, in a shocking gesture, designed to jar the spectator's sense of equilibrium, his hood falls to his shoulders, and it is revealed that the Inquisitor's face is exactly identical to that of the *Peregrino* (both roles are played by the same actor). Gómez-Arcos indicates in his stage directions (omitted from the performed / published version) that this disturbing revelation should be carried out with absolute simplicity: "*como una moneda que tuviera dos caras idénticas*" (88). In the "game" of the sacrificial process, socio-cultural order (the Inquisition) is supposed to have triumphed over the anarchy and chaos of the *alumbrados*. Yet, Gómez-Arcos, who plays by different rules, subverts this process of signification with his bizarre final revelation. His text thus represents an iconoclastic interrogation of socio-cultural order, a celebration of the "sacrificial crisis" —in the sense that such a crisis breeds ambiguity, and consequently, anarchy and freedom. It is no longer possible for the spectator to distinguish between the Inquisitor and the *Peregrino*; their two faces of good and evil have become blurred, forming a hazy image of double exposure. Order has not won the game; rather ambiguity has triumphed in the final round, and the Extremaduran village appears to have become even more deeply immersed in a crisis of distinctions than ever before. The Inquisitor / *Peregrino* raises his head to the life-size Christ figure and makes his final accusations: "¿Cuánto dolor, cuánta sangre nos costarán todavía tu dolor y tu sangre? ¿Cuánta muerte nos costará tu muerte?... Si mi lengua fuera libre... te acusaría de asesino. Alguien lo hará... algún día" (88). In this deconstructive dialogue that fuses past and present centuries, history is allegorized as an endless quest for freedom of expression. Yet somebody *has* finally garnered the freedom to accuse Christ of murder for the sacrificial blood that has been shed in his name. That "somebody" is Gómez-Arcos.

Notes

1 A preliminary version of this essay was presented at the 1992 Kentucky Foreign Language Conference.

2 Concerning the annulment of this first Lope de Vega Prize, Gómez-Arcos elaborates: "El jurado de ese premio se componía de una serie de personas entre las cuales estaba José Tamayo, el director del Teatro Español en aquellos momentos —que era un teatro nacional. (Hoy es un teatro nacional, también, pero depende del Ayuntamiento de Madrid, y entonces, dependía directamente del Ministerio.) Y me dieron el premio, y como la obra tenía muchos problemas de censura, hicieron presión sobre Tamayo para que retirara su voto. Me dijo, 'Pues, es retirar mi voto o me quitan el teatro. Entonces, no tengo más remedio que retirar mi voto'." ("Interview with S.G.F." 2). In 1966, Gómez-Arcos was awarded a second Lope de Vega for *Queridos míos, es preciso contaros ciertas cosas.*

3 The above mentioned issue of *Primer Acto* contains an introduction to the play by José Monleón ("Los mitos embalsamados"); reviews by Ricardo Domenech (who wonders whether Gómez-Arcos, in fact, ever received the Lope de Vega), Elías Gómez, Enrique Llovet, and Alfredo Marquerie; Gómez-Arcos's "Autodefensa"; Gregorio Marañón's commentary on the historical background of the play; and critical "reflections" by director José María Morera. See also Juan Emilio Aragonés's review of the play, published separately.

4 He is the author of twenty plays in Spanish, and thirteen novels in French.

5 For example, Gómez-Arcos's *L'agneau carnivore* won France's Prix Hermès for the best first novel of 1975, and he has been twice a finalist for the Prix Goncourt: in 1978, for *Scène de chasse (furtive)* and again, in 1984, for *Un oiseau brûlé vif.* In 1985, he became one of only four Spaniards —along with Picasso— ever to be decorated by the French Legion of Honor as "Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts ès Lettres."

6 I wish to express my appreciation to Agustín Gómez-Arcos for sharing with me the biographical information included in this study, and for providing me with a copy of his unpublished manuscript.

7 See also César Oliva on historical drama.

8 Cf. Deborah L. Madsen, Brian McHale, and Maureen Quilligan on Pynchon; Owens on Anderson, Levine, and Rauschenberg; Gregory L. Ulmer on Levine; and Joan Simon for a general discussion of allegorical strategies in contemporary painting and photography.

9 This process of defamiliarization closely parallels the strategies of Brechtian alienation. Cf. *Brecht on Theatre.*

10 Georges Bataille notes that both mysticism and eroticism stem from a

universal idea of sacrifice of the self, which occurs when one being is united with another (23). In mysticism, the human soul is spiritually fused with a divine entity, while in eroticism, a carnal-spiritual fusion occurs between human beings.

11 Derrida's discussion refers to Plato's use of this term in the *Phaedrus*.

12 Regarding the historical underpinnings of *Diálogos de la herejía*, Marañón recalls a famous incident of *alumbrismo*, similar to that described in the play, which transpired in the village of Llerena (Extremadura) between 1574 and 1578 (20). The plot also bears a subtle resemblance to the legend of Urbain Grandier, a seventeenth-century French priest accused of diabolism, whose tale is recounted by Aldous Huxley in his historical novel *The Devils of Loudun*. (See also Stephen Greenblatt's "Loudun and London.") Huxley's narrative was the inspiration for John Whitling's play *The Devils* and Ken Russell's film *Devils*. The plot also slightly resembles Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

13 In *Violence and the Sacred*, Girard posits the theory that all religions —and all cultural systems and institutions (both secular and religious)— are universally derived from a primordial sacrificial event. In this original scenario, the members of a hypothetical community effectuated a metaphoric displacement of their cultural hostilities and maladies by collectively channeling them to a single sacred being. In disposing if this sacred *pharmakos*, the community cathartically expelled its own internal violence and duress to a remote, nebulous region of transgression. According to Girard, this initial sacrificial episode has become indelibly internalized within all cultures as a type of seminal paradigm, destined to breed an infinite number of variations and repeat preformances in the ubiquitous rituals of abstinence, depravation, penance, etc. This fundamental structure, or "sacrificial process," functions as a universal preventive mechanism in the suppression, censorship, and purification of violent impulses and dissension within the boundaries of a given community.

14 Paradoxically, the idea of ritual sacrifice is itself ambiguous in that it is at once both sinful and saintly, benevolent and malevolent, a "coincidence of the permitted and the prohibited" (Girard 196).

15 Some of the differences between the original version and the new version are not necessarily the result of censorship, but are instead lexical and structural changes that were implemented by Gómez-Arcos. For example, in the new version, he substituted the generic names "Capataza" and "Capataz" for "Posadera" and "Posadero," changed the setting from the seventeenth to the sixteenth century, and restructured the new version into two parts from what was originally a three-act play. Other differences between the two versions appear to be tied more directly to the presence / absence of

censorship: In the new version, nudity is overtly specified in the stage directions, while in the censored version, it is only subtly implied. In the new version, the language generally —and not surprisingly— acquires a more coarse, vulgar, and unrestrained tone. Finally —and perhaps, most significantly— there is a dramatic difference between the two versions with regard to the ending of the play: the new text ends with a surprising dramatic twist that was completely omitted from the censored version.

16 Cf. Derrida and Girard. The successful performance of the sacrificial ritual requires that the victim pertain in some way to both the community (*intra muros*) and to the realm of the sacred (*extra muros*). For this reason, the sacrificial victim is often chosen from among the marginal, interstitial categories of being that are found in the crevices and peripheries of society. Often, this ritual victim is a foreigner who newly arrives (such as Asunta and the *Peregrino*), is incorporated within the community for a temporary duration, and is subsequently expelled or murdered.

17 Cf. Joel Fineman: "In Roman Jakobson's linguistic formula,... allegory would be the poetical projection of the metaphoric axis onto the metonymic, where metaphor is understood as the synchronic system of differences that constitutes the order of language (*langue*), and metonymy the diachronic principle of combination and connection by means of which structure is actualized in time in speech (*parole*).... No other figure so readily lays itself out on the grid constructed out of the hypothesized intersection of paradigmatic synchrony and syntagmatic diachrony, which is to say that no other figure so immediately instances the definition of linguistic structure that was developed by Jakobson out of Saussure and the Russian formalists, and that has since been applied to all the so-called sciences of man, from anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) to semiotics (Barthes) to psychoanalysis (Lacan)" (50-51).

18 Hysteria, during the Renaissance, was equated with diabolic possession. Cf. Marañón (220-21).

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