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Abstract: AHCT Symposium, March 2012

Beauty, Money and Middle-Class Marriage: Mira de Amescua's *La ventura de la fea*

Originally attributed to Lope de Vega, various scholars have established this *comedia* within the canon of works by Mira de Amescua. An early play, likely dating from 1610, and one whose plot appears to be later reworked by the Granadine dramatist into a superior *comedia*, *Cuatro milagros de amor*, this short play (2264 verses) reflects the product of a young dramatist. Scant descriptions, be they of character or scene, minimal variety of locations in the play other than the home of the one father, Alberto, and a condensed time frame in which the *comedia* plays out, perhaps signal the yet developing talent of the dramatist. Nonetheless, it is possible to argue that these very elements, in addition to the *actantes* (the protagonist's love letter and the daughters' shared mirror), contribute to Mira's indictment of the gentlemen's brutal assessment of a woman's decorative value, and middle class marriage in general.

Known for his doubling, Mira's *La ventura de la fea* does not disappoint in this respect, although it is not necessarily a simple case, as in *El esclavo del demonio*, of one "good" daughter juxtaposed with a "bad" one. Both of the impoverished Alberto's two daughters—the ugly Francisca, and the ravishing Angela—display certain defects of character, and a difficult, even vindictive sisterhood, despite the more virtuous spirit of the former, and the generosity of affections of the latter, as echoed in the various affairs of their *graciosa*/maid, Aldonza. Vying for the daughters' hands are, at a minimum, two suitors, each accompanied by their respective confidant, and very comical *gracioso*. The actions of the *galanes* (and friends)—both the illegitimate son, Carlos (and Diego), and the wealthy *indiano* Don Juan (and Claudio)—while somewhat predictable, range from friendly support, to chivalric pacts, vengeance, and evident greed. Only with the sudden demise of a third suitor, the male protagonist's own father, can the marital pairings finally be resolved. In addition to the juxtaposition of the *galanes*, *damas* (and servants), and the structural novelties of the *comedia*, this fortunate death is clearly part of Mira's perhaps biting commentary on the marriages of these *hidalgos* that have less to do with love, and more to do with convenience, materialism, and the external appearance of the lady fair. As Mira will ironically show: *La ventura de la fea, la bella la desea*.