

## Deception and the Role of the Senses in Tirso de Molina's *Los tres maridos burlados*

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Tirso de Molina's *Los tres maridos burlados*, a short novella included in the miscellany *Cigarrales de Toledo* (1624), begins with a dispute. Three women find a jewel, and each one claims to have a right to it. Given the impossibility of deciding who should keep it, and following the suggestion of a count, the women agree to take part in a competition to settle this affair; the one who plays the best joke on her husband will win the jewel. The first wife aims at convincing her husband that he has died. The second wife transforms the house in which she and her husband live into an inn, putting him in the utmost confusion. The third wife, aided by a group of friars, sedates and transports her husband to a convent, where he is forced to concede that he has been a member of the church for the last fifteen years. The pranks become so successful that the count determines to reward all three women, not with the jewel, as he now claims to have lost it the day on which it was found, but with equal amounts of money.

Literary critics have approached this witty and fascinating novella from multiple angles. Fernando Rodríguez Mansilla regards it as the “paradigm” of the *novela de burlas* in seventeenth-century Spain, a narrative subgenre whose plot revolves around a trick that certain characters play on others (127).<sup>1</sup> Francisco Florit Durán emphasizes the theatrical nature of this story, drawing particular attention to the stage elements that the three women employ in order to deceive and laugh at their husbands (140).<sup>2</sup> Naima Lamari identifies in this tale aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin's theorization of the grotesque, such as the presence of a carnivalesque atmosphere and the resulting freedom to transgress established norms and values (53).<sup>3</sup> Another important factor in *Los tres maridos burlados*, which literary scholars have not studied before, is the role that sensory perception plays in the illusionary environments in which the husbands find themselves. In this essay, I argue that Tirso's novella both incorporates and deviates from the contemporaneous notion of the susceptibility of the senses to deception. While the third husband provides an example of this vulnerability, the first two husbands offer lessons of self-defense against deceit via the senses. They rely on sensory information to reconstruct their previous realities and to challenge the illusions created by the tricksters. Even though they ultimately abandon their efforts to oppose the artifice, the first and second husbands manage to illustrate ways in which sensorial perception effectively assists them in discerning truth from pretense, in a period, the Baroque, in which the opposite was often believed to be the case.

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<sup>1</sup> Rodríguez Mansilla also discusses works by Alonso Jerónimo de Salas Barbadillo and Alonso de Castillo Solórzano as part of this subgenre. According to this critic, the *novela de burlas* is characterized by an action set in urban spaces, by featuring tricksters from the upper levels of society and victims who usually come from a rural background, and by employing elements from theatre, especially from burlesque comedy (123–24).

<sup>2</sup> Some of the stage elements that Florit Durán identifies include characters' usage of costumes, make-up, and accessories; the narrator's employment of phrases that highlight movements, gestures, and sound; as well as the inclusion of plays on words (136).

<sup>3</sup> In another important study, André Nougué explores the sources that Tirso may have employed in writing these stories, namely French and Italian medieval tales (120–32). Nougué also highlights the success that Tirso's novella had with at least nine editions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and with multiple imitations since its publication, including an adaptation by Dario Fernández Flórez in 1957 (134–35). See also Jovanović for a study on a Serbian translation of *Los tres maridos burlados*.

*Engaño* (deceit) and *desengaño* (becoming undeceived) are among the most recognizable preoccupations in Baroque culture. In this context, the bodily senses through which we perceive the world were frequently seen as untrustworthy and easily deceivable, possibly leading individuals to mistake appearance for reality. This notion appeared in politics, literature, and art, to name just a few areas. For example, in *Idea de un príncipe político cristiano* (1640), *Empresa* 46, *Fallimur Opinione*, Diego de Saavedra Fajardo cautions against the reliability of vision by alluding to how an oar looks as either broken or crooked when submerged under water due to the way light bends. Saavedra Fajardo outlines several other factors that can alter the information that we receive through the eyes and produce false impressions, including the positionality of the perceiver in relation to the perceived object. The fallibility of the senses in this regard leads Saavedra Fajardo to describe them as “instrumentos por los cuales se forman las fantasías” (187). For him, sensory perception only allows one to say what something appears to be as opposed to what it is (188). In literature, Miguel de Cervantes’s *Don Quijote* (1605, 1615) deals with visual deception in a humorous and satirical context. In Part I, the protagonist believes to see giants, two armies of fighting knights, and a legendary helmet, when there are only windmills, two flocks of sheep, and a barber’s basin, respectively.<sup>4</sup> Influenced by his chivalric delusions, the knight-errant misinterprets what he sees, producing a variety of comic scenes in the novel.<sup>5</sup> In pictorial representations, painters such as Juan Sánchez Cotán and Francisco de Zurbarán, among many others, employed the technique of *trompe l’œil*, an optical illusion whereby individuals and objects in a painting appear to occupy a three-dimensional space.<sup>6</sup> In Tirso’s novella, the story of the third husband offers yet another variation on the theme of the deception of the senses. In contrast, the tales of the first two husbands deviate from this notion by demonstrating ways in which sensory perception aids the male protagonists in discerning truth and in opposing the illusions created by the pranks.

The action in *Los tres maridos burlados* is set in February, during Carnival. We are thus in a world dominated by schemes, deception, laughter, and the momentary suspension of social norms. This is a prime time for the three crafty women to engage in playful and mischievous behavior without facing the negative consequences that such actions would normally have. Indeed, the first wife, Polonia, mentions the context of the Carnival when persuading other characters to help her convince her husband, Lucas Moreno, that he has died. The idea for this trick seems to find inspiration in a malady that was well documented at the time: a delusion whereby an individual could come to believe that they are someone or something that they are not, including being dead. There were multiple instances of people suffering from this type of disorder, in literary texts as well as in real life.<sup>7</sup> In literature, Cervantes’s *El licenciado Vidriera* (1613) and *Don Quijote* are the most well-known examples of texts featuring characters who adopt a different identity as a result of their madness. In addition, Manuscript P of Don Juan Manuel’s *El conde Lucanor* (1557) incorporates a story in which the protagonist believes himself

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<sup>4</sup> There are countless examples of sensory and visual deception in Spanish Baroque literature. See Baquero Goyanes for a study of multiple instances of this phenomenon in Baltasar Gracián’s *El Criticón* (1651, 1653, 1657) and in other contemporaneous literary works.

<sup>5</sup> Julia Domínguez highlights the influence that Don Quijote’s internal senses—the memories that he created while reading romances of chivalry—have on his external senses: what he sees, hears, smells, touches, and tastes in the present time of the novel (63).

<sup>6</sup> See Soriano Sánchez for a survey of different painters who employed this technique in the seventeenth century.

<sup>7</sup> Galenic medicine explains this ailment as the result of a melancholic state caused by an imbalance in the humor system. See articles by Hasson and Speak for examples of medical texts documenting glass delusion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as for cases of real-life individuals who suffered from this kind of madness.

to be dead. The delusion that affects this character does not allow him to comprehend why his wife thinks that he is still alive and even wants him to get up: “¡Verés que loca muger esta! Vee que está muerto e dizeme que me levante” (Lacarra 239).<sup>8</sup> In *Los tres maridos burlados*, the trick that Polonia plays on Moreno appears to draw from these literary intertexts, albeit with an important twist. Instead of seeing the reactions of the sane society to the delusions of a mad character, Tirso inverts this exercise and has Moreno navigate the information that he receives from those who aim to convince him of his passing.

In the story in Manuscript P of *El conde Lucanor*, the wife of the “dead” husband finds a doctor who, with medicine and a trick, manages to cure this delusional character. In Tirso’s novella, Polonia resorts to an astrologer who “también es médico” in order to instill in her husband the belief that he is going to die within the next twenty-four hours (52). On his way home from work, Moreno encounters the deceiving astrologer who informs him of his imminent death, justifying this outcome with his knowledge about the stars, as well as the paleness and pulse of the soon-to-be victim of the joke. Moreno first disregards this information as another more-than-likely failed prediction by the astrologer.<sup>9</sup> This husband, however, cannot fully obviate the diagnosis and continues walking home feeling “[t]urbado y confuso ... tentándose por el camino los pulsos y más partes de donde podía temer algún asalto repentino y mortal, pero hallándolo todo en su debida disposición y no siendo el crédito del adivinante muy abonado, medio burlándose del y medio temeroso, entró en su casa” (43). Moreno is caught between his skeptical attitude toward the astrologer’s credibility and the possibility that the deadly diagnosis may come to pass. The use of the verb *tentar* offers an initial indicator of how Moreno relies on sensory perception—on his sense of touch to understand his physical condition, in this case—when attempting to assess the validity of what others communicate to him. This impulse acquires increasing relevancy in the story as the illusion created by the prank develops.

Polonia and the secondary characters carry the trick forward through a series of metatheatrical performances. The day after receiving the information about his impending death, Moreno encounters several friends and acquaintances who act out various charades to convince him that he has in fact died. There is an uncanny moment in which this husband hears members of the local church and other neighbors converse about the death of a certain Lucas Moreno. He initially wonders if these characters are talking about a namesake of his in town, and he eventually feels disturbed when this group scatters before he can inquire about the subject of their talks. Moreno’s distress increases when he listens to the astrologer and another friend—the second husband—talking about his passing. Moreno briefly entertains the possible existence of a *doppelgänger* whose death has been mistaken for his: “¿Quién me hace las honras en vida, o tomando mi forma se ha muerto por mí?” (46). Upon seeing Moreno, his friends treat him as a suffering soul who may have returned to this world to settle his affairs. Then, they run away in terror as an additional way of convincing him that he is no longer part of the world of the living.

At this moment, and as Florit Durán has noticed, Moreno delivers a speech that resembles a soliloquy (136). The action is put momentarily on hold, and Moreno begins reflecting on the

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<sup>8</sup> As María Jesús Lacarra explains, Don Juan Manuel is not the author of this tale, and it was likely included in the manuscript by a scribe. One of the elements that Lacarra uses to support this argument is the fact that this tale lacks the narratological framework (the conversations between the count and Patronio) that characterizes the stories written by Don Juan Manuel (243).

<sup>9</sup> In the folkloric tradition, unreliable predictions and diagnoses characterized both astrologers and physicians; their unreliability made them laughable characters and the target of satire in both oral and written literature. In Tirso’s novella, we are also in the realm of comic and superstitious astrology. See Lanuza Navarro for a study on the relationship between medicine and serious astrology.

events that are occurring around him. Through the employment of this theatrical device, Tirso gives the reader access to the mind of this character right at the moment in which he considers whether he is dead or alive:

¡Alto! ¡No hay más! ¡Yo debo de haberme muerto! (decía entre sí muchas veces). ¡Dios debe de enviarme a esta vida en espíritu para que disponga de mi hacienda y haga testamento! Pero ¡válgame Dios! Si me morí de repente, ¿cómo no vi a la hora postrera al demonio, ni me han llamado a juicio, ni puedo dar señal alguna del otro mundo? Y si soy alma y el cuerpo quedó en la sepultura, ¿cómo estoy vestido, veo, toco, y uso de los sentidos corporales? ¿Si he resucitado? Pero si fuera así, ¿no hubiera visto o oído algún ángel que de parte de Dios me lo mandara? Mas ¿qué sé yo de lo que se usa en el otro mundo? ... Lo que yo veo es que todos huyen de mí y me tienen por muerto ... (47–48)

The window that the soliloquy offers into Moreno's psyche reveals the prominent role that the senses play amidst the confusion that he experiences. On the one hand, this character is aware that what he sees and what he hears—the conversations that his friends have about his death and their subsequent reactions running away in terror—seem to indicate that he is in fact dead. On the other hand, Moreno also uses the information that he receives from the senses as a counterargument to the idea of his passing. He knows that if he is able to see, touch, and use his other senses, he cannot be a soul without a body.<sup>10</sup>

Moreno's allusions to the soul need to be understood in the context of Aristotelian and Thomistic notions of this entity, which Tirso studied as part of his religious education.<sup>11</sup> In *De Anima* (ca. 350 BC), Aristotle defines the soul as "an actuality of the first kind of a natural body having life potentially in it" and divides it into three types: vegetative, sensitive, and rational, which are characteristic of plants, animals, and human beings, respectively (656). The powers of the vegetative soul include growth, nutrition, and reproduction. The sensitive one is responsible for sensorial perception and the ability to move. The rational soul possesses the capacity for reasoning and understanding. This is a hierarchical model whereby the faculties of the vegetative soul are contained by the sensitive one, and the capacities of these two are integrated by the rational soul. In *Summa Theologiae* (1266-1273), Saint Thomas Aquinas accepts Aristotle's conceptualization of this entity and adapts it to the Christian doctrine by, among other things, endowing the rational soul with a spiritual and eternal nature that can survive the death of the body (219–20). In Moreno's soliloquy, and based on the information that he receives from the secondary characters, he entertains the possibility that what remains of him is this immortal soul, while his body is lying in a grave. An important aspect of the soul, to which Moreno resorts to question the idea of his demise, is that this entity is dependent on one's corporeal physique to engage in sensory perception. According to Saint Thomas, sensation, even though it is a power of the soul, cannot be exercised without the body: "Now the action of the senses is not performed without a corporeal instrument. Therefore it behooved the intellectual soul to be united to a body fitted to be a convenient organ of sense" (238). Moreno relies on the embodied nature of sensory

<sup>10</sup> Moreno also questions the claim about his passing on the basis of religious expectations of death, as he has not seen the "other world" or the angels, nor has he been called for reckoning.

<sup>11</sup> Elena Nicolás Cantabella explores the works that Tirso read and studied as a friar of the Order of La Merced, identifying Saint Thomas's *Summa Theologiae* as one of the main influences in Tirso's religious thought (392). Nicolás Cantabella also analyzes several works by Tirso in which the author incorporates ideas from Aristotle and Saint Thomas. For example, in *La ninfa del cielo* (1613), Tirso includes references to the powers of the vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls, as well as to the immortal nature of the last one (393).

perception to form a weighty argument against the trick that the other characters play on him. If he is just a spirit—that is, if his eternal soul has abandoned his body because of his death—how is it possible, he wonders, that he can still perceive the world around him through his senses? Moreno’s awareness of sensorial stimuli offers proof for him of his continuous existence as a corporeal being.

The pranks that the three husbands suffer, as Ignacio Arellano contends, immerse them into mock environments in which they lose any previous certainties about their lives and feel disoriented (22). For Arellano, the illusion that the first trick produces entails a rupture with “cualquier sentido de la ‘realidad’ y difumina todas las fronteras del universo cotidiano” (22). Indeed, Moreno is put in a position in which he needs to reconsider his reality at the most fundamental level: is he alive or is he dead? In this context, the senses become a metaphorical compass that allows this character to find evidence of his status as a living individual. Even if momentarily, the story shows that sensory perception assists Moreno in finding the truth of the situation and in opposing the spurious beliefs that the concoctors of the joke try to instill in him.<sup>12</sup>

After this husband delivers his soliloquy, Polonia enacts a final performance that ends up convincing him of his passing. When he arrives at home, he sees his wife, dressed in mourning, faint at his presence: “¡Jesús, qué veo!” (49). Moreno then accepts that he must have died and abandons his attempts to refute the possibility of his death via the senses or otherwise. Indeed, he has a copious dinner and gets drunk without inquiring “si comian o no los del otro mundo” (49). Moreno passes out on account of the wine that he drinks and the physical weakness that results from the distress and confusion of the events that he has experienced. This is a pivotal moment in the narrative that marks the transition from the illusion created by the prank to a return to reality. As of this moment, the story resembles more closely that in Manuscript P of *El conde Lucanor*; Moreno wakes up believing that he is dead, while his wife and the other characters are now in charge of convincing him that he is not. They pretend not to know anything about what Moreno relates, from the astrologer’s prediction to his fainting wife in mourning. Instead, they suggest that the wine that Moreno had the previous night may have caused him to dream about all the events that he recounts.

The second wife, Mari Pérez, fakes an illness, *mal de madre*, in order to send her husband, Diego de Morales, on a fool’s errand and to be able to prepare the prank while he is away.<sup>13</sup> In the middle of a cold and rainy night, she begins uttering painful cries and making references to suffocation and an imminent death. She aims to create a sense of urgency that would prompt her husband to leave their house and go in search of a midwife who has recently moved to a different and distant neighborhood of Madrid. Taking advantage of Morales’s absence, and with the help of some secondary characters, Mari Pérez changes the door of their house and puts up a signboard that reads “casa de posadas” (61). She is then joined by a group of guests who drink and dance, as if they were truly at an inn.

When Morales returns—drenched, frustrated, and, to be sure, without the midwife—he is bewildered by what he hears and sees: “oyendo desde la puerta las voces, bailes y grita que

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<sup>12</sup> Moreno is a more complex individual than the other characters and the narrator concedes. There is a certain irony that results from the contrast between the narrator’s dismissal of Moreno’s soliloquy as “discursos desvariados” and the accuracy that this character shows in his speech (48). Not only does Moreno use his senses in a clever way to refute the possibility that he may have died, but he also deciphers the mystery of what he is experiencing when he considers that his friends may be playing a joke on him because of Carnival (48).

<sup>13</sup> See Zapatero Molinuevo for a recent study on this illness and how it was represented in the theatre of seventeenth-century Spain, including plays by Tirso.

pasaba dentro, pensando que la había errado [su casa], levantó la linterna y reconociéndola vio las puertas nuevas y la tablilla de posadas sobre ella, que le desatinó sobremanera” (62). The props that the secondary characters employ—the new door and signboard—and the performances that they enact—the celebration taking place inside—challenge Morales’s understanding of reality; what he recognizes as his house now seems to be an inn. This illusion, as Arellano notes, entails a disintegration of an essential and well-known space for this character, resulting in the perplexity and disorientation that he experiences (22–23).

In the midst of this confusion, Morales turns to sensorial perception to anchor himself in reality and to attempt to combat trickery. He first inspects the street and neighboring houses to certify that he is in the right place: “volvió a examinar la calle, y halló que era la de Lavapiés. Recorrió las casas colaterales y conoció que eran las de sus vecinos. Reparó en las de enfrente y halló las propias que siempre. Volvió a la suya y desconoció la novedad de su puerta y reciente oficio de su título” (62). The use of the verbs *examinar* and *reparar* in its intransitive sense, both synonyms of “to look closely,” emphasizes Morales’s reliance on vision to reconfirm his understanding of reality.<sup>14</sup> He searches his surroundings for visual cues that assure him that the purported inn is located where his house has always been.

Then, once he is certain that he is outside his home, he engages in a soliloquy in which he tries to find an explanation for this transformation. Morales’s speech is much shorter than Moreno’s; however, in both cases, the employment of this theatrical device offers important insights into the minds of these characters as they navigate the deceptions orchestrated by the tricksters:

¡Válgame Dios! (dijo haciéndose cruces). Hora y media ha que salí de mi casa, donde mi mujer estaba más para llantos que para bailes. En ella sólo vivimos los dos y su sobrina. Las puertas, aunque menesterosas de reformación, eran las mismas cuando salí que los otros días. Casas de posadas en esta calle no las vi en mi vida, y cuando las hubiera, ¿quién puede, de noche y en tan breve tiempo, haberle dado a la mía este ventero privilegio? Pues decir que lo sueño no es posible, que tengo los ojos abiertos y los oídos examinadores deste encantamento. Echar la culpa al vino en tiempo de tanta agua es obligarme a la restitución de su honra. Pues ¿qué puede ser esto? (62)

In his soliloquy, Morales resorts to sensory experience to rule out the possibility that the extraordinary events that are occurring in his house are the result of being in a dream.<sup>15</sup> The examination that he conducts through his “open eyes” and “attentive ears” yields a clear and unequivocal picture of what he is facing, which seems to offer a contrast for him with the diffuse and disjointed perception of one’s situation that often characterizes oneiric states.<sup>16</sup> After these

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<sup>14</sup> The *Diccionario de autoridades* includes that meaning of the verb *reparar*: “Vale también mirar con cuidado alguna cosa” (577).

<sup>15</sup> Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s *La vida es sueño* (1635) emphasizes the opposite view on the senses, as they are not reliable in distinguishing dream states from reality. In a conversation with a soldier in Act III, Segismundo does not trust that what he sees is real: “Ya otra vez vi aquesto mesmo tan clara y distintamente como ahora lo estoy viendo, y fue sueño” (194). The unreliability of the senses in this regard is part of the theological base at the core of this play, which does not appear in *Los tres maridos burlados*. Discussing *La vida es sueño*, Ángel Valbuena-Briones remarks that “los ojos, las manos, los oídos engañan. El mundo de los sentidos es falso. El hombre vive en un mundo de apariencia, puesto que lo espiritual es lo real, y lo material, lo ficticio” (415).

<sup>16</sup> He also seems to rely on the intensity of unpleasant feelings that he endures (being soaked and cold on a winter night) as evidence that what he is experiencing is not the result of being drunk.

brief considerations, the narrator emphasizes this character's continuous engagement with his senses, as Morales once again proceeds to "tentar y ver y oír puertas, tablilla y bailes, sin saber a qué atribuir tan repentina transformación" (62). What he touches, sees, and hears does not help him in elucidating the cause of these alterations. However, sensory information does become his main tool to ground himself in reality and oppose deception. Said information allows him to establish that he is not at an inn but outside his house, as well as to determine that this astonishing change is very much real and not a dream. He trusts his own perception, which prompts him to insistently knock on the door, demand to be let into his house, and be informed of the reason for this transformation.

As of this moment, the trick develops in a crueler fashion. Morales's confidence that this place is his home clashes with the endeavors by the minor characters to reinforce the sham. They first treat him as a mere drunk who does not know where he is, leaving him outside in the pouring rain. Then, they punish his persistence by threatening him with two mastiffs, which, as the narrator remarks, would have given the joke a tragic ending, should the dogs have gotten Morales (64). When he finally manages to have a longer conversation with the tricksters, they dismiss his claims about his ownership of this place, informing him that it has been an inn for over six years and slamming the door on him. Feeling helpless, he abandons the scene and spends the night at a friend's house, the protagonist of the third prank, where he continues denouncing the usurpation and transformation of his residence. Despite enduring these humiliations, Morales illustrates a view of the senses as effective in discerning the true state of affairs. This prank creates, as he himself describes it, a type of "trampantojo" [*trompe l'œil*] (63), in which the props that the secondary characters employ and the performances that they enact give his house a misleading appearance, casting doubt on the certainties that he possesses about his own home and even on the reality of the events that he experiences. Sensorial perception assists this husband in regaining those certitudes, even though this knowledge and the actions that he decides to take allow the other characters to mock him further.

When he returns home in the morning, he finds his house back in its usual form, with the original door and without the signboard or any traces of the celebration that took place inside. Mari Pérez, now recovered from her *mal de madre*, chastises him for being gone all night and accuses him of making up the story about the inn and the partying guests. Morales's knowledge of what occurred during the night is met with his wife's denial of those events, as well as with the fact that his house now presents itself in its normal condition. In the end, this tricked husband manages to reconcile the two contradictory accounts by convincing himself that what he faced was the product of supernatural phenomena, namely the work of goblins dwelling in his home. He then makes the decision to sell his house to prevent this situation from happening again.

The third prank differs from the two previous ones in some important ways. First, the new wife, Hipólita, has a double purpose in mind when conceiving her trick; she wants to win the jewel, and she also wishes to "cure" her old and suspicious husband, Santillana, of his unfounded jealousy.<sup>17</sup> Because of its reformatory purpose, this prank is intensely more severe and extended in time than the ones endured by the other two husbands. It is also closely directed and monitored by the secondary characters, who nullify any of Santillana's attempts to refute the

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<sup>17</sup> For Rodríguez Mansilla, the reformatory intention of the pranks is also a defining characteristic of the *novela de burlas* (122). He discusses two short novellas by Castillo Solórzano—*El culto graduado*, included in *Tardes entretenidas* (1625) and *El celoso hasta la muerte*, part of *Noches de placer* (1629)—in which the tricks are intended to reform egotistic and jealous characters, respectively (125–26). In Tirso's novella, only the story of the third husband shares this exemplary purpose.

illusion. Second, this last story emphasizes an aspect of the widespread notion of the vulnerability of the senses to deception. In *Don Quijote*, as we saw with the examples from chapters 8, 18, and 21 of Part I, the protagonist, motivated by his chivalric madness, mistakes what he sees in the quotidian world of La Mancha for the fantastic elements of romance. In Tirso's novella, something similar happens with Santillana's "sospechosa vejez" (72); it conditions the information that he receives from his senses, causing him to misapprehend his wife's actions as possible instances of unfaithful behavior.<sup>18</sup>

For instance, when this husband wakes up at a convent—after having been sedated by his wife and transported there by a group of friars—he shows that his jealousy influences the way in which he construes sensory input:

¡Jesús! ¿Qué es esto, Hipólita? ¿Cáese la casa? ¿Hay truenos o vienen por mí los diablos? Como no le respondió, atentó a los lados buscando a su mujer, y no hallándola, lleno de malicias y imaginando que estaba haciéndole fayancas y con el ruido pasado querían echarle el aposento a cuestras, se levantó furioso y diciendo a voces: —¿Dónde estás, adúltera? ¡Mala hembra, no dirás ahora que son ilusiones y vejeces las mías! ¿A media noche fuera de mi cama y mi aposento, recibiendo por el techo el adúltero? ¡Más leales que tú son para mí las tejas, pues cayéndose me han despertado! (75)

Santillana misinterprets the sound that he hears from the bells and the *matracas* calling the friars to the midnight prayers as evidence that his wife is committing adultery in his own house. He believes that the noise is produced by the tiles falling off the roof, where his wife would be having a rendezvous with her lover. Moreover, this supposition is supported by the information that he receives from another sensory organ when he cannot find Hipólita after feeling for her in his bed. Of course, he does not know yet that he is at a convent, but this part of the novella seems to offer an example of this character's habit of misconstruing sensorial stimuli according to his jealous outlook on his wife, making her life miserable as a result.

Santillana's fury turns into fear and confusion when he realizes that he is not at home but in a cell. He engages in a brief soliloquy in which he tries to make sense of the disconcerting novelty of his room; however, the appearance of the friars quickly puts an end to any of his attempts to find an explanation to what he is experiencing. The friars refer to Santillana as Father Rebolledo and are adamant that he has been part of their religious order for the past fifteen years. When this tricked husband tries to fight the claim of his long-standing status as a member of the church, he is severely whipped until he is ultimately forced to accept that he is one of them. He is also confined for long periods of time to the *cepo* (a feet-restraining device) when he cannot perform his conventual duties properly or when he tries to find a way out of this newly acquired identity. The objective of this trick is not just mere amusement at the expense of the deceived character, as in the cases of the two previous husbands; here, the emphasis is placed on reforming the jealous Santillana. While Moreno and Morales have freedom to explore the deceptive environments in which they find themselves and use sensorial perception to try to fight the trickery, Santillana does not have much room to defend himself via the senses or any other means. He is closely monitored and rigorously punished whenever he deviates from the spurious reality that the minor characters impose on him.

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<sup>18</sup> Santillana's jealous feelings seem to border on madness. When he finds himself in a cell as part of the trick, he initially hypothesizes that he may have gone mad and been sent to El Nuncio, a well-known lunatic asylum at the time, on account of his jealousy (76).



In the end, the tormenting friars succeed in their endeavors. Santillana is in the *cepo* for a month when he hears a mysterious voice reciting a poem that states Hipólita's innocence and warns him of more negative consequences if he maintains his jealous attitude. After promising to mend his ways, he is given the sedative substance once again and wakes up at home with his wife. He “pidióla perdón [a Hipólita], jurando no creer aún lo que viese por sus mismos ojos de allí adelante” (87).<sup>19</sup> The methods of the friars are so effective that Santillana does not simply relinquish the obsession for Hipólita that influenced his understanding of sensory information. He also promises not to believe his own eyes—even if he were to truly see something suspicious regarding his wife—as an additional measure of protection to make sure that he does not have to experience that suffering ever again.

In the medieval and early modern periods, there are multiple examples of literary texts featuring practical jokes. For instance, in Castillo Solórzano's *El culto graduado*, a group of characters dress up as academics and organize a fake scholarly meeting in which they aim to mock an arrogant poet who prides himself on his understanding of, and ability to write, elevated-style poetry. Likewise, in *Don Quijote* Part II, the duke and duchess stage chivalric fantasies in their castle to laugh at the protagonist's knightly aspirations. In *Los tres maridos burlados*, the jokes stand out because they alter fundamental aspects of the existence of the victims. That is, these tricks not only mislead characters; the illusions that they produce, as Arellano explains, also entail a crumbling of the husbands' known reality (22–23). Tirso exploits the possibilities of these existential crises by combining them with soliloquies, which give the reader access to the mind of these characters when the certainties about their lives begin to collapse.

The thoughts that the first and second husbands share, and the actions in which the latter also engages, as we have seen, reveal that these characters resort to the information that they perceive via the senses to reestablish the certitudes that have been shattered by the pranks. Moreno relies on this information as evidence that his immortal soul has not abandoned his body, and Morales uses it to certify that what purports to be an inn is in fact his house, as well as to confirm that the extraordinariness of this transformation is not the result of being in a dream. The knowledge that stems from sensory experience allows these characters to elucidate the true state of affairs and to attempt to challenge the deceptions orchestrated by their wives. The story of Santillana differs from the two previous ones in several ways. He illustrates an aspect of the susceptibility of the senses to deceit; what he sees, touches, and hears is conditioned by his obsession for his wife, prompting him to misinterpret sensorial stimuli as indicators that she has adulterous intentions. The torments that he suffers at the convent are designed to make him abandon this jealous attitude toward her. In *Los tres maridos burlados*, Tirso both incorporates and deviates from notions of the senses as unreliable and easily deceivable. My analysis of this novella allows for the articulation of the roles that the sensory organs play in the stories of the three husbands, demonstrating ways in which sensorial perception effectively assists the first two in discerning truth from pretense.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> He relies heavily on vision to certify that is back at home: “Mandó abrir la ventana y se vio en su cama y aposento, los vestidos a su lado, sin rastro de cepo ni de hábitos. Pidió un espejo y vio otra cara diferente de la que los días pasados le enseñó el de la sacristía” (87). Then, he conjectures that he must have dreamt about the events at the convent.

<sup>20</sup> The apparent fallibility of the senses has received renewed critical attention as part of the growing interest in the study of sensory experiences in the early modern world. For instance, Howard Mancing analyzes Calderón de la Barca's *La dama duende* (1629) and, among other things, argues that the senses are not responsible for characters' misinterpretation of what is occurring around them: “In *La dama duende* there is no problem of perception; the senses are reliable. The problem is with the characters' attempts to understand what they say and hear” (145).

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Mancing attributes the misunderstandings in this play to characters' use of Machiavellian intelligence, narrative imagination, and theory of mind (145). For more critical studies on the senses in the early modern world, see the collection of essays edited by Yolanda Gamboa and Bonnie Gasior in 2017, as well as that edited by Ryan D. Giles and Steven Wagschal in 2018.

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