

— *Monografías* —

THE PLAYS OF
JUAN RUIZ
DE ALARCÓN

Jules Whicker



Colección Támesis

SERIE A: MONOGRAFÍAS, 200

THE PLAYS OF JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCÓN

At the height of Spain's Golden Age, the theatres of Madrid and the plays performed there were the focus of tremendous popular enthusiasm, vigorous economic enterprise and intense literary and moral debate. As they entertained their audiences by staging their desires, ambitions and fears, the theatres provoked the criticism and opposition of literary theorists and theologians alike. This book shows how at least one playwright, the Mexican-born Juan Ruiz de Alarcón (1580–1639), used the medium of the *comedia* to write back, setting out his personal manifesto for the art of writing plays, and projecting a public persona fashioned for his own prestige and advancement. His works range from sharp social comedies, to dramas of political intrigue, to plays about magic and military and moral heroism, yet while they all contain a critique of the way individuals manipulate appearances for their own ends, they also promote a calculated approach to deception, representing it not just as necessary but as a benchmark of moral virtue. Arising from neo-stoic interpretations of prudence, Alarcón's identification of the successful manipulation of illusion as a moral art serves as a defence of the *comedia* and offers an alternative to the supposed moral irresponsibility of Lope de Vega.

JULES WHICKER lectures in the Department of Hispanic Studies, University of Birmingham.

JULES WHICKER

THE PLAYS OF
JUAN RUIZ DE ALARCÓN

TAMESIS

© Jules Whicker 2003

All Rights Reserved. Except as permitted under current legislation no part of this work may be photocopied, stored in a retrieval system, published, performed in public, adapted, broadcast, transmitted, recorded or reproduced in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the copyright owner

First published 2003
by Tamesis, Woodbridge

ISBN 1 85566 093 8

Tamesis is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
and of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
PO Box 41026, Rochester, NY 14604-4126, USA
website: www.boydell.co.uk

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Whicker, Jules, 1966–

The plays of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón / Jules Whicker.

p. cm. – (Colección Támesis. Serie A, Monografías ; 200)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-85566-093-8 (hardback : alk. paper)

1. Ruiz de Alarcón, Juan, 1580?–1639 – Criticism and interpretation.

I. Title.

PQ6431.R8 Z94 2003

862'.3 – dc21

2003011729

This publication is printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Great Britain by
Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Abbreviations	vii
Introduction.	1
1 Fiction, Theatre and Morality.	15
2 Lies and Dissimulation: <i>La verdad sospechosa</i>	52
3 Alarcón's Criticism of Satire in <i>Las paredes oyen</i>	79
4 Illusion in Magic and Drama: <i>La cueva de Salamanca</i> , <i>Quien mal anda en mal acaba</i> , and <i>La prueba de las promesas</i>	107
5 Prudent Dissimulation and Military Virtue in <i>La manganilla de Melilla</i>	142
6 Deceit in Politics and Alarcón's <i>Privado</i> Plays: <i>La amistad castigada</i> and <i>Ganar amigos</i>	162
Conclusion	188
Bibliography	197
Index.	209

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am immensely grateful to Dr R. W. Truman, of Christ Church, Oxford who supervised my doctoral work on Alarcón and I extend my thanks to my colleagues in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Birmingham; to the trustees of the Instituto de Valencia de don Juan, Madrid; to Ysla Campbell and the *socios* of the Asociación Internacional de Teatro Español y Novohispano del Siglo de Oro; to the final-year students at Birmingham who have bravely taken my Alarcón module and whose participation has been so valuable in testing and refining the ideas contained in this study; and to all those who have given me their generous support and friendship while I worked on this book and the thesis that preceded it.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ACer</i>	<i>Anales cervantinos</i>
<i>AUMLA</i>	<i>Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Languages Association</i>
<i>BAE</i>	<i>Biblioteca de autores españoles</i>
<i>BBMP</i>	<i>Boletín de la Biblioteca de Menéndez Pelayo</i>
<i>BCom</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Comediantes</i>
<i>BH</i>	<i>Bulletin Hispanique</i>
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Bulletin of Hispanic Studies</i>
<i>BRAE</i>	<i>Boletín de la Real Academia Española</i>
<i>CSIC</i>	<i>Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas</i>
<i>DHR</i>	<i>Duquesne Hispanic Review</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>Hispanic Review</i>
<i>HispM</i>	<i>Hispania (Mexico)</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Obras completas de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón,</i> <i>ed. Agustín Millares Carlo</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America</i>
<i>RABM</i>	<i>Revista de archivos, bibliotecas y museos</i>
<i>RCLL</i>	<i>Revista de crítica literatura latinoamericana</i>
<i>REH</i>	<i>Revista de estudios hispánicos</i>
<i>RFE</i>	<i>Revista de filología española</i>
<i>RH</i>	<i>Revue hispanique</i>
<i>RI</i>	<i>Revista ibérica</i>
<i>RJ</i>	<i>Romanistisches Jahrbuch</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Romance Notes</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa theologiae</i>
<i>UNAM</i>	<i>Universidad Nacional de México</i>

INTRODUCTION

This study of Alarcón's drama is posited on the view that in the general run of his plays he shows a particular interest in the issue of deception, its necessity, and its conditional legitimacy. It is true that this is not a totally new view, and that published criticism has not been altogether indifferent or blind to the role of mendacity and social pretence in Alarcón's drama. This need not surprise us of course, since deception constitutes a fundamental structural device in the majority of social and situational comedies and not just in those of Alarcón. However, the argument presented in this book is, firstly, that this is a thematic concern which runs through the body of Alarcón's work and plays an important if not a predominant part in it; and secondly, that Alarcón deals with it in a way that is more intellectually complex and morally serious way than has previously been recognised. That said, it should not be forgotten that Alarcón's plays are no less witty and well-paced than the best of those of his contemporaries. Indeed, it is abundantly clear from his *comedias* that as a dramatist he was both alert to the practical importance of keeping his audience interested and amused, and eager to display his own creative skill in the creation of lively dialogue, ironic situation, and deft versification.

However, with regard to the central subject of this study – Alarcón's own treatment of the theme of deception – the question arises as to what it was about Alarcón, or the times in which he lived, that caused him to be interested in this issue. It should be remembered that Alarcón began his career as a playwright in Madrid during a period of extensive social change. In the words of J. H. Elliott, 'Madrid [. . .] was a boomtown. In 1561, when Philip II chose it as his capital, it was little more than an overgrown village. By 1621 it had a population approaching 150,000, almost as large as that of Seville'.¹ But if Seville was the greatest mercantile city in Spain in the early 1600s, Madrid was without doubt the social capital, and the massive increase in its population led to a multiplication of its social structures and modalities. This in turn lent considerable emphasis to the importance of place, privilege and

¹ John H. Elliott, 'Art and Decline in Seventeenth-Century Spain', in his *Spain and its World, 1500–1700* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 263–86 (p. 277). See also William R. Blue, *Spanish Comedy and Historical Contexts in the 1620s* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), Chap. 2, 'Comedy and Madrid'.

influence, and led to much self-questioning and criticism about social and, by extension, individual values.

As Elliott has observed, this was also an age in which Spaniards increasingly came to perceive Spain as a nation in decline, and to seek the remedy for their country's malaise in a whole series of economic, political, social, and, in particular, moral reforms.² In view of their concern about the future of Spain, it is not surprising that many of those who wrote in this vein, the *arbitristas*, turned their attention to the behaviour of young noblemen and women, and to the moral impact of the theatres which they attended so enthusiastically.³ Here a concern with contemporary *mores* drew strength from a hostility towards theatrical performances that went back to the Church Fathers and to Plato, whose views on the subject were readily recalled.⁴ Whether in response to the resulting controversy or to the general spirit of the times, the theatre's apologists repeatedly appealed in these years to the classic argument according to which the theatre in general and the *comedia* in particular were mirrors held up to life, whose basic function was to better men's behaviour. As Ruth Lee Kennedy remarks: 'The *comedia* was being made to serve as a medium for those who would convert art into a handmaiden for a better life.'⁵

There was also, at the level of abstract discourse, a manifest concern with the way in which general principles of morality and religion related to the complex and often tangled circumstances of actual life. This was a concern that lent impetus to the development of casuistry, and found a focus in the perception that the application of the Ten Commandments, or the ethical core of the four Cardinal Virtues as bequeathed by Classical antiquity, was anything but straightforward. Evidence of this is to be found everywhere. It is true that certain now much referred-to works like Ribadeneyra's *Tratado de la religión y virtudes [. . . del . . .] príncipe cristiano* (Madrid, 1595) attacked Machiavelli. Nevertheless, even in that work we find its author yielding many intellectual points, even if he finally jibs at accepting the essential point about the relation of power to principle.⁶ One notes also in this context an increased

² See Elliott, 'Self-Perception and Decline in Early Seventeenth-Century Spain', in *Spain and its World*, pp. 241–61.

³ For a lively account of the controversy over the moral and social legitimacy of the *comedia*, see the introduction to Blue, *Spanish Comedy*. The essential source for this topic however remains Emilio Cotarelo y Mori's comprehensive *Bibliografía de las controversias sobre la licitud del teatro en España* (Madrid: RABM, 1904).

⁴ For a particularly interesting example, see St Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1984), Bk 1, Chaps 30–33; Bk 2, Chaps 8–14, 25–27; Bk 4, Chaps 26–27 [pp. 41–44, 56–65, 81–85, and 167–70].

⁵ Ruth Lee Kennedy, 'The Madrid of 1617–1625, Certain Aspects of Social, Moral and Educational Reform', in *Homenaje a Archer M. Huntington* (Wellesley, 1952), pp. 275–309 (p. 292).

⁶ Pedro de Ribadeneyra, *Tratado de la religión y virtudes que debe tener el príncipe cristiano para gobernar y conservar sus estados*, in *Obras del Padre Pedro de Rivadeneira*, BAE,

interest in Tacitus, whose works present the view that power and position depend on an ability continually to outmanoeuvre, by sharp perception, calculation and ruthlessness, those who would threaten it.⁷

This was also the age of the great *privados*. Lerma, the first of these, was in power at the time Alarcón arrived in Madrid. The existence of such men itself had a particular social significance and impact. Madrid society already functioned on the basis of favour and patronage, but never before had the potential rewards to be derived from the system been so great. With so much to win (and as much to lose) what means might not now be employed?⁸ In such a society, wealth and reputation were vital commodities, to be flaunted if one had them, and simulated if one did not: what mattered was how one appeared and what others thought. The extravagance and unreality of the capital is vividly conveyed in fray Alonso Remón's *Guía y avisos de forasteros en la Corte* (Madrid, 1620):

En esta Babilonia de la confusión de la vida de la corte, de cuatro cosas que se ven no se han de creer las dos. ¡Qué de galas sin poder traerse! ¡Qué de gastos sin poder sustentarse! ¡Qué de ostentaciones de casa y criados, sin que se sepa dónde se cría ni a qué árbol se disfruta aquello que allí se consume! ¡Qué de opinión de hombres ricos, más por opinión que por renta! ¡Qué de rentas sin opinión y qué de opiniones sin probabilidad! Todas son apariencias fabulosas, maravillas soñadas, tesoros de duendes, figuras de representantes en comedia, y otros epítetos y títulos pudiera darles más lastimosos y ridículos.⁹

Vol. 60 (Madrid: Sucesores de Hernando, 1919). For a lucid examination of this complex issue, see R. W. Truman, 'The Idea of the Prince in the Latin and Vernacular Writings of Sixteenth-Century Spanish Theorists' (unpub. Doctoral Thesis, Oxford, 1963), pp. 362–94.

⁷ See Charles J. Davis, 'Tacitus in Golden-Age Spain: His Influence on Political Thought and Prose Literature' (unpub. Doctoral Thesis, University of Oxford, 1987); and Francisco Sanmartí Boncompagni, *Tácito en España* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1951).

⁸ The operation and abuse of this system of patronage in the reign of Philip III is described by John Lynch: 'Clients [. . .] sought to attach themselves to a powerful patron who disposed of influence and wealth, and the most influential of all was the king's favourite, and after him the favourite's favourite. For their part patrons, anxious to build up a large following as a measure of their own power and status, were willing to oblige. This accounts for the manoeuvring for strategic positions around the king and for the constant agitation at court. [. . .] The downfall of Lerma and Calderón attested to the ruthlessness of the patronage system and the vindictiveness of the 'outs' when they became the 'ins'. There was too much at stake to expect clemency' (*Spain Under the Habsburgs, Volume II: Spain and America 1598–1700*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981) pp. 27–29). See also Antonio Feros, *Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III, 1598–1621* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 184 for example.

⁹ Fray Alonso Remón [pseud. 'Antonio de Liñán y Verdugo'], *Guía y avisos de forasteros en la Corte*, ed. Edison Simons (Madrid: Editorial Nacional, 1980), p. 97. Remón was far from being the only writer to view Madrid society in this way: 'It seems', wrote González de Cellorigo, as he surveyed the parasitic rentier society with its extravagant dreams and conspicuous consumption and neglect of economic realities, 'as if

As a native of New Spain, Alarcón could (and probably did) look at the world of Madrid with the eyes of an outsider as well as with the knowledge derived from the years of his adult life which he had already spent in Salamanca and Seville.¹⁰ He was experienced in the practice of the law and had an extensive university training. Moreover, his training in the law was very likely to foster a particular kind of intellectual interest, even a particular kind of intellectual vision or response characterised by an interest in the broad principles of ethics, an acute awareness of the complexity of social reality as empirically perceived, and a strong sense of the problems involved in the relating of apparently conflicting principles and values.¹¹

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that as well as writing plays which have many obvious virtues as comedies (in the unproblematic sense of the word), Alarcón was at the same time exploring in a sustained and serious way issues which find their focus in the issue of deception, seen as a social and personal necessity. As a writer of dramatic fiction at a time when the issue of the moral or social legitimacy of the theatre was the subject of considerable controversy, Alarcón's plays indicate that he regarded this issue, the necessity of deception, as one which had an immediate personal relevance, and which offered a

one had wished to reduce these kingdoms to a republic of enchanted beings, living outside the natural order of things.' (Martín González de Cellorigo, *Memorial de la política necesaria y útil restauración a la república de España* (Valladolid, 1600), f. 25v., cit. Elliott, 'Art and Decline', p. 227). Quevedo's social portraits in *La vida del buscón* and *Los sueños* inevitably come to mind here.

¹⁰ This point is also made by Willard F. King who believes that 'justamente por no haberse criado en el seno de la sociedad peninsular, Alarcón era capaz de percibir su conformación y sus peculiaridades de manera más aguda que los nacidos en ella. Tal es, en parte la razón del éxito de sus comedias de costumbres contemporáneas. Aquí está en su elemento el Alarcón "moralista", moralista en el sentido de observador de la conducta, que es una de las connotaciones del término' (*Juan Ruiz de Alarcón, letrado y dramaturgo: su mundo mexicano y español* (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1989), p. 225).

¹¹ In King's view, there is a direct connection between Alarcón's legal training and his manner of writing comedies: 'Viéndolo bien [su formación legal] fue en más de un sentido una preparación peculiarmente adecuada para el futuro autor teatral. Muchos siglos antes de los siglos de Alarcón, un breve tratado griego sobre la estructura de la comedia en contraste con la de la tragedia (el *Tractatus Coislinianus*) había definido el género comedia como una forma de proceso judicial en que se van presentando alegatos en pro y en contra de una tesis o de un personaje, hasta que el peso de las sucesivas pruebas jurídicas destruye la falsa opinión y establece la inocencia o la culpa, la verdad o la falsedad. No hay duda de que en la firme estructura, en la compleja, sentenciosa y bien matizada argumentación, en la equilibrada racionalidad del teatro de Alarcón, ha influido bastante su educación jurídica' (*Letrado y dramaturgo*, p. 79). A similar connection is identified by James A. Parr: 'His considerable training and experience served to foster a predominantly secular outlook [. . . and] helps one to understand the advocacy of reason, his characteristically concise and precise style, and the pains taken everywhere in his work to offer logical explanations for behaviour and to analyse actions and motivations' ('Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza and the Contexts of Criticism', in *After its Kind* (Kassel: Reichenberger, 1991), pp. 9–21 (p. 12)).

theoretical basis on which he might justify his occupation as a playwright in moral and social terms. So, whilst it would be an exaggeration to assert that this is the thing that he is emphasising all the time, it nevertheless represents an area of serious interest that is apparent throughout his work, albeit at different depths. Moreover, it is a theme that lends a remarkable degree of resonance, interest and significance to his *œuvre*.

As well as breaking new ground by exploring an issue, that of legitimate deception, which has never previously received extensive consideration, I hope in this book to draw together a number of recurring issues in the existing corpus of critical work on Alarcón's drama, which includes noteworthy studies by Ellen Lavroff-Claydon, Willard F. King, Cynthia L. Halpern, James A. Parr, and Walter Poesse, among others.¹² By way of background, most previous studies of Alarcón's work have sought to assess the extent to which his plays advocate a particular kind of moral vision, and to define the nature of that vision. The view that Alarcón is a morally serious dramatist is first found in the work of Ramón Mesonero Romanos and Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch and has been current ever since.¹³ Subsequently a division has appeared between those scholars who view Alarcón's moral vision as predominantly religious, and those for whom it is predominantly secular.¹⁴ Other critics, such as Alfonso Reyes and Edouard Barry, have remarked on the practical advantages gained by those characters in Alarcón's plays who act in accordance with his moral

¹² Ellen Lavroff-Claydon, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón: Baroque Dramatist* (Madrid: Castalia, 1970) and her article 'Some Observations on Alarcón's Position in the Development of the Seventeenth-Century Theatre', *Hispanófila*, 42 (1971), 7–19; Walter Poesse, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón* (New York: Twayne, 1972); Cynthia Leone Halpern, *The Political Theatre of Early Seventeenth Century Spain, with special reference to Juan Ruiz de Alarcón* (New York: Lang, 1993), together with the works already mentioned here: King, *Letrado y dramaturgo*; and Parr, *After its Kind*.

¹³ See Juan Eugenio Hartzenbusch, 'Carácteres distintivos de las obras dramáticas de don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón', in *Comedias de don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza*, BAE vol. 20 (Madrid, 1866), pp. xiii–xxvi (p. xv): 'el primero y más notable rasgo que distingue a Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza como poeta cómico, es la moralidad, la filosofía', and Ramón de Mesonero Romanos, *ibid.* p. xl: 'Todas sus comedias respiran una intención moral (cosa rara entre nuestros primeros dramáticos)'.

¹⁴ For an exposition of the view that Alarcón's moral vision is essentially religious, see: Alice M. Paulin, 'The Religious Motive in the Plays of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón', *HR*, 29 (1961), 33–44, and Claydon, *Baroque Dramatist*. There is much that is of value in Claydon's work, but I cannot agree with her assertion that 'all of Alarcón's morality, however social and rational it may seem, is presented in function with the salvation of the soul' (p. 171).

The following studies take a secular view: Julio Jiménez Rueda (ed.), *Los pechos privilegiados* (Mexico: UNAM, 1932), p. xiv; Antonio Castro Leal, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón: su vida y su obra* (Mexico: Cuadernos Americanos, 1943), p. 204; Carmen Olga Brenes, *El sentimiento democrático en el teatro de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón* (Valencia: Castalia, 1960), p. 238; and Parr, 'Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón y Mendoza and the Contexts of Criticism', in his *After its Kind*, pp. 9–21.

code, so as to present Alarcón as a dramatist whose morality has a significant pragmatic aspect.¹⁵ More recently the focus of critical attention on the issue of Alarcón's morality has shifted from the individual to society.¹⁶ Thus, Geoffrey Ribbans describes Alarcón's moral vision exclusively in terms of social convention: '*La verdad sospechosa* functions entirely within the framework of human beings reacting to each other in a context of conventional society life', a context which he describes as a 'not very attractive world of relative though rational standards'.¹⁷ However, Ribbans does not make it clear in this article whether he regards Alarcón as an advocate of such a society or simply as a dramatist who sought to reflect contemporary social values.¹⁸

Other aspects of Alarcón's work on which critical debate has focused are: his indebtedness to Plautus or Terence; his difference from his contemporaries, especially Lope de Vega, and the related question of his *mexicanidad*; his ability to create female characters; the psychological depth of his characterisation; his portrayal of the *privado* in his 'political' plays; and his use of occult elements in his theatre.

Some of these issues have been settled more conclusively than others. The idea that Alarcón's Mexican origins give a distinctive character to his *comedias* has now been set aside as unprovable and largely irrelevant to literary criticism.¹⁹ The (on the face of it, reasonable) suggestion that Alarcón may

¹⁵ See Edouard Barry (ed.), *La verdad sospechosa* (Paris: Garnier, 1913), p. xxxi and Alfonso Reyes (ed.), *Ruiz de Alarcón: Teatro* (Madrid: Espasa Calpe, 1923), p. xxxviii.

¹⁶ See Brett Levinson's innovative article, 'The Management of the Estate in *La verdad sospechosa*', *Revista de estudios hispánicos*, 28 (1994), 163–83. Levinson does not find any moral concern at the heart of the play, and claims that lying is not a vice to be censured but an essential element in the management of economic affairs in an aristocratic society based on credit. See also, Blue, *Spanish Comedy*, Chap. 3, 'Comedy and Economy'.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Ribbans, 'Lying in the structure of *La verdad sospechosa*', in *Studies in Spanish Literature of the Golden Age presented to Edward M. Wilson*, ed. R. O. Jones (London: Tamesis, 1973), 193–216 (pp. 215–16).

¹⁸ Ribbans' reference to 'rational standards' in the remark quoted previously, reflects a widely-held view that one of the most distinctive features of Alarcón's theatre is its emphasis on reason and common sense. This is a view which appears in Chandler and Schwartz, *A New History of Spanish Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), p. 90, and Ángel del Río, *Historia de la literatura española* (New York: Holt, 1963), I, 372. It is also prominent in the following studies of Alarcón's theatre: Carlos Ortigoza-Vieyra, *Reason, the Chief Motivating Force: Los móviles de la Comedia* (Mexico, 1954), p. 131; Paulin, 'The Religious Motive [. . .]', p. 39; Margaret Wilson, *Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1969), p. 130; Claydon, *Baroque Dramatist*, p. 15; Charles E. Perry, 'Comedy and Common Sense in *El Semejante de sí mismo*' RN, 16 (1974–75), 734–41 (p. 734); and Parr, *After its Kind*, p. 12.

¹⁹ See Claydon, *Baroque Dramatist*, p. 11. On the issue of Alarcón's *mexicanidad* see: Pedro Henríquez Ureña, 'Don Juan Ruiz de Alarcón', *Seis ensayos en busca de nuestra expresión* (Buenos Aires, 1952), pp. 91–103; Joaquín Casualdero, 'Sobre la nacionalidad del escritor', *Estudios sobre el teatro español* (Madrid, 1962), pp. 145–59; and Antonio Alatorre, 'Para la historia de un problema: la mexicanidad de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón', *Anuario de Letras* (UNAM: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras), 4 (1964), 161–202.

have modelled his dramatic art on that of Plautus and Terence has also been dismissed in the absence of any significant evidence to substantiate it.²⁰ The allegation that Alarcón's female characters are less substantial or less sympathetically drawn than their male counterparts, which derives from the assumption on the part of certain critics that Alarcón's physical deformity adversely prejudiced his relationships with women, has also been effectively laid to rest in studies by David Pasto, Dolores Bravo and Dorothy Severin, so that it is now generally accepted that Alarcón's women characters are neither less sympathetically presented nor less substantial than his men.²¹

Other issues are less settled. The widely-held view that Alarcón's characters are more 'rounded' than those of Lope, for instance, derives from the fact that in Alarcón's theatre individuals frequently comment explicitly on the motivation behind their own and others' actions. Claydon rejects as anachronistic the notion that Alarcón was interested in psychological motivation per se and concludes (with A. A. Parker) that 'characters are used primarily to dramatise the ideas'.²² Whether or not this is so, it does not preclude the possibility, raised by E. C. Riley in his study of *La verdad sospechosa*, that Alarcón was interested in the origins of character as they were understood in his own day, and as they were notably presented in Juan Huarte de San Juan's remarkable *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* (Baeza, 1575).²³ Indeed,

²⁰ On Alarcón's supposed 'Classicism' see: Elisa Pérez, 'La influencia de Plautus y Terence en el teatro de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón', *HispM*, 11 (1928), 131–49; John Brooks, 'La verdad sospechosa: The Source and Purpose', *HispM*, 15 (1932), 243–52; Miriam Virginia Melvin, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón: Classical and Spanish Influences* (Michigan: Edwards, 1942); Richard W. Tyler, 'A Possible Influence on *La verdad sospechosa*', *BCom*, 22 (1970), 6–7; and John London, 'La verdad sospechosa': *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón* (Madrid: Ciclo, 1990), p. 94. Melvin's arguments against regarding Alarcón as a 'classicist' are summarised in a review article by Joseph H. Silverman, *RI*, 17 (1952), 357–59.

²¹ See David J. Pasto, 'The Independent Heroines in Ruiz de Alarcón's Major Comedies' *BC*, 40 (1988), 227–35; Dolores Bravo, 'La mujer en la obra de Ruiz de Alarcón', in *Memoria de las Segundas Jornadas Alarconianas, 1989*, ed. Héctor Azar (Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de Guerrero, 1990), pp. 41–60; and Dorothy Sherman Severin, 'Ruiz de Alarcón's Romantic Heroines', in *Golden Age Spanish Literature: Studies in Honour of John Varey* (London: Westfield College, 1991), 207–14. This issue is revived by Blue, however, when, in his hard-headed study of sexual relations in the *comedia*, he describes *El examen de maridos* as a play in which Alarcón makes the female protagonists 'look small and petty by contrast to the men who must step in in the final scenes to right the wrongs wrought by the women' (*Spanish Comedy*, p. 72).

²² Claydon, *Baroque Dramatist*, p. 11.

²³ See E. C. Riley, 'Alarcón's *mentiroso* in the light of the contemporary theory of character', in *Hispanic Studies in Honour of I. González Llubera*, ed. Frank Pierce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 287–97. It seems likely, in view of the presence in Alarcón's plays of a significant number of characters (including his most famous) whose behaviour is marked by obsessive or compulsive behaviour, that Alarcón did indeed have a genuine interest in questions of this sort. This aspect of Alarcón's work is elaborated on in a study by Dwight Keith Neumann, 'The Inferiority Complex in the Characters of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón' (unpub. Master's Dissertation, University of California at Los Angeles, 1980).

there seems little reason why intellectual and professional analyses of this kind should not also be put to use by the dramatist in order to illustrate his theme and to add substance to the argument of the play.²⁴

The recent publication of a new study of Alarcón's political drama has introduced the larger question of the extent to which the dramatists of the Spanish Golden Age were seriously interested in the political issues of the age.²⁵ Here, in the course of studying the political dramas that make up a significant proportion of his work, Halpern asserts that Alarcón displays 'a concern for sound government and reform measures which is far more persistent, consistent and insistent than that of any of his contemporaries, such as Tirso or Lope', and that 'it is clear that he had read widely in the major political treatises of his day'.²⁶ Halpern supports Kennedy's view that many of the plays of the period 1617–1625 are 'so closely tied to [the] moralising spirit of the epoch [. . .] that they lose in large part their meaning if separated from the currents of thought that were tugging at men's minds and consciences', and also Kennedy's contention that 'it is impossible to interpret aright many of the plays which such dramatists as Ruiz de Alarcón, Guillén de Castro, Tirso de Molina, or Antonio de Mira de Amescua were writing in these years, unless they are set against the backdrop of this struggle for reform'.²⁷ However, despite this promising point of departure and her useful survey of the principal contemporary theories of kingship, Halpern's conclusions are disappointingly modest: she finds Alarcón's political plays more notable for 'the constancy with which he returned to his favourite themes and the artful dramatic technique which makes these political plays exciting theatre' than for anything in his political thought as such, in which she sees 'nothing revolutionary or radical'.²⁸

²⁴ It should be remembered that the explanatory remarks made by Alarcón's characters from which this debate derives are made in the context of 'asides' and confidences and that these have a dramatic function in themselves, allowing the audience privileged information as a means both of increasing the spectators' sense of involvement in the action and of allowing the dramatist to create a number of ironic effects.

²⁵ See Halpern, *Political Theatre*, and John W. Gilmour, 'Political Themes in the Theatre of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón' (unpub. Doctoral Thesis, University College, Cardiff, 1972).

²⁶ Halpern, *ibid.*, pp. 137–38.

²⁷ See Kennedy, 'The Madrid of 1617–1625', pp. 291–92. Halpern rejects both the position advanced by José María Díez Borque and José Antonio Maravall that the theatre functioned as a tool of political, social and economic propaganda, and Leicester Bradner's conclusion that Spanish dramatists rarely stressed 'issues of good and bad government as the English do'. See José María Díez Borque, *Sociología de la comedia española del siglo XVII* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1976); José Antonio Maravall, *Teatro y literatura en la sociedad barroca* (Madrid: Seminarios y Ediciones, 1972); and Leicester Bradner, 'The Theme of *privanza* in Spanish and English Drama 1590–1625', in *Homenaje a William Fichter*, ed. David Kossoff & José Amor y Vázquez (Madrid: Castalia, 1971), pp. 97–106 (p. 106). See also Melveena McKendrick, *Playing the King: Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity*, Colección Tàmesis. Serie A; Monografías, 182 (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2000).

²⁸ Halpern, *ibid.*, p. 138.

As well as his social comedies and political dramas, Alarcón also wrote a number of plays incorporating occult elements. These ‘magic plays’ have also received a degree of critical attention, most notably from Alva Ebersole, Augusta Espantoso-Foley and Charles Perry.²⁹ These studies observe that Alarcón’s treatment of the use of magic is essentially orthodox, as one might expect in view of the dangers attendant upon deviating from established religious doctrine in such a matter. They conclude, therefore, that Alarcón has little interest in magic per se and that he makes use of magical elements in these plays for reasons that are primarily dramatic and practical. According to this view, magic serves as a dramatic device which offers two advantages to the playwright: first, it provides him with a convenient way of advancing the plot and solving any difficult situations created in the course of the action; and secondly, it allows for any number of spectacular effects designed to delight and amaze the audience. In my judgement, however, these scholars have failed to recognise that magic is handled by Alarcón in a manner that is artistically and morally both more sophisticated and more significant.

It will be evident from this summary that the discussion of deception does not feature as one of the main lines taken by existing critical work on Alarcón’s theatre as a whole. Indeed, it is an issue which features prominently only in the extensive critical literature on *La verdad sospechosa* and in Claydon’s *Baroque Dramatist*. In the context of *La verdad sospechosa*, it has been approached in both moral and aesthetic terms. Thus García’s lies have been seen by critics not only as breaches of ethical or social codes (as I have mentioned previously) but also as examples of ‘metatheatre’ or ‘the play within the play’.³⁰

While Claydon regards deception as an important theme and one that runs throughout Alarcón’s work, its significance for her derives from what she sees

²⁹ See Alva V. Ebersole Jr., ‘Supersticiones españolas y la obra de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón’ *Hispanófila*, 2 (1958), 35–48; Augusta Espantoso-Foley, *Occult Arts and Doctrine in the Theatre of Juan Ruiz de Alarcón* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1972); and Charles E. Perry, ‘The Question of Means and Magic in Alarcón’s *La Prueba de las Promesas*’, *BCom*, 27 (1975) pp. 14–19.

³⁰ Claydon takes an extreme ‘ethical’ position as regards the point where García lies to his father, referring to his ‘almost diabolic defiance of Christian virtue and respect for the authority which represents it’ (*Baroque Dramatist*, p. 118). For the ‘aesthetic’ interpretation, see Alan Soons, ‘*La verdad sospechosa*’, in *Ficción y comedia en el Siglo de Oro* (Estudios de literatura española: Madrid, 1967), pp. 124–30; Alan Paterson, ‘Reversal and Multiple Role Playing in Alarcón’s *La verdad sospechosa*’, *BHS*, 61 (1984), 361–68; and Mary Malcolm-Gaylord, ‘The Telling Lies of *La verdad sospechosa*’, *MLN*, 103 (1988), 223–38 (p. 232). For ‘metatheatre’ see London, *La verdad sospechosa*, p. 90. Strangely, in view of the fact that he refers to other acts of deceit in Alarcón’s plays as ‘comedia[s] dentro de la comedia’, Ebersole does not use the latter phrase in his discussion of *La verdad sospechosa*, and refers to García only as the inventor of ‘personajes’, ‘papeles’ and ‘máscaras’. The theatrical metaphor remains evident nonetheless. See Ebersole, *Juan Ruiz de Alarcón: Obras completas*, 2 vols (Barcelona: Albatros Hispanófila, 1990), I, xxvii–xxx, xxxvii.

as the dramatist's 'baroque' vision. For Claydon the various deceptions practised by Alarcón's characters stand as evidence that he was seeking to make a point about the illusory nature of man's earthly existence: 'Deception is an important theme in the Baroque, because according to Christian doctrine, the only true life was life everlasting, while worldly life was a short-lived illusion, i.e., life was a dream'.³¹ While this view of the significance of deception may hold good for the Baroque in general, whatever that term may be taken to signify, and even for a number of well-known plays by Calderón, its relevance to the majority of Alarcón's *comedias* is less apparent. More valuable, however, is Claydon's recognition that the structure of Alarcón's plots is extensively determined by his inclusion of elements of deception.

Nevertheless, there is ample evidence to suggest that the discussion of the theme of deception should be developed much further than it has been and that it should be afforded a place of central prominence in Alarconian criticism by virtue of the light it sheds on all the major aspects of his works. For example, Alarcón's magic plays have so far been seen principally as entertainments designed to please an audience with a taste for spectacle and limited only by the need to keep on the right side of the Inquisition, and whilst there is no need to deny the playwright such motives, we may also usefully consider these plays as evidence of his keen interest in the nature of illusion, deception and self-deception, and its relationship to desire, reason, and knowledge. Likewise, Alarcón's political plays have previously been considered in relation to the rise of the *privado* under Philip III and Philip IV (Gilmour), and to contemporary theories of kingship such as those of Juan de Mariana and Jean Bodin (Halpern), as well as in terms of the issues of desire and duty with which they deal (Claydon), yet not at all in terms of the issue of deception and its necessity or utility as a tool of government, despite the fact that this is one of the major political concerns of the age, and clearly something with which Alarcón is very much concerned.

Whether they believe Alarcón's moral vision to be essentially religious or predominantly secular, those critics who view Alarcón as a moral dramatist with a didactic purpose have considered his presentation of deception, to the extent that they have considered it at all, almost exclusively in its negative aspect: as lies, as slander, as imposture or as diabolic illusion. In this view, deception or *engaño* has no purpose other than to be overthrown. Yet in the work of those critics who regard the fictions of don García in *La verdad sospechosa* as a reflection of the corrupt moral values of his society, one has glimpses of another view of deception, in which it serves as a means of revealing certain truths. These critics have also directed the reader's attention towards the manner in which García lies, and noted the contrast between his extravagant lies and the more prudent deceptions practised by others. However, they have not recognised the full significance of this contrast.

³¹ Claydon, *Baroque Dramatist*, p. 169.

Instead, charmed by don García's entertaining 'performances' and repelled by the calculating manoeuvres of don Beltrán and Jacinta, they have sought to mitigate don García's responsibility for his lies by showing that he is not the only character in the play to practise deceit, rather than focus on the practical and rational character of the deceptive strategies employed by don Beltrán and Jacinta themselves.³²

This contrast between what I shall term honest and dishonest deception constitutes an essential element not only in *La verdad sospechosa* but throughout Alarcón's works. His treatment of the theme of deception is a complex one, going beyond the truism that appearances deceive and revealing a sustained interest in those situations in which acts of deception may be necessary or may be regarded as morally legitimate. Thus, in the majority of his plays Alarcón presents certain strategies of deception as the most effective means of exposing and defeating those who threaten social harmony. Moreover, these strategies are presented by Alarcón as essential tools, not only for those who govern and defend Spain, but also for private individuals who seek to maintain or to restore their position in society.

This aspect of Alarcón's dramatic writing clearly has particular significance with regard to the moral and political beliefs and preoccupations of the Golden Age. Yet it is also of interest in the context of the controversy regarding the moral effects of dramatic fiction. At a time when theatrical illusion was abhorred by many as an agent of moral corruption, and defended by others as an effective instrument of moral reform, Alarcón implicitly uses the concept of honest deception to justify his activities as a creator of dramatic fictions. It has long been assumed that Alarcón regarded dramatic illusion as an effective means of moral instruction, but no one has previously examined how he adapts the *comedia* to this end. It is my belief that there is a direct connection in Alarcón's drama between his moral objectives and his technical artifice, so that the concept of honest dissimulation is both illustrated in the actions of his dramatic characters and exemplified in his own dramatic technique.

It is not possible or necessary to deal with each of Alarcón's twenty-seven plays here.³³ Those selected for analysis nevertheless represent a substantial range of plays that together cover the span of his work and in which the theme of deception presents itself as a serious and important issue and aspect. The discussion relates to plays on different kinds of subjects, in different moods, and

³² See Robert L. Fiore, 'The Interaction of Motives and Mores in *La verdad sospechosa*', *Hispania*, 61 (1977), 11–21 (p. 12).

³³ This figure includes five plays attributed to Alarcón (*Quien mal anda en mal acaba*, both parts of *No hay mal que por bien no venga*, *La culpa busca la pena y el agravio la venganza*, *Siempre ayuda la verdad* and the First Part of *El tejedor de Segovia*), as well as one in which he is known to have collaborated with other dramatists (*Algunas hazañas de las muchas de don García Hurtado de Mendoza, marqués de Cañete*).

different keys. In most cases, I have felt it preferable to deal in detail with single plays, or to examine plays in pairs, when marked similarities or contrasts cast a clearer light on a particular stage of the argument. Where relevant, Alarcón's work has been set against the background of contemporary ideas of a theological, political and literary nature to reveal the character and extent of his intellectual concerns.

I begin with an account of the controversy surrounding the moral effects of theatrical illusion in the Golden Age which summarises the arguments regarding the theatre's potential either as a source of moral corruption or as an agent of moral reform, and provides the basis for an examination of the ideas expressed by Golden Age moralists and literary theorists concerning the ways in which audiences might be affected by theatrical illusion. It also supplies the background for an assessment of Alarcón's references in the prefaces and plays contained in his two *Partes* to his own plays, to the *corrales*, and to the *comedia* in general, from which may be drawn some preliminary conclusions about how he himself saw the occupation in which he was engaged.

Chapter 2 examines the relationship between literary technique and morality outlined in Chapter 1 in the context of Alarcón's best-known work, *La verdad sospechosa*. García's lies are evaluated in terms both Golden Age literary theory and the modern concept of 'metatheatre' or 'the play within the play'. Consideration is also given to the psychological aspect of Alarcón's presentation of the liar, focusing on what motivates García to lie (and to lie in the way that he does) and why others should be persuaded to believe him. While the discussion of these issues draws on the substantial corpus of critical work concerning this play, the final part of this chapter offers a new approach which emphasises not don García's lies but the strategies employed by others to counter the effect of his lies, and it reveals an important but previously underemphasized link between the maintenance of reputation and the practice of honest deception.

Chapter 3 returns to the twin issues of moral fiction and honest deception, this time with reference to another of Alarcón's urban comedies, *Las paredes oyen*, with the aim of opening up another dimension to this play, beyond the obvious elements of social criticism, in which Alarcón examines the satirical function of his own art. This literary perspective, and a summary of the views expressed by Golden Age literary theorists and other writers of the period concerning the character and purpose of satire, provide the context for an examination of Alarcón's pursuit of the satirical mode and his presentation of the satirical vision of his characters. This analytical approach leads to the conclusion that Alarcón uses this play to present to his audience two contrasting versions of satire, one merely mendacious and destructive and the other essentially moral, manoeuvring with great subtlety, so as simultaneously to condemn the hypocrisy of insincere moral criticism, to entertain his audience with a lively and somewhat scurrilous plot, and to refute the personal criticisms levelled against him by his professional rivals and personal enemies.

The second part of the chapter is concerned with the issue of honest deception. As is the case in *La verdad sospechosa*, the way in which other characters respond to the actions of the protagonist is significant here, as the threat of slanderous gossip obliges them to act with the utmost discretion and leads them to adopt strategies of honest deception which enable them to discover and expose the truth about others without risk to their own reputations. More important, however, as regards the special nature of Alarcón's dramaturgy, is the underlying implication within the play that these strategies are analogous to the methods of the moral satirist.

Chapter 4 turns to the subject of Alarcón's 'magic plays', examining three comedias: *Quien mal anda en mal acaba*, *La cueva de Salamanca* and *La prueba de las promesas*, which present magical illusion in an illuminating variety of ways. The first of these plays presents the creation of illusions in a negative light, setting it within the context of a diabolic conspiracy that presents a serious and direct threat to social harmony. In the second of these plays, however, the presentation of magical illusions is more ambiguous, since in *La cueva de Salamanca* they are set against the background of a university renowned both for its learning and for the riotous behaviour of its students, and they accordingly prove to be both a source of comic intrigue and a means of moral instruction. In the third play, meanwhile, magical illusion is presented in a positive light as a test of individual virtue and as a means of resolving social conflict. The discussion of *Quien mal anda* focuses on the relationship between illusion and desire, whilst that of *La cueva de Salamanca* points to the fundamentally neo-Stoic character of the play's two magicians, and of the argument of the play in general. This is also a feature of the last play, *La prueba de las promesas*. The discussion of this play, however, would not be complete without re-addressing the concept of 'metatheatre' introduced in Chapter 2, since it provides a means of assessing the parallel between the magician and the dramatist suggested by the play.

In each of the chapters so far mentioned it is argued that those aspects of the drama that have the most immediate theatrical appeal are also the aspects most closely associated with dishonest deception, and that this constitutes an implicit challenge to the audience to interpret these plays in a more reflective manner.

In Chapter 5, I have chosen to discuss one of Alarcón's lesser-known works, *La manganilla de Melilla*. The reason for this choice is that although this play is usually regarded as a 'magic play' it gains immeasurably in interest if considered in relation to Golden Age concepts of military virtue. The relevance of this approach to the present study derives from the fact that military theorists have long recognised the art of deception to be an essential element of the general's skill. The play is based on an historical incident in which a Spanish general defended the Christian enclave of Melilla against a Moorish assault by means of a stratagem (the 'manganilla' of the title). Alarcón presents the general both as a model soldier and as a paragon of Christian virtue, making his stratagem one of the clearest examples of honest deception in his works.

The final chapter focuses on two of Alarcón's political plays, *La amistad castigada* and *Ganar amigos*, setting the presentation of deceit in these plays against the background of contemporary attitudes concerning the use of deception by princes and their ministers. *La amistad castigada* is set in ancient Sicily and presents the negative example of an immoral ruler (Dionisio) and a corrupt and devious *privado* (Filipo). *Ganar amigos*, however, is set in the Spain of King Pedro I and shows how the King learns the value of prudent and morally tenable dissimulation from the example of his exemplary *privado*, Fadrique.

Placing the theme of deception squarely in the foreground of the discussion of Alarcón's theatre illuminates the structural principles and conceptual framework of much of his dramatic writing, but it carries with it the risk of giving the impression that he was too preoccupied with intellectual concerns, or driven too completely by the impulse to expose and correct the faults he saw in his fellow citizens and playwrights, to care much about entertaining his audience. Yet his plays ceaselessly affirm his sly sense of humour, the vitality of his wit and his feel for the dramatic moment even as they articulate his intellectual concerns.

The theme of deception is relevant in other ways too. As the discussions of theatrical legitimacy, moral and political philosophy, theology and military theory contained in the following chapters show, deception – the possibility of being deceived and the ability to deceive, along with the attendant tension between ethics and practicality – was a subject much in the minds of Alarcón's Spanish and European contemporaries. His development of a personal theory of deception, as revealed and applied in his own work, therefore provides both a window into the intellectual life of the *letrado* class of seventeenth-century Spain and an approach to dramatic fiction that might profitably be extended to the work of his most notable contemporaries, although such an undertaking lies outside the scope of this study.³⁴

³⁴ All quotations from Alarcón's *comedias* are taken from Agustín Millares Carlo's *Obras completas de Juan Ruiz de Alarcón*, 3 vols (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957, 1958, 1968). Although not the most recent edition of Alarcón's works, it is the only one to contain all the plays attributed to Alarcón as well as the twenty *comedias* included in his two *Partes* (of 1628 and 1634) and his non-dramatic verse. Orthography, accentuation and punctuation have all been standardised according to modern norms, and the plays are divided up into scenes for ease of reference. All references to this work in this book will be as *OC*.

The only one of Alarcón's plays not contained in this edition is the recently rediscovered second part of *No hay mal que por bien no venga*. See Germán Vega García-Luengos, 'Alarcón y el sorprendente retorno de don Domingo de don Blas', in *El escritor y la escena II: Actas del Segundo Congreso de la Asociación de Teatro Español y Novohispano del Siglo de Oro* (17–20 marzo, 1993, Ciudad Juárez, México), ed. Ysla Campbell (Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez: Mexico, 1994), pp. 13–38.